

GREEN DOOR PROJECT

2022 ANNUAL REPORT



BACKGROUND

Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU) is the most westerly of Ontario's 34 public health units, serving the Kenora and Rainy River districts. The catchment area covers approximately one-fifth of Ontario's land mass and encompasses 19 municipalities, 39 official First Nations communities, and two unorganized territories. The population of approximately 82,000 is scattered across the region with a population density of 0.5 people per km², compared with the provincial average of 14.1 people km².



Registered dental hygienist Angela Groves in the new two-operatorial dental clinic in Dryden.

Although NWHU covers a large area geographically, it is one of the smallest public health units in terms of staffing, funding, and population. The large geographical area combined with dispersed population, demographics, and numerous remote communities contributes to health disparities in the region. These factors make the delivery of public dental health programs and services unique and challenging in the area.

Dental decay rates in the NWHU region are twice the provincial average and people with low incomes are the least likely to have access to dental services. Access to dental care in the region is further negatively impacted by the expansive geography, shortage of dental providers, lack of public transportation, and economic strains related to living in the north. Dental decay not only impacts a person's oral health, but also affects their overall health and quality of life. It can lead to pain and discomfort, tooth loss, infection, gum disease, nutritional deficiencies, emotional distress, and financial burdens. Taking steps to prevent dental decay and seeking timely treatment can help to avoid these negative impacts.

For many years, NWHU dental programs focused primarily on prevention and education through community and school-based programs. Over time, we expanded to provide access to care for underserved populations including low-income individuals and seniors. Today, our programs also include treatment services for eligible clients. By providing comprehensive dental services through community-based clinics, school-based programs, and mobile dental clinics, we aim to address oral health disparities in the communities we serve.

NWHU dental programs support eligible people to receive benefits through the following programs:

- Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO)
- Ontario Works (OW)
- Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
- Children's Oral Health Initiative (COHI)
- Federal Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB)
- Green Door Project (GDP)
- Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSCDP)

In late 2020, NWHU partnered with Green Shield Canada (GSC) to provide no-cost dental care to eligible adults. GSC committed to providing an annual gift of \$120,000 for three years (2021-2023) to help "fill the gap" in dental care for vulnerable adults in the NWHU region.

Our agreement with GSC also includes working with University of Toronto to gather data for the One Smile Research Project. Implementation of the research project was delayed, however in 2023 we will begin to gather data from GDP clients prior to and after receiving cost-free dental treatment to examine the link between oral health and overall lifelong health.

PROGRAM GROWTH

In the second year of our partnership with GSC, NWHU identified more opportunities to improve GDP program delivery.

It was evident in 2021 that GDP clients would benefit from preventive dental services to maintain good oral health practices. NWHU proposed the addition of dental cleanings to the services offered through the program. Additionally, we identified renovations to the NWHU dental clinic in Fort Frances that would allow us to better serve our clients.

With COVID-19 recovery underway, program promotion increased through various channels, including social media, targeted community mailouts, email communication and community outreach. Staff recruitment was needed to support more GDP treatment days to offer services, plus increased administrative support. Internal processes were reviewed and improved to ensure seamless delivery of services and communication with dental partners.

IMPLEMENTATION

In January 2022, dental staff were redeployed to support NWHU's COVID-19 pandemic response and were unable to offer dental services at our clinic sites until May. During that time, we supported eligible GDP clients to access dental care through our partnership with private practice dental providers.

Despite the pandemic, we saw significant growth in the program in 2022. NWHU's new two-operatory dental clinic in Dryden opened its doors in May. Additionally, our second mobile dental office arrived, allowing increased services being offered across the catchment area.

In the fall of 2022, GSC provided a generous contribution of \$142,049 to support enhancements to program delivery. Upon receiving the funds, we began to offer preventive services to eligible GDP clients. The additional money also enabled us to begin renovations to enhance the NWHU dental clinic in Fort Frances.

Our dental team also grew. We added two registered dental hygienists, two health educators, and one program assistant to our existing team.



Northwestern Health Unit and Kenora District Services Board staff at the "floss cutting ceremony" for the new dental clinic in Dryden.

SERVICE STATISTICS

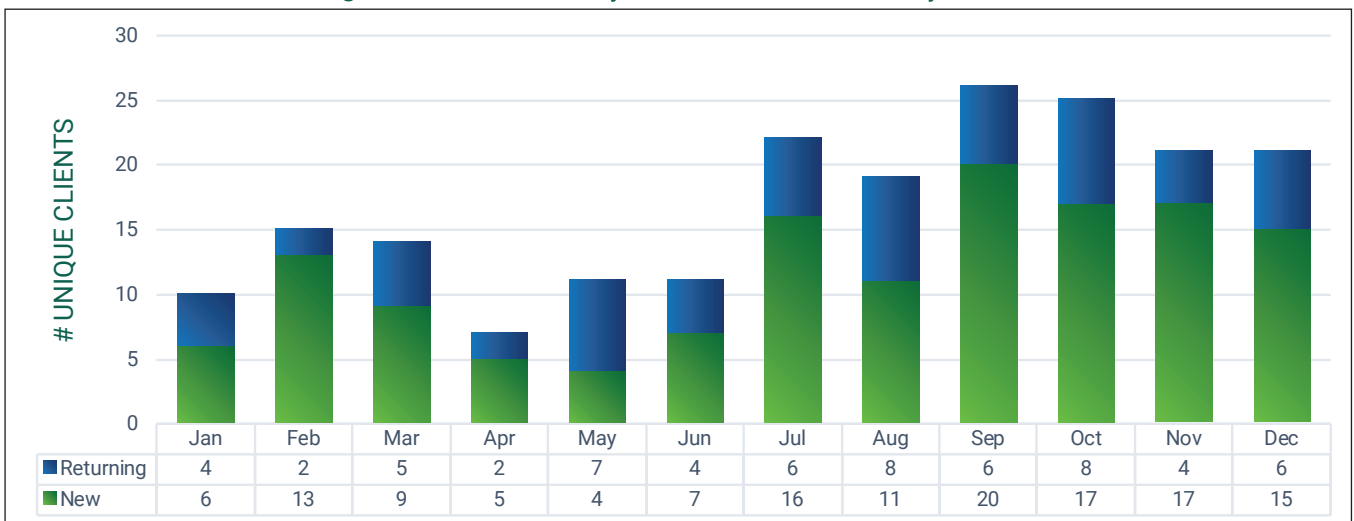
In 2022, NWHU provided dental treatment to 103 unique GDP clients across the catchment area. Of the 103 clients, 31 began treatment in 2021 that continued into 2022, while the remaining 72 began treatment in 2022 (Figure 1). These clients were approved to access dental care through a mixed-model approach, meaning treatment and preventive services were provided through NWHU mobile dental offices (MDO) and community clinics (CC) or through private practice dental providers. Clients were eligible to receive the following services: diagnostic, preventive, restorative, endodontic, prosthodontic, and oral surgery. Treatment generally requires two or more visits, which is further illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 1: Green Door Project 2022 Clients



Of 103 total clients, 31 were returning and 72 were new.

Figure 2: Green Door Project 2022 Clients Treated by Month*



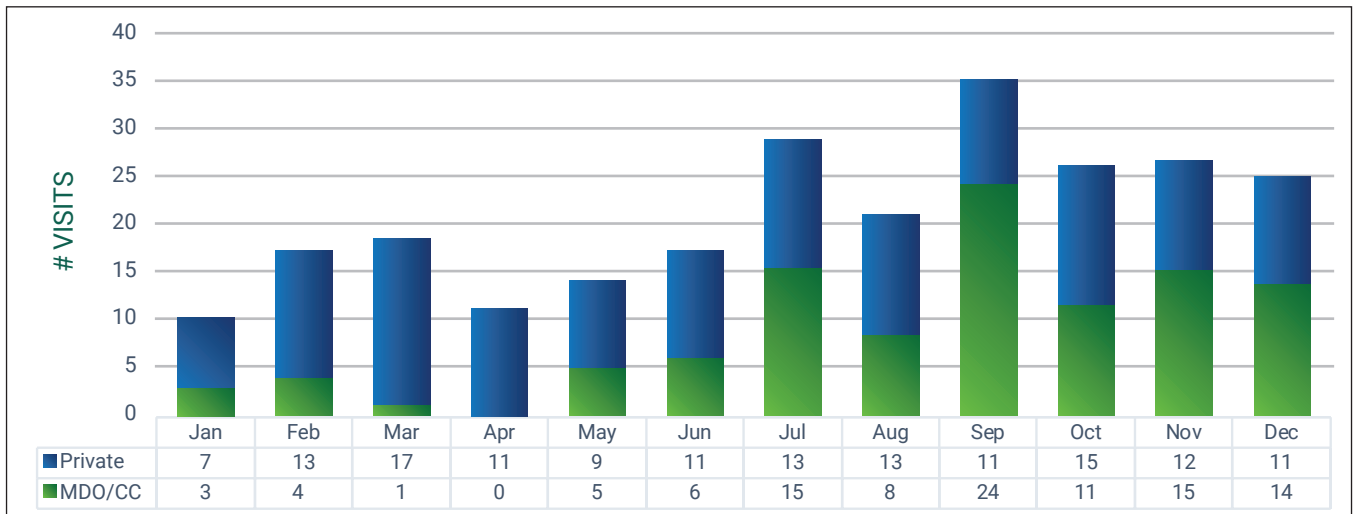
*Unique clients is by month; the same client is counted more than once if they return in more than one month.

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In 2022, 57 unique clients received dental care in four communities through our partnerships with 14 private practice dental providers, two denturists offices, and one oral surgeon practice. In 143 visits, 463 procedures were completed - primarily diagnostic and oral surgery. Client visits and procedures are illustrated in detail in Figures 3, 4 and 5. Dental providers were remunerated a total cost of \$83,355.47. In comparison, 32 unique clients received care in 2021, with 61 visits and 238 procedures, which totaled a remuneration of \$35,127.73.

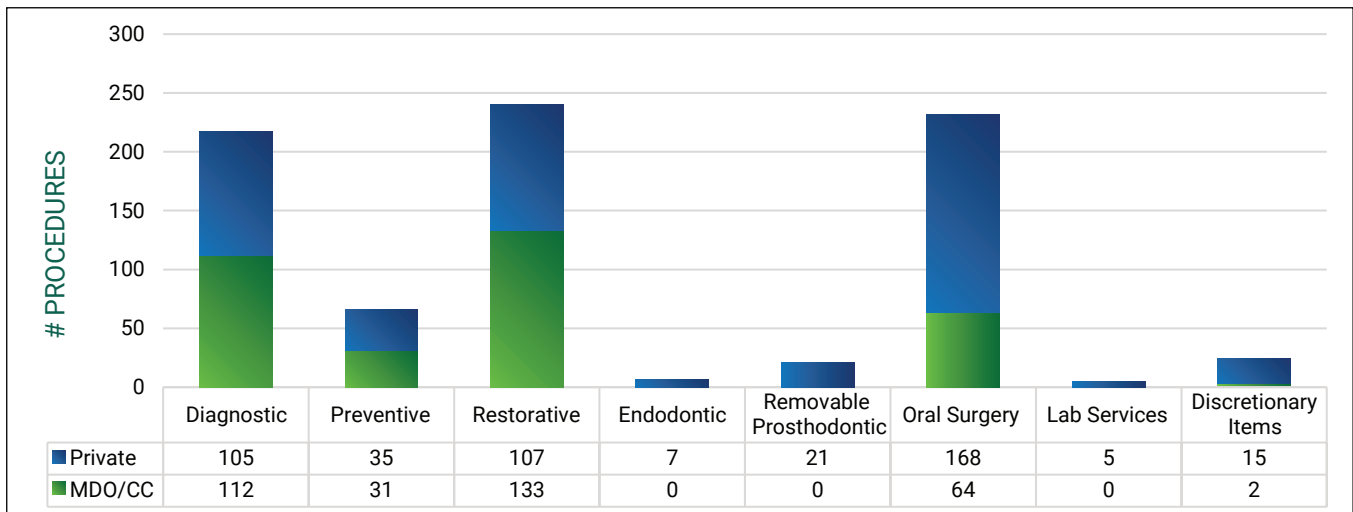
Additionally, at NWHU clinics, 46 unique clients received comprehensive dental care in six communities. During 106 visits, 342 procedures were completed – primarily diagnostic and restorative services. Client visits and procedures are illustrated in detail in Figures 3,4 and 5. Compared to the previous year, there were more teeth restored opposed to extracted, which is a positive shift. The total fees for services provided were \$29,500.00 within the same remuneration structure of the private practice model.

Figure 3: Green Door Project 2022 Client Visits by Month



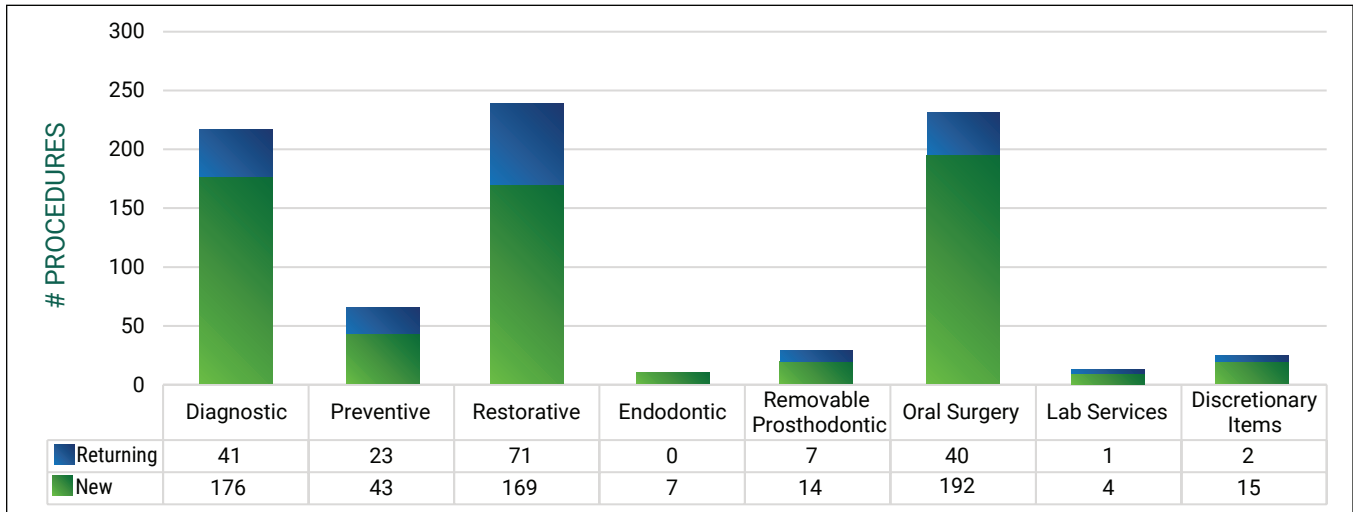
Of 249 total visits, 143 were to private practice dental providers and 106 were to NWHU clinics.

Figure 4: Green Door Project 2022 Procedures



Of 805 total procedures, 463 were in private practice dental providers and 342 were in NWHU clinics.

Figure 5: Green Door Project 2022 Procedures by Client Status



Of 805 total procedures, 185 were provided to returning clients and 620 were provided to new clients.

In the fourth quarter of 2022, we added preventive services to the basket of services available for GDP clients, which included teeth cleaning, tooth polish, fluoride treatment, and oral hygiene instruction. Twenty-eight clients received this expansion of services through our mixed model of care, with a large percentage of these clients requiring repeat visits to address the years of tarter buildup; a consequence of not seeing a dental professional regularly.

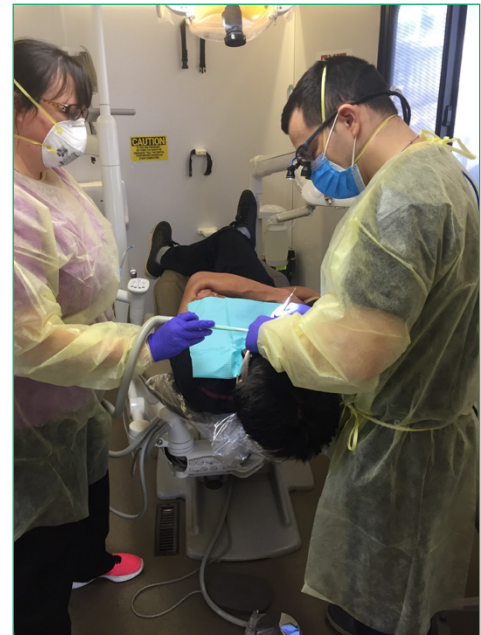
SUMMARY

In 2022, we accomplished our goal of providing dental care to over 100 recipients! Clients received comprehensive dental care in a variety of settings and locations to lessen barriers to accessing care.

We are committed to continued promotion of this program through targeted outreach to potential clients. Our increase in staff allows us more capacity to provide client support with program enrollment and navigation. Providing a robust treatment plan that includes preventive care will help clients see improved oral health and overall health outcomes. In 2023, we will support GDP clients to participate in the One Smile Study, to highlight the positive changes that they have experienced due to improved oral health.

Enhancements to the Fort Frances NWHU dental clinic were delayed due to the pandemic, and the project completion has been prioritized for 2023. The enhancements will allow additional clients to receive comprehensive dental care in another fixed clinic location in the region.

Offering a solution to clients who have not been able to access dental care for many years due to cost or other barriers has been very rewarding. NWHU looks forward to continuing our work with Green Shield Canada to improve the lives of eligible clients in our communities. Together we have helped over 100 clients to smile again and improve their quality of life!



NWHU Dental team providing treatment services to a GDP client on the mobile dental office.

Green Door Project: By the Numbers



103

103 clients received care through Green Door Project



249

249 total client visits



805

805 procedures



I had bad teeth that were causing me pain and I hoped they could be fixed. I have had the oral issues for a while due to being low income and had no benefits. I had other things that had to come first. Oral issues impacted my day-to-day life because the worst tooth was a front one and when I talked or smiled people could see it. These issues went on for years, but since I got it fixed, I feel better and smile more. It meant a lot to me to get treatment for my dental issues because I wasn't sure how it was going to get fixed. Being a single parent, kids and bills tend to take all the money, so I do not have much left over for other things like dental work since it is so costly.

Amanda



I was unable to pay for dental services and presented with an infection. I broke my tooth in January 2022 and it slowly got worse and became infected. I didn't access dental care for over 25 years before this. Emotionally I was very worried because I couldn't afford it, plus, I wasn't comfortable accessing dental care. Financially I was unable to pay for services as I was self-employed.

Now, I'm healthy. It helped me to focus on my business and not worry about the dental condition I had. Getting care from the dental team(s) has provided me with confidence and restored my faith in humanity.

Mariano



What brought me to NWHU for dental help was periodontal disease and a lack of dental care coverage since 2003. My dentist told me many years ago at an emergency visit, I needed all my teeth pulled but I couldn't afford it. The progression of my disease over the past 20 years had caused financial burden, as I was a single mom raising three children and dentist bills just weren't in the budget. These bills led to depression. I was in physical pain and getting infections throughout the years. I had to go to our hospital ER at times for antibiotics and then the dentist for teeth removal. At a recent emergency visit I asked my dentist if he knew of any financial assistance for seniors. He was unsure but referred me to the Health Unit to get that information. GREEN DOOR PROJECT! Truly the answer to my prayers for assistance. I was approved for a full top denture and a partial bottom plate. The Health Unit hygienist cleaned my teeth, and their dentist and his assistant pulled 16 teeth. They were very professional and made me feel at ease. Our local denturist has made me beautiful dentures. I'm no longer stressed about my teeth, have confidence about my appearance and love to smile. Thank you to everyone involved in the steps for my journey to beautiful teeth.

Cheryl

