

BCDA Statement on Oral Health for Older Adults

March 11, 2023

The older adult population in British Columbia represents a spectrum of clinical diversity, encompassing functionally independent, frail, and functionally dependent individuals. Oral health contributes to overall health and quality of life. The dental treatment of older adults should reflect this diversity, in terms of its assessment, treatment planning, communication with patients and caregivers, and treatment delivery.

Best Practice Guidelines for Older Adults in the Private Practice Setting¹

1. Establish good prevention strategies (oral hygiene and diet) while the older adult is relatively healthy and cognitively intact
2. Diet education, hygiene education, and patient specific measures to maintain oral health
3. Rational dental care individualized to the patient's needs
4. Consider the patient's ability to handle dental treatment (stress, length of appointments, number of appointments) and the possibility of less extensive treatment alternatives
5. Consider how the patient's dental problems affect their quality of life
6. Consider the present and future ability of a patient to maintain the provided dental treatment

Best Practice Guidelines for Older Adults in Long-Term Care Facilities²

Given the particular oral health challenges faced by seniors in care facilities and the importance of oral health to overall health, the following should be the minimum oral care requirements for all residents in long-term care, above and beyond the standards set out in the BC *Community Care and Assisted Living Act*, Residential Regulation, Sections 54(3, 4).

- Oral health assessment by an appropriately trained and licensed/registered oral health professional upon admission and annually thereafter;
- as soon as possible after admission, referral to a dentist for examination, diagnosis of oral disease, and treatment in a timely manner;
- a daily mouth care plan developed by an oral health provider and implemented by appropriately trained caregivers; and
- suitable infrastructure to support the appropriate delivery of needed care by the oral health care team.

About the British Columbia Dental Association

The British Columbia Dental Association (BCDA) is the recognized voice of dentistry in this province, advocating on behalf of over 4,000 members to promote oral health for all British Columbians.

The BCDA Geriatric Dentistry Committee has a four-fold purpose: to explore avenues for expanding BCDA's seniors' dental care initiatives; support dentists who provide dental care for challenged seniors in private practice and residential care facilities; strive to ensure dentists remain the primary providers of oral care for all seniors, especially those in residential care facilities; and, to ensure residents in long-term care facilities receive ongoing oral care by the appropriate oral healthcare provider.

¹ Adapted from "Optimal Health for Frail Older Adults: Best Practices Along the Continuum of Care" Canadian Dental Association, 2009 (www.cda-adc.ca/_files/becoming/practising/best_practices_seniors/optimal_oral_health_older_adults_2009.pdf)

² Adapted from Canadian Dental Association Position Statement, 2016 (www.cda-adc.ca/en/about/position_statements/ltc/)