CANADIAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION DENTAIRE CANADIENNE

Opening Remarks – HESA Appearance on Thursday, November 20, 2025

Good afternoon and thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee for the opportunity to appear.

My name is Dr. Aaron Burry and I'm the CEO of the Canadian Dental Association.

CDA is a trusted national voice for dentists working to improve the oral health of all people living in Canada. We promote oral health, support our members, and advance the dental profession. CDA represents over 21,000 practicing dentists across Canada and is a trusted source of information for and about the dental profession on both national and international issues.

Today, I will provide an overview of the current state of the oral health care sector. Across Canada, the oral health care sector is experiencing significant human resources challenges. Dental clinics are struggling to recruit and retain dental assistants and dental hygienists. This is similar to the wider healthcare system, and CDA will suggest how federal policy measures can help improve the situation. A recent Statistics Canada survey shows that 80% of dental offices in Canada are experiencing staffing shortages. Nearly half report difficulties hiring dental assistants and hygienists, leaving over 7,200 positions unfilled in 2023, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

The full launch of the Canadian Dental Care Plan means more Canadians are seeking dental appointments for care. Ensuring the dental workforce can meet this increased demand is crucial to the program's success and maintaining high-quality care.

Recent reforms to federal immigration policies have removed dental assisting as an eligible field of study under the Post-Graduate Work Permit program, preventing dental assistant graduates from working in Canada. This is leading to difficult decisions where some schools are already planning to cancel dental assisting programs in Canada. If unaddressed, these issues will further strain dental practices.

Due to the urgent need for dental assistants and expected pressure from the CDCP rollout, CDA calls on the federal government to expand PGWP eligibility to include dental assisting. This would also make immigration policies better align with the federal government's own criteria for PGWP eligibility.



According to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, fields of study linked to jobs facing long-term shortages in Canada should be prioritized for PGWP eligibility. Dental assisting clearly meets this test given the widespread shortages across Canada and its essential role in providing oral health care for all people living in Canada.

This evidence-based policy change will help address the dental assistant shortage, attract international talent and provide a fair pathway for graduates to contribute to Canada's healthcare system, ensuring timely and accessible care.

While the greatest workforce pressures are among dental assistants and hygienists, it is also important to consider the broader dental workforce. Although Canada does not face a shortage of dentists, there is an uneven distribution, with urban centres well served and rural areas lacking access.

Another issue is the challenges related to credential recognition and pathways into practice for internationally trained dentists. They represent about 8% of all internationally educated health professionals in Canada, yet only one-quarter of them are actually practicing as dentists. Overall, internationally trained dentists represent 33% of licensed practitioners in Canada and is now growing year over year.

Continued collaboration between federal and provincial partners in improving credentialing processes will help ensure that our dental workforce remains strong, competent, and responsive to evolving health needs.

In conclusion, Canada's oral health system is at an important juncture. Targeted, practical policy decisions, such as restoring PGWP eligibility for dental assisting, can help address immediate pressures and improve access for communities across the country.

Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members. I look forward to your questions and to working together on practical solutions that strengthen our oral health workforce.