

College of Alberta
Dental Assistants

Competence Program Manual

A regulated member's guide to the Continuing Competence Program

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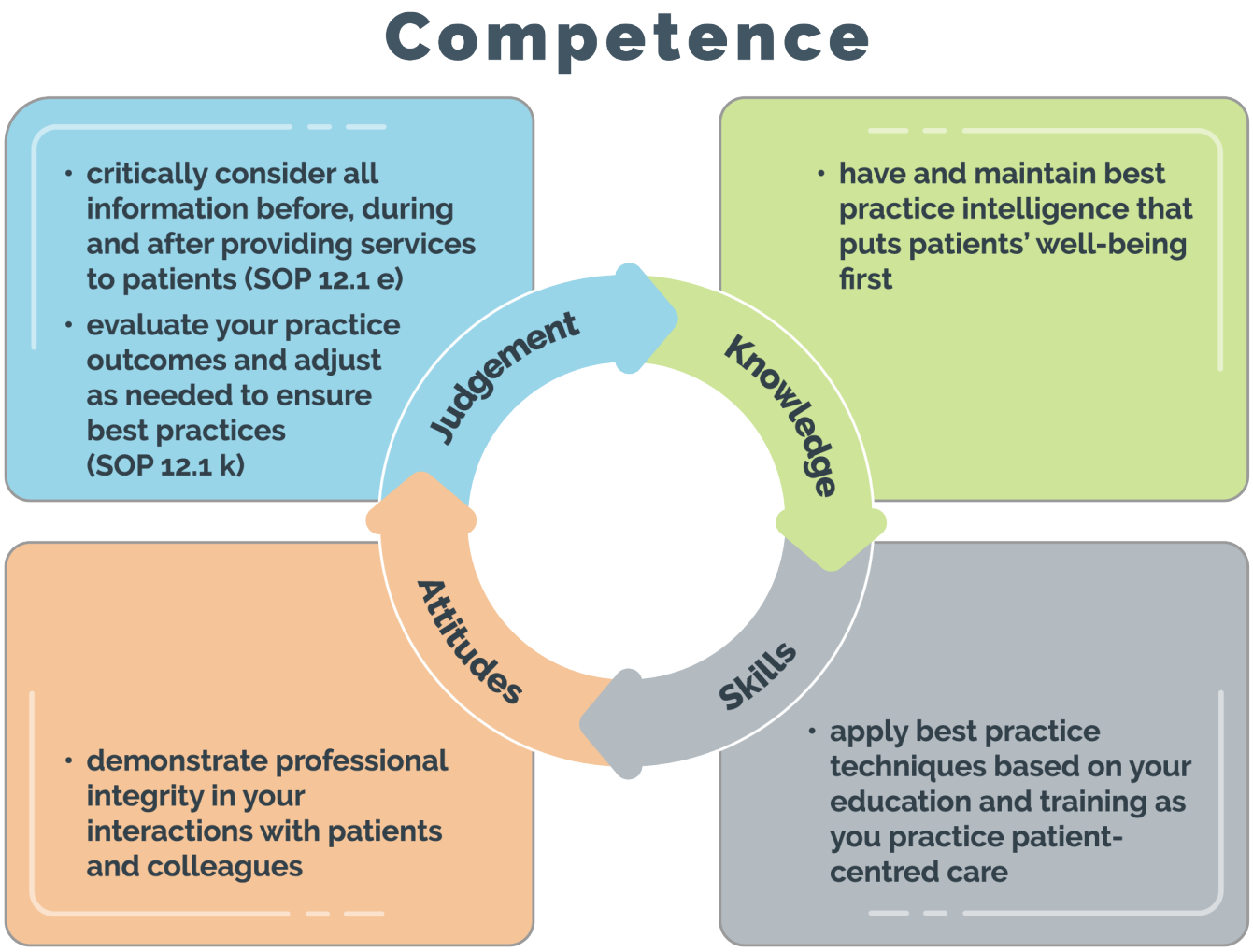
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Introducing Continuing Competence

Lifelong learning is at the heart of what it means to be a competent professional. Patients assume and expect that you will provide them with knowledgeable, competent care throughout your career. To provide safe and appropriate services to the public, you must engage in ongoing learning.

Defining Competence

When you are competent, you have the **knowledge**, **skills**, **attitudes**, and **judgement** needed to provide professional services.[1]



[1] Standards of Practice 18.1

A bit about our CCP

Before we get into the Continuing Competence Program (CCP) requirements – the details about what you must do – let's look at what the CCP is for. Ideally, it will help you develop the **knowledge**, **skills**, **attitudes**, and **judgement** you need for competent practice. Briefly, the intent of our CCP is to:

1. meet the public's expectation of receiving competent care from dental assistants
2. meet the *Health Professions Act* (HPA) requirement of continuing competence for health professionals
3. meet our College's mission to regulate its members in the public interest, promoting the delivery of safe, quality oral health care
4. work with you to ensure you understand your responsibilities and meet them, practice competently and take responsibility for your own learning
5. encourage you to achieve more through self-reflection

We recognize that simply completing all CCP requirements does not guarantee competence. Instead, effective CCP participation requires self-assessing, completing learning activities and analyzing outcomes. We consider effective CCP participation to be an indirect indicator of competence.

This manual is meant to help you understand the CCP. It explains what we expect of you and guides you to resources that will support you. If you need help understanding anything, reach out to our Regulatory Compliance Advisors (RCA). They will answer your questions and help guide you.

Contact our RCAs

Annual CCP requirements

Every registration year (December 1 to November 30 of the following year), dental assistants must:

1. complete a self-assessment
2. create a minimum of two learning goals
3. complete learning activities to fulfill their learning goals
4. provide proof of completed learning activities
5. analyze learning outcomes
6. provide proof of practice hours
7. participate in a CCP audit if selected

You can use our CCP Checklist as a quick reference.

Access the CCP Checklist

Assess → Achieve → Analyze

We have designed the CCP to encourage you to think proactively about your professional growth by following these **Assess → Achieve → Analyze** steps.



ASSESS

The **ASSESS** step is about reflecting on your practice to identify areas for learning, growth, and improvement. This process should be intentional and meaningful.

STEP 1: COMPLETE THE SELF-ASSESSMENT

Complete the mandatory self-assessment in the portal. The self-assessment includes reflective questions connected to the Standards of Practice and is designed to help guide your thinking and identify possible learning needs.

You should also continually self-assess throughout your day-to-day practice. Learning needs may come from patient interactions, challenges in practice, feedback, changes in practice, areas where you feel less confident, or skills you do not perform often.

The Competency Profile may also be used as a resource to help identify areas for learning and professional growth.

STEP 2: CREATE YOUR LEARNING GOALS

Create a minimum of two learning goals in the portal based on your self-assessment responses or other areas important to your current or future practice.

As part of each learning goal, you will answer reflective questions about:

- what you plan to learn
- why the learning is important to you and your practice

Strong learning goals should be SMART:

- **Specific** – clear and focused
- **Measurable** – you can tell when you have achieved it
- **Achievable** – realistic for your practice
- **Relevant** – meaningful to your work
- **Time-bound** – can be completed during the current registration year

ACHIEVE

The **ACHIEVE** step is about completing meaningful learning activities that support your learning goals and help strengthen your knowledge, skills, judgment, and professional practice.

There are many types of learning activities that may support your learning goals. Examples include:

- completing formal education courses
- self-study
- attending a workshop, seminar, or webinar
- mentorship or peer learning
- workplace or in-office training
- reviewing legislation, Standards of Practice, guidelines, or professional resources

STEP 3: COMPLETE YOUR LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Complete learning activities that support and help achieve your learning goals.

Learning activities must be completed within the current registration year, which runs from December 1 to November 30 of the following year. Learning activities completed in a previous registration year cannot be carried forward or counted toward a future registration year.

STEP 4: UPLOAD PROOF OF LEARNING

Upload proof of completed learning activities in the portal.

Proof may include:

- a certificate
- transcript
- course record
- Verification of Learning Form

Documentation must clearly show:

- your name
- the learning activity
- completion date(s)

Self-study activities must be documented in the portal and should include the website name or material title, website link or source, and the pages, sections, or chapters reviewed.

Access the Verification of Learning Form



ANALYZE

The **ANALYZE** step is where you reflect on the outcome and impact of your learning. This is an opportunity to think about what you learned, how it changed or improved your practice, and how it supports safe, patient-centered care.

STEP 5: ANALYZE YOUR LEARNING

Answer a minimum of two reflective questions in the portal about your learning and professional growth.

Your responses may include reflection on:

- how the learning impacted or improved your practice
- how you applied the learning in a real practice situation
- what you do differently now because of the learning
- key knowledge, skills, or insights you gained

Your responses should demonstrate reflection, application, and professional growth.

What matters most

The CCP focuses on the impact of learning, not just completion of learning.

The CCP is not measured by continuing education hours, credits, or points. The focus is on meaningful learning and whether the activity helped improve your practice, strengthen confidence and decision-making, and support safe, patient-centered care.

The goal is meaningful learning that:

- improves your practice
- strengthens confidence and decision-making
- supports patient-centered care
- improves patient safety

Changing your learning goals

There may be situations where your learning goals change throughout the registration year. For example, you may change jobs, begin performing different duties, encounter new challenges in practice, or your office may introduce new equipment or procedures.

It is okay for your learning goals to change from those originally identified during your initial self-assessment.

Repeating learning goals

The intent of the CCP is to support ongoing learning, growth, and professional development throughout your career.

You may continue learning within the same area of practice when ongoing development is appropriate or important to your role. Repeating a topic area is acceptable if the learning activity is different or if the learning reflects continued growth, updated knowledge, changes in standards or legislation, new technology or materials, or evolving practice responsibilities.

However, the exact same course or identical learning activity may only be counted toward CCP requirements once every three years, unless otherwise approved or directed by the College.

Documentation and record retention

Dental assistants are responsible for maintaining CCP records that demonstrate participation in the Continuing Competence Program.

Proof of learning may include certificates, course records, transcripts, self-study references, or other documentation accepted by the College.

CCP records must be retained for a minimum of **five years** and provided to the College if requested during an audit or other approved CCP process.

Practice hours and substantial equivalence

Maintaining current practice is an important part of continuing competence. As part of practice permit renewal, dental assistants must demonstrate ongoing engagement in dental assisting practice.

To meet practice hour requirements, you must have proof of at least 300 practice hours within the previous three years before renewing your practice permit.

Practice hours may include paid employment or volunteer experience in the dental field that requires or benefits from a dental assisting background.

Acceptable proof of practice hours

Proof of practice hours must be uploaded in the portal and may include:

- a Practice Hours Verification Form signed by an employer or supervisor
- pay stubs
- T4 slips
- Records of Employment
- a signed employer or supervisor letter

Documentation should clearly show:

- your name
- employer or organization
- dates of employment or service
- hours worked

Sensitive personal information, such as your SIN, should be removed or blacked out before documents are uploaded.

Access the Practice Hours Verification Form

If you do not meet the practice hour requirement

If you do not meet the required practice hours, you may still demonstrate current practice through **substantial equivalence**.

Substantial equivalence may include:

- graduation from a dental assisting program within the last three years
- successful completion of an approved clinical refresher course within the last three years
- successful completion of the NDAEB Clinical Practice Evaluation within the last three years
- current registration as a dental assistant in another regulated Canadian jurisdiction
- other evidence accepted by the College demonstrating current practice

Audit

We audit the CCP records of at least 5% of dental assistants each year. If we select you for audit, we will send you a CCP audit notice in January. In that CCP audit notice, we will let you know which years of your CCP records we will review.

During audit, our Regulatory Compliance Advisors check to see that your mandatory practice hours, learning goals, learning activities and verification meet the requirements and that your records accurately capture your continuous learning activities. They use the criteria throughout the CCP Policies when they decide if an audit is successful or incomplete. Keeping complete and meaningful records throughout the year can help support a successful audit.

Access the CCP Policies

When we audit, our goal is to educate you about our continuing competence expectations rather than to penalize.

You must keep copies of all documents related to CCP for at least five years.

Audit extensions

If you are experiencing extenuating circumstances and want to ask for more time to submit your audit, you must request an audit extension on or before the CCP audit deadline.

Audit outcomes

We will let you know by email if your audit is Satisfactory or Incomplete, any required next steps and the response timeframe where applicable.

If your audit is Satisfactory, your audit is done.

If your audit is Incomplete, you will have steps to take to make it Satisfactory (the remedial process). This may include updating or editing your records. We may ask for further proof of the activities you completed or any other steps that align with our CCP expectations.

Referral to conduct

If you fail to meet the CCP audit requirements through the remedial process the next step may be that we refer you to the unprofessional conduct process. To avoid this, and to meet public safety expectations, we encourage you to engage with us and the remedial process.

Appealing a decision

If you are not satisfied with your audit outcome you may appeal to the Competence Committee.

Standards of Practice

Our Standards of Practice require that all dental assistants in Alberta must follow our Continuing Competence Program (CCP) requirements. They help define professional practice and are one tool we use to measure dental assistants' professional conduct. While the requirements of the CCP are in Standard 18, there is also information throughout the Standards that describe our expectations for competent practice. Applying the Standards to your practice may also help guide your CCP activities.

Access the Standards of Practice

Competence Committee and College staff

We have a committee and staff who work together to support the Competence Program. The Competence Committee reviews CCP policies and procedures, including CCP audit. If needed, they suggest changes to Council.

Our Regulatory Compliance Advisors are your source for help, so reach out to them when you have questions about competence. They also perform audits.

Contact our RCAs

Competence Policies

The Standards of Practice provide the rules for the CCP. We also have Competence Policies that complement the Standards of Practice by defining how we operate the program.

Access the CCP Policies

Competency Profile

The Competency Profile (Profile) describes the knowledge, skills, behaviours, and attitudes of competent dental assistants. We do not expect you to have every competency described in this Profile. Instead, your competencies will be specific to you and your patients' needs. Also, depending on those same needs, you may be more or less proficient than other dental assistants.

You will achieve most competencies in the Profile through formal education. Some you may gain through experience, further education and/or on-the-job training.

The Profile consists of nine competency categories, which are groupings of competencies or skills. They are:

A. Foundational Knowledge
B. Safety
C. Treatment Support Procedures
D. Dental Equipment & Technology
E. Clinical Procedures
F. Oral Health Education & Promotion
G. Communications & Interpersonal Skills
H. Practice Management
I. Professionalism

Access the Competency Profile