

For Immediate Release

Free Dental Care Plugs Crucial Gap in Low-Income Seniors' Health Care - National Institute on Ageing Applauds Ontario Government for Taking Important Step Forward

TORONTO, April 11, 2019 – In today's budget, the Government of Ontario took an important step forward in providing free dental care for low-income seniors by introducing a specialized dental benefit program. Oral health is an essential component of comprehensive health care and the [National Institute on Ageing \(NIA\)](#) applauds this measure aimed at the seniors in Ontario who need it the most.

"This is an important first step in filling the gaps in dental care. Most government initiatives that provide dental care to low-income Ontarians are aimed at children and youth through *Healthy Smiles Ontario*," says [Dr. Samir Sinha](#), NIA Director of Health Policy Research and Director of Geriatrics at Sinai Health System and the University Health Network. "There are great examples of dental initiatives at the municipal level for low-income seniors, but today's announcement will allow low-income seniors across Ontario to maintain oral health and to seek the care that might otherwise be unaffordable."

Access to dental care is increasingly recognized as a component of overall health. [Living Well, Living Longer](#), a report prepared by Dr. Sinha for the Ontario government in 2012, shows an association between poor oral health and medical conditions such as pneumonia, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis and rheumatoid arthritis - highlighting the need for older adults to have access to ongoing and consistent dental care.

The NIA's [National Seniors' Strategy](#) shows that low income seniors face negative health outcomes when they can't access care that isn't covered by OHIP, including dental care. Financial barriers, co-pays, deductibles and lack of supplementary insurance coverage all lead to worse health outcomes for seniors.

[32 per cent](#) of Canadians have no dental insurance. Many seniors don't have access to affordable supplementary dental coverage after they retire. As such, older Ontarians are turning to the emergency room for treatment that doesn't resolve the underlying dental problem. In 2014, [5,880 Ontarians](#) over the age of 65 went to hospitals to seek treatment for acute dental problems, costing approximately [\\$3 million](#).

The plan announced today will provide \$90M annually when fully implemented. It includes coverage for single seniors age 65 and older with incomes of \$19,300 or less (or senior couples with combined incomes of less than \$32,300) and without existing dental benefits. The program is slated to start by summer 2019. Services will be administered by public health units, community health centres, and Aboriginal Health Access Centres located throughout the province. The program will be expanded in the winter with the inclusion of new dental services in underserved areas, including through mobile dental buses and an increased number of dental suites in public health units. We look forward to the release of additional details on the implementation of the plan.

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About the National Institute on Ageing

The NIA is a think tank focused on meeting the realities of Canada's ageing population. We are Canada's only think tank dedicated to policy solutions at the intersections of healthcare, financial security, and social well-being in relation to ageing. We do evidence and experience driven research founded on the strongest available evidence and original research. Our team is led by experts and practitioners in the fields of financial security, healthcare delivery, and public policy. With the backing of Ryerson University and our industry partners we work across private and public sectors providing solutions that promote the evolution and sustainability of Canadian systems and programs. Our mission is to make Canada the best place to grow up and grow old.