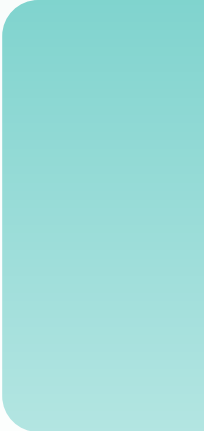
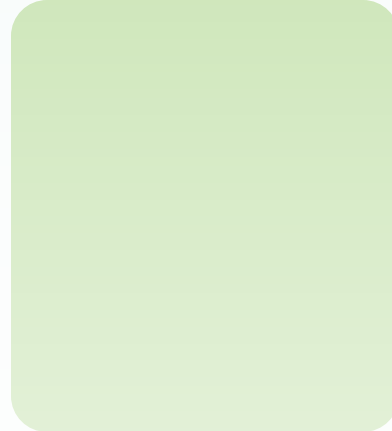
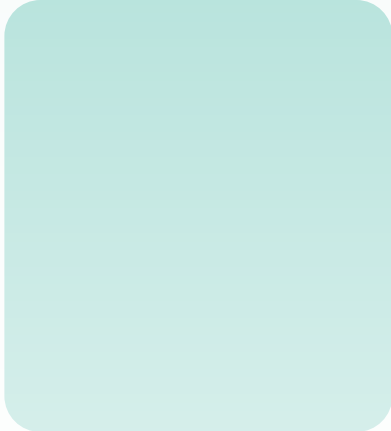
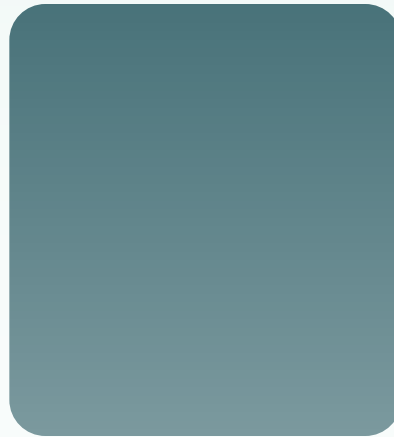
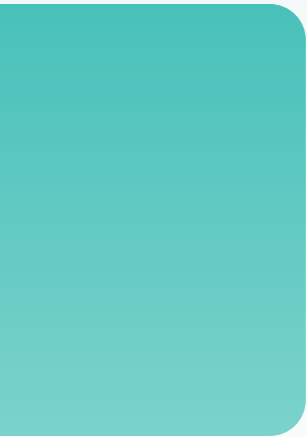




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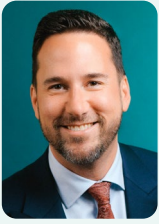
BC Dental Association



2026

ORAL HEALTH REPORT

# Building a Sustainable Oral Healthcare System for British Columbia



## A Message from BCDA's CEO: Quinn Mathiesen-Newcomb

*It is my pleasure to introduce BCDA's inaugural Oral Health Report. Oral health is a critical component of overall health, yet BC's oral healthcare system is facing growing pressures, including workforce shortages, rising demand, evolving regulation, and challenges related to access to care. Dentists and oral health professionals across the province are working every day to meet these challenges while delivering high-quality care to British Columbians.*

*This report highlights key issues facing the oral healthcare system and outlines practical recommendations to help strengthen access, support vulnerable populations, and build a more sustainable future for oral healthcare in BC.*

*BCDA and the more than 4,200 dentists we represent remain committed to working collaboratively with governments, regulators, educators, and community partners to help ensure all British Columbians have access to quality oral healthcare.*

## Oral Health as a Cornerstone of Overall Health

Oral health is a fundamental component of overall health. **Untreated oral disease is linked to pain, infection, chronic illness, and avoidable strain on Canada's provincial and federal healthcare systems.**

Dentists are regulated health professionals who prevent, diagnose and treat oral disease, and who support the broader healthcare system by improving population health and reducing pressure on hospitals and emergency departments.

In communities throughout BC, dentists and their teams work to meet growing and evolving patient needs.

**From rural and remote communities to urban centres, and across hospital, educational, private, and Not-for-Profit (NFP) settings, oral health professionals navigate increasing demand, workforce shortages, and regulatory changes while delivering care British Columbians rely on every day.**



## A Rapidly Changing System Under Pressure

**BC's oral healthcare system faces immediate and growing challenges, including access to care, workforce shortages, an evolving policy environment, and rising demand.**

Dentists across the province see these challenges firsthand and understand their implications for patients and the broader healthcare system.

# Building a Sustainable Oral Healthcare System

A sustainable oral healthcare system in BC depends on coordinated action across regulation, education, funding, and workforce planning.

**The five recommendations in this report provide practical, evidence-based steps to protect access to care, support vulnerable populations, and respond to rising demand.**

BCDA looks forward to working with interested parties, including government partners, to advance equitable access and deliver world-class oral healthcare for all British Columbians.



## Sustainability & Access Challenges in Dental Care



### *Evolving Policy & Regulatory Landscape*

On November 24, 2022, the Government of BC passed the *Health Professions and Occupations Act* (HPOA), formerly Bill 36, overhauling BC's health profession regulation. The HPOA came into force on April 1, 2026, replacing the *Health Professions Act*.

While BC dentists support public protection and safety, significant concerns remain regarding government-

appointed boards, disciplinary process changes, public disclosure of minor disciplinary actions, and the loss of a statutory right to appeal.

*The HPOA introduces sweeping structural changes to how health professionals are regulated in BC.*

### Unintended Risks & Consequences

The introduction of the HPOA is already resulting in unintended system-level impacts, including:

- Regulatory overreach that **undermines trust** between patients and healthcare providers
- Increased regulatory burden **affecting workforce stability** and the availability of care
- Longer-term effects such as **higher costs, delays in care, and reduced patient access** ■



# A Sustainable Oral Health System Depends on a Strong Dental Workforce

Staff shortages, particularly of Licensed Dental Assistants (LDAs)\*, are the most urgent threat to dental care delivery in BC. While driven by multiple factors, sustaining access to care requires coordinated action by

government and oral health professionals, as shortages force clinics in both rural and urban communities to reduce services or delay patient appointments.

## Causes Behind the Shortage



**Limited Supply:** LDA workforce growth has stalled. From 2019–2023, LDA numbers grew by just 1.7%, compared to 7.6% growth in dentists<sup>1,2</sup> and 8% population growth<sup>3</sup>, with net declines in multiple years (see Figure 1). The optimal LDA-to-dentist ratio is 2:1 (realistic target: 1.75:1). In BC, this ratio has declined from 1.62 in 2019 to 1.53 in 2024. BCDA estimates there is a current **shortage of nearly 1,500 LDAs**.

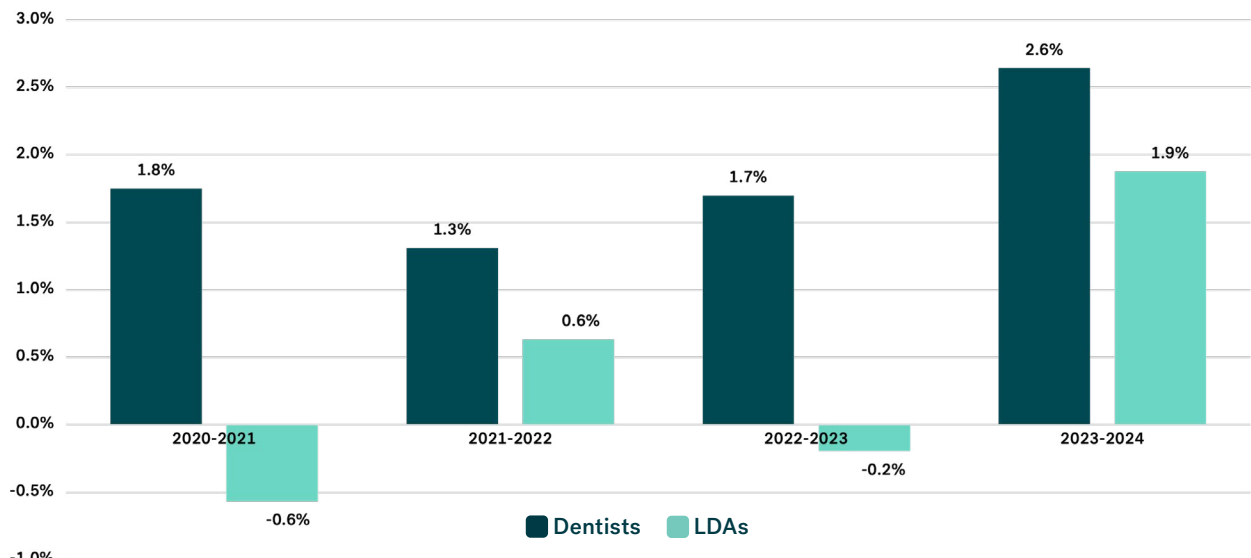


**Training Constraints & Closures:** Public programs have limited capacity and long waitlists largely due to shared radiography (X-ray) facilities with dental hygiene programs. The closure of Douglas College’s LDA program in 2018 removed a major training pathway. Vancouver Community College is the only public provider of online LDA training, with limited seats for students outside the Lower Mainland.



**Funding Pressures:** International student visa caps have reduced post-secondary revenue, leading to cuts in dental programs. The closure of Vancouver Island University’s 38-seat LDA program and Vancouver Community College’s reduction from 72 to 36 seats in fall 2026 will reduce public LDA training capacity by approximately 30%. High private tuition costs also remain a barrier.

Figure 1: Dentists vs. LDA Growth Rate (Note: Figure excludes students and non-practising Dentists/LDAs.)



\*In BC, as of April 1, 2026, following regulatory updates under the HPOA, Certified Dental Assistants (CDAs) are now known as Licensed Dental Assistants (LDAs). LDAs are formally trained oral health professionals licensed with the BC College of Oral Health Professionals and serve as an integral part of the dental team, performing clinical procedures under the supervision or delegation of a dentist. For consistency, this report uses the term LDA throughout.

## Increased Demand for Dental Professionals Under the CDCP

BC dentists support improved access to oral health care for all British Columbians, including through the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP), which aims to provide affordable dental care to up to 9M uninsured Canadians<sup>4</sup>, including approximately 1.2M in BC.

In the 2025–2026 benefit year, more than 486,282 BC residents received care through the CDCP<sup>5</sup>.

However, BCDA's September 2025 member-informed research identifies staff shortages as a key barrier to accommodating additional patients, limiting access and undermining the program's intended reach. ■

<sup>1</sup> College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia, Annual Reports 2019-2022, Accessed April 14, 2026.

<sup>2</sup> BC College of Oral Health Professionals, Annual Reports 2022-2024, Accessed April 14, 2026.

<sup>3</sup> Government of BC, Population Estimates, Annual population, July 1, 1867-2025 (CSV), Accessed April 14, 2026.

<sup>4</sup> Government of Canada, The Canadian Dental Care Plan, Accessed April 27, 2026.

<sup>5</sup> Government of Canada, Canadian Dental Care Plan statistics, Accessed May 22, 2026.



## Access to Care: The Role of Not-for-Profit Dental Clinics in BC

There are 25 NFP dental clinics across BC delivering essential oral health care to people who would otherwise go without or seek care through costly hospital emergency room visits. Staffed largely by volunteer dentists and dental staff, these clinics provide equitable, community-based care rooted in community need.

The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (MSDPR) dental plans, including the Disability and Social Assistance Dental Plan and the Healthy Kids Program, provide basic dental coverage for BC's most vulnerable populations.

*The Canadian Dental Care Plan is a historic step forward, but it works best when it complements, rather than replaces, provincial programs and community-based clinics serving our most vulnerable residents.*

However, MSDPR dental fees are severely outdated, having remained largely unchanged for 20 years and covering less than **30% of BCDA's Suggested Fee Guide—the lowest rate in Canada.**

These inadequate fees place financial pressure on dentists and clinics, leading to reduced services or increased patient costs, and ultimately causing many patients to delay or forgo care.

### Quick Facts About Not-for-Profit Dental Clinics

- The number of NFP dental clinics increased from 19 in 2021 to 25 in 2025, **reflecting rising demand.**
- In 2025, all **clinics delivered 53,782 in-person visits** (+13% year-over-year).
- **24,300+ patients served**, nearly one-third in rural and remote communities.
- Nearly half of NFP clinics **operate outside Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley.**
- Clinics in rural and remote areas often **focus on pain relief and urgent dental care.**
- **~90% of patients are low-income**, uninsured, or receiving government assistance.

NFP dental clinics, which serve most MSDPR clients and lack balance-billing options, are especially vulnerable. Recent cuts to MSDPR operational funding and capital equipment support further threaten their long-term sustainability. ■

# The Path Forward: BCDA Recommendations

Based on the current and emerging challenges facing oral healthcare in our province, BCDA has identified **five key recommendations to help strengthen the delivery of and access to oral healthcare for patients across BC:**

## 01

### *Ensuring Public Protection Through Responsive & Effective HPOA Implementation*

- Dentists are the largest employers of oral health professionals in BC and provide the infrastructure that delivers dental care across the province. As such, the HPOA will have far-reaching implications for healthcare workers, employers, and, most importantly, patients.
- **With the HPOA now in force, the Government of BC should commit to regular partner engagement and a formal post-implementation review to identify and address unintended consequences.**
- This will help ensure the HPOA strengthens public protection without compromising workforce stability or patient access.

## 02

### *Preserve & Expand Dental Education Programs*

- Rising demand for dental care under the CDCP underscores the need to protect and expand dental education programs, including LDA and dental hygiene training.
- **The Province should support innovative delivery models, such as Work-Integrated Learning, and secure stable provincial and federal funding to increase training capacity, particularly for rural learners.**
- Strong education pipelines are essential to sustaining access to care.

# 03

## *Integrate & Modernize Ministry Dental Programs*

- NFP dental clinics are critical access points for community-based care serving BC's most vulnerable populations.
- **Integrating MSDPR dental plans into the Ministry of Health and modernizing fee schedules through inflationary adjustments would improve program sustainability, accountability, and coherence.**
- These changes would help stabilize BC's 25 NFP dental clinics—nearly half in rural and remote communities—and protect equitable access to essential care.

# 04

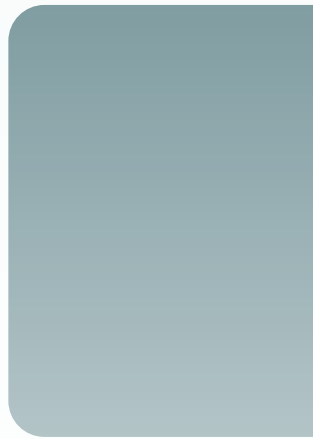
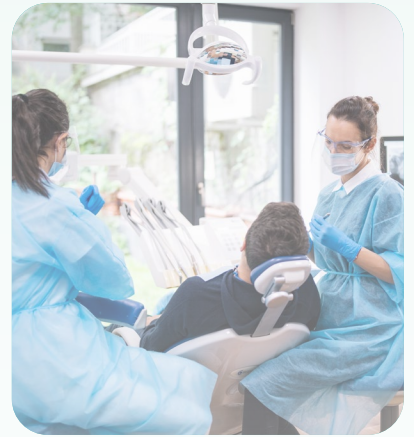
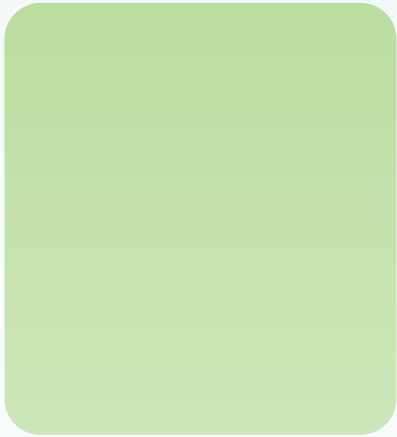
## *Appoint a Full-Time Provincial Dental Officer*

- **As oral health policies and programs grow in scope and complexity, BC would benefit from dedicated provincial oral health leadership.**
- As seen in other jurisdictions, a full-time Provincial Dental Officer would strengthen coordination, accountability, and system planning, working with federal counterparts to integrate oral health into broader health strategies, address workforce challenges, and improve equitable access across the province.


# 05

## *Partner with Dentists to Build a Sustainable Oral Healthcare System*

- Dentists are trusted, front-line health professionals with first-hand insight into patient needs, workforce challenges, and barriers to access.
- **Partnering with BC dentists as system leaders and advisors will help ensure reforms are practical, responsive, and grounded in patient realities**—strengthening quality, safety, and access as demand continues to grow while protecting quality, safety, and access for all British Columbians. ■



The British Columbia Dental Association (BCDA) is the recognized voice of dentistry in BC, dedicated to serving the interests of its members and promoting oral health for all British Columbians. Located in Vancouver, BCDA is governed by an all-dentist Board, comprised of 15 elected and 3 appointed members, supported by Chief Executive Officer, Quinn Mathiesen-Newcomb and 25 full and part-time staff.

 [bcdental.org](https://www.bcdental.org) | [advocacy@bcdental.org](mailto:advocacy@bcdental.org) | 604-736-7202 or 1-888-396-9888 | 540-1385 W 8th Ave | Vancouver, BC V6H 3V9

The BC Dental Association office is located on the homelands of the Coast Salish peoples, the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations. BCDA gratefully acknowledges that BC dentists live and work on the unceded, traditional and ancestral homelands of Indigenous Peoples and Nations across BC.