



**College of Alberta  
Dental Assistants**

## **Program Approval Policy 001**

Program approval and course recognition framework

# PAP-POL-001 Program approval and course recognition framework

**Legislative authority:** This policy is established under the *Dental Assistants Profession Regulation*, the *Fair Registration Practices Act*, the *Health Professions Act*, the *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation*, and the *Labour Mobility Act*. Authority is further supported by the Bylaws of the College of Alberta Dental Assistants (2023).

## 1.0 Purpose

This policy establishes the program approval and course recognition framework for the College of Alberta Dental Assistants.

It sets expectations for Council authority, regulatory oversight, approval decision making, monitoring, and accountability associated with education programs and education courses recognized by the College.

This policy confirms that program approval and course recognition decisions support legislated responsibilities, align with the College mandate to protect and serve the public interest, and reflect the Strategic Plan (2025–30) *Leading with Vision, Ensuring Public Trust*.

This policy ensures program approval and course recognition practices are transparent, reasonable, and defensible, and that decisions occur within statutory authority and established regulatory expectations. Program review mechanisms, monitoring requirements, approval status determinations, and reporting requirements are governed through related policies, procedures, standards, and supporting documents within this suite.

This program approval policy suite establishes the regulatory architecture for Council oversight of education program approval and course recognition and clarifies authority, accountability, and role separation across these functions.

Program approval forms part of the College’s regulatory assurance framework supporting entry-to-practice readiness. Evidence obtained through program approval, monitoring, and review activities provides Council with visibility into how education programs prepare graduates for safe entry-to-practice. This evidence supports defensible reliance on education programs as a source of readiness signals informing registration decisions under the *Dental Assistants Profession Regulation*.

## 2.0 Scope

This policy applies to Council, the Registrar and Chief Executive Officer (or delegate), the Program Approval Committee, and any individual participating in program approval or course recognition activities on behalf of the College.

This policy applies to program approval activities, course recognition activities, approval decisions, monitoring functions, review processes, and accountability mechanisms exercised by or on behalf of Council.

This policy applies to public and private education institutions equally.

This policy does not apply to operational education delivery activities conducted by education institutions.

This policy does not apply to labour mobility registration decisions, substantial equivalence determinations, or other registration pathways governed through the registration policy suite.

Operational procedures supporting this policy include program approval procedures, course recognition procedures, monitoring activities, verification processes, reporting mechanisms, and review procedures approved by the Registrar and Chief Executive Officer (or delegate).

## 3.0 Principles

The College applies the following principles to ensure program approval and course recognition practices are lawful, consistent, and accountable:

1. **Public protection** is upheld by ensuring that program approval and course recognition decisions prioritize safe, competent dental assisting practice and the integrity of professional regulation.
2. **Legislative consistency** is upheld through approval practices aligned with the *Health Professions Act*, the *Dental Assistants Profession Regulation*, the *Fair Registration Practices Act*, and other applicable legislation.
3. **Accountability** is demonstrated through clear roles for Council, the Program Approval Committee, and the Registrar and Chief Executive Officer (or delegate). Responsibilities for approval oversight, monitoring, and decision making are defined and monitored.
4. **Transparency and fairness** guide program approval and course recognition decision making. Decisions are documented, defensible, and supported by clear review processes, monitoring activities, and written communication. The *Fair Registration Practices Act* requires registration practices to be transparent, objective, impartial, and procedurally fair. Where program approval decisions influence registration pathways, this framework supports those fairness expectations.
5. **Role clarity and separation** are maintained to ensure Council oversight of approval decisions is distinct from operational program review, monitoring, and education delivery functions.
6. **Continuous quality improvement** is maintained by requiring approved programs and recognized courses to demonstrate ongoing evaluation, improvement, and responsiveness to risks, outcomes, and changing regulatory expectations.
7. **Strategic alignment** ensures program approval and course recognition practices support the Strategic Plan (2025-30) *Leading with Vision, Ensuring Public Trust*.

## 4.0 Program approval and course recognition framework

The College exercises regulatory authority for program approval and course recognition consistent with applicable legislation, Council-approved standards, and this policy.

### 4.1 Council authority

1. Council is the governing body of the College and exercises authority in accordance with legislation and the Bylaws.

2. Council establishes policies governing program approval and course recognition, sets regulatory expectations for entry-to-practice education and Council-approved advanced training, and provides oversight of approval decisions, compliance, and regulatory risk.
3. Council monitors outcomes and system performance but does not participate in operational management of education delivery, program evaluation, or monitoring activities.
4. Operational management responsibilities rest with the Registrar and Chief Executive Officer (or delegate).
5. The Registrar and Chief Executive Officer (or delegate) administer the procedures, monitoring activities, and operational processes that support program approval and course recognition oversight.
6. Council is accountable for ensuring that education programs approved by the College and courses recognized by the College support safe, competent practice and the public interest.

#### **4.2 Committee recommendation and Council decision**

1. The Program Approval Committee reviews submissions, monitoring information, and review findings and makes recommendations to Council regarding program approval and course recognition. The Program Approval Committee is established as a governance committee and brings recommendations to Council for consideration.
2. Council retains final authority to grant, condition, not approve, or remove program approval and course recognition.
3. The Program Approval Committee does not exercise independent approval authority unless expressly delegated by Council through a separate policy or terms of reference approved by Council.

#### **4.3 Program approval and course recognition pathways**

1. The College may recognize or approve dental assisting education programs for the purposes of entry-to-practice eligibility. The *Dental Assistants Profession Regulation* requires applicants for the general register to complete a one-year program of studies in dental assisting approved by Council.
2. The College may recognize or approve advanced practice education courses and other education courses where legislation, regulation, standards of practice, or College policy require Council-approved education or training. Such courses may be used to support regulatory requirements including advanced practice authorization, re-entry to practice, currency of practice, bridging or upgrading education, labour mobility requirements, or other competence related education requirements established by the College. Under the *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation*, certain restricted activities may require dental assistants to complete advanced training approved by Council.
3. Program approval and course recognition criteria are established in separate standards and supporting documents approved under the relevant authority.
4. External accreditation conducted by a recognized third-party accrediting body may be considered as supporting evidence during program evaluation and regulatory review. External accreditation does not replace or determine College approval. Program approval decisions remain the authority of Council

#### **4.4 Approval status**

1. Council assigns approval status to programs in accordance with PAP-POL-002 Program Approval Status and Review.

2. Approval statuses include:
  - a. Preliminary approval
  - b. Provisional approval
  - c. Approved
  - d. Approved with conditions
  - e. Approval removed
3. **Preliminary approval** may be granted before a program admits students where the College is satisfied that the proposed program design, curriculum, resources, governance, and clinical education model meet College requirements.
4. **Provisional approval** may be granted where a program is operating, and the College requires additional evidence of graduate outcomes, clinical readiness, or program performance before full approval is granted.
5. **Approved** status may be granted where a program demonstrates sustained compliance with College requirements and evidence supports confidence in entry-to-practice readiness.
6. **Approved with conditions** may be granted where a program substantially meets requirements but specific remedial actions, timelines, or monitoring conditions are required.
7. **Not approved** indicates that the program does not meet College requirements for approval or that sufficient evidence has not been provided to establish regulatory confidence in the program.
8. Program **approval may be removed** where monitoring, review findings, or unresolved conditions identify material concerns affecting regulatory confidence, entry-to-practice readiness, or public protection.

#### 4.5 Monitoring, review, and verification

1. Preliminary approved programs are subject to development verification and progress reporting requirements established by the College to confirm that program design, resources, and implementation conditions are met prior to student admission.
2. Provisionally approved and approved programs are subject to monitoring and reporting requirements established by the College. Monitoring may include annual reporting, evidence submission, outcome analysis, and other oversight activities necessary to support ongoing regulatory assurance.
3. Programs granted preliminary approval must demonstrate readiness for program launch before being considered for provisional approval. Annual monitoring may include outcome reporting, evidence submissions, changes to curriculum or delivery model, faculty or clinical placement changes, examination outcomes, or other indicators identified in the standards and supporting documents.
4. As part of the ongoing monitoring cycle, programs are subject to a scheduled review at least every four years to support deeper examination of program performance, outcomes, and alignment with College requirements.
5. The scheduled review may include expanded document review, interviews, site visits, verification activities, outcome analysis, and any other evidence gathering the College considers necessary.
6. The College may conduct site visits or other verification activities as part of an initial approval review, scheduled review, focused review, monitoring activity, or condition follow-up.
7. Additional review may occur at any time where monitoring findings, complaints, material program changes, outcome indicators, or other information indicate potential regulatory concern or risk affecting program performance or entry-to-practice readiness.

8. Program approval review activities may be conducted by the College or by reviewers, review teams, or external organizations engaged by the College.
9. The engagement of external reviewers or organizations does not alter Council authority or statutory accountability for program approval decisions.

#### 4.6 Continuous quality improvement

1. Approved and provisionally approved programs and recognized courses must demonstrate continuous quality improvement processes.
2. Continuous quality improvement includes the ability of programs or courses to identify issues, respond to outcome trends, address gaps, and implement improvements that strengthen graduate competence, safe patient care, and regulatory readiness.
3. Continuous quality improvement expectations are further described in the standards and supporting documents within this suite.

#### 4.7 Registration and examination implications

1. Where program approval status affects registration or examination pathways, the applicable consequence is determined based on the program's approval status at the time of the applicant's graduation.
2. Registration eligibility, provisional registration requirements, labour mobility, and substantial equivalence remain governed by the registration policy suite and applicable legislation. The *Dental Assistants Profession Regulation* sets separate pathways for general registration, equivalent jurisdiction, and substantial equivalence.
3. Assessments used to support entry-to-practice readiness or regulatory review are governed through the College's registration and assessment policies. This may include national certification assessments such as those administered by the National Dental Assisting Examining Board (NDAEB), as well as other Council-approved assessments. Evidence of successful completion of such assessments may be considered as part of program evaluation or regulatory review.

#### 4.8 Public reporting and external expertise

1. The College publishes current program approval status on its website to support transparency, informed decision making, and public confidence.
2. Council may obtain independent professional advice, education expertise, regulatory expertise, or external consulting support where necessary to fulfill its responsibilities related to program approval and course recognition.
3. External expertise may support evidence review, validation, synthesis, or analysis. Engagement of external expertise does not alter Council authority or statutory accountability.

### 5.0 Expected outcomes

1. **Public protection** is strengthened through program approval and course recognition decisions that support safe, competent entry-to-practice and advanced practice readiness.
2. **Clear authority and accountability** ensure Council, committees, and leadership understand their respective roles in program approval and course recognition.

3. **Effective role separation** supports strong regulatory oversight without operational interference in education delivery.
4. **Defensible approval decisions** ensure program approval and course recognition activities are documented, reviewable, and compliant.
5. **Transparency and public reporting** support trust in education approval decisions and regulatory processes.
6. **Strategic alignment** ensures program approval and course recognition practices support the Strategic Plan (2025-30) Leading with Vision, Ensuring Public Trust.

This policy is reviewed annually, or sooner if required by legislative, regulatory, or strategic change.

## 6.0 Related legislation and references

### Legislation and regulation

*Dental Assistants Profession Regulation (Alberta Regulation 252/2005)*

*Fair Registration Practices Act*

*Health Professions Act*

*Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation (Alberta Regulation 22/2023)*

*Labour Mobility Act*

*Regulated Professions Neutrality Act*

*Private Vocational Training Act*

*Post-secondary Learning Act*

### College authority and governance

Bylaws of the College of Alberta Dental Assistants (2023)

Code of Ethics (2020) of the College of Alberta Dental Assistants

Governance Policies of the College of Alberta Dental Assistants

Strategic Plan (2025-30) Leading with Vision, Ensuring Public Trust

### Related College policies

GOV-POL-004 Committees and Decision Pathways

PAP-POL-002 Program Approval Status and Review

PAP-PRC-001 Program Approval Procedure

PAP-PRC-002 Course Recognition Procedure

REG-POL-001 General Registration

REG-POL-002 Provisional Registration

REG-POL-006 Entry Practice Authorization

## 7.0 Definitions

1. **Approved:** An approval status assigned by Council where an education program demonstrates sustained compliance with College requirements and provides sufficient evidence supporting entry-to-practice readiness.
2. **Approved with conditions:** An approval status assigned by Council where a program substantially meets College requirements but must satisfy specified conditions, timelines, or monitoring requirements to maintain approval.
3. **Approval removed:** A determination by Council that a program's approval status is withdrawn because the program no longer meets College requirements.
4. **College of Alberta Dental Assistants:** the regulatory body established under the *Health Professions Act*, responsible for governing the practice of dental assisting in Alberta to protect and serve the public interest. For the purposes of policies, the term "College" refers to the College of Alberta Dental Assistants.
5. **Council:** The governing body of the College as established by legislation and the Bylaws. Council exercises authority for program approval and course recognition decisions in accordance with legislation, the Bylaws, and College policy.
6. **Course recognition:** The formal determination by Council that an education course meets College requirements for a defined regulatory purpose, including advanced practice training, continuing competence, or other Council-approved education requirements.
7. **Entry-to-practice readiness:** The level at which a graduate demonstrates the knowledge, skills, judgment, professional behaviour, and clinical readiness required to meet the entry-to-practice requirements established by Council for safe and competent dental assisting practice.
8. **Preliminary approval:** An approval status granted before a program admits students, confirming that the proposed program design, curriculum, governance, resources, and clinical education model meet College requirements.
9. **Program approval:** The formal determination by Council that an education program meets College requirements and is recognized for regulatory purposes, including entry-to-practice eligibility, subject to any applicable approval status, conditions, monitoring, or review requirements.
10. **Program Approval Committee:** A governance committee established by Council to review program approval and course recognition matters and make recommendations to Council.
11. **Provisional approval:** An approval status granted where a program is operating but the College requires additional evidence of outcomes, clinical readiness, or program performance before full approval is granted.
12. **Registrar and Chief Executive Officer (or delegate):** The individual appointed by Council to manage the operations of the College and implement Council policy.
13. **Regulatory readiness:** The degree to which an education program or course demonstrates alignment with College requirements, approval standards, monitoring expectations, and evidence requirements sufficient to support defensible regulatory decision making.

# 8.0 Document information

Policy type	Program Approval			
Policy owner	Registrar and Chief Executive Officer (or delegate) of the College of Alberta Dental Assistants			
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Related documents	Bylaws of the College of Alberta Dental Assistants (2023) Code of Ethics (2020) GOV-POL-004 Committees and Decision Pathways PAP-POL-002 Program Approval Status and Review PAP-PRC-001 Program Approval Procedure PAP-PRC-002 Course Recognition Procedure Program Approval Standards Course Recognition Standards Standards of Practice (2023) Strategic Plan (2025-30) Leading with Vision, Ensuring Public Trust			