

January 24, 2020

Mr. Jeremy Roberts, MPP
Vice Chair, Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
99 Wellesley St W., Rm 1405, Whitney Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

RE: Pre-Budget Consultations 2020

Dear MPP Roberts,

As the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs undertakes its 2020 Pre-Budget study, I am writing to request your support for Ontario's dental care programs. The Ontario Dental Association (ODA) represents over 10,000 dentists across the province who work on the frontlines delivering the government's dental programs. I am one of those dentists, and I practice and live in Ottawa West—Nepean.

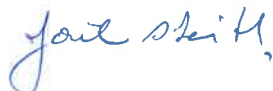
The Ontario government sponsors dental care programs for those in need: children from low-income families through the Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) program, adults through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW), and patients requiring emergency and complex services in hospitals through the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). Unfortunately, for over a decade the funding for these programs has not covered the cost of delivering care. Instead dentists like myself are reimbursed at approximately 42% of the ODA's Suggested Fee Guide, far below the cost of delivering care. The Ontario Dental Association (ODA) estimates that dentists subsidize the actual costs of these programs by approximately \$150 million each year.

My colleagues and I are committed to providing care to Ontario's most vulnerable. But unless the government closes the funding gap and updates increasingly antiquated fee schedules, our ability to do so will continue to be compromised.

As your Committee undertakes its Pre-Budget study, I request that you address this severe funding gap for these programs, starting with the HSO program for children. A \$50 million investment would have an immediately beneficial impact and demonstrate the government's commitment to resolving this issue. Further details on this funding gap can be found in the attached briefing note and letter from Dr. Kim Hansen, the President of the ODA. I encourage you to review these documents in detail and would be pleased to answer any questions.

I hope I can count on you to stand up for Ontario's most vulnerable.

Sincerely,



Dr. Janet Leith
Nepean, ON

Encl (2): *In-Brief document outlining the ODA's ask (Jan 2020); ODA Letter to Minister Phillips (Nov 2019)*

CC: Julia Douglas, Clerk

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**.

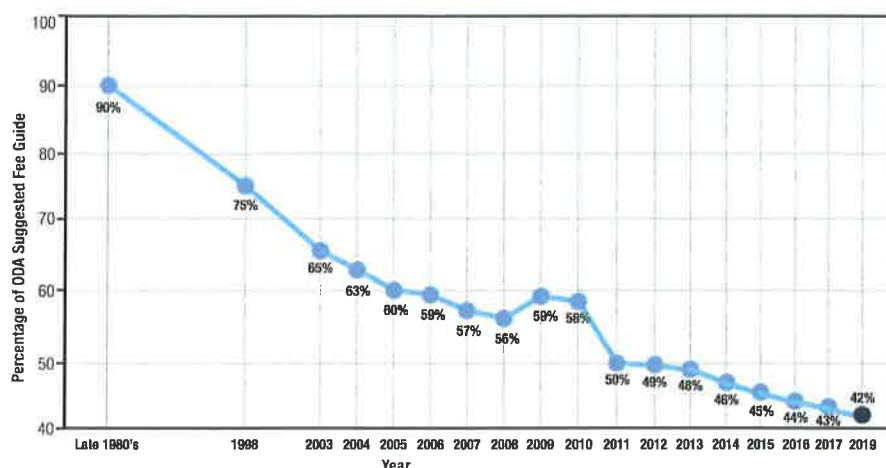
Government-funded dental programs in Ontario are simply **underfunded and unsustainable**, putting the oral health of hundreds of **thousands of Ontarians at risk¹**, **clogging hospital emergency rooms²**, and **keeping kids from school each and every day³**.

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
2019



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.oahc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Information-ER-OR-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.

Questions? Contact the Ontario Dental Association at advocacy@oda.ca or 416-922-3900 x 3328



Ontario Dental Association
4 New Street, Toronto, Ontario M5R 1P6
Tel 416-922-3900 Fax 416-922-9005

November 7, 2019

The Honourable Rod Phillips
Minister of Finance
Frost Building South, 7th Floor
7 Queen's Park Cres
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y7

Re: The 2019 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review

Dear Minister Phillips,

The Ontario Dental Association (ODA) represents over 10,000 dentists across the province, who work on the frontlines delivering your government's dental programs. I am one of those dentists and have practiced in Prescott, Ontario for more than thirty years providing care to those in need.

While the ODA is pleased by this government's commitment to fiscal responsibility and small businesses, our members – *mostly community-based small business owners and employers* – continue to be disappointed and frustrated by the severe funding gap in government dental care programs and missed opportunities to fix them. Let me tell you why.

The Ontario government acts as a sponsor to those who require dental care – children from low-income families through the Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) program, adults through the Ontario Disability Support Program (OSDP) and Ontario Works (OW), and patients requiring emergency and complex services in hospitals through the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). Unfortunately, for over a decade the funding has not even come close to covering the cost of delivering care. Today, dentists are reimbursed at approximately 42 per cent of the ODA's *Suggested Fee Guide*, meaning Ontario's dentists subsidize your government's programs by approximately \$150 million each year!

While the ODA supports initiatives to save time and money, and the recent decision to better use dental specialists, now is the time to work with us to get even more Ontarians healthier, faster, while at the same time respecting taxpayers.¹

The government's continued commitment to low-income seniors through the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) is also notable. Ontario's dentists believe there's a need for a properly structured and resourced program that addresses the obstacles preventing low-income seniors from getting the dental care they need. Public health is making it clear that community-based dentists are needed to reduce geographic and mobility barriers, and to ensure medically compromised patients have access to dental specialists.²

Ontario's dentists prove every day that we are committed to providing care to Ontario's most vulnerable. Failing to close the funding gap and update increasingly antiquated fee schedules jeopardizes our ability to deliver on government's promises.³ Simply put, it is unfair to expect dentists to continue to subsidize your government's programs. After more than a decade of inaction we are asking for your support in finally fixing this problem. The ODA wants to meet now to negotiate a plan to invest in dental care.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kim Hansen", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr. Kim Hansen
Chair, Board of Directors and President

c Hon. Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
Hon. Todd A. Smith, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services



January 24, 2020

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu, MPP
Chair, Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
99 Wellesley St W., Rm 1405, Whitney Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

RE: Pre-Budget Consultations 2020

Dear MPP Sandhu,

As the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs undertakes its 2020 Pre-Budget study, I am writing to request your support for Ontario's dental care programs. The Ontario Dental Association (ODA) represents over 10,000 dentists across the province who work on the frontlines delivering the government's dental programs. I am one of those dentists.

As you may know, the Ontario government sponsors dental care programs for those in need: children from low-income families through the Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) program, adults through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW), and patients requiring emergency and complex services in hospitals through the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). Unfortunately, for over a decade the funding for these programs has not covered the cost of delivering care. Instead dentists like myself are reimbursed at approximately 42% of the ODA's Suggested Fee Guide, far below the cost of delivering care. The Ontario Dental Association (ODA) estimates that dentists subsidize the actual costs of these programs by approximately \$150 million each year.

My colleagues and I are committed to providing care to Ontario's most vulnerable. But unless the government closes the funding gap and updates increasingly antiquated fee schedules, our ability to do so will continue to be compromised.

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I hope I can count on you to stand up for Ontario's most vulnerable.

Sincerely,

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Dr. Anil Bhalla

Encl (2): *In-Brief document outlining the ODA's ask (Jan 2020); ODA Letter to Minister Phillips (Nov 2019)*

c Julia Douglas, Clerk

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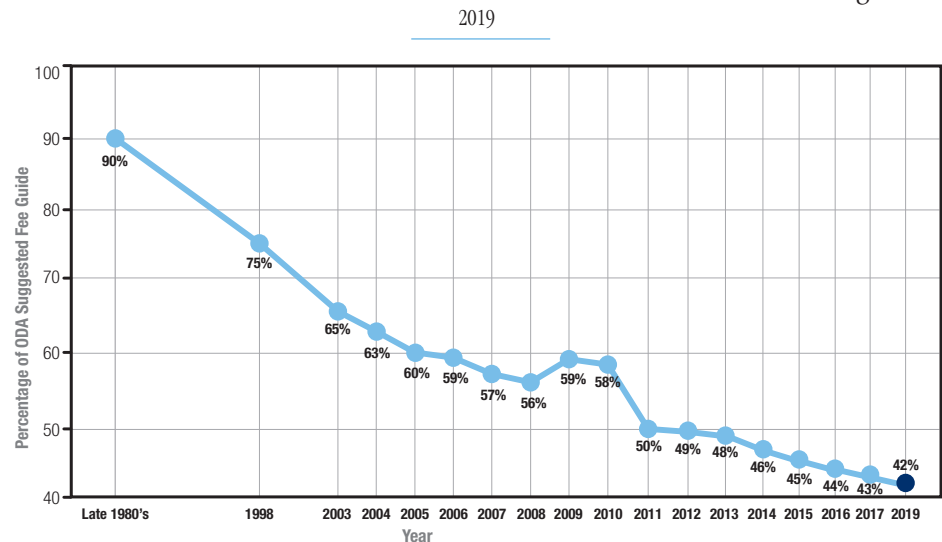
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Ontario Dental Association

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Minister of Finance
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Dr. Kim Hansen
Chair, Board of Directors and President

c Hon. Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
Hon. Todd A. Smith, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services

¹ Lack of oral care leads to needless pain. The Toronto Star. Feb. 28, 2017.

² OAPHD. (2019). Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program: Recommendations to Ensure Program Effectiveness.

³ Dentists call on gov't to fund kids program. The Sudbury Star. April 1, 2019.