2015 CAPHD Life Membership Awarded to Dr. Peter Cooney

Dr. Cooney has made significant contributions to public health dentistry in Canada at the provincial and national level, internationally and as a Past President of the Canadian Association of Public Health Dentistry.

Dr. Cooney began his career in dentistry in Canada with a private practice in Newfoundland. He moved to Manitoba in 1991 to join the federal public service after completing his Specialty, Master’s and Fellowship in community dentistry. He worked for Health Canada’s Medical Services Branch initially, was then appointed the National Dental Officer in 1997 in Ottawa, and went on to serve as the Director General of the Non-Insured Health Benefits Directorate from 1999 to 2003.

Dr. Cooney was the President of the Canadian Society of Public Health Dentists from 1993 to 1994. In 1994, under his leadership the Society proposed to the membership that the Society’s name be changed to the Canadian Association of Public Health Dentistry and allow health professionals other than dentists full membership. In 1996, this change became official. The breadth of our membership today is what gives CAPHD its strength and voice. Dr. Cooney also actively chaired the CAPHD membership committee for many years and actively recruited members from across the country.

In 2004, Dr. Cooney was appointed as the inaugural Chief Dental Officer of Canada providing national leadership and point of contact on oral health issues for dentists, other oral health professionals, researchers, and faculties of dentistry. He held this position for 11 years increasing the awareness of oral health issues, such as the benefits of community water fluoridation, and enhancing oral health promotion and prevention. He coordinated public education efforts, environmental scans, special projects and the collection of comprehensive national oral health data. The first national oral health survey, as part of the Canadian Health Measures Survey was completed under Dr. Cooney. The survey and data collection involved close collaboration with Canadian Forces, Stats Canada, universities and a whole host of community members. Advocates and planners have used these data to document the inequalities in oral health and support the position that dental fluorosis is not endemic in Canada. Dr. Cooney also led the First Nations Oral Health Survey and the Inuit Oral Health Survey in partnership with First Nations Information Governance Centre and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) to ensure that population specific information would be available to identify needs and gaps in oral care. The data from these surveys has facilitated and focussed the work of public health programming and policy development at the provincial and federal levels. A number of provincial strategies are now in place focusing efforts to improve the oral health of Canadians. The data from the surveys has also increased research activity in oral health, allowing researchers to do analysis and build evidence necessary to identify successful interventions to improve oral health.

On the international front, Dr. Cooney served for 6 years as the Chair of the International Chief Dental Officers Public Health Section of the FDI World Dental Federation. As Chair he networked with 194 Chief Dental Officers from approximately 160 countries, sharing his expertise and knowledge to help strengthen disease prevention and health promotion activities, specifically in developing countries. Dr. Cooney also represented Canada on a four country advisory group that worked on the development of an oral health strategy for the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) for 2005-2015. This oral health strategy is a means to improve general health in the Americas through improvements in oral health.

Throughout his career in public health, Dr. Cooney has also mentored many students and young professionals over the years; sharing his passion for improving the oral health of Canadians. Dr. Cooney retired from the federal government in January 2015; however he remains actively engaged in public oral health through his ongoing work with a number of public health units and as a dental consultant.