



*Deputy Premier
Office of the Minister
MLA, Edmonton-Glenora*

November 2, 2017

AR 147613

Dr. David Swann
MLA, Calgary-Mountain View
6 Floor, Federal Building
9820-107 Street
Edmonton, AB T5K 1E7

Dear Dr. David Swann:

Thank you for your letter regarding rising dental fees in Alberta, the dual role of Alberta Dental Association and College (ADA&C) functions, advertising guidelines, and increasing funding for public dental services for children and low-income Albertans.

As you may know, in response to concerns expressed by the public about the high fees charged by Alberta dentists for their services, the Government of Alberta completed the Alberta Dental Fee Review in 2016. An interprovincial analysis of dental offices' operating costs, wages, materials, rent, and other factors were considered and included in the Review. The Review confirmed that dental fees are higher and growing faster than those in other provinces, and that all other provinces and territories have a dental fee guide. Alberta has been without a fee guide for 20 years, and during that time prices for dental services have risen sharply to the point where some services now cost Albertans up to 40% more than what other Canadians pay.

While the Dental Fee Guide released by the ADA&C on August 17, 2017 was a step in the right direction, it did not go far enough to save costs for Albertans and make dental care more affordable. I have directed the ADA&C to work with my Ministry and go back to the table to look at how they can better align Alberta's dental fees with those of other provinces.

The Review identified a number of secondary concerns related to advertising guidelines established by the ADA&C. Under the *Health Professions Act* (HPA), our government provides health profession regulatory colleges with the authority to govern their members in a manner that serves and protects the public interest. Under the HPA, a college is mandated to provide direction and regulate the practice of its regulated members. Specifically, colleges are responsible for establishing, maintaining, and enforcing standards of practice and codes of ethics for their members.

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Over the past year, I have been made aware of numerous concerns related to the ADA&C's advertising guidelines. These concerns were expressed by numerous dentists, both to the ADA&C and to the Ministry of Health. A summary of the concerns raised to the Ministry were forwarded to the ADA&C earlier this year for their consideration. I also wrote a letter to the College that outlined our government's expectations related to advertising. Specifically, I requested that the ADA&C provide dental providers with clear direction on how to apply the College's advertising guidelines. This will ensure Albertans receive clear information regarding dental services and fees. I also reinforced that it was essential that the ADA&C hold the public confidence and serve the public interest going forward.

Since receiving my letter, the ADA&C has taken several steps, and have developed guiding documents to provide clarity to members on advertising. I appreciate the ADA&C's work to date, and I will be encouraging the ADA&C to further enhance the transparency of its communication with its members and the public, to clearly focus on its role as a regulatory college, and to continue to work with my Ministry to develop appropriate guidelines.

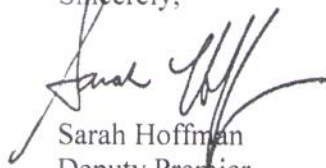
I appreciate your suggestion that the ADA&C consider separating its regulatory and association functions. I fully expect colleges regulated under the HPA to give priority to their regulatory responsibilities. If colleges find this difficult, I expect them to consider separating regulatory and association functions. I have made the ADA&C aware of my concerns and will be monitoring this situation going forward.

You may be pleased to know that after the Review was completed, a working group was established to ensure that low-income Albertans continue to have appropriate dental coverage and access to essential dental services. The working group identified that qualifying income thresholds should reflect current economic conditions, ensure the most vulnerable Albertans have access to appropriate dental services in a timely manner, and improve utilization of the government programs. In the near future, Alberta Health will review the qualifying income thresholds for the low-income programs.

To educate Albertans about their dental health, the ADA&C has developed the "Ask Your Dentist" campaign. This campaign is designed to speak to Albertans and dentists about transparency, accountability, and patients' rights to receive quality dental services. These measures are the first steps in making dental services more affordable to Albertans. I look forward to further discussions with the ADA&C about advancing this important work.

Thank you for taking the time to share your concerns.

Sincerely,



Sarah Hoffman
Deputy Premier
Minister of Health