

May 21, 2026

Via Email

Honourable Sylvia Jones
Minister of Health of Ontario
Ministry of Health
5th Floor, 777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M5G 2C8

Dear Honourable Minister Jones:

Re: Healthy Smiles Ontario Fee Schedule and Access to Dental Care for Children and Youth

The Board of Health for Algoma Public Health acknowledges the Government of Ontario's demonstrated commitment to improving oral health for Ontarians. The recent introduction of the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program reflects commitment to addressing long-standing gaps in access and demonstrates a broader commitment to prevention, health equity, and reducing avoidable pressures on the health care system.

Alongside these important investments for seniors, continued attention to publicly funded dental care for children and youth is essential to ensure equitable access to oral health services at all stages of life¹. At its meeting on April 22, 2026, informed by a presentation on Healthy Smiles Ontario, the Board of Health for Algoma Public Health discussed ongoing barriers to care and is writing to request that the Ministry of Health update the Healthy Smiles Ontario Schedule of Dental Services and Fees. Although tooth decay is largely preventable, it affects more than half of Canadian children aged 6 to 19. The burden of oral disease is not evenly distributed, with higher rates observed among children from households experiencing socio-economic barriers to care^{2,3}.

Early childhood dental disease is largely preventable, yet untreated decay remains a leading cause of day surgery under general anesthesia for children under the age of 5 in Canada. Poor oral health can cause pain, disrupted eating and sleep, and difficulties with learning and school attendance, with effects that may persist into adulthood. Evidence shows that timely

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prevention and early intervention improve long-term health outcomes while reducing avoidable use of hospital services⁴.

Healthy Smiles Ontario plays a vital preventive role by enabling early diagnosis and treatment, helping to prevent the progression of dental disease, and reducing demand for more intensive care. However, the program's impact is limited by its current fee structure, with reimbursement rates at approximately 40 percent of the Ontario Dental Association Suggested Fee Guide, discouraging provider participation and contributing to access challenges across the province. While some families may supplement care through the Canadian Dental Care Plan, many HSO-eligible children and youth do not qualify and continue to face unmet oral health needs.

Accordingly, our Board of Health respectfully urges the Ministry of Health to update the Healthy Smiles Ontario Schedule of Dental Services and Fees to strengthen provider capacity, improve access, and support more equitable oral health outcomes for children and youth across Ontario.

We would welcome the opportunity to contribute to this work, including sharing local perspectives on access barriers and practical considerations that could support effective implementation.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Trivers
Chair, Board of Health,
District of Algoma Health Unit

- c: Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario
Dr. David A. Brown, Chair, Board of Directors and President, Ontario Dental Association
Bill Rosenberg, Member of Provincial Parliament, Algoma–Manitoulin
Chris Scott, Member of Provincial Parliament — Sault Ste. Marie
Ontario Boards of Health

References

¹Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), Oei T. Evidence brief: Dental caries prevention in school-aged children. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2015.

²Zwicker J, Dudley C, Emery J. It's not just about baby teeth: preventing early childhood caries. School Public Policy Publications. 2016;9.

³Government of Canada. Effects of oral health on overall health [Internet]. Ottawa, ON: Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada; 2008 [cited 2026 May 20]. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/publichealth/services/publications/diseases-conditions/report-sexually-transmittedinfections-canada-2013-14.html>

⁴Government of Canada. Oral health for children [Internet]. Ottawa, ON: Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada; 2025 August 28 [cited 2026 May 20]. Available from: [Oral health for children - Canada.cahttps://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/topics/oral-health/caring-your-teeth-mouth/children.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/topics/oral-health/caring-your-teeth-mouth/children.html)