

CLS Consultancy
College of Alberta Dental Assistants

Program Approval Review
Summary of Findings



Program Approval Review: Supporting Entry-to-Practice Readiness in Alberta A Public Summary College of Alberta Dental Assistants

Purpose of the Review

The Program Approval Review was undertaken to strengthen understanding of how entry-to-practice readiness for dental assistants is supported across education, assessment, and regulation in Alberta.

The review examined how national standards, education pathways, accreditation, assessment, and provincial oversight interact to support readiness for regulated practice. Its purpose was not to evaluate individual programs or organizations, but to clarify roles, responsibilities, and how assurance mechanisms work together to support public confidence.

The review draws on surveys, focus groups, document analysis, and engagement with provincial and national bodies involved in education, accreditation, and assessment. Detailed evidence and analysis are contained in the full Program Approval Review report.

How Entry-to-Practice Readiness Develops

Readiness for regulated practice develops over time. It is shaped through a series of stages before an individual enters practice, including:

- approval or licensure of education providers
- admission into education programs
- curriculum and program design
- clinical and practicum experience
- nationally defined entry-to-practice competencies
- national assessment
- registration and early practice supports

Each stage plays an important role in preparing individuals for practice. No single stage is responsible for readiness on its own.

The Role of National Standards

National Occupational Analysis

Nationally agreed entry-to-practice competencies provide a common foundation for education and assessment across Canada. These competencies describe what a new practitioner is expected to be able to do at the point of entry-to-practice.

They support national consistency and provide a shared reference for curriculum design, accreditation standards, and assessment.

National Accreditation

National accreditation reviews education programs against agreed national standards. It focuses on curriculum design, learning resources, faculty, and program structure, and it supports continuous improvement across education programs.

Accreditation confirms that programs meet certain standards and provides flexibility in how those standards are achieved. Its design supports educational quality and innovation across diverse education models.

National Assessment

National assessment provides a standardized way to confirm that individuals have met national entry-to-practice expectations. It supports fairness and consistency across jurisdictions and is an important component of registration decision making.

What the Review Observed

Through engagement with dental teams, educators, and system partners, the review observed that individuals entering practice bring a wide range of experiences and levels of preparedness. This variability reflects differences in educational pathways, clinical exposure, and practice environments.

National standards, accreditation, and assessment provide an important foundation for consistency across Canada. At the same time, readiness for practice is also influenced by jurisdiction-specific scope, practice expectations, and regulatory context.

Alberta's Regulatory Responsibility

In Alberta, the regulator is responsible for ensuring that individuals entering practice are prepared to practice safely and competently within the province's legislative and practice framework.

While national standards and processes play a critical role, provincial oversight remains necessary to ensure alignment with Alberta-specific practice realities and expectations. Program Approval supports this role by providing a structured way to consider how education pathways preparing individuals for practice in Alberta align with provincial requirements.

What This Review Clarifies

The Program Approval Review clarifies that:

- entry-to-practice readiness develops across multiple stages
- national standards, accreditation, and assessment each serve distinct purposes
- education quality and regulatory readiness are closely related but not the same
- provincial regulators retain responsibility for ensuring readiness aligns with jurisdictional practice expectations

The reviews purpose is to provide clarity, transparency, and a shared understanding of how readiness is currently supported.

Supporting Confidence in the System

The findings of the Program Approval Review support informed discussion about how the College of Alberta Dental Assistants can continue to uphold confidence in entry-to-practice readiness while respecting national standards and education quality processes.

This work reflects the regulator's commitment to transparency, collaboration, and continuous improvement in the public interest.