



CITY OF HAMILTON
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES
Healthy Families Division

TO:	Mayor and Members Public Health Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	July 10, 2024
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Future of Levy Funded Dental Health Programs for Adults (BOH24020) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Pat Armstrong (905) 546-2424 Ext. 2424
SUBMITTED BY:	Jennifer Vickers-Manzin, CNO Director, Healthy Families Division Public Health Services
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That staff be directed to work with Public Works, Fleet Services to dispose of the levy funded Dental Health Bus and to transfer any net revenue from sale to the Hamilton Public Health, Dental Health Bus Program, Department ID 678116;
- (b) That Council approves opening a Capital Project for the capital investment of up to \$188,600 for the addition of one dental operator to the existing downtown dental clinic funded from the forecasted surplus in the 2024 Tax operating budget in the 100% levy funded Dental Health Bus Program;
- (c) That staff be directed to re-align the annualized estimated cost savings of \$73,000 from the Dental Health Bus program budget to the Dental Operator budget for the following additional costs; and,
 - \$28,000 – dental operating supplies and transportation costs for clients
 - \$45,000 - Salary and wage cost 0.6 FTE dental receptionist
- (d) Subject to approval of Recommendation (c) to Report BOH24020, that the staff complement be increased in the Public Health Services Dental Program by 0.2 FTE to convert the 0.4 FTE bus driver to 0.6 FTE dental receptionist.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across Canada there is recognition of gaps in oral health care coverage among different populations. Locally, one in three Hamilton adults who do not visit the dentist identify cost as the main barrier (Board of Health Report BOH18001). From a public health perspective, oral health impacts overall health and has the potential to exacerbate existing health disparities, as those with fewer resources are disproportionately impacted. Oral health has been linked to the social determinants of health across the lifespan including factors such as employability, education, physical and mental health, and wellbeing. Population health data shows that poor oral health is common in Hamilton.

In August 2023, earlier than anticipated, it was determined there were structural deficits that made the Dental Health Bus unfit to drive.¹ Since August 2023, interim adjustments have been made to maintain 65% of Dental Health Bus service at the downtown dental clinic. This adjustment is displacing restorative and preventive services and increasing pressures in other programs.

In addition to local program challenges, recent federal policy decisions related to dental care coverage require a review of local policy decisions related to dental programming provided by Public Health Services. The purpose of this report is to provide details regarding the current and evolving state of dental care coverage that Hamilton residents can access and propose service delivery options for 100% levy funded Public Health Services Dental programs including the Dental Health Bus and Adult Dental program in the City of Hamilton.

In Ontario, there is a patchwork of publicly funded plans that provide varying levels of dental coverage for those that are eligible. These programs include:

- The Ontario Disability Support Program;
- Healthy Smiles Ontario, for children in low-income families, including those on Ontario Disability Support Program and the Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities Program;
- The Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program for those 65 years and older;
- Ontario Works; and,
- Ontario Works, Special Supports Program.

In 2022, the federal government proposed the Canadian Dental Care Plan. By the end of 2025, the full Canadian Dental Care Plan is expected to be rolled out to all eligible Canadians. Appendix “A” to Public Health Committee Report BOH24020 describes eligibility criteria, funding source and degree of dental care coverage under each of the publicly funded programs.

¹ City of Hamilton Board of Health Communication Update. (2023-08-31) Dental Bus Update.

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The City of Hamilton, Public Health Services provides several oral health programs targeted for different at-risk populations including children, adults, and seniors (Appendix “A” to Public Health Committee Report BOH24020). Dental services for children and seniors are mandated and funded through the Ontario Public Health Standards. In addition to provincially mandated oral health programs, the City of Hamilton Public Health Services offers two 100% municipally funded dental programs. The Adult Dental program is accessed through an application process and operates at the downtown dental Clinic at 110 King Street West and provides a dental home for eligible adults. In addition, the Dental Health Bus program provides emergency dental services for residents of Hamilton who have no other form of dental insurance and cannot afford dental care in the community. High demand and wait time for services persists across all age categories and are dominated by demands from adult and senior populations.

After careful analysis, expansion at the current downtown site, maximizing space at the newly renovated Upper James site and use of the Seniors Dental Health Bus are being recommended as the most feasible and cost-effective solutions to continue to meet the needs while the Canadian Dental Care Program is being implemented. This report details proposed changes to 100% levy funded oral health services which are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Proposed Changes to maintain oral health services for adults with no oral health coverage.

Location	Public Health Services downtown clinic	Adult Dental Bus	Upper James Clinic	Senior Oral Health Bus	East End Clinic
Historical	restorative, preventive and emergency services	Emergency services	Non-Applicable	Non-Applicable	Non-Applicable
Interim	Additional restorative, and emergency services	Non-Applicable	Non-Applicable	Preventive and emergency services	Preventative
Proposed	restorative, preventive and emergency services	Non-Applicable	Restorative, preventive and emergency services	Restorative, and emergency services Dominic Agostino Site	Non-Applicable

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The proposed solution utilizes existing and new office space through the addition of one new operatory, operating three days per week and utilizes two unused dental operatory days at the newly renovated Upper James clinic. The Seniors Dental Health Bus will be utilized one day per month at the Dominic Agostino Riverdale Community Centre. The proposed plan provides comparable service delivery levels, considers proximity of services, and increases capacity and efficiencies in service provision across all program areas.

The proposed service delivery plan requires a 0.2 FTE increase to Public Health Services Dental Program complement and a conversion of 0.4 FTE bus driver to 0.6 FTE dental receptionist position, funded from the forecasted surplus in the Tax operating budget in the 100% levy funded Dental Health Bus Program.

With the full launch of the Canadian Dental Care Plan by the end of 2025, the program will report back through the 2025 and possibly 2026 budget process to determine the future of the levy dental programs in the City of Hamilton.

Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 10

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: The City of Hamilton Public Health Services Levy Dental programs have an overall budget of \$967,434. The Dental Health Bus 2024 budget is \$428,126 while the Adult Dental program is \$539,308. In consultation with Public Works, Corporate Facilities and Energy Management the estimated cost for an additional operatory at the downtown dental clinic is up to \$188,600.

With the current 2024 vacancy of 0.6 FTE dentist \$114,677 and 0.4 FTE bus driver \$25,035 as well as unused vehicle related expenses of \$31,000 and vehicle insurance cost savings of \$16,966, there is an overall savings of approximately \$187,678. This leaves a pressure of \$913 this will be offset by proceeds of sale of the dental bus as noted in Recommendation (b) to Public Health Committee Report BOH24020.

In 2025, with the completion of the additional operatory and without bus costs, there is projected operational savings of approximately \$73,000 (\$47,965 vehicle related expenses and \$25,035 for 0.4 FTE Dental bus driver). These savings will be used for the following: \$28,000 transportation costs for clients as well as operating supplies and \$45,000 for the 0.6 FTE Receptionist as noted in Recommendation (c) to Public Health Committee Report BOH24020.

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Staffing: The proposed service delivery plan requires a 0.2 FTE increase to Public Health Services Dental Program complement and a conversion of 0.4 FTE bus driver to 0.6 FTE dental receptionist position, funded from the forecasted surplus in the 2024 Tax operating budget in the 100% levy funded Dental Health Bus Program.

Program	Dental Health Bus	Adult Dental program	Total Levy
2024 budget	\$428,126	\$539,307	\$967,433
2024 FTE	2.8 FTE	4.1 FTE	6.9 FTE
2025 budget	\$443,715	\$560,445	\$1,004,160
2025 FTE	3.0 FTE	4.1 FTE	7.1 FTE

Legal: Not Applicable.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The City of Hamilton has two 100% municipally funded Public Health Services Dental programs. The Dental Health Bus provides emergency dental services for residents of Hamilton who have no other form of dental insurance and cannot afford dental care in the community. When operational, the Dental Health Bus parked at five different locations each week throughout the City of Hamilton:

1. Norman Pinky Lewis - 192 Wentworth Street North;
2. Neighbour to Neighbour Centre - 28 Athens Street;
3. Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club - 45 Ellis Avenue;
4. Dominic Agostino Riverdale Community Centre - 150 Violet Avenue; and,
5. Central Memorial- 93 West Avenue South.

The Adult Dental program is accessed through an application process and operates at the downtown dental Clinic on the 3rd floor of the Robert Thomson Building, 110 King Street West. Those who are eligible for the program are residents of Hamilton, do not have dental insurance coverage and meet the financial criteria of 2022 Low Income Measure (adjusted after tax dollars and household size). The Adult Dental program offers emergency, restorative and preventive treatment based on client need and provides a dental home for clients to improve and maintain good oral health.

A complete list of Dental Support programs can be found in Eligibility, Funding and Coverage Details in Appendix "A" to Public Health Committee Report BOH24020.

In August 2023, earlier than anticipated, Fleet Services determined that the Dental Health Bus was no longer fit to drive due to structural deficiencies. As an interim measure Public Health Services Dental Programs rearranged scheduling to support bus clients to access these services at the Robert Thomson Building downtown dental clinic. The interim structure is providing 65% coverage (or 12 fewer appointments per week) of

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the Dental Bus service. To reduce barriers, bus tickets are provided to clients who would have otherwise accessed the Dental Health Bus so they can travel to the downtown dental clinic site.

Beginning in September 2023, the program explored temporary alternatives to maintain services while longer term planning was occurring. After exploring several options over a five-month time frame, no feasible solution was identified. Staff transitioned to focus efforts on planning options for a longer-term solution.

The new federal Canada Dental Care Plan is rolling out to Canadians. This program will be accessed through an application process for Canadians who do not have access to private dental coverage and have filed taxes. As of June 2024, seniors over 65 years of age, children and youth under 18 years of age, and those who receive the Ontario Disability Support Program will be eligible while the population between 18 years of age to 64 years of age will become eligible by the end of 2025.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

The levy programs are not part of the Ontario Public Health Standards. The Municipal Act allows municipalities to establish procedural requirements for the programs and services provided to residents by the municipality. The Dental Health Bus and low-income Adult Dental program are discretionary programs funded 100% by the levy.

Public Health Services is mandated to provide all components of the Ontario Senior' Dental Care Program and Healthy Smiles Ontario in the dental clinics.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

- The program consulted with facilities and recreation to support an interim solution for alternate sites to park the bus to temporarily continue service while longer term planning was underway. At all sites many barriers were identified making it difficult to find a suitable temporary location to leave the bus inside or outside. Barriers include costs, access to water and power to the bus, grey water disposal, walkability, transit access, as well as adequate parking space and safety to protect the asset;
- The program explored opportunities to co-locate in community partner locations to offer service. These options were space and cost prohibitive compared with the current recommendation;
- Facilities were consulted on the cost and feasibility of adding additional dental operatory space at the Robert Thomson building downtown Public Health dental Clinic to accommodate bus clients. This option is included as part of the recommendation;

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- The program consulted with Fleet Services for annual review of vehicle and operating safety and mechanisms for disposal/sale of bus parts; and,
- Finance was consulted regarding costs, feasibility of staffing, budget and financing the capital costs to an existing clinic space.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Oral health is linked to overall health and is an important health matter for many adults in the community. In addition, many adults face barriers to accessing dental care due to cost and gaps in oral health care coverage. Locally, one in three Hamilton adults who do not visit the dentist identify cost as the main barrier (Board of Health Report BOH18001). From a public health perspective, oral health impacts overall health and has the potential to exacerbate existing health disparities, as those with fewer resources are disproportionately impacted. Oral health has been linked to the social determinants of health across the lifespan including factors such as employability, education, physical and mental health, and wellbeing. Population health data shows that poor oral health is common in Hamilton.

Local program challenges because of the decommissioning of the dental health bus, as well as recent federal policy decisions related to dental care coverage, is prompting a review of local policy decisions related to dental programming provided by Public Health Services.

The new federal Canada Dental Care Plan is being rolled out and will be provided by oral health care providers in the community. The impacts on the City of Hamilton's municipally funded programs will not be fully realized until the Canada Dental Care Plan is fully operational at the end of 2025.

The City of Hamilton has two 100% municipally funded Public Health Services dental programs. The goal of the programs has been to reduce unnecessary trips to the hospital, prevent chronic disease and increase quality of life for adults. Both Public Health Services programs have been in existence for many years and address the gap in dental services mostly for those 18 years and older who are residents of Hamilton, who cannot afford dental care in the community and who do not have any form of dental coverage. High demand and wait time for services persist across all age categories and are dominated by demands from adult and senior populations.

The two operatory Dental Health Bus travelled to five different sites per week throughout the City of Hamilton. There are no booked appointments on the bus. Clients arrive, are triaged, and are scheduled based on urgency. Four of the five sites where the bus parked were in lower East Hamilton and one mountain location at Neighbour to Neighbour. Historically, the busiest sites have been Norman Pinky Lewis Recreation Centre and Neighbour to Neighbour. The demand for services on the Dental Health Bus

is consistently high sometimes leading to people being turned away only to return the next day. When fully operational, the average number of clients serviced annually is 1,796 and the average number of clients turned away annually is 502.

While the temporary adjustments to the program have prioritized emergency dental services, the change is displacing restorative and preventive services and increasing wait times up to 12 months. The plan proposed in this report will allow the program to return to the full suite of restorative and preventive services.

Feedback from clients who access emergency dental services indicates they are more likely to access a walk-in model of care versus appointment based. This is consistent with research on oral health care and vulnerable populations. Staff have indicated that this is particularly important for clients who are unhoused and/or experience a substance use disorder.

The recommendations in this report accommodate all dental programs and streamline service delivery to three existing sites including the Seniors Bus, Upper James Clinic, and the Robert Thomson Building downtown dental Clinic. For former Dental Health Bus clients, utilizing existing office space to add one new operatory at the downtown dental Clinic operating three days per week and using two unused dental operatory days at the newly renovated Upper James Clinic as well as utilizing the Seniors Dental Bus will allow the dental program to return to comparable service delivery levels as when the bus was operational.

A Statistics Canada 2009 report states that one kilometre is typically referred to as “walking distance” while five kilometres is referred to as a reasonable distance to travel to access services (Board of Health Report BOH19026(a)). In consideration of this information, four of the five original sites fall within zero to five kilometres of proposed service delivery sites (Table 2 - Historical Bus Service Delivery Sites, Ranked by Number of Clients serviced). Many clients accessing bus services are from the downtown core or lower east Hamilton and identify the downtown Clinic site as easy to access due to proximity to core and bus services. The Dominic Agostino Riverdale Community Centre is outside of the five-kilometre range and requires a 50-minute bus commute to reach the proposed downtown site. The program is planning to arrange to park the Seniors Dental Health bus at the Dominic Agostino Riverdale site once per month to accommodate needs in that location. The Upper James Clinic is within walking distance of our second busiest site. Bus tickets, parking vouchers and taxi vouchers are always available to clients at clinic sites to reimburse travel expenses.

Table 2: Historical Bus Service Delivery Sites, ranked by number of Clients Served

Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6
Location	Norman Pinky Lewis- 192 Wentworth Street North	Neighbour to Neighbour Centre- 28 Athens Street	Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club- 45 Ellis Avenue	Dominic Agostino Riverdale Community Centre- 150 Violet Avenue	Central Memorial- 93 West Avenue South	Location
Distance from proposed service delivery location	2.7 Kms*	0.5 Kms**	4.8 Kms*	10.6 Kms*	3.1 Kms*	
Location	Norman Pinky Lewis- 192 Wentworth Street North	Neighbour to Neighbour Centre- 28 Athens Street	Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club- 45 Ellis Avenue	Dominic Agostino Riverdale Community Centre- 150 Violet Avenue	Central Memorial- 93 West Avenue South	

*Robert Thomson Building Clinic, 110 King Street West and

**Upper James Clinic 891 Upper James Street

At this time, replacement of the Dental Health Bus would cost approximately \$1.5M. While the bus provides access to service at different locations across the city there are always additional costs and challenges including weather, vehicle maintenance, fuel, service, and repairs compared to a fixed clinic site. Given the cost to replace the bus and the potential impact of the Canadian Dental Care Plan on the future of the adult levy programs, this option is not being recommended at this time.

To dispose of the bus in coordination with Fleet Services and Procurement, the Dental Health Bus would be sent to auction. The anticipated amount received for the bus sale would not be substantial. To be financially and environmentally conscious the dental equipment on the bus would be removed and some of the equipment would be repurposed in the new dental operatory at the downtown dental Clinic with the remaining going through the Policy #16 Procurement process.

Within the current context, the need and demand for dental services in the City of Hamilton remains high and disproportionately impact the city's most vulnerable

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populations. With the full launch of the Canadian Dental Care Plan in 2025, the program will reassess the barriers to care for adults and report back to the Public Health Committee to determine the future of the levy dental programs in the City of Hamilton through the 2025 and possibly 2026 budget process. Should a future decision be made to discontinue the adult levy funded program, the additional operator, proposed in this report, will continue to significantly benefit other dental services offered through Public Health Services dental programs. For example, it could improve operational efficiencies, such as a reduction in down time between clients and an increase in client seen per day.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

If Recommendations (b) and (c) to Report Public Health BOH2040 are not approved, there would be a \$188,600.00 savings to the levy. Public Health Services would discontinue service delivery for clients at the downtown dental Clinic previously services by the Adult Dental Health Bus. The reduction of 0.6 FTE dentist and subsequent three days of service would decrease service to 20-25 adults per week and 1,100 adults per year. Without these services there is no longer a need for the 0.6 FTE receptionist position, or transportation and operating supplies.

Recommendation (d) to Public Health Committee Report BOH24020 is based on the approval of recommendations (b) and (c) to Public Health Committee Report BOH24020 and becomes null.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix "A" to Report BOH24020	City of Hamilton Dental Support Programs
Appendix "B" to Report BOH24020	Canadian Dental Care Plan interactions with Ontario's Dental Coverage FAQ Document, April 19, 2024