

For Information

REPORT TITLE: **Improving Access to the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program Using a Mixed Model Approach**

FROM: Nancy Polzinelli, Commissioner of Health Services
Katherine Bingham, MD MSc CCFP(EM) FRCPC, Acting Medical Officer of Health

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this report is to provide additional information to Council on the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program and the procurement needs for the mobile dental clinic.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program is mandated to be delivered through Public Health Units, Community Health Centres, and Aboriginal Health Access Centres, with care provided by salaried dental providers. Fee-for-service for ongoing dental treatment through private dental providers is not permitted.
 - There are approximately 7000 seniors on a waitlist for Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) services in Peel.
 - To ensure community needs are met, Peel will require a mixed-model approach (including fixed and mobile clinics) to provide dental services that meet the growing demand for OSDCP and expand its reach while remaining within the provincial guidelines for the program.
 - In 2019, the Ministry of Health awarded Peel Public Health \$885,000, as part of the approved capital funding for the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP), for a two-operatory mobile dental bus. In May 2022, the Ministry provided additional capital funding to expand existing clinic infrastructure, build three new five-operatory fixed clinics, and provide operational funding to the clinic planned for the Seniors Health and Wellness Village at Peel Manor.
 - A mobile dental clinic uses a health equity approach by bringing services to clusters of seniors experiencing barriers, such as those who reside in senior housing, long-term-care homes, have mobility issues, and/or live far from a city's core.
-

Improving Access to the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program Using a Mixed Model Approach

DISCUSSION

1. Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program

a) Provincial Design & Requirements for Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program

In November 2019, the Provincial government launched the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) to provide low-income seniors access to quality dental care in order to reduce the number of dental-related emergency department visits, prevent chronic disease, and increase quality of life for seniors. The OSDCP aims to provide accessible, comprehensive, and ongoing dental services similar to an insurance model to eligible low-income seniors. The Ministry requires that services be provided through Public Health Units, Community Health Centres (CHC), and Aboriginal Health Access Centres. The Ministry does not permit the standard fee-for-service payment model through private dental offices.

Once a client is enrolled in the OSDCP they will continue to have access to services providing they continue to meet eligibility requirements. This differs from the former Region of Peel Seniors' Dental Program, which provided limited, once-per-lifetime dental treatment. Refer to July 11, 2019, report titled "New Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program" for a comparison between the provincial and regional dental program for seniors.

b) Current Service Delivery and Capacity in Peel

In Peel, the OSDCP is delivered at two CHCs across three locations (Brampton, Malton, and Mississauga):

- Wellfort's Health n' Smiles location dedicates four of its eight operatories to the OSDCP, the Four Corners location has three operatories for OSDCP clients
- East Mississauga Community Health Centre currently dedicates one third of its operatories to OSDCP.

Combined, the two CHCs can serve approximately 500 unique clients per month. This varies depending on the complexity of clients needs (e.g., clients may require one to six appointments to resolve an urgent need). Given their current capacity, two CHCs are unable to meet the demand for the OSDCP. Also, the shutdown of dental clinics in 2020 during the pandemic and changes in COVID infection control requirements have resulted in reduced appointment and further capacity constraints.

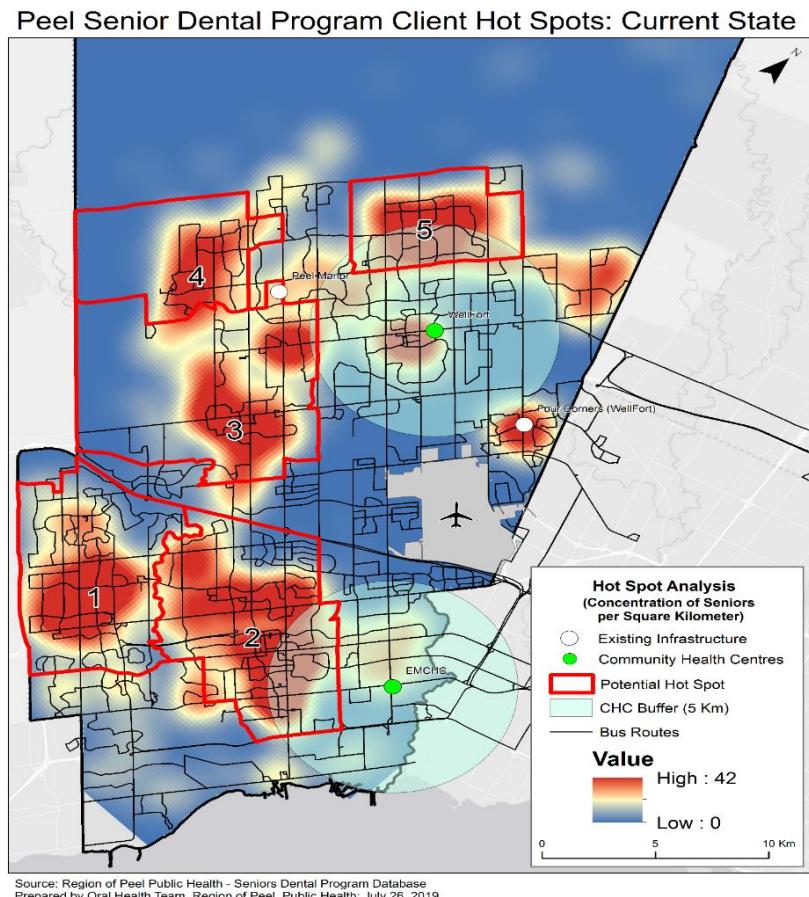
As of April 30, 2022, more than 11,200 seniors have enrolled in the program in Peel, which is over 60 per cent greater than the estimate provided by the ministry of 6,938 seniors accessing ongoing dental treatment. Public Health projected the annual uptake for OSDCP services to be approximately 20,794 seniors, which is significantly greater than the Ministry's estimate.

Peel Public Health has provided additional funding to each CHC for increased staff and extended hours of operation. However, the demand continues to surpass the current infrastructure, with approximately 7000 clients waiting for OSDCP service in Peel.

Improving Access to the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program Using a Mixed Model Approach

As shown on Map 1, the green and white points represent four locations that are currently or will be providing OSDCP services. However, there are five hot spots in Peel with high concentrations of seniors not residing near an OSDCP service location. Three of these hot spots are in Central Mississauga, West Mississauga, and West Brampton. Not shown on this map is the lack of access to services for residents of Caledon.

Map 1: Peel Senior Dental Program Client Hot Spots: Current State



c) Peel's Planned Service Delivery Model

In 2019, Public Health developed a plan consisting of a mixed-model approach (including fixed and mobile clinics) to service delivery based on data and local needs. A mixed model of service delivery offers clients flexibility in accessing essential dental care and reduces health inequities. The plan included expansion at Peel's two CHCs, building new fixed dental clinics, and a mobile dental bus to reach Peel's most vulnerable population.

Public Health submitted a request to the Ministry of Health for capital funding to meet Peel's demand for service. Refer to October 24, 2019, report titled "Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program: Capital Funding Requests" for the rationale to support expanding Peel's current dental infrastructure and building new infrastructure.

Improving Access to the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program Using a Mixed Model Approach

Unfortunately, not all components of the plan submitted to Province were funded initially. In December 2019, the Ministry approved part of Peel's plan: an expansion from six to eight operatories at Wellfort Community Health Services and a mobile dental clinic to support Peel's proposal to expand dental infrastructure. Over the pandemic, staff provided the Ministry with updates on the current implementation of the program and advocated for increased funding to maximize current infrastructure and to build new infrastructure to support Peel's community.

In December 2021, Peel was given the opportunity to resubmit for the outstanding components of the mixed-model plan. In May of 2022, the remaining capital projects were funded, with the Ministry awarding the Board of Health for Peel Public Health funding for three new fixed clinics (total of \$3,515,400) to ensure access in underserviced areas in Peel (i.e., West Mississauga, Central Mississauga, West Brampton) and an expansion at East Mississauga CHC. This recent funding allows for the full implementation of Peel's planned mixed-model approach. See Appendix II for an overview of Public Health's plan to expand and build new dental infrastructure in Peel in order to meet growing demands for seniors' dental care.

i) Mobile Dental Clinic as Part of Peel's Mixed-Model Plan

While a fixed clinic has a greater capacity to offer services to clients compared to a mobile dental clinic, the bus is intended to fill a service gap by serving a proportion of the senior population that is hardest to reach, adding more infrastructure in the system. The mobile dental clinic would remove barriers for clients, such as enabling easier and direct access for underserviced communities without needing to book transit and/or coordinate with a caregiver to attend appointments.

The mobile dental clinic is intended to supplement and work synergistically with the fixed clinics by providing services throughout Peel Region to clusters of seniors experiencing barriers, (i.e., those who reside in seniors housing, long-term-care facilities, have mobility issues, and/or live in rural areas or far from a city's core, including Caledon) and will work with community partners to bring essential dental services to the seniors who are most vulnerable and might otherwise be left behind or missed altogether.

ii) Experiences with Mobile Clinics from Other Jurisdictions and Programs

Toronto Public Health, City of Hamilton, Northwestern Public Health Unit and others throughout Ontario have been operating mobile dental clinics, providing treatment for children, seniors, and other adults for more than a decade. These public health units have shared several advantages to mobile service delivery such as addressing access barriers (e.g., transportation, mobility, stigma), building community partnerships, and health promotion opportunities. Meeting people where they are and being continuously visible in the community, in places that are familiar and trusted, is key to the design of equitable health practices and services.

Drawing from the COVID mass vaccination experience in Peel, mobile community vaccination clinics were brought to high priority areas (e.g., those with a high proportion of people who experience multiple systemic barriers and health inequities) because a different approach was needed to increase vaccine uptake. Qualitative data showed that residents were opting not to attend the nearby fixed vaccine clinic location. Likewise, in

Improving Access to the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program Using a Mixed Model Approach

the OSDCP, some clients have chosen to defer needed treatment until an appointment becomes available with a provider closer to where they live. When barriers to services are reduced in such a way that brings the service closer to home there would be higher uptake of services amongst isolated and vulnerable seniors.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

Limited Access to Dental Care for Peel Seniors

Offering OSDCP services only through fixed clinic locations would disproportionately impact a segment of seniors, including those in long-term-care, who are most marginalized from accessing essential dental services. This may result in seniors experiencing a reduced quality of life and either not pursuing care or needing emergency dental services in hospital settings.

In addition to the planned expansion of fixed clinic sites, the two operatories in the mobile dental bus will support the growing need for dental services and meet the diverse needs of seniors in Peel.

The day-to-day operational requirements of the mobile dental clinic have been factored into the planning and current program funding; whereby operational costs reflect costs incurred in a fixed clinic. Offering dental service on a mobile bus does not impact the safety or quality of service clients would receive. The mobile clinic will meet all accessibility requirements and will be a fully equipped clinic. Staff continue to advocate to the Ministry for operational funding that adequately supports the demand for service across the mixed-model plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Capital funding in the amount of \$885,000 to procure a mobile clinic have been received by Peel Public Health.

The Ministry's deadline to complete the procurement of the two-operatory mobile dental bus is March 30, 2023, thus any decisions that may delay the project will impact staff's ability to meet the ministry's funding requirements.

CONCLUSION

Currently, there is limited capacity to meet the demands of the OSDCP in Peel. Staff plan, through a mixed-model approach (including fixed and mobile clinics), to address current and future program needs by expanding existing clinics and building new infrastructure with new clinics and a mobile dental bus.

The mobile dental clinic offers a unique approach to ensure that equity, community, and trust are at the forefront of OSDCP delivery to reduce systemic barriers to obtaining quality dental care for low-income seniors. Improving the service delivery model beyond traditional methods aligns with the Region of Peel's mission of working with the community.

Improving Access to the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program Using a Mixed Model Approach

APPENDICES

Appendix I – Overview of Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program

Appendix II – Planned Approach for Expanding and Building New Dental Infrastructure

Authored By: Stephanie Tea, Supervisor, Chronic Disease & Injury Prevention



Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services



Katherine Bingham, MD MSc CCFP(EM) FRCPC, Acting Medical Officer of Health