

KEY MESSAGES

- Ontario dentists work on the front lines of government-funded dental programs, delivering care to those who need it.
- We are frustrated and disappointed by the severe funding gap, which has led to dentists subsidizing government programs by \$150 million each year.
- After more than a decade of inaction, we are asking for your support in finally fixing this growing problem.

The ISSUE

Dentists across the province provide high quality, timely care to children from low-income families through **Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO)**, adults through the **Ontario Disability Support Program** and **Ontario Works**, and patients requiring emergency and complex care in hospitals through the **Ontario Health Insurance Plan**.

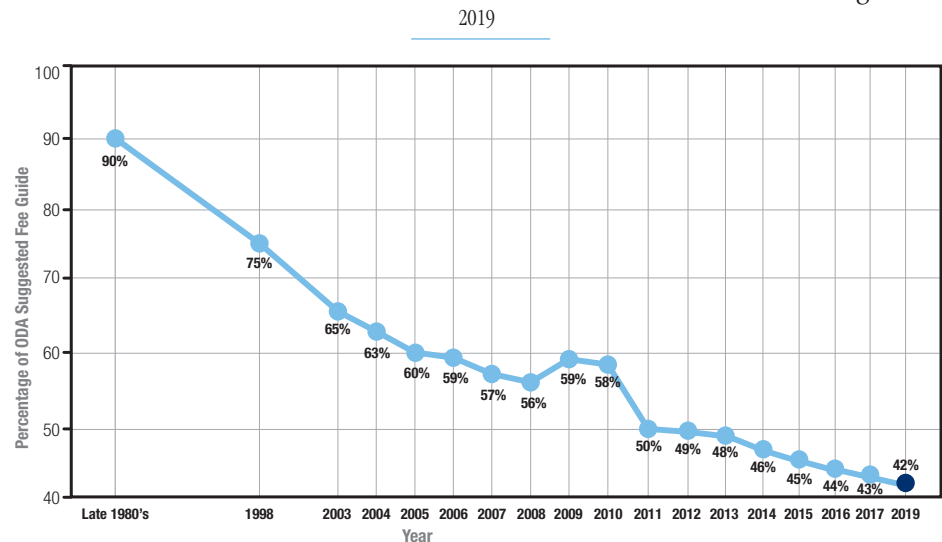
Government-funded dental programs in Ontario are simply **underfunded and unsustainable**, putting the oral health of hundreds of **thousands of Ontarians at risk¹**, **clogging hospital emergency rooms²**, and **keeping kids from school** each and every day³.

Currently, dentists are reimbursed at an average of 42 per cent of their normal fees, meaning that dentists subsidize the government dental programs **by approximately \$150 million each year**.

The government's commitment to low-income seniors is admirable, but **seniors need a dental program that works**. Public health⁴ accepts that community-based dentists are the most cost-efficient way to deliver care and reduce geographic and mobility barriers, and to ensure medically compromised patients have access to dental specialists.

We also support initiatives to save time and money, and the decision to better use dental specialists so that patients can get the care they need is a good first step. There are nearly 61,000 unnecessary visits to emergency rooms, and nearly 222,000 visits to physicians' offices, for dental problems costing taxpayers in excess of \$38 million each year.⁵

Decline in Fees Reimbursed to Dentists Under Provincial Government Programs



Starting with the HSO program for children, a \$50 million investment phased in over a two-year period would demonstrate a commitment to dental care and help ensure that all of the 500,000 eligible children and youth get the care that they need.

1 Quiñonez, C., DMD MSc PhD FRCD(C), Sadeghi, L., DDS, MSc, & Manson, H., MD, FRCPC, MHSc. (2012). Report on Access to Dental Care and Oral Health Inequalities in Ontario (pp. 2-3, Rep.). Toronto, Ontario: Public Health Ontario. doi: https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/eRepository/Dental_OralHealth_Inequalities_Ontario_2012.pdf

2 No access to dental care: Facts and figures on visits to emergency rooms and physicians for dental problems in Ontario (Issue brief). (2017). Toronto, Ontario: Ontario Oral Health Alliance. Retrieved April 10, 2017 from https://www.aohc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Information-ER-DR-visits-dental-problems_Jan-2017.pdf

3 Jackson, Stephanie L et al. "Impact of poor oral health on children's school attendance and performance." *American Journal of Public Health*. vol. 101,10 (2011): 1900-6.

4 OAPHD. (2019). Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program: Recommendations to Ensure Program Effectiveness.

5 Lack of oral care leads to needless pain. *The Toronto Star*. Feb. 28, 2017.