

***Northwestern Health Unit and Green Shield Canada Partner
to Create Innovative Dental Public Health Program
Aims to Bridge the Gap on Delivering Dental Care in Northern Communities***

KENORA – March 29, 2021 – Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU) and Green Shield Canada (GSC) are partnering on an innovative dental public health program that will offer access to dental care through several dental clinics and mobile dental buses throughout the region, all at no cost to eligible patients.

Green Shield Canada's Green Door Project will provide an annual gift of \$120,000 for three consecutive years to allow NWHU to offer cost-free care for hundreds eligible low-income adults in the NWHU region who are currently unable to access to regular dental care.

Green Shield Canada: Bridging the North's Oral Care Gap

"Despite strong evidence that oral health is directly linked to overall lifelong health, many adults in the NWHU area don't qualify for public programs and don't have insurance coverage for dental care," explains Zahid Salman, president and CEO, Green Shield Canada. "We are committed to start the process of filling that gap by providing care to those in need and by creating programs like the Green Door Project." adds Salman.

Helping Northwestern Ontario Families

"Increased access to regular dental care is a much-needed service that has the potential to greatly benefit many adults in our communities," says Marilyn Herbacz, CEO of Northwestern Health Unit, adding that NWHU is already accepting applications for the new program. Herbacz says local residents can visit the dental page on the [NWHU website](#) for more information about who may qualify.

The NWHU plans to open its first standalone clinic at the Mary Berglund Community Health Centre in Ignace, Ontario during the month of May. Depending on pandemic-related restrictions, Herbacz expects the program's Mobile Dental Office (MDO) to begin visiting clients across the region in Summer 2021. The mobile team will provide preventive dental care and treatment out of specially-retrofitted buses.

Proper Dental Care Creates a Positive Wellness Ripple Effect

“People come into our emergency department, not only with physical health problems, but with mental and social issues as well,” says Sandra Paul, a Registered Social Worker who supports ER patients at Lake of the Woods District Hospital. Paul says, “the lack of access to dental care is a prevalent issue that impacts many residents in the region”.

“One individual receiving proper dental care trickles out to all of the people the individual comes into contact with. It’s hard to be kind to others when you’re in pain because you are so focused on your own discomfort,” says Paul, adding the Green Door Project will be able to make a real difference in the community.

Researching the Impact of Access to Oral Health Care in Northern Communities

The NWHU program is affiliated with the Green Shield Canada Clinic, Canada’s largest public health program in history, announced in November 2020 in collaboration with a multi-disciplinary team of researchers at the University of Toronto who are investigating the long-term impacts of access to quality oral health care. The University of Toronto clinic recently began seeing patients – and anticipates sharing public health research updates later this spring.

“Green Shield Canada understands that poor oral health can contribute to many serious physical, social, and financial problems, including infection, low self-esteem, barriers to employment and education, and more,” explains David Willows, EVP, Innovation at Green Shield Canada. “Canadians in lower-income brackets are four times more likely to avoid seeing a dentist due to cost — and twice as likely to have worse oral health outcomes. Our partnership with Northwestern Health Unit reflects our ongoing commitment to improving northern communities’ access to quality health care — and to advancing the importance of dental public health,” says Willows.

ABOUT THE GREEN DOOR PROJECT

The Green Door Project is on a mission to fill the gaps in our health care system by helping Canadians get access to the health care they need and deserve. Launched by Green Shield Canada in 2020, the Green Door Project partners with academic institutions and community health providers to provide no-cost care to those in need, and fund key research that will help us change the health care system – for good. Together, we’re building a better and healthier future

for all. Join us. Visit greendoorproject.ca for more info.

ABOUT THE NORTHWESTERN HEALTH UNIT

The Northwestern Health Unit is the most westerly of Ontario's 34 public health units, serving the Kenora (part) and Rainy River districts. The Northwestern Health Unit stretches across 171,288 square kilometers or approximately one-fifth of the Province of Ontario. It includes 19 municipalities and 39 First Nation communities. The Dental Health program at the Northwestern Health Unit provides dental screening, preventive services, and treatment to prevent and reduce dental cavities (decay). Their aim is to improve the oral health of children, youth, eligible adults and seniors in our communities. nwhu.on.ca

ABOUT GREEN SHIELD CANADA (GSC)

GSC is Canada's fourth-largest health and dental benefits provider, and is uniquely structured as a social enterprise with the purpose of making it easier for people to live their healthiest lives. From coast-to-coast, our service delivery includes drug, dental, extended health care, vision, hospital, and travel benefits for groups and individuals, as well as administration and benefits management services. Supported by outcomes-based sustainability strategies, advanced technology, and exceptional customer service, GSC creates innovative programs for nearly four million plan participants nationwide. Greenshield.ca

Check out GSC's latest podcast on the state of dentistry [here](#).