

# ORAL HEALTH



Oral health refers to the health of a person's teeth, gums, and related dental structures (PHAC, 2018). Oral health is an integral aspect of a person's overall health and well-being throughout the duration of their life (FNIGC, 2018). Healthy teeth and gums influence the physical, mental, and social well-being of a person (PHAC, 2018). Oral health is also linked to other health conditions such as diabetes, dementia, cardiovascular disease, and can affect how often these diseases occur (PHAC, 2018).

Phase 3 of the Regional Health Survey conducted by the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) found that "two-thirds (66.0%) of First Nations adults rated the health of their teeth and mouth as good, very good or excellent, while more than one-third (34%) rated their oral health as fair or poor" (FNIGC, 2018, p. 99).

For Indigenous communities, poor oral health outcomes, such as periodontal disease, are linked to larger factors like poverty, lack of access to healthy foods, and barriers in accessing culturally appropriate dental care. For many remote communities, there is no dentist located close by and getting to one can be challenging. To improve oral health outcomes, culturally appropriate care must be made accessible for all Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

## What is periodontal disease?

### How do you know if you or someone you know has it?



Without daily care of teeth and gums, and regular cleanings by a dental professional, individuals may develop periodontal disease (NCCA, 2013). The two most common forms of periodontal disease are gingivitis and periodontitis. The most common type is gingivitis, which is "caused by an accumulation of plaque and tartar and may present as redness, swelling, and bleeding" (NCCA, 2013).

Periodontitis is more severe, and can develop if gingivitis is not treated properly. The "inflammation begins to spread beyond the gum tissue, causing loss of bone and connective tissue that support the tooth" (NCCA, 2013, p. 1). Periodontitis can be diagnosed by a dental professional "using x-rays and through a clinical examination" (NCCA, 2013, p. 1).

# Prevention:

There are a number of things that you can do to practice good oral health to prevent disease which includes:



Brushing your teeth twice a day



Flossing (cleaning between your teeth and above and below your gums daily)



Using mouth rinses that contain fluoride



Visiting a dental professional regularly



Cutting back on sugary drinks and foods



Cutting back on smoking and drinking alcohol

## Dental Health Benefits for First Nations and Inuit in Canada

Many dental and orthodontic services are covered by Health Canada's Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program for status First Nations and Inuit land claim beneficiaries. In British Columbia, the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) provides health benefits to help meet the dental needs for BC First Nations peoples not covered by provincial, territorial, or other third party health insurance. Your dental provider will be able to tell you what services are covered by NIHB or the FNHA Health Benefits program. Services covered include cleanings, fillings, braces, and general examinations, if they are not covered by provincial or territorial insurance.

## Calls to Action

There is currently a large gap in who is able to receive dental health benefits in Canada. Non-status First Nations and Métis people are not eligible for coverage under any of the existing programs. Organizations like NWAC have called on the federal government to fix these gaps, and ensure health equity for all Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

**For information on NIHB, visit the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch at the Health Canada webpage, [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/index-eng.php) or call the Dental Predetermination Center toll free at 1-855-618-6291**

**For FNHA Health Benefits information, visit the FNHA website: [www.fnha.ca/benefits](http://www.fnha.ca/benefits), or call toll-free: 1-800-321-5003**



Native Women's Association of Canada

L'Association des femmes autochtones du Canada



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