



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
ALBERTA

Dr. David Swann, MLA

Calgary-Mountain View Constituency

August 24, 2017

Hon. Sarah Hoffman
Minister of Health
423 Legislature Building,
10800 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Hoffman:

I am writing to encourage you to take a stronger stand on Alberta's dental fees. In particular, I urge you to press the college to liberalize advertising rules, consider requiring a separate dental association and college, as well as increase funding for public dental services to children and low-income Albertans.

The Alberta Dental Association and College is standing in the way of real competition among dentists by putting extreme limitations on dentists' public information and advertising. For example, dentists are prevented from offering special rates for low-income Albertans, special days for seniors or students, and are banned from informing the public of a dentist's extra training in various specialties. Many dentists have also described punitive responses from the Association and College for their attempts to advertise or offer special pricing.

I continue to be concerned by the apparent conflict of interest between the roles of the Alberta Dental Association and the College. The Association's mandate is to protect and promote the dental business and the interests of dentists, but the College has more of a regulatory role, overseeing matters related to licensing, professional conduct and quality of care. Some other provinces have formally separated these two.

In addition, Alberta has some of the highest dental fees in the country. These high costs pose serious barriers to middle and lower-income families. Some estimates indicate that between 15 to 25 per cent of Albertans do not receive appropriate dental care due to the high cost of dental fees. A jurisdictional comparison of the fees for the most common dental services reveals Alberta has higher fees, especially for hygienist, than our neighbouring provinces for virtually every service in each category.

Children in particular are vulnerable and while many receive public dental services there are a growing number who do not. As of June 2016, the most common surgical procedure in the Alberta Children's Hospital was dental work under general anesthetic. According to Dr. Steve Patterson of the Faculty of Dentistry at the U of A, there has not been a provincial review of delayed, missing and filled teeth among children since 1986. This data is needed to assess the state of dental health and prevention programs, particularly among our most vulnerable populations.

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As you know, dental health is an important part of a person's overall health and well-being, and, when it is neglected, it may lead to emergency room visits and expensive surgical procedures. Failure to provide accessible dental care puts needless additional strain on Alberta's health care system and adds to wait times for all services.

Furthermore, money should not be an obstacle to good dental health for all Albertans, regardless of income. We must provide better dental health education and improve access for lower-income Albertans to routine prevention and treatment services, which are crucial in preventing more serious health issues later on.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this matter, and I welcome further discussions on this important issue to Albertans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Swann". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dr. David Swann, MLA
Calgary-Mountain View
Alberta Liberal Opposition Leader