
Subject: Supporting Seniors Dental Care with Provincial Funding

Report to: Public Health & Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, September 10, 2019

Recommendations

1. That an adjustment to the previously adopted 2019 Regional Municipality of Niagara (Niagara Region) operating budget in the amount of \$1,602,750 for the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program, fully funded through the Ministry of Health (MOH), **BE APPROVED**;
2. That the creation of up to 17.2 permanent full time equivalent positions to support the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program, fully funded through the MOH, **BE APPROVED**;
3. That Public Health staff **BE DIRECTED** to continue to advocate for increased provincial funding for the Seniors Dental Care Program to fully address the population's need: and
4. That the Regional Chair **BE DIRECTED** to write to the Minister of Health and the Minister of Seniors & Accessibility to thank the Provincial government for this funding.

Key Facts

- In September 2018, Regional Council as the Board of Health endorsed report PHD 14-2018 which called on the provincial government to follow-through on a campaign promise to create a seniors dental program.
- In April 2019, the province announced creation of the seniors dental care program and on August 20, 2019 formally communicated funding for this program, designating the program as 100% provincially funded with \$2,137,000 annualized funding on the Provincial government budget year (April 1 to March 31). This funding is pro-rated to \$1,602,750 for the balance of the municipal budget year (April 1 to December 31).
- The purpose of this report is to inform the Board of Health of the in-year funding announcement received from the MOH for the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program and obtain approval of the related budget adjustment. In-year receipt of funding must comply with by-law 2017-63, Budget Control, items 6.6(a) and 6.6(b), requiring Council's approval for any amounts received in excess of \$1 million for operating programs

- Regional Council also requires staff to seek approval before creating any new permanent positions. Approval is being sought for the positions required to support this new initiative.
- The Seniors Dental Care Program will be operated through tight integration with many partners including Niagara's Community Health Centres and Niagara College.

Financial Considerations

The seniors dental care program is 100% provincially funded with \$2,137,000 annualized funding on the Provincial government fiscal budget year (April 1 to March 31). This funding is pro-rated to \$1,602,750 for the balance of the municipal budget year (April 1 to December 31). There is no municipal contribution required and no levy impact associated with this program.

Of the \$1,602,750 in funding for the balance of the municipal budget year, \$425,000 has been earmarked to fund the up to 17.2 permanent full time equivalent positions required to support the new initiative until the end of 2019. The balance of \$1,177,750 will be used for supplies, equipment, maintenance, and other eligible operating costs associated with direct service delivery.

Based on the timing of the official funding announcement and the time required to recruit staff and negotiate agreements with community health centres, the funding allotment for 2019 may not be fully spent. Any unspent funds must be returned to the MOH at year-end, however an application will be made to carry funding over to 2020 in lieu of returning it, if necessary.

The ongoing annual provincial funding of \$2,137,000 per year will constitute base funding for this program in future years' budgets as a fully provincially-funded program with no levy contribution required.

Analysis

Evidence of Need for Seniors Dental Care

- In 2015, there were almost 61,000 hospital emergency visits for dental problems, at a cost to Ontario's health care system of approximately \$31 million.
- Two-thirds of low-income seniors do not have access to dental insurance.

Evidence shows that low income seniors have limited to no dental insurance coverage and generally higher dental care needs. As a result, untreated oral health issues can

lead to adverse health outcomes such as infection, pain and abscess. These adverse health outcomes can lead to chronic disease and lower quality of life^{1 2}.

In 2017, the Niagara Dental Health Coalition worked on, and presented to council (PHD 14-2018) the *Niagara Region Adult Dental Health Care Barriers Survey Report 2017: A snapshot of those who face barriers to accessing dental care*. Although the report was based on survey results from those 18+ years, the results can be extrapolated to reflect the seniors' population.

Plan for Delivering the Program

The Ontario government expects that Public Health will leverage existing infrastructure for the publicly-funded children's dental program, Healthy Smiles Ontario.

Public Health plans to utilize community health centres (CHCs), Public Health dental clinics, and a Regional building that has space, to deliver clinics, either upgrading existing dental clinics or equipping new ones to support preventive and restorative dental care. As well, the Dental Bus operated by Public Health will be leveraged. The extent of upgrades or new equipping will be dependent on a separate application for capital funding from the Provincial government.

These clinics will be staffed by a multidisciplinary dental team. The size of the team may vary based on provincial capital funding that will determine the complement of clinic sites. As well, subject to current negotiations with CHCs, most employees will likely end up as employees of the CHCs rather than Public Health. At most, the following will be positions needed to operate this program:

Table 1 Breakdown of Positions Needed for Seniors Dental Care Program in Scenario with Maximum Number of Positions

Position	Number of Full Time Equivalent
Dentists	2.2
Registered Dental Hygienists	4.0
Certified Dental Assistants	4.0
Program Assistants	4.0
Co-coordinators	3.0
Total	17.2

Volume of Service

¹ Canadian Academy of Health Sciences, 2014. Improving access to oral health care for vulnerable people living in Canada.

² Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Report on access to dental care and oral health inequalities in Ontario. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2012.

Approximately 9000 seniors in Niagara could be **eligible** to receive dental services under this program. The Ministry has determined that 3789 seniors will actually **utilize** the program based on data on the Ontario Drug Benefit utilization of 40%.

The information provided to us from the MOH is based on the income cut-off of \$19,300 for a single person and \$32,300 for a couple. Line 236 of the income tax return will determine eligibility.

Public Health has mapped the region using census data to show where potential clients are based, and is using this information to plan the program. As well, this data informed the capital funding proposal submitted to the Ministry on August 7, 2019.

Alternatives Reviewed

The Board of Health could reject this new provincial funding. However, the provincial government is expected to make seniors dental care a mandated Public Health program, and so then the entire cost of the program would be borne by the Regional levy. This is therefore not recommended.

The Board of Health could defer approval of new positions until a later date, once capital funding allocations have been announced by the Provincial government, and then final plans can be negotiated with CHCs. However, funding must be spent by December 31 which is less than 4 months away, and several weeks are needed to recruit new positions. The delay required to seek approval of the Board of Health for positions once all details are known might prevent spending of all the funding allocated for the Seniors Dental Program. This would require return of those funds to the Ministry of Health. This would also not serve local seniors who could not benefit from the returned funds. Approval of positions now is therefore recommended to minimize any subsequent delays.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Approval of the recommendations in this report will support the Council Strategic Priority of a *Healthy and Vibrant Community* by enabling Public Health to deliver a service that is greatly needed by seniors.

Other Pertinent Reports

[PHD 14-2018](#) Support for Low-Income Senior's Dental Health Program

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Appendices

None