

November 27, 2023

Hon. Sylvia Jones,
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
sylvia.jones@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Jones:

Re: Adequate Funding for the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Health for Peterborough Public Health (PPH) to bring to your attention concerns about the funding model for the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP), and the resulting limitations for access to service promised to Ontarians. Low income and a lack of insurance play the dominant role in limiting people's ability to access oral health care, so PPH appreciates the Ministry of Health's vision to advance oral health equity through access to comprehensive oral health care for seniors.

As stated by the Ministry of Health, the OSDCP provides access to free dental services to seniors aged 65 and over who meet the required income conditions and do not have dental benefits either through private insurance or other government programs. Further, it states, if you are accepted into the program, you can access dental services by contacting your local public health agency (LPHA).

These statements imply that those who meet the eligibility criteria will be provided that service once they have demonstrated eligibility and contacted their LPHA. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of an annualized budget process and significant delays in confirming any in-year adjustments, those seeking these services have had to be told the service is not available at this time, despite the existence of capacity in the community to provide this service.

Early in the 2023 fiscal year, it was recognized by our PPH dental team that demand for services by eligible clients within the OSDCP would surpass the approved annual budget. After several discussions with Ministry staff, we learned that requests for additional funds could not be made until November 2023, and approval of these requests would be received in January 2024, at the earliest. Our Board, therefore has been forced to decide what services to continue beyond the budget approval levels and assume the risk that the funding request may not be approved.

Since Boards of Health are not permitted to run a deficit, our Board has committed to retaining essential services for the balance of 2023, with the expectation the additional \$200,000 required to meet this minimum service level will be approved by the Ministry. In addition to the funding risk, this decision will mean many referrals for those in need of dental care will be delayed until 2024. Lastly, the Board has also instructed staff that, if the one-time funding to support the extraordinary program pressures in 2023 is not received, to cease service delivery once the budget is exhausted in 2024 and beyond.

On behalf of our Board, I urge you to ensure this program is adequately funded in all LPHAs and that systems for in-year adjustments are provided in a timely manner so that eligible clients needing service are not forced to wait unnecessarily. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Councillor Kathryn Wilson
Chair, Board of Health

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cc: Hon. Raymond Cho, Ontario Minister for Seniors and Accessibility
Local MPPs
Age-Friendly Peterborough
Peterborough District Dental Society
Ontario Dental Association
Ontario Dental Hygienists' Association
Ontario Association of Public Health Dentistry (OAPHD)
Ontario Boards of Health
Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa)