
For Information

REPORT TITLE: Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program - 2026 Update

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OBJECTIVE

To provide an update on the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) in Peel.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The OSDCP is a free, comprehensive dental care program that takes a health-equity approach to reducing barriers to dental services for low-income seniors in Peel.
 - There is a high demand for low-income seniors' dental services in Peel. Approximately 22,000 seniors have been enrolled in the OSDCP in Peel, with approximately 4,100 on a waitlist to be assigned a dental clinic.
 - Public Health has not received an increase in annual base funding, despite the completion of three new fixed clinics and a mobile dental bus.
 - To stay within the current base funding of \$6.5M, Public Health has redirected funds from the community dental program to the new fixed clinics and dental bus. Service levels continue to be reduced due to financial constraints.
 - Public Health is working to determine the risks and implications of integrating the CDCP into program operations.
 - Public Health is exploring the feasibility of using CDCP to increase capacity of the new fixed clinics and dental bus by engaging a consulting firm to determine an acceptable financial model.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

a) Why is Oral Health an Issue?

In the past 5 years, Peel's senior population has grown by 20 percent, and by 2041, the number of seniors is expected to double. Oral health plays a critical role in seniors' overall health and quality of life. Poor oral health can affect essential functions such as eating and speaking, worsen existing health conditions, and impact social connection and mental wellbeing. Accessible oral health services reduce emergency visits to the hospital and reduce the burden of oral health disease on the healthcare system.

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b) Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (Provincial)

Since 2019, Peel Public Health has delivered the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP), which provides free, comprehensive dental services to eligible low-income seniors aged 65 and older. Delivered primarily through local Community Health Centres (CHC), the OSDCP uses a health-equity approach to support seniors with annual net incomes under \$25,000 for individuals and under \$41,500 for couples. The OSDCP addresses financial and non-financial barriers to oral health care, including out-of-pocket costs, mobility limitations, cognitive impairments, chronic diseases, language barriers, and limited access to transportation. For example, Public Health offers client-centered support to seniors whose first language is not English or who are new to Canada, such as assisting with OSDCP applications, connecting them to a dental team who speak their language or are located close to home.

c) Canadian Dental Care Plan (Federal)

In December 2023, the federal government introduced the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP), designed to provide dental coverage to uninsured Canadians with low and moderate incomes. Unlike the OSDCP, the CDCP is a financial benefit rather than a publicly funded program; it is not free. Dental providers may charge above the CDCP reimbursement rate. As a result, low-income seniors may face significant out-of-pocket expenses.

Although seniors may qualify and enroll in both programs, there is currently no coordination of benefits between the OSDCP and the CDCP. The OSDCP continues to fill critical gaps by offering tailored, no-cost services and navigation support for low-income seniors. The influence of the CDCP on the OSDCP is still being assessed and its long-term impacts remain uncertain.

2. Current Status

a) High Demand for OSDCP Services

Approximately 22,000 seniors in Peel have been enrolled in the OSDCP, with 4,100 currently on a waitlist to be assigned to a dental clinic for ongoing services (down from 10,000 in 2023).

- In 2025, staff supported approximately 9,000 seniors, including:
 - More than 1,800 calls with general OSDCP inquiries, and
 - More than 6,000 outbound calls related to waitlist management, navigation to dental services, and client follow-up.

Despite a reduction in the waitlist, demand for OSDCP services continues to exceed available provincial funding and resources.

b) Status of New Fixed Clinics and Mobile Dental Bus

Public Health has built three new fixed clinics and one mobile clinic (dental bus) using capital funding from the Ministry of Health. The mobile dental clinic received additional funding from the Region of Peel Green Fleet Reserves (Resolution 2022-716). The new clinics are open and operating at minimal capacity (1-2 days per week). See Appendix I for clinic locations.

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The mobile dental bus was delivered in December 2025, with planning underway to begin operation in Summer 2026. The bus will focus on serving under-resourced areas and harder-to-reach seniors, such as those living in long-term care. The bus will also operate at minimal capacity.

c) Program Changes

To remain within the current base funding allocation of \$6.5 million, Public Health has closed and redirected funds from the community dental (private office) program to support the operation of the three new fixed clinics and mobile dental bus. As a result, the geographic service coverage of OSDCP across Peel has been reduced.

All clients previously registered with a community provider were contacted and will be navigated to a CHC-operated clinic if they wish to continue receiving OSDCP services. Clients may choose to remain with their community dental office and use CDCP or pay out-of-pocket.

d) Exploring Opportunities to Leverage the Canadian Dental Care Program (CDCP)

CDCP and OSDCP benefits cannot be coordinated due to structural and administrative differences. The CDCP is designed as a fee reimbursement model (similar to private insurance), while the OSDCP does not have a fee schedule and requires a salaried model.

Public Health is working with CHC partners to explore the feasibility of incorporating billing CDCP into their business model. A consulting firm has been engaged to determine a financial model acceptable to both CHCs. A final report is expected by the end of May.

In the meantime, Public Health continues to provide services to seniors within current Ministry base funding. The new clinics are open and operating at 1-2 days per week as the new business model is being developed.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The OSDCP is 100 per cent funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health. Public Health has not received an increase in annual base funding since 2023. In 2025, Peel received \$3.2 million in one-time funding to offset 2024 in-year pressures. For 2026, Public Health will deliver services within its existing \$6.5 million budget based on matching the provincial funding.

CONCLUSION

The OSDCP in Peel remains significantly underfunded relative to program enrollment and service demand. Public Health has not received an increase to its annual base funding and is managing additional financial pressures associated with operating the new fixed clinics and the mobile dental bus. As a result, funding has been reallocated from the community dental program, and the new clinics are operating at minimal capacity. Public Health is exploring the feasibility of leveraging the CDCP to increase capacity at the new clinics and on the dental bus. Despite these challenges, the OSDCP continues to advance equitable access to oral health care by offering tailored, no-cost services and support to low-income seniors in Peel.

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APPENDIX

Appendix I – Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program Clinics in Peel



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