Background

During 2007-2008, two pilot projects began in Saskatoon and Regina to provide clinical oral health services to the residents at Long Term Care (LTC) homes. In the Saskatoon Health Region (SHR), the University of Saskatchewan, College of Dentistry and a private practice dentist, Dr. Raju Bhargava and his team, implemented an oral health project at St. Anne’s Home and Saskatoon Convalescent Home. Within this project, the LTC residents received free oral health assessments. Portable equipment was then used to provide oral treatment for consenting residents. Treatment was paid for by the resident or their family. LTC home staff also received basic oral health education from SHR Oral Health Program staff.

In Regina, in partnership with the College of Dental Surgeons of Saskatchewan (CDSS), University of Saskatchewan, College of Dentistry, and a private practice dentist, Dr. Maureen Lefebvre conducted a pilot project in the Santa Maria LTC home. Within this project, the LTC residents received free oral health assessments. Oral treatment was provided on site in dental operatory for residents who consented to treatment (paid for by the resident or their family).

Over the next few years, Dr. Bhargava and his team in Saskatoon, and Dr. Lefebvre and Dr. Ed Reed with their team in Regina provided services to the LTC residents. The Santa Maria Seniors Oral Services (SOS) Program that originated in 2007 as a pilot project, continues to improve the oral health of LTC residents.

The initial pilot project was instrumental in demonstrating the need for oral health services in LTC homes, on-site oral health professionals to coordinate services/staff/residents, and basic daily oral care for residents. An outcome of this initial pilot was a second pilot in 2011 that supported an Oral Health Coordinator (OHC) at two LTC homes in SHR – Parkridge Centre, and Sherbrooke Community Centre. This was called the Oral Health LTC Initiative. It was supported with a $20,000 Community Wellness Grant from SHR. A registered dental assistant was hired in partnership with the University of Saskatchewan, College of Dentistry as the OHC and assisted LTC staff and residents to access oral care at each site. The College of Dentistry-General Dental Residency Program, delegated dentists from the program to provide treatment for residents who consented. All initial assessments were free of charge, to encourage residents to participate.

At the same time as these LTC pilots were occurring, the Saskatchewan Oral Health Coalition (SOHC)* was launched. Through strategic planning, the SOHC members identified that oral health in LTC homes was a significant issue, and one that they wanted...
to focus on. One of the outcomes of the SOHC was the partnership involved in securing the SHR - Community Wellness Grant. As a result of the SOHC working with the community related to oral health in LTC homes, the Saskatchewan Oral Health Professions (SOHP)** began to develop standardized recommendations for LTC.

Since 2011, SOHC and SOHP groups have worked collaboratively to develop a Saskatchewan strategy for oral health in LTC. The group used best practice and evidence to select a strategy and resources that provided a solid foundation for the Saskatchewan Seniors’ Oral Health and LTC Strategy. The goal was to find resources that provided the necessary education/training at all levels (staff, family, resident) and that included community feedback and participation.

In 2011, the SOHP and SOHC endorsed the use and adaptation of Australia’s national program entitled, Better Oral Health in Residential Care. With the endorsement by the SOHP and SOHC, a licensing agreement was signed between SHR and Australia. The license allowed for Saskatchewan adaptations. During 2011-2013, SOHP representatives worked to modify the training resource to Canadian/Saskatchewan standards. In 2013, the resource was retitled Better Oral Health in Long Term Care – Best Practice Standards for Saskatchewan. It has been a community development and capacity building project from the onset. Partners and stakeholders have been supportive of the need to improve oral health in LTC homes.

The OHC is responsible for assessments and training LTC home staff using the Better Oral Health in Long Term Care – Best Practice Standards for Saskatchewan. The training occurred at Parkridge Centre in 2014. It was provided by dental health educators of the Saskatoon Health Region – Population and Public Health Oral Health Program. Daily oral care for Parkridge Centre residents is now occurring in all neighbourhoods. The OHC continues to mentor and support staff to provide daily oral care.

In addition, dental staff in all health regions have been orientated to Better Oral Health in Long Term Care – Best Practice Standards for Saskatchewan. Several health regions and oral health professionals are showing interest in providing dental services in LTC and personal care homes. This includes the implementation of daily oral care following the Better Oral Health in Long Term Care – Best Practice Standards for Saskatchewan.

Currently, the Better Oral Health in Long Term Care – Best Practice Standards for Saskatchewan is being implemented at Sherbrooke Community Centre and Sunnyside Nursing Home in the Saskatoon Health Region. In LTC homes now following Better Oral Health in Long Term Care – Best Practice Standards for Saskatchewan, residents’ oral health has significantly improved. Residents have clean teeth, fresh breath, and are able to chew well and smile. This has improved their self-esteem and quality of live. Residents
who have accessed dental treatment on-site are free of oral discomfort, pain, and infection.

In September 2016, the SOHC and SOHP presented the report -through slides and video- to the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health did state that they were very impressed with the presentation and level of information. The Ministry of Health was motivated and interested in keeping the momentum going on this work. They will be looking for opportunities to share the strategy/training with other Directors of Care in all health regions.

The SOHC and SOHP will continue to work collaboratively with LTC homes, policy makers and government to implement the model for all Saskatchewan LTC homes. Saskatchewan seniors and LTC residents need and deserve a healthy mouth to have quality of life.

* The Saskatchewan Oral Health Coalition was originally the Saskatoon Oral Health Coalition until 2012. SOHC is a group of oral health professionals, community agencies, health region staff, provincial and national government representatives, and interested groups and individuals whose common goal is to improve oral health, particularly among vulnerable populations.

** SOHP is a group that represents legislated oral health associations including the College of Dental Surgeons of Saskatchewan, Denturists Society of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Dental Assistants’ Association, Saskatchewan Dental Hygienists’ Association, and Saskatchewan Dental Therapists Association)