

# THE SITUATION

There are an estimated 3.8 million people in Canada 15 years or older who have a disability that limits their daily activity. Every one has the right to good oral health, but for patients living with special health care needs, there are a number of barriers to care that can lead to unmet dental needs—placing them at greater risk for severe dental decay, pain, gum disease, and damaged teeth.



Poor oral health can also contribute to systemic illnesses like **aspiration pneumonia, systemic infection and inflammation, poor digestion, diabetes, and heart disease.**

Depending on the severity of a patient's special health care needs, it's possible that issues related to their hearing, vision, chronic condition, mobility, dexterity, learning, psychological, developmental, and intellectual challenges can affect the way they receive or participate in their personal oral health care.

## OTHER FACTORS MAY INCLUDE:

- Prescribed medications
- Various levels of dependence
- Specialized diet and feeding
- Fear, anxiety, or oral aversions
- Living situations (community-based living, long term care facility, home-bound, rural versus urban)
- Transportation and mobility
- Limited specialized care or interpersonal relationships with your family physician, dentist, and other care givers
- Cognitive abilities
- Communication
- Behavioral issues
- Physical barriers



# NOVA SCOTIA ORAL HEALTH REPORT 2018

**A PATH TO BETTER ORAL HEALTH FOR PATIENTS WITH SPECIAL HEALTH CARE NEEDS.**

Nova Scotia dentists know that persons living with special health care needs face many barriers to care every day. Good oral health is a critical component of a healthy, full life, and collectively we can do more to support the 19% of Nova Scotians living with disabilities to ensure they receive the important dental care they need.

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# WHAT WE CAN DO TODAY

Prevention of oral disease and infection is the key to oral care for persons with disabilities and often requires a collaborative approach, working with care givers, their health care team, and their dental team.



First, establishing a dental routine by the age of one is critical. Whether it is in water, toothpaste, or applied during a dental visit, fluoride is essential for patients who are at risk of dental disease—helping prevent decay by 20 to 40%.



When it comes to brushing and flossing, adaptive devices that have enlarged handles or extension rods prove to be helpful for individuals with physical impairments. With the help of their caregiver, patients who have limited dexterity or possible tremors may find special toothbrushes such as a triple-headed or electric more useful.

## CORPORATE RESEARCH ASSOCIATES ATLANTIC AUTUMN 2017 STUDY FOUND:



47% of survey respondents who identified as providing direct care for a person with a disability reported being very concerned about that person's oral health.

Corporate Research Associates, Inc., Atlantic Quarterly Survey (NSDA Commissioned Questions), November 2017 and February 2018

Because oral health is directly linked to the overall health of a patient, it's important that the dental team works closely with other health care providers, family members, and social service agencies to provide necessary and consistent care.

# WHAT WE CAN DO TOMORROW

## FOUR KEY ACTIONS CAN HELP MOVE OUR WHOLE PROVINCE FORWARD.



### 01 LEARN

The oral health status of Nova Scotians with disabilities is relatively unknown. We need to conduct and publish more provincial research with persons living with disabilities to learn what they need for optimal oral health and make sure the public and oral care providers can access this information easily. We can also promote and facilitate continuing education courses for practicing dentists and their dental staff.



### 02 COLLABORATE

It's important that the dental team, primary and other health care providers, family members, and social service agencies work together to facilitate therapy and home care. Together, Nova Scotians can help people living with special health care needs access equitable and necessary care. Talk to your family dentist, physician, and local MLA if you have a disabled family member in need of care.



### 03 SCREEN

Residents of long-term care facilities (LTCF) and small option group homes need oral health screenings on admission as part of the routine collection of health information. For those residents who are flagged to have potential dental problems, appropriate arrangements should be made to attend to the resident's immediate comfort. Arrangements should then be made for a dental examination and definitive treatment plan. All residents should be examined by a dentist within six weeks of admission.



### 04 ADVOCATE

Dentists are proud advocates for patients who are at special risk of oral health issues. Professional activity at the association level encourages our dentists to be better in service of Nova Scotians. Recent and future efforts include:

- Working with provincial government to improve publicly-funded dental programs for patients with special health care needs
- Engaging with like-minded associations and groups aimed at providing improved and equitable access to care for people with disabilities