

The \$38 million problem as election campaign begins

With the 2018 Ontario election campaign now underway, this month's Community Care commentary continues to stress the need for accessible dental care for all.

In this province, at least one person goes to a hospital Emergency Room (ER) once every 9 minutes, and every 3 minutes someone goes to a doctor's office due to dental problems. Such individuals are desperate for help, but they can only get antibiotics and painkillers that may relieve the pain, but do not treatment the problem so that it does not reoccur.

They are among the estimated 2.5 million Ontarians who do not visit a dentist because of the cost, and they do not have any private coverage or workplace benefits to cover the fees.

The average cost of a hospital visit in Ontario is \$513. That means that dental-related hospital ER visits by City of Kawartha Lakes residents cost the health care system more than \$280,000 each year, or more than \$38 million province-wide – with no treatment to fix the problems, only painkillers for temporary relief. These funds would be much better spent on programs that cover oral care for adults and seniors who face dental problems, but cannot afford to see the dentist. It would certainly reduce unnecessary hospital visits and thus save health care costs in the long run.

It's not fair that only people who can afford private dental care or who are fortunate to have such employment-related benefits can have healthy mouths and teeth. There should be an equitable access to oral health care for all Ontarians.

Community Care is a member of the Kawartha chapter of the Ontario Oral Health Alliance, along with the HKPR District

Health Unit and the Brock Community Health Centre. The Alliance believes that the next Ontario government should extend public dental programs for children to include low income adults and seniors.

OOHA has a multi-step proposal to phase in additional coverage that logically points out how oral health coverage for all provincial residents can be implemented without overall costs to the health care system (a \$38 million savings is a good start).

With clear solutions within reach, it's time to ask our local candidates what steps their party would take to address Ontario's gap in oral healthcare.