

## NCOHR WORKING PAPER SERIES

# Why was dental care excluded from Canadian Medicare?

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### Abstract

Internationally, health policy analysts are often surprised that Canada's national system of health insurance (Medicare) does not include dental care. Understanding the historical reasons for its exclusion can inform current domestic and international policy debates on dental care. This paper proposes five interrelated reasons for why dental care was not incorporated into Canadian Medicare (i.e. legislative, professional, socio-cultural, economic, and epidemiological). In summary, dental care was not included because of significant decreases in dental caries and limitations in dental human resources as the country's health legislation was being developed, alongside the presence of a viable alternative option to large-scale treatment services (i.e. fluoridation), and the belief that maintaining one's oral health and the ability to seek out dental care were individual responsibilities, not social ones. Reflecting on these historical reasons provides an important policy foil for current international efforts at expanding the public financing of dental care.

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