
For Information

REPORT TITLE: Seniors Oral Health – Public Health Program and Service Update

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OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the implementation of the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In November 2019, the provincial government launched the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP), which replaced the Region of Peel’s Seniors Dental Program (SDP), offering ongoing dental care to low-income seniors.
 - In Peel, the OSDCP services are provided through Community Health Centres (CHC) and temporarily through private dental providers, for treatment of urgent needs only. This interim measure assists the CHCs to continue providing both routine and urgent care.
 - The Ministry of Health (Ministry) has incrementally approved seven projects, which will expand the public dental infrastructure in Peel and provide equitable access to dental care.
 - Peel Public Health continues to work with the Ministry for additional funding to enhance OSDCP service provision at current and future clinics.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

Public Health Oral Health Services for Seniors

Public health programs and services aim to improve population health outcomes by reducing preventable disease and health inequities in accordance with the Ontario Public Health Standards (see related report listed on the April 27, 2023 Regional Council agenda titled "The Oral Health System - A Picture in Peel"). This defines the responsibilities of boards of health for the provision of mandatory public health programs and services. The Ontario Public Health Standards requires the Region of Peel’s Board of Health to provide the OSDCP in accordance with the *Oral Health Protocol, 2021*, which includes supporting access to and delivery of eligible dental services to enrolled clients, assisting seniors to enroll in the program, and assisting with the establishment of a dental home under the OSDCP.

In 2019, the provincial government launched the OSDCP, a provincially funded program that offers eligible seniors access to ongoing dental care. The OSDCP is intended to improve

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access to free dental care as it permits clients to access the program multiple times a year, like an insurance program. Enrollment is automatically renewed on a yearly basis if clients meet the eligibility criteria.

The Ministry sets the parameters of the OSDCP. Services can only be accessed through clinics operated by public health units, Community Health Centres, and Aboriginal Health Access Centres. The Ministry does not permit the standard fee-for-service payment model through private dental providers.

The provincially funded OSDCP has replaced the regionally funded SDP.

2. The Former Region of Peel Seniors Dental Program

Prior to the implementation of the OSDCP, the Region of Peel funded and operated the Seniors' Dental Program, which provided services to approximately 10,000 clients from 2008 to 2020. The Region determined all program parameters including eligibility requirements and the service delivery model. Dental services provided by the former SDP removed pain and infection, as well as reduced the complications of untreated dental conditions and restored reasonable function; it did not cover all dental conditions. Services were provided to eligible low-income seniors by CHCs and private dental providers. Clients were limited to only one-time treatment (within the SDP schedule of services), that ideally needed to be completed within a six-month period. This service limitation was due to fixed funding and high demand for the program.

3. Implementation of the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program in Peel

In late 2019, implementation of the OSDCP began in Peel with CHC clinics providing service delivery at three locations (additional locations coming in 2023 and 2024):

1. Health n' Smiles Dental Clinic-WellFort Community Health Services (Brampton)
2. Four Corners Health Centre-WellFort Community Health Services (Malton)
3. East Mississauga Community Health Centre (Mississauga)

In 2019, the Ministry approved two of seven proposed projects to expand the public dental infrastructure in Peel (for further information, refer to the October 24, 2019, report from the Commissioner of Health Services, titled "Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program: Capital Funding Requests"):

- a) **Construction of two new treatment rooms at WellFort Community Health Services Health n' Smiles clinic**
 - Completed March 2021
- b) **Procurement of a mobile dental clinic**
 - Currently in the procurement process for a mobile dental clinic with two treatment rooms

Less than a year after the OSDCP was implemented, CHC dental clinics were forced to temporarily close due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon reopening, the required Infection Prevention and Control measures and the volume of seniors in need of urgent dental care impacted the CHCs capacity.

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4. Current Status

The Ministry underestimated the annual uptake of OSDCP services in Peel at approximately 7,000 clients per year. Not only are there more seniors seeking OSDCP services than initially estimated, but those accessing the OSDCP have high dental needs that often require multiple appointments to resolve. As a result, the overall demand for the OSDCP services in Peel exceeds the service capacity of the CHCs.

Each CHC clinic has a roster of OSDCP clients and registers additional clients each month. Those waiting to be registered for ongoing routine services can receive treatment for their immediate urgent dental needs through the CHCs and as needed, private providers. The prioritization of urgent cases has impacted the capacity to provide services to those waiting for routine (i.e., non-urgent dental) care. To improve timely access to OSDCP services, the Ministry allowed public health units to enter temporary arrangements with private dental providers, using an alternative payment structure, (e.g., sessional rate). Peel Public Health continues to utilize private dental providers to treat urgent needs only, which assists the CHCs to continue providing both routine and urgent care. Peel Public Health intends to maintain these partnerships over the next few years, until public dental infrastructure in Peel increases.

Peel Public Health continuously works with the Ministry to highlight Peel's needs, which has resulted in additional funds for operating and capital projects to help alleviate capacity constraints.

5. Current Expansion of OSDCP Dental Infrastructure in Peel

Planning for OSDCP implementation in Peel has been developed with a health equity lens. The service delivery model consists of a mixed-model approach (fixed and mobile clinics), which offers clients flexibility in accessing essential dental care and reduces health inequities. For example, the three new dental clinics will be constructed in underserved areas of Peel, and the mobile dental clinic will service a large geographic area within Peel, therefore reducing some barriers to access.

In 2022, the Ministry approved the remaining five proposed projects, which will incrementally expand the public dental infrastructure in Peel Region:

New Infrastructure Project	Location	# of New Treatment Rooms	Anticipated Start
Expansion of East Mississauga CHC	Mississauga	3	Summer 2023
Seniors Health and Wellness Village at Peel Manor*	Brampton	2	Fall 2023
Construction of Dental Clinics	Central Mississauga	5	2024
	West Mississauga	5	
	West Brampton	5	
Procurement of Mobile Dental Clinic	Various	2	2024

*Note: this project did not receive capital funding from the Ministry in 2019 and was funded by the Region of Peel. The Ministry has since provided operational funds for this clinic.

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6. Advocacy Strategy

As part of an endorsed motion by Regional Council in November 2020 (Resolution 2020-940), Peel Public Health committed to developing an advocacy strategy to ensure the implementation of the OSDCP services meets the needs of Peel seniors and demand for services. Since that time, progress has been made to address most of the advocacy positions, including expanding the income eligibility threshold, temporarily permitting service provision by private dental providers, and providing capital funding for expanded clinic locations. Removing the denture co-payment has not been addressed to date.

7. Canadian Dental Care Plan


The proposed investment into a national dental care plan is a welcome step toward making dental care affordable for more Canadians. The intention is to launch the Canadian Dental Care Plan by the end of 2023 for lower-income uninsured children under the age of 18 and seniors 65 years and older, and for people with disabilities. Full implementation is expected by 2025. However, details have yet to be shared on how the plan will intersect with current provincial oral health programs.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The OSDCP is 100 per cent funded by the Ministry. In 2022, the Ministry provided an additional \$908,200, pro-rated at \$681,150 for the period of April 1, 2022, to December 31, 2022, with maximum base funding of \$4,593,950. Peel Public Health will request additional funding in Spring 2023 to further support the OSDCP implementation in Peel.

CONCLUSION

Improved access to the OSDCP has occurred over the past few years through expanding the income eligibility threshold, temporarily permitting service provision by private dental providers, and increased capital funding, however, there continues to be unmet demand for services. Over time, public dental infrastructure in Peel will increase through expanding existing clinics and constructing new clinics. Peel Public Health is committed to working alongside the Ministry to improve the implementation of the OSDCP in Peel to meet the high demand and dental needs of seniors.



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