



MISCONCEPTIONS PERSIST ABOUT THE CDCP

The federal government implemented its Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) in May. The CDCP represents a significant opportunity to improve the oral health of uninsured Canadians. Dentists have long advocated for oral health to be considered essential primary health care, and the dental profession has been sharing its expertise about how the CDCP can best serve the oral health needs of eligible people living in Canada. There is still work to be done.

An urgent area for improvement is the government's communication to the public about the CDCP. Misconceptions about the program persist. In a survey conducted in May by CDA and the provincial and territorial dental associations (PTDAs), we learned that over half of seniors (61%) had not heard about the CDCP's co-payment requirement based on income. This knowledge gap was even higher among the general population at 74%. In addition, 59% of seniors, and 69% of the general population had not heard about the potential additional charges or costs associated with the program.

This is a problem. Our primary concern with these findings is that misunderstandings about the program adds extra pressure to dental visits and undermines patient care. Unless the government makes a more concerted effort to clearly communicate the parameters and limitations of its plan, many people in Canada will experience difficulty receiving care.

Individual dentists can decide whether or not to participate in the CDCP. You know what's best for your patients, staff and practice. Dental offices across Canada are facing the added burden of having difficult conversations with patients about CDCP's limitations and misconceptions about what it offers. Surveys with dentists also showed that dental office staff are spending about 50 minutes per day explaining the program to patients.

In response to continued confusion, CDA and the PTDAs launched a public education initiative encouraging people who are eligible for the CDCP to "Know Before You Go." Based on what we've heard from our patients and know about our profession, these are things people need to know before they seek treatment under the CDCP:

For many patients, treatment under the CDCP will not be free. Many are under the impression the CDCP will cover all the costs for their care. This is not the case. In many cases, the coverage provided by the federal government under CDCP is less than the usual dental service fees. Patients will be responsible to cover the difference.

Patients cannot receive CDCP covered treatments from any dentist. Up until July 8, patients could only see a dentist registered to participate in the program. After July 8, patients can start to see a dentist that will participate through the CDCP's claim-by-claim pathway. However, this alternative pathway still requires dentists to accept the same CDCP terms and conditions and not all dentists will choose to do so.

The CDCP will not cover all treatments. The CDCP currently offers limited coverage and treatment options. Care options like sedation, commonly needed by youth, seniors, and persons with disabilities, will need government pre-approval. We still don't know how long our patients will need to wait for the government to approve the treatment that dentists determine they need.

Despite these ongoing concerns with the CDCP, we reaffirm our commitment to work closely with the federal government to advance the common goal of improving access to oral health care for those who are uninsured. ♦



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