



April 21, 2017

For Immediate Release

Survey Finds Many Niagara Region Residents Cannot Afford Dental Health Care Services

Niagara – A survey recently conducted by the Niagara Dental Health Coalition has found that cost and lack of health insurance are the two biggest barriers facing many adults in Niagara who are seeking dental health care. The survey received 1,334 responses from Niagara residents aged 18 and over from across all twelve municipalities.

“Local health and social service agencies have told us anecdotally that they frequently encounter people across Niagara who face challenges accessing dental care,” says Lori Kleinsmith, Chair of the Niagara Dental Health Coalition. “The survey findings quantify what we have been hearing and allow us to tell a more complete picture of the ways lack of dental care access is impacting the lives of numerous Niagara residents.”

57 per cent of survey respondents indicated that they had no access to workplace or publicly funded dental care benefits and could not afford to buy private insurance. 63 per cent reported their household family income at less than \$30,000 annually.

31 per cent of survey respondents reported that they had not visited a dentist in three or more years. When faced with a dental emergency, over one in four respondents turned to their family doctor, a walk-in clinic, or the hospital emergency room, only to receive painkillers or antibiotics and no treatment of the underlying dental problem. 11 per cent of respondents reported various ways they treated a dental emergency on their own, including pulling out their own tooth and filing down a broken tooth with a nail file.

The lack of access to dental care clearly affects the health of many survey respondents. 692 people reported regular tooth pain, while 565 had loose or missing teeth and 250 had abscesses over the past year. These health issues impact other areas of life, with hundreds of respondents indicating they faced problems with eating, low self-esteem, and sleeping.

“Imagine your worst toothache ever. Then imagine you had to contemplate living with that for the rest of your life. My pain at least sometimes comes and goes, but I don't know how much longer before it gets worse. This situation is inhumane,” said one dental survey respondent.

“The current provincial government has said that it plans to expand access to dental benefits to adults and seniors on low incomes by 2025,” says Kleinsmith. “However, for those who are suffering daily with tooth pain and eating problems, eight more years without access to dental care is interminable.”

The Niagara Dental Health Coalition calls on the public to continue to let their elected representatives know that expanding access to publicly-funded dental care for low income adults and seniors is an issue they want addressed now, not in eight years. Niagara employers can also play a role by providing dental benefits to their workers. Visit the coalition’s website at <http://niagaradentalhealthcoalition.weebly.com/> for more survey results and a link to an e-petition.

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