



**College of Alberta  
Dental Assistants**

# **Request for Proposal**

Continuing Competence Program Review

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# 1 TABLE OF CONTENTS

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1	Table of Contents.....	3
2	Project Summary and Background .....	4
	2.1 Project Summary .....	4
	2.2 Background.....	4
	2.2.1 College Authority .....	4
	2.2.2 College Mission, Vision, Standards.....	5
	2.2.3 Continuing Competence History .....	5
3	Project Purpose and Description.....	7
	3.1 Project Purpose .....	7
	3.2 Project Description.....	8
	3.2.1 Trends in Health Regulation .....	8
4	Proposal Guidelines .....	9
5	Project Scope.....	9
6	Request for Proposal and Project Timeline.....	10
	6.1 Request for Proposal Timeline .....	10
	6.2 Project Timeline.....	10
7	Budget .....	11
8	Bidder Qualifications .....	11
9	Proposal Evaluation Criteria .....	11
10	Principal Point of Contact.....	12
11	References.....	13

## 2 PROJECT SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

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### 2.1 PROJECT SUMMARY

The College of Alberta Dental Assistants (the College) is currently accepting proposals for a Continuing Competence Program Review (CCPR). This project will include comprehensive review, assessment, analysis, and research of the existing Continuing Competence Program (CCP). It will also include research of CCP history and regulatory oversight, progression and trends in CCP, and recommendations for improvement to the CCP.

The purpose of this Request for Proposal (RFP) is to solicit proposals from various candidate organizations, conduct a fair and extensive evaluation based on criteria included in this RFP, and select a candidate who best meets the College's requirements for this project.

### 2.2 BACKGROUND

#### 2.2.1 College Authority

The College serves and protects the public interest by overseeing and directing the practice of dental assistants to ensure Albertans receive safe, competent, and ethical oral health care.

The Alberta Government and the *Health Professions Act (HPA)*<sup>1</sup> give the College the authority and mandate to act as the regulator for dental assisting. The HPA provides a legislative framework, delegating self-governance to health profession regulatory colleges in partnership with government. This framework outlines accountability mechanisms with standard processes for registration, continuing competence, complaints and discipline, and processes for maintaining professional standards of practice and codes of ethics. "Through these processes, the [*Health Professions Act*] ensures that health professionals maintain high standards of competency, safety and ethics, and provide Albertans with safe, high-quality care." (pg. 1,<sup>2</sup>)

The HPA requires that all activities the College performs fit within the regulatory mandate. The College sets expectations to ensure that dental assistants know what's expected of them. The College does this through regulation,<sup>3</sup> policies,<sup>4</sup> Bylaws,<sup>5</sup> Standards of Practice,<sup>6</sup> Code of Ethics,<sup>7</sup> Continuing Competence Program,<sup>8</sup> and guidelines.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the things the College does must focus on:

- ensuring that Albertans receive safe, high-quality oral health care from dental assistants
- ensuring that dental assistants adhere to the highest standards and ethical conduct
- protecting the public from unsafe practice
- holding dental assistants accountable for the care they provide

Section 50 of the HPA requires that all health profession regulatory colleges have a continuing competence program for their registrants to maintain competence and enhance their provision of professional services. The intent of continuing competence in the HPA is for “health professionals to view the maintenance of competence and the ability to apply advances in their profession as a lifelong process.” (pg.38,<sup>2</sup>)

Continuing competence programs are mandatory and linked to a registrant’s ability to obtain and maintain a practice permit, which gives a health professional authority to practice in a profession. The regulatory colleges have flexibility in how they design their CCP, with the HPA defining that they include one or more of the following:

- continuing education that may include a specific number of credits per year
- self-directed learning, self-assessment and evaluation, and continuing competence plans
- re-certification on a regular basis
- on-the-job experience/practice hours

Further detail related to how the HPA oversees CCP is included in Section 50-53 of the HPA<sup>1</sup> and in the *Health Professions Act Handbook*. (pp. 38-39,<sup>2</sup>)

Dental Assistants were proclaimed under the HPA in 2006,<sup>3</sup> and the College’s CCP launched in 2009. It has evolved over the years and is now defined in the Competence Program Manual,<sup>10</sup> with a three-stage process of Assess – Achieve – Analyze, released for registrants in August 2022.

### **2.2.2 College Mission, Vision, Standards**

Alberta Dental Assistants are recognized leaders in regulation and governance, and support practices that establish universally accepted standards of competence, professionalism, quality, and safety for the profession.

*Our Mission<sup>11</sup>: The College of Alberta Dental Assistants regulates its members in the public interest, promoting the delivery of safe, quality oral health care.*

*Our Vision<sup>11</sup>: We champion regulatory excellence, innovation, and trust among our communities.*

The College’s Standards of Practice<sup>12</sup> define 8 criteria for continuing competence. These criteria outline expectations for Dental Assistants including linkages with the Competency Profile,<sup>13</sup> infection prevention and control standards, and occupational health and safety guidance.

### **2.2.3 Continuing Competence History**

Competence-based education was recognized since the 1970s as effective in adult education programs.<sup>14</sup> However, since CCPs were launched for health professionals in Alberta in the early 2000s, much debate ensued among regulators about the effectiveness of self-direction, self-engagement, and self-reporting processes for continuing competence measurement.

As the HPA regulated more professions, more questions than answers about CCP became evident. Alberta health professional regulatory colleges immediately recognized the need for collaboration and created an interest group (Continuing Competence Interest Group-CCIG) focused on sharing and learning. Through the CCIG, regulators explored the logic of continuing competence, adult learning philosophies, and different ideas of measuring competence in professionals.

As continuing competence (or quality assurance) was a trend emerging across Canada for health professionals, the CCIG hosted a conference on the topic in November 2005. CCP expert Zubin Austin was featured, having years of study on the topic and involvement in implementation of a similar quality assurance program with pharmacists in Ontario. His advice on CCP guided many Alberta health professions in the early stages of development and implementation.

Austin's work, along with other scholars', is considered in an article published on the College of Physiotherapists of Alberta website.<sup>15</sup> Austin's common perspective, shared at many events over the years, is that the engagement discourse of competence doesn't focus on a list of skills or abilities per se. It relates competence to engagement, competency drift, professional identity, and flow.<sup>16,17</sup> Additionally, Austin challenges the meaning of competence and how it has changed and continues to evolve.<sup>18</sup>

Austin also related to the challenge of engaging professionals in the learning and CCP process: "Regulators must be accountable to multiple stakeholders and they also need to have methods that all members can understand, accept, and, most importantly, buy into."<sup>19</sup>

A profound statement on continuing competence is captured in the 2015 report by the Health & Care Professionals Council (HCPC) of the UK, where HCPC Chair, Anna van der Gaag, writes in her Foreword:

*The study of competence in health and care professionals has generated many hundreds of research papers by academics and practitioners from different disciplines. Perhaps the only area of agreement amongst the models and constructs is that competence, like professionalism, is challenging to define. Endeavours to try and capture it in a list of knowledge, skills and attributes, to produce a checklist which covers all behaviours, are likely to end in oversimplification. Competence, like professionalism, is more than the sum of its parts. (pg. 1, <sup>20</sup>)*

The move to viewing competence as a professional activity that builds throughout the lifespan of a professional seems to have a good basis in health regulation perspective. However, it remains an international discussion about self-directed programs vs a more structured point or credit system that counts learning activities.<sup>21</sup>

## 3 PROJECT PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION

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### 3.1 PROJECT PURPOSE

*The Problem:* The problem the College wishes to solve is to enhance the CCP to see registrants advance their participation in CCP, to engage in all parts of the program and see measurable changes in their practice.

Many registrants do not have a full understanding of the CCP, why it exists, or requirements related to their professional responsibilities to participate in continuing competence.

The overall goal of the CCP aligns with typical adult education evaluation and includes engagement in the three stages of the CCP; *Assess* through self-assessment, *Achieve* with completion of learning, and *Analyze* by reflecting on the impact of learning to one's practice. However, most registrants complete learning (Stage 2-Achieve) yet fail to fully self-assess their practice (Stage 1-Assess) or reflect on the impact of learning (Stage 3-Analyze).

Additionally, the CCP Audit results demonstrate that most registrants have not moved beyond being *reactionary*<sup>i</sup> in their learning.<sup>22</sup> This indicates they are not moving past Level 1 of the four-part *Kirkpatrick Model*<sup>23</sup>, a recognized tool for effective evaluation of learning.<sup>24</sup>

*The Main Goal of the CCPR* is to achieve clear recommendations for improvements to the CCP that:

- ensure regulatory oversight and protection of the public
- are measurable and manageable for the College
  - based on the Kirkpatrick Model, or other learning evaluation models
- provide worthwhile and dynamic CCP expectations for Dental Assistants that:
  - improve their understanding of the CCP, and all its parts
  - enhance their commitment to learning
  - guide the transfer of learning into targeted outcomes<sup>28</sup>
  - encourage measurable improvements in professional practice

*The Purpose of the CCPR* is to perform a comprehensive review, assessment, and analysis of the existing CCP to:

- define areas of gaps within the CCP
  - to ensure public protection
  - to engage College registrants
- assess alignment of the CCP guiding documents
- assess alignment of other College resources
- acknowledge what the current CCP does well

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<sup>i</sup> "Reaction – Level 1 – The first level is learner-focused. It measures if the learners have found the training to be relevant to their role, engaging, and useful." <sup>xxix</sup>

- complete a literature review of data related to continuing competence for regulated professionals, including the history, progression, and trends in continuing competence
- summarize perspectives gathered in discussion with registrants and stakeholders through focus groups, interviews, and surveys performed during the review
- recommend improvements for the CCP, guiding documents, and other College resources that meet the project goals
- integrate research into all components of the review, validating all recommendations

### 3.2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The College is seeking a provider to perform a comprehensive review of the CCP currently in place for Dental Assistants in Alberta.

The provider will be expected to meet the following project goals:

1. Review all current CCP resources and expectations.
2. Analyze demographics of Alberta Dental Assistants to ensure all CCP resources address variations in learning styles due to age, gender, language, culture, education.
3. Perform various focus groups, interviews, and/or surveys gathering perspective from a representative group of Dental Assistants and stakeholders.
4. Recommend improvements to the CCP that meet the main goal of this project.
5. Integrate current research and trends in continuing competence into all recommendations and improvements.
6. Maintain report parameters within the mandate of the HPA<sup>1</sup> and *Dental Assistants Profession Regulation* (2006).<sup>2</sup>
7. Suggest potential platform management tools for the CCP.

#### 3.2.1 Trends in Health Regulation

Regulators have trends to manage that reach beyond continuing competence, none more obvious today than the 2010 introduction of Harry Cayton’s “right-touch regulation.”<sup>25</sup> Cayton describes “eight steps to effective regulatory decision-making,” which focus on balancing risk through understanding, along with allowing professionals a framework where they can be flexible to make good decisions within their professional roles.<sup>21</sup> However, the question remains for many regulators, does “right-touch regulation” maintain enough control or oversight?

Government oversight in health regulation is stronger today than ever before in HPA history. In 2018, after nearly two decades with little change to the legislation “...the ‘winds of change’ sweeping much of Canada and around the world arrived in Alberta with gale force. As a result, the last four years have been a period of extensive, intense, and complex regulatory reform in Alberta.”<sup>26</sup>

Government has been ramping up expectations, expecting more transparency, public input, higher and more unified expectations on all regulated health professions.<sup>27</sup> Some of these changes impact



continuing competence programs, including shifting them from the professions' regulations to their Standards of Practice.

Legal experts in health regulation, Field Law, provide advice on their website and through regularly held regulatory webinars to help regulators keep up with these changes.<sup>28</sup> Many regulators, including the College, balance these and other regulatory trends through refreshed regulatory guidance documents and updated Strategic Plans.<sup>29</sup>

## 4 PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

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This Request for Proposal represents the requirements for an open and competitive process.

Proposals will be accepted until **11:59 pm on Friday, May 5, 2023**. Any proposals received after this date and time will be returned to the sender. All proposals must be signed by the official agent or representative of the company submitting the proposal.

If the organization submitting a proposal outsource or contract any work to meet the requirements of the RFP, they must clearly state this in the proposal, including the name and description of the organizations being contracted.

All costs must be itemized to include an explanation of all fees and costs, including associated outsourced or contract work.

Terms and conditions of an engagement contract will be negotiated upon selection of the winning bidder for this RFP.

## 5 PROJECT SCOPE

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The successful proposal will be responsible for planning, conducting, and finalizing the CCPR.

These criteria must be met to achieve a successful project:

- A clear and concise written Report that articulates review of all goals for the CCPR.
- Evaluation of the current CCP and how it meets requirements for continuing competence.
- Detailed analysis and description of areas for enhancement in the CCP.
- Identified challenges anticipated in achieving the main goal of this project.
- Comprehensive research and trends summary that:
  - identifies historical continuing competence belief structures
  - examines changes, if any, to how continuing competence is viewed
  - describes a plan to examine current College CCP data
  - validates all suggested recommendations and improvements
- Suggested evaluation tool(s) for the College to measure and monitor CCP results.
- Detailed recommendations that outline improvements to the CCP.
- A map that defines sequential activities to achieve all recommendations.

- Ability to work closely with the College team assigned to oversee the CCPR.
- Willingness to clarify any areas of the Report that are unclear.
- Availability to present a summary of the Report, either online or in person.

## 6 REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL AND PROJECT TIMELINE

### 6.1 REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL TIMELINE

All proposals in response to this RFP are due no later than **11:59 pm, May 5, 2023**.

Questions about this RFP can be sent directly to the College via Jill Bateman at [jbateman@abrda.ca](mailto:jbateman@abrda.ca), before **May 5, 2023**.

Evaluation of proposals will be conducted between **May 6, 2023 – June 4, 2023**. If additional information or discussions are needed with any bidders during this time, the bidder(s) will be contacted directly.

The selection decision and awarding of winning bidder will be made by **June 5, 2023**. Notification to bidders who were not selected will be completed by **June 5, 2023**.

Upon notification, the contract negotiation with the winning bidder will begin immediately.

Proposals DUE	Question Period	Evaluation by the College	Awarding of Winning Bid	Notification of Unselected Bids
May 5, 2023 11:59 pm	Before May 5, 2023	May 6 to June 4, 2023	By June 5, 2023	By June 5, 2023

Table 1

### 6.2 PROJECT TIMELINE

Project initiation phase will include a face-to-face (or possibly online) meeting at the College office in Edmonton and must be completed by **June 19, 2023**.

Project planning phases and timelines will be reviewed with additional direction and support from the College team to clarify parameters, provide data and information, and set communication check points.

Project planning phase will determine the timeline/schedule for all phases of the project which must be completed by **December 5, 2023**.

Project Initiation Meeting with the College	Research and Development	Focus Groups, Surveys, Interviews	Deadline for Submission of Completed CCPR
By June 19, 2023	June 5 – December 4, 2023	August – October, 2023	December 5, 2023 at 11:59 pm

Table 2

## 7 BUDGET

All proposals must include proposed costs to complete the tasks described in the Project Scope.

The budget for the CCPR is \$60,000. The College will allocate additional funds for costs associated with facilitating focus groups. Bidders must include anticipated focus group costs, including venue, participant refreshments and bidder travel, considering the College regulates members throughout Alberta.

If there are additional resources, tools, materials outside of those identified in the Project Scope, they must be indicated with an outline of additional costs.

## 8 BIDDER QUALIFICATIONS

Bidders should provide these items as part of their proposal for consideration:

- Description of experience in regulation, continuing competence, adult learning, research.
- List of how many involved full-time, part-time, and contractor staff.
- Examples of similar projects completed by bidder or by their organization.
- Testimonials from past clients/references related to past work.
- Anticipated resources you will assign to this project (total number, role, title, experience).
- Timeframe for components and completion of the project.
- Potential project management methodology.
- A statement of any potential, perceived or anticipated conflicts of interest.
- Business information including:
  - liability insurance of at least \$2,000,000
  - business and GST number
  - full contact details

## 9 PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

The College will evaluate all proposals based on the following criteria.

To ensure consideration for this Request for Proposal: proposals should be complete; no longer than 20 pages and may include additional information as appendices; and address all of the following criteria:

- Overall proposal suitability: Proposed solution(s) must meet the scope and needs included in this RFP and be presented in a clear and organized manner.
- Organizational experience: Bidders will be evaluated on their experience as it pertains to the scope of this project.
- Previous work: Bidders will be evaluated on examples of their work pertaining to continuing competence programs, regulatory oversight, adult learning integration, and research, as well as client testimonials and references.
- Value and cost: Bidders will be evaluated on the budget noted in their proposal and the scale of the work to be performed, in accordance with the scope of this project.
- Technical expertise and experience: Staff technical expertise and experience will be examined based on the needs of this project.
- Each bidder must submit their proposal to the email address below by **11:59 pm, May 5, 2023**.

## 10 PRINCIPAL POINT OF CONTACT

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Jill Bateman  
[jbateman@abrda.ca](mailto:jbateman@abrda.ca)  
 Competence & Registration Manager  
 780-486-2526 / 1-800-355-8940

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