Number of Dentists

In January 2010, there were 19,563 licensed dentists in Canada. Approximately 89% were in general practice, while 11% were specialist dentists. The specialty with the highest number of dentists is orthodontics, with approximately 735 orthodontists in Canada in 2010. The specialty with the fewest number of specialists is oral radiology, with only 12 specialists in 2010.

In January 2009, there were approximately 22,000 dental hygienists, 2200 denturists, and 300 dental therapists in Canada. There at least 30,000 dental assistants in Canada. The population to dental hygienist ratio in 2009 was 1 hygienist for every 1509 people, compared to one dentist for every 1745 people.

Dental Demographics

In 2009, approximately 72% of dentists in Canada were men. Roughly 34% were under 40 years old. About 18% were over age 60. There has been a dramatic shift in the gender make-up of the profession. In 2009 over 58% of dentists in the under 30 age category were female. versus 42% being male. In contrast, only 8% of dentists in the over 60 age group were female. The average age of a Canadian dentist in 2009 was 46.

Most dentists are in solo private practice (54%). About 19% are in partnerships and 19% are associates in a private practice. Roughly 2% are in an academic setting, 1% in public health, 1% in the military and 3% in other settings or retired. Although 54% of dentists are in solo practice, approximately 7% of dentists work in a practice with 5 or more dentists. The average number of dentists in a practice in 2006 was 2.1 whereas the average number of dental hygienists per practice was 2.2.

Dental Practices

In 2006, the average dentist practised clinical dentistry for 45 weeks of the year, 4 days of the week, and an average 32.5 hours per week. Dentists who were in practice 5 years or less spent 35 hours per week in practice, whereas those in practice 20 years or more spent approximately 31 hours per week in practice.

In 2006, dentists saw an average of 65 patients in a typical week. Specialists saw an average 91 patients versus 61 patients seen by general practice dentists. Those in practice 20 years or more saw 69 patients per week in comparison to those in practice 5 years or less who saw 46 patients per week.

Regional Distribution of Dentists

In July 2009, there were 57.6 dentists per 100,000 people in Canada. There were wide variations from province to province. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the number of dentists per 100,000 people was 34.6 (lowest) compared to 66.3 (highest) in British Columbia. There were 2186 dental specialists in July 2009, or roughly 6.5 dental specialists per 100,000 people.
There are wide variations on the distribution of dentists in Canadian cities and rural areas with a much denser concentration of dentists in urban areas. There was one dentist for 5096 people in rural areas in Canada in 2005 whereas there was one dentist for 1734 people for all areas combined. This shows there were about 3 times as many dentists serving the urban areas than the overall population in Canada. The province with the greatest density in July 2009 was British Columbia (1509 persons per dentist) and the lowest density of dentists was Newfoundland and Labrador (2891 persons per dentist). In the Northwest Territories there were 1447 persons per dentist in 2009 and in Nunavut there were 5367 persons per dentist.

**Dental Schools**

There are 10 dental schools in Canada. All dental schools are in publicly funded universities. Entrance to dental school requires at least 2 years of undergraduate university pre-requisites, although most students entering dental programs have a bachelor’s degree in Canada. The course of study covers four years in dental school, although in one school it is 5 years. There were 512 graduates from all dental schools in Canada in 2009. Approximately 53% of the student body was female.

**Dental Services and the Canadian Health Care System**

Health care in Canada falls under provincial jurisdiction, and each province has its own dental legislation that affects dental services. Dental services are not included as medicare services under the national Canada Health Act, however dental services provided in hospitals are covered under medicare. These and other public dental services represent a very small proportion of the overall dental services in Canada (ie. approximately 5% of dental expenditures in 2009 were public sector dental expenditures).

There have also been changes to health care legislation in some provinces affecting the scope of practice of dental hygienists and denturists, but nothing significantly altering the funding of dental care services in the Canadian health care system.

**Expenditures on Dental Services**

Total expenditures on dental services in Canada in 2009 was estimated at almost $13 billion. Of this amount, $12.2 billion (95%) were private sector expenditures and only $608 million (5%) public sector expenditures. The expenditures on all dental services are 7% of total health expenditures in Canada. The increase in dental service expenditures from 2008 to 2009 was 5.6%. Per capita spending on dental services in 2009 was $380.83.

The term “dental services” as defined by the Canadian Institute of Health Information “expenditures for professional fees of dentists (includes dental hygienists and assistants) and denturists, as well as the cost of dental prostheses, including false teeth and laboratory charges for crowns and other dental appliances." (This encompasses all dental services, but does not include products like tooth pastes).
Federal spending on public dental programs in 2009 was between $250 to $275 million dollars whereas provincial and municipal public sector expenditures accounted for the remainder.

**Public Sector Financing of Dental Care in Canada**

Where does dentistry fall within these public sector health expenditures? In 2005, publicly funded dental services accounted for $225 million of the $5.3 billion federal health budget, or 4.2%. At the other levels of public sector spending, publicly funded dental services accounted for $354 million of the $94.7 billion provincial, territorial and municipal health care budgets, or just 0.4%.

Federal programs or departments account for approximately 39% of the total public expenditures on dentistry. A breakdown of the federal public health expenditures by department indicates that Health Canada accounted for most of the spending, primarily because it administers the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program for First Nations people.

Provincial and territorial public sector expenditures for dentistry accounted for approximately 61% of the total public expenditures on dentistry and included targeted dental public health programs such as children’s oral health, preventive services, assistance for seniors, some dental surgery in hospitals, programs for the socially marginalized, specific disorders such as cleft palate, orthodontic treatment, and dental programs in long-term care facilities.

**Private Sector Financing of Dental Care in Canada**

Private sector expenditures on health care in Canada were estimated at $51.6 billion in 2008. Prescribed drugs and dental care were the greatest components of total private health spending.

The total private sector expenditures on dental care in 2008 were estimated at $11.6 billion (approximately 95% of total). Approximately 55% of all private expenditures on dental care were from private insurance sources, and 45% from out-of-pocket.

In 2008, the private insurance industry in Canada financed $6.4 billion of expenditures for dental care through dental insurance plans, covering over 20 million Canadians (62% of the population).

In a 2009 survey of Canadians, over one-third say that dental insurance coverage plays the greatest role in determining frequency of visits to the dentist.

**Number of Dental Patients**

Nearly three quarters of Canadians (74.5%) visited a dentist in the previous 12 month period. Roughly 80% of Canadians say they have a dentist, and 41% of those have
had the same dentist for over 10 years. Approximately 85.7% of Canadians visit a
dentist within a 2 year period. High usage rates are seen among children 6-11 years
old (91% made an annual visit) and adolescents (84% made an annual dental visit).
Almost 70% of adults aged 20 to 39 see a dentist each year. Among older adults,
79.3% of dentate people and 18.3% of edentulous (those with no teeth) make annual
visits. Access to dental care by children with private dental insurance is almost
universal with 95% seeing a dentist annually.

**Economic Burden of Oral Health Disease**

It is estimated that 2.26 million school days and 4.15 million working days for adults
are lost annually due to dental visits or dental sick-days. An estimated 40.36 million
hours are lost from normal activities, school or work on an annual basis due to
check-ups or problems with teeth.

The percentage of Canadians who have experienced time-lost from normal activities
for oral health reasons is 39.1%. Overall an average of 3.54 hours per year is lost per
person due to dental disease in Canada, including professional treatment.

**Oral Health Indicators in Canada**

Canadians take very good care of their teeth and oral care. Almost 9 in 10 people
(88% of Canadians) feel that their oral health in an important part of their overall
health.

According to the CHMS, 84% of Canadians report their oral health as good or
excellent. Only 6.4% of Canadians have no teeth and only 5.5% of Canadians have
untreated coronal cavities. Most Canadians (73%) brush twice or more a day and over
a quarter (28%) floss 5 times a week.

An estimated 12.2% of Canadians avoid certain foods because of problems with their
teeth or mouth, and 11.6% of Canadians sometimes or often have pain the mouth in a
one year period.

Approximately 4.1% of Canadians are currently receiving orthodontic care, from a
high of 18% of adolescents and 6.2% of children. Almost 20% of Canadians have
received or are currently receiving orthodontic treatment.

*For children aged 6 to 11 years old:* Less than 0.3% have severe fluorosis. 56.8% are
affected by one or more dental caries. 32% have one or more sealants to prevent
cavities.

*For adolescents 12- 19 years old:* 58.8% are affected by one or more dental caries.
50.6% have one or more sealants to prevent cavities.
For adults aged 20 to 79 years old: 95.9% of dentate adults have experienced dental decay. 32.3% have gingivitis. 23.8% have one or more lost or traumatized anterior teeth. There are few teeth on average (0.58) that have untreated decay.

The lifetime probability of developing oral cancer in Canada is 1 in 105. In 2009, it is estimated that 1,150 Canadians died from oral cancer.

Approximately 78% of Canadians have had at least one filling done, 37% a root canal, 7% used a tooth-whitening product and only 3% have had a dental implant.

As of 2008, 45.1% of Canadians have access to fluoridated water.

**Trends in Oral Health Care**

The oral health of Canadians has greatly improved since 1972 when another national survey in Canada was undertaken (1972 National Canadian Nutrition Survey).

Today, 75% of Canadians visit a dentist annually compared to 50% in 1972. The prevalence of decayed, missing or filled teeth for children (6-11) is 23.6% today compared to 74% in 1972. The average number of decayed, missing or filled teeth was 6.0 in 1972 compared to 2.5 today (140 percent higher in 1972).

The prevalence of decayed, missing or filled teeth for adolescents (12-19) is 58.8% today compared to 96.6% in 1972. The average number of decayed, missing or filled teeth was 9.2 in 1972 compared to 2.5 today (268 percent higher in 1972). Edentulism has decreased substantially from 23.6% of the population in 1972 to 6.4% today.