

**Region of Waterloo**  
**Public Health and Paramedic Services**  
**Child, Family and Dental Health**

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**To:** Community and Health Services Committee  
**Meeting Date:** October 8, 2024  
**Report Title:** Region of Waterloo Public Health Dental Program Update

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**1. Recommendation**

For information.

**2. Purpose / Issue:**

To provide an update for Regional Council as the Board of Health on the Public Health Dental Program.

**3. Strategic Plan:**

This report aligns with the Region's Strategic Plan 2023-2027, priority 3: Equitable Services and Opportunities. Program activities focus on improving access to dental services for equity-deserving populations and improving oral health outcomes.

**4. Report Highlights:**

- The Public Health Dental Program through its provincially mandated screening program continues to identify children with unmet urgent dental needs. During the 2023-24 school year, almost 20,000 children were screened and 8.6 per cent had urgent dental needs. Dental staff also screened 449 children between 2022-24 at targeted community sites where 58 per cent were identified with urgent dental needs. Public Health supports families to arrange dental treatment regardless of ability to pay.
- Public Health provides dental treatment or access to treatment through publicly-funded programs for persons with low income. With the recent introduction of the federal Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP), there has been no impact on demand for local and provincial programs at this time. Staff are monitoring demand as CDCP implementation progresses.
- Public Health supports seniors living with low income to access dental care through the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP). The program waitlist remains extensive due to demand exceeding capacity. Public Health continues to partner

with Community Health Centres and community providers as funding allows to support waitlisted seniors.

## **5. Background:**

The Dental Program is responsible for implementing oral health requirements in accordance with the Ontario Public Health Standards and its Oral Health Protocol. This includes providing dental screenings in school and community locations; promoting oral health; and providing access and navigation supports to Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) through case management for children with identified urgent dental needs. For screenings in schools, all Junior Kindergarten (JK), Senior Kindergarten (SK), and Grade 2 students attending a primary school in Waterloo Region are screened. Additional students in Grades 4 and 7 are screened in schools that were identified in the previous year as having a higher proportion of children with unmet dental needs.

Changes in the Emergency and Essential Services Stream (EESS) of the Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) program as of August 2024 include a shortened access window requiring a course of treatment to be completed in 6 months versus 12 months as well as limitations to the number of times the program is accessed (three per lifetime versus unlimited). This may lead to challenges in completing treatment and may result in out-of-pocket expenses, particularly when individuals are not eligible for the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) (e.g., non-tax filers, and some newcomers). For children and youth who are eligible for both HSO and CDCP, benefits can be coordinated between these programs.

In Waterloo Region, service delivery for the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) is provided at Langs in Cambridge, Community Healthcaring in Kitchener, and as of June 2024, at Woolwich Community Health Centre in Wellesley. In August 2024, income eligibility thresholds were increased for OSDCP which is likely to place further pressure on the existing waitlist. Public Health continues to advance partnerships with community dental providers to support waitlisted individuals. Seniors eligible for OSDCP may also be eligible for the CDCP, and can choose to access either program, without the option to coordinate benefits between the two programs.

Dental services are also offered through two Public Health dental clinics in Waterloo and Cambridge for children of low-income families; children enrolled in the HSO program; and low-income adults who are experiencing a dental emergency and do not have social assistance. The Dental Program also partners with the Community Services Department to provide claims administration for the Adult Emergency Dental Program and the Denture/Discretionary Program for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program recipients as well as non-social assistance recipients seeking temporary coverage for dental emergencies.

## **6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public**

### **Area Municipalities:**

Nil.

### **Public:**

The Dental Program consults annually and ad-hoc with the Waterloo Region District School Board and the Waterloo Catholic District School Board about school dental screenings. Public Health also participates in biannual and ad-hoc Finance and Executive Director meetings with Langs, Community Healthcaring, and Woolwich Community Health Centres to review service level targets, service delivery indicators, and any challenges related to the OSDCP. Key issues related to all publicly-funded dental services are shared with the Ontario Association of Public Health Dentistry and the Ministry of Health.

## **7. Financial Implications:**

The 2024 Public Health approved Operating Budget includes the following:

- \$1.493M for the Public Health Dental Program, this program is cost shared between the Province of Ontario and the Region of Waterloo. While the traditional Provincial cost share level was “up to 75%”, Provincial funding restrictions over several years have resulted in a current provincial cost sharing level of approximately 68% (based on the Region’s 2024 Budget). This represents a Provincial funding shortfall of \$2.5 million across all Public Health programs.
- \$2.274M for the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program, which is 100% funded by the Ministry of Health. Public Health provides funding to three community health centres for the service delivery of this program.
- \$2.360M for the Ontario Works Discretionary Benefits, including the Adult Emergency Dental Program and the Ontario Disability Support Program Denture and Discretionary Services, which is 100% funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.
- \$299K for the Public Health Dental Clinics for low-income children and adults who are not covered by other social assistance programs, which is 100% levy funded by the Region of Waterloo.

## **8. Conclusion / Next Steps:**

Public Health will monitor and report on the impact of changes in eligibility for provincial dental programs, as well as the introduction of the Canadian Dental Care Plan, on access to dental care for Waterloo Region residents.

## **9. Attachments:**

Appendix A - School and Community Outreach Dental Screening Data

Appendix B - Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program Service Delivery

Appendix C - Public Health Dental Clinics Service Delivery

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