
Hon. Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Room 281
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON
M7A 1A1

December 17, 2009

Honourable Premier,

Re. Funding for the Dental Program for Low-Income Families

On behalf of member Medical Officers of Health, Boards of Health and Affiliate organizations of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA) I am writing to urge you to build on the positive steps that your government has taken to address dental health for low-income Ontarians.

We were very pleased when your government followed through on its pre-election pledge with a firm commitment in the 2008 provincial budget of \$135 million over three years to provide dental services to low-income Ontarians. The recent expansion of the Children in Need of Treatment (CINOT) program to include children up to the age of 17 was a very welcome first step.

We are also looking forward to implementing the recently announced program to start providing preventive care and earlier treatment services that are not part of the more urgent ones provided by the CINOT program, but our members have significant concerns about this important next step.

The first of these is that there does not appear to be a clear vision for this new strategy. Funds have recently been made available to Ontario's health units, with a request to submit a business case on how it will be used. This is very difficult without a clear set of parameters for program development, a clear statement of how it is related to the Poverty Reduction Strategy, or a detailed explanation of how these funds are expected to fit into our members' overall dental health budget.

Dental professionals in Ontario's health units are generating many innovative ideas and programs for their communities, but we believe that they should be related to a coherent, evidence-based and carefully evaluated provincial strategy.

The second concern stems from the absence of any mention of low-income adults as more details of this important program are announced. When your government released its platform prior to

the 2007 provincial election, dental health for low-income Ontarians was a central plank. It followed high-profile stories in the media about the inability of low-income adults to access oral health services, leading to difficulties in obtaining employment, poor nutrition, severe illness, and even death.

When the commitment to the program was made in the 2008 provincial budget, it was clearly described as a plan to provide dental services to low-income persons, which would begin with an expansion of the CINOT program, and continue through working with Public Health Units, Community Health Centres, dentists and dental hygienists to deliver prevention and treatment services for all low-income Ontarians – not just children.

Too many low-income adult Ontarians are still awaiting access to the provincial dental program that they were promised in 2007. We are therefore urging you to follow through on this promise, which was reiterated in the 2008 and 2009 budgets, with a renewed focus on Ontario's low-income adults.

We acknowledge that Ontario still faces unprecedented economic challenges, but we repeat that it is precisely because of these challenges and not despite them that the provincial government must accelerate and not delay such investments. A healthy province is impossible without healthy people.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED

Valerie Sterling
President

Copy Dr. Arlene King, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Public Health Division
Hon. Laurel Broten, Minister, Children and Youth Services,
Hon. Margaret Best, Minister of Health Promotion
Hon. Deb Matthews, Minister of Health and Long Term Care
Hon. Dwight Duncan, Minister of Finance
Hon. Madeleine Meilleur, Minister of Community and Social Services
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