

To improve access to oral health-care for Nova Scotia Seniors

WHEREAS, the Nova Scotia Dental Association's Oral Health Report for 2015 has identified that Nova Scotia seniors are facing an oral health care crisis due to lack of dental insurance, or inadequate provision and monitoring at long term care facilities; and

WHEREAS, most dental diseases can be prevented through early intervention, prevention and timely treatment by dental professionals; and

WHEREAS, oral health promotion and disease prevention are essential to any strategies aimed at improving access to care;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Nova Scotia Provincial Council of the Catholic Women's League of Canada urge the Nova Scotia Provincial Government to act upon the recommendations of the Nova Scotia Dental Association's Oral Health Report for 2015, and implement an oral health plan that will assist seniors to access oral health care services.

Submitted by:

Antigonish Diocesan Catholic Women's League

Brief

In the Nova Scotia Dental Association's 2015 Oral Health Report it was recommended that provisions provide oral screening for seniors prior to admission to long term care, an annual oral examination by a dentist and a daily mouth care plan for each resident in a long term care facility. The President of the Nova Scotia Dental Association has called seniors' oral health in Nova Scotia, "a quiet epidemic".¹

Vulnerable populations such as institutionalized seniors often have difficulty accessing oral health care. A number of barriers exist: financial, the lack of Dental Insurance, mobility and transportation, inadequate remuneration for service providers in long-term care institutions and lack of perceived need.² Within long term care facilities it has been found that oral hygiene/care is considered to be the most undesirable task among caregivers and is not being given the importance it deserves.³

Oral health has a substantive impact on overall health and well-being. Pain and disability associated with poor oral health can impact the ability to eat properly – affecting nutrition status, body weight and overall resistance to systemic diseases. Studies have shown links between gum disease and poor glycemic control in diabetes. Still others have shown a link between gum disease and cardio-vascular disease.⁴ A connection between oral health and general health is well documented and is particularly strong in seniors. Poor oral health and tooth loss results in a reduction in chewing capacity, which

leads to altered food choices and possibly a poor diet. Seniors with a compromised chewing capacity tend to eat softer foods, often leading to a reduction in fiber and essential nutrients. This can be further complicated by a decrease in mobility (manual dexterity) required to properly clean teeth and the large number of medications often taken by seniors which can lead to periodontal disease and dental caries.⁵

The Canadian Dental Association defines oral health as “...a state of the oral and related tissues and structures that contributes positively to physical, mental and social well-being and the enjoyment of life’s possibilities, by allowing the individual to speak, eat and socialize unhindered by pain, discomfort or embarrassment.”⁶

In 2004, a research study of oral health care for seniors in Nova Scotia made a number of recommendations regarding standards of oral health and the provision of required services. In 2010, the Canadian Dental Association, in a position paper entitled, “Access to Oral Health Care for Canadians” recommended the development of strategies to include oral health standards in long term care facilities. Focus group findings from a study of seniors in Nova Scotia confirm that fear and a lack of awareness about the importance of regular oral health care, limits the ability to obtain care.⁷

Oral diseases are all preventable. The morbidity, mortality and economic burden associated with these conditions can be considerably reduced by programs and interventions aimed at prevention and health promotion.⁸

Bibliography:

- Nova Scotia Dental Association: Nova Scotia Oral Health Report 2015: *Are Seniors in Trouble?* <http://www.nsdental.org/Portals/0/Nova%20Scotia%202015%20Oral%20Health%20Report.pdf>
- Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection: Nova Scotia Oral Health Review (Summer/Fall 2008), Dr. Ferne Kraglund, MSc. Dental Public Health candidate, University of Toronto and Dr. Peter Cooney, Chief Dental Officer of Canada.
- Canadian Academy of Health Sciences: Improving Access to Oral Health Care for Vulnerable People Living in Canada, Appendix D, p. 6
- Seniors Oral Health Collaboration - The Oral Health of Seniors in Nova Scotia <http://www.dal.ca/dept/hpi/community-reports/oralhealth-seniors.html>
- Ibid, 2.
- Canadian Dental Association Website https://www.cda-adc.ca/en/about/position_statements/
- Oral Health of Seniors: A Nova Scotia Project - <http://www.dal.ca/dept/hpi/community-reports/oralhealth-seniors.html>
- Ibid, 2.

Action Plan

1. Visit the Provincial Minister of Health to lobby for his support concerning the CWL resolution on the issue access to oral health-care for Nova Scotia seniors.
2. Encourage CWL members to write letters to or e-mail the Nova Scotia Provincial Government .
3. Educate members on the concerns brought forward by this resolution.
- 4) Monitor the provincial government's response to the request contained in this resolution