

College of Alberta Dental Assistants

Standards of Practice

Authorized Practice, Restricted Activities, Direction,
Supervision, and Additional or Advanced Practice

Draft status

This document is a proposed companion to the College of Alberta Dental Assistants (“College”) Draft Core Standards of Practice. It is not in force and does not replace the current Standards of Practice unless approved by Council through the applicable process.

Purpose

This Standard establishes detailed enforceable expectations for authorized dental assisting practice. It explains how a dental assistant determines whether an activity may be performed, when a restricted activity may be performed, what direction or supervision is required, and how additional or advanced practice is obtained and maintained.

It supports patients, the public, dental assistants, employers, educators, and other health professionals by providing a single, accessible source for the professional requirements that apply to authorized practice. It does not replace the current official text of applicable legislation, which prevails if there is a conflict.

Scope and interpretation

This Standard applies across dental assisting roles, practice settings, employment arrangements, delivery methods, and areas of practice. It applies before, during, and after an activity where authorization, competence, direction, supervision, documentation, or communication is relevant.

- A dental assistant remains personally accountable for their own performance when acting on a prescription, under direction or supervision, following employer instruction, or participating in team processes.
- A workplace policy, instruction, customary practice, or request from another person does not create authorization or excuse noncompliance with applicable legislation, regulations, or a binding College requirement including this Standard.
- A dental assistant must meet every applicable condition concerning registration, practice permit, education, training, competence, patient circumstances, equipment, direction, supervision, documentation, and follow-up.
- A dental assistant must seek authoritative clarification and limit, pause, or stop practice when unsure whether an activity is authorized, within current competence, safe, or appropriate.

How to Read this Standard

Each Standard has four parts:

Standard statement: This states the professional outcome and the core expectation that applies to dental assisting practice.

Public expectation: This explains, in plain language, what patients and the public should be able to expect. It supports understanding but does not create an additional authorization or obligation beyond the Requirements.

Requirements: These are the enforceable professional obligations. The word “must” identifies a mandatory requirement.

Application: This provides context, explains how the Requirements operate with legislation and other College instruments, and clarifies professional boundaries. Application material explains how the Requirements are to be

interpreted and applied. It does not independently create an additional professional obligation or authorization and does not reduce or replace a Requirement.

In this Standard:

- legislation and regulation prevail if there is a conflict;
- a more specific binding legal or College requirement prevails over a general requirement;
- the words “including” and “such as” introduce examples and do not limit the requirement; and
- guidance and practice resources support interpretation but do not independently create authorization or enforceable duties.

Role in the regulatory lifecycle

This Standard is one linked component of the College’s regulatory lifecycle and regulatory mandate under the *Health Professions Act*. The Core Standards of Practice establish broad professional expectations. This Standard gives detailed effect to authorized practice, restricted activities, direction, supervision, and additional or advanced practice. Registration and authorization instruments determine individual eligibility and permissions. The College’s Competency Profile, Program Approval, and continuing competence support readiness and maintenance of competence. No individual document replaces the legal role of another.

Health Quality Alberta connection

Health Quality Alberta provides a quality, safety, learning, and system-improvement context for the College’s lifecycle. It may inform the College’s system-level quality and learning approaches, including the use of recurring scope questions and practice information to improve public guidance, education, and regulatory clarity. It does not independently create an enforceable obligation or authorization.

Standard 1

Authorized Practice and Practice Limits

Dental assistants perform or support professional activities only when legally authorized, individually authorized where required, currently competent, appropriate in the circumstances, and consistent with every applicable condition.

Public expectation

Patients and the public can expect a dental assistant to perform only activities they are authorized and competent to perform, and to stop when an activity is unsafe or outside their role.

Requirements

A dental assistant must:

1. hold and maintain the registration and practice permit required for their practice and comply with every condition, limitation, suspension, or cancellation affecting that permit;
2. know the activities they are authorized to perform and the conditions, limitations, and evidence that apply to those activities;
3. perform only activities that are within the practice of dental assisting and authorized by applicable legislation and College requirements;
4. meet the education, training, competence, authorization, patient-condition, direction, supervision, equipment, safety, documentation, and follow-up requirements that apply before performing an activity;
5. assess personal competence, patient circumstances, the proposed activity, required safeguards, available direction or supervision, and the practice environment before proceeding;
6. confirm patient identity, relevant information, consent status, prescribed or directed care, equipment readiness, and required safety controls before starting;
7. not rely on an employer request, workplace custom, informal instruction, another person's authorization, or the absence of an objection as evidence that they are authorized or competent;
8. not advertise, represent, or imply that they are authorized, qualified, or competent to perform an activity unless that representation is accurate and supportable; and
9. decline, limit, pause, or stop an activity that is unauthorized, outside current competence, unsafe, insufficiently directed or supervised, inappropriate to the circumstances, or inconsistent with the patient's needs or treatment plan.

Application

Four linked questions: Before an activity is performed, the dental assistant must be able to answer four separate questions: Is the activity within the legally permitted practice of dental assisting? Is the individual dental assistant authorized by the College where authorization is required? Is the dental assistant currently competent in the circumstances? Are the required direction, supervision, and other safeguards in place? A yes to one question does not answer the others.

No automatic authority: An activity is not automatically permitted because it is common in a dental office, requested by an employer, included in another person’s treatment plan, taught informally, or performed by another dental assistant.

Public authorization information: The College’s controlled authorization instruments, public register, and public authorization information identify applicable individual authorizations, conditions, and verification mechanisms. Authorization of the profession to perform an activity does not mean every dental assistant is individually authorized to perform that activity. If the information is unclear, the dental assistant must obtain authoritative clarification before proceeding.¹

Direction and supervision are separate legal concepts. Where the *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation* requires direction, that requirement must be met even when supervision also applies. Supervision of a provisional registrant under the *Dental Assistants Profession Regulation* is a separate registration condition.

¹ See the College’s public register and current College public authorization information for individual authorization status and applicable conditions.

Standard 2

Restricted Activities and Direction

Dental assistants perform restricted activities only as permitted by legislation, College authorization requirements, current competence, patient conditions, and the required direction of an authorized professional.

Public expectation

Patients and the public can expect restricted activities to be performed only by appropriately authorized and competent dental assistants with the legally required safeguards in place.

Requirements

A dental assistant must:

1. perform a restricted activity only if it is authorized for dental assistants under the *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation* and is within the dental assistant's legally authorized practice;²
2. perform only those restricted activities that they are authorized and competent to perform and that are appropriate to the circumstances of the patient and the procedure;
3. obtain direction for a restricted activity only from the authorized professional specified in the *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation* and meet any applicable on-site, able-to-assist, or other direction condition set by the regulation;³
4. confirm that the directing professional has provided the direction required for the patient, activity, and circumstances before the restricted activity is performed;
5. comply with every patient-condition, equipment, safety, and documentation requirement that applies to the restricted activity;
6. perform scaling of teeth only if they have advanced training approved by Council and comply with every condition in section 7(2) and (3) of the *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation*, together with any applicable College requirements;⁴
7. not perform a restricted activity listed in section 7(1)(a) to (e) when the required direction is absent, the required on-site or able-to-assist conditions are not met, or any other legal or College condition is not met; and
8. remain personally accountable for their own performance of a restricted activity regardless of direction or supervision.

² *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation*, s. 7(1) to (3).

³ *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation*, s. 7(1) and (2).

⁴ *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation*, s. 7(2) and (3).

Application

Statutory activity list: The information on page 14 reproduces, in summary form, the restricted activities currently authorized for dental assistants under section 7 of the *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation*. The current official regulation prevails and must be consulted if an activity, condition, or wording is uncertain.

Direction: For restricted activities listed in section 7(1)(a) to (e) of the *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation*, the directing dentist, dental hygienist, or denturist must be on-site, able to assist, and authorized to perform or order the performance of the activity. Scaling is subject to the separate direction and patient conditions in section 7(2) and (3). Direction is not a transfer of the dental assistant's responsibility or accountability.

Treatment decisions: A dental assistant does not independently diagnose, prescribe, determine a treatment plan, or make a decision reserved to another authorized professional. The dental assistant must communicate concerns, uncertainties, and changes requiring the attention of the responsible professional.

Standard 3

Additional and Advanced Practice

Dental assistants perform additional or advanced activities only after acquiring and maintaining the education, training, competence, and any individual authorization required by applicable legislation or the College for the specific activity.

Public expectation

Patients and the public can expect a dental assistant to obtain appropriate training and any required authorization before performing activities beyond entry-to-practice preparation or subject to a specific authorization requirement.

Requirements

A dental assistant must:

1. before performing an activity, obtain and maintain the education, training, assessment, competence, and any individual authorization required by applicable legislation or the College;
2. provide the College with accurate, complete, and timely evidence where the College requires an individual authorization, recognition, or assessment;
3. perform an additional activity only when all required education, training, competence, direction, safety, quality, and other conditions are met, and perform an advanced activity only when any required advanced authorization is current;
4. maintain any activity-specific competence, practice currency, continuing competence, or reassessment requirement established by applicable legislation, regulations, or a binding College requirement;
5. stop performing an additional or advanced activity when any required competence, currency, direction, supervision, authorization, or other condition is absent or no longer current;
6. not treat completion of a course, employer orientation, informal instruction, experience in another jurisdiction, or direction from another professional as sufficient authorization unless it satisfies all applicable legislative and College requirements;
7. not represent an activity as advanced practice unless the College has designated it as advanced and the dental assistant holds the required authorization; and
8. meet Alberta legal and College requirements when seeking recognition of education, training, or experience from another jurisdiction, including applicable labour mobility requirements.

Application

Additional practice: Additional practice describes an activity that is beyond entry-to-practice preparation or that requires additional education, training, assessment, competence, or distinct evidence. It does not by itself create a separate authorization category, require an individual authorization, or expand legal authorization. Where legislation and the College do not require a distinct individual authorization, the activity may be performed under the dental assistant's existing authorization once all required education, training, competence, direction, safety, quality, and other conditions are met.

Advanced practice: Advanced practice is reserved for an activity or authorization formally designated by the College or applicable legislation. It is not a general status conferred by years of experience, employer role or authorization, or completion of unrelated education.

Mobility: Interjurisdictional recognition and mutual-recognition arrangements support fair, timely assessment of qualifications. They do not remove Alberta legal conditions for practice or permit a dental assistant to perform an activity before the College confirms the applicable authorization.

Current advanced practice categories are determined through applicable College authorization instruments. This Standard does not itself designate an activity as entry-to-practice, additional or advanced.

Scaling: Section 7(2) of the *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation* separately requires advanced training approved by Council before a dental assistant may perform scaling of teeth.

Standard 4

Direction, Supervision, and Student Practice

Dental assistants provide supervision only where permitted, and students or provisional registrants perform activities only when the applicable legislative and College requirements are met and patient safety is protected.

Public expectation

Patients and the public can expect students and provisional registrants to be appropriately supervised and to perform activities only when the patient's circumstances, the learner's status, education, competence, required direction, supervision, and other safeguards support safe participation.

Requirements

A dental assistant must:

1. provide supervision only when they are competent, authorized where required, on-site where required, able to assist, and able to devote the attention needed for safe performance;
2. provide supervision of a restricted activity only when the supervising dental assistant is authorized and competent to perform the activity and the person being supervised is permitted to perform the activity under that supervision in accordance with applicable legislation and this Standard;
3. when supervising a student enrolled in a Council approved dental assisting education program, be registered on the General Register or Courtesy Register, remain on-site while the student performs a restricted activity listed in section 7(1)(a) to (e) of the *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation*, be available to assist, ensure the student performs only a restricted activity for which the supervisor is authorized, and confirm that any separate direction requirement applicable to the activity or student is met;
4. when supervising a dental assistant undertaking Council approved studies for scaling of teeth, be on-site and able to assist, and be a dental assistant, dentist, or dental hygienist who is authorized to perform that restricted activity;
5. for the purposes of section 1.6(1)(a)(v) of the *Health Professions Act*, not consent to or supervise a person performing a restricted activity unless the person and the supervision meet the requirements set out in items 3 or 4 of this Standard;
6. if registered on the provisional register, practice only while supervised by a dental assistant on the General Register, a dentist, dental hygienist, denturist, or another person approved by the Registrar, as required by the *Dental Assistants Profession Regulation*;⁵
7. when responsible for a student's or provisional registrant's participation in an activity, before the activity begins, confirm and communicate the activity, the respective roles and limits of the educator, clinical instructor, mentor, preceptor, supervisor, and directing professional, and the required direction, supervision, documentation, escalation, and follow-up arrangements;

⁵ *Dental Assistants Profession Regulation*, s. 6(7).

8. intervene, stop the activity, and obtain appropriate assistance when the student's or provisional registrant's readiness, the patient's consent status as known within the dental assistant's role, the patient's circumstances, the activity, environment, required direction, required supervision, or other support does not permit safe performance of the activity;
9. ensure the required documentation, communication, and follow-up are completed within the role and authority of the persons involved; and
10. when acting as an educator, clinical instructor, mentor, or preceptor, work within the role, competence, registration status, and authority applicable to the activity. A dental assistant must not assign, require, permit, or represent a student or provisional registrant as authorized to perform a restricted activity unless the required education, direction, supervision, and escalation arrangements have been confirmed.

Application

Statutory basis for supervision: The *Health Professions Act* establishes the supervision pathway and requires the College's Standards to specify who may be supervised and how supervision must occur when a regulated member of the College provides supervision. The *Health Professions Act* also limits who may provide consent, supervision, and control and prohibits requiring a person to perform a restricted activity unless authorized to do so. Where a separate direction requirement applies, supervision does not replace that direction.⁶

Supervision and authority: A person may rely on supervision as the legal basis for performing a restricted activity only where section 1.6 of the *Health Professions Act* applies and all applicable requirements of this Standard are met. Supervision does not permit the supervising dental assistant or the person being supervised to act outside the activities, conditions, competence, or safeguards applicable to them.

Direction and supervision: Direction and supervision are not interchangeable. A restricted activity may require statutory direction by an authorized dentist, dental hygienist, or denturist even where a dental assistant also provides permitted student supervision.

Student safety: The supervising dental assistant must assess whether the student's readiness, the patient circumstances, the procedure, and the practice environment permit safe participation. Workload, staffing pressure, or an educational objective does not justify unsafe performance.

Educators, clinical instructors, mentors, and preceptors: These roles may support learning, feedback, confidence, professional socialization, and transition to practice where the participant is otherwise legally authorized. They do not create or expand authorization or replace required direction or supervision. Where a person in one of these roles also provides supervision, or supervision is relied upon as the legal basis for performance of a restricted activity, all applicable legislative and College supervision requirements must be met.

⁶ *Health Professions Act*, s. 1.6(1)(a)(v), s. 1.6(1)(b)(ii) and (iii), and s. 1.6(3) and (4).

Defined terms

Additional practice

An activity that is beyond entry-to-practice preparation or that requires additional education, training, assessment, competence, or distinct evidence. It does not by itself create a separate authorization category or expand legal authorization.

Advanced practice

An activity or authorization formally designated as advanced by the College or applicable legislation, for which a dental assistant has met the specified requirements and holds the required College authorization.

Authorization

The formal permission, where required, for an individual dental assistant to perform a particular activity or category of activities, subject to stated conditions and limitations.

Authorized

Permitted under applicable legislation and College requirements, including any relevant practice-permit authorization, condition, or limitation.

College

The College of Alberta Dental Assistants.

Competent

Having and integrating the knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and judgment required to perform safely and effectively in the circumstances.

Dental assistant

A regulated member of the College to whom these Standards apply, unless the context requires otherwise.

Directing professional for section 7(1)(a) to (e) activities

A dentist, dental hygienist, or denturist who is authorized to perform or order the performance of the activity, is on-site, and is able to assist.

Directing professional for scaling

A dentist or dental hygienist authorized to perform the restricted activity, as required by section 7(2) of the *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation*.

Direction

The direction required by applicable legislation or a College requirement. A specific legislative direction requirement prevails.

Entry-to-practice

The authorization, competence, and readiness expected for a dental assistant beginning practice in Alberta, as established through applicable legislation and College instruments.

Fit to practice

Having the physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral capacity to provide safe, competent, and ethical professional services.

Health Quality Alberta

A provincial quality, safety, learning, and system-improvement organization. Its inclusion in these Standards provides quality-improvement context and does not independently create an enforceable professional obligation.

Patient

Has the meaning established in the Core Standards of Practice, subject to the specific patient definition in the Professional Boundaries, Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct, and Female Genital Mutilation Standard of Practice for sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, and patient relationship boundaries.

Practice permit

The permit issued by the College that authorizes a regulated member to practice, subject to applicable legislation, regulations, or a binding College requirement and any condition, limitation, suspension, or cancellation.

Professional practice

Any role, activity, communication, teaching, research, supervision, administration, management, leadership, or other function in which dental assisting knowledge, authorization, title, or professional status is used or relevant.

Provisional registrant

A dental assistant registered on the provisional register who may practice only within the requirements and supervision conditions set by the *Dental Assistants Profession Regulation* and the College.

Public authorization information

The current College-controlled public information that explains activity categories, individual authorization requirements, applicable conditions, and the means to verify an authorization.

Restricted activity

An activity designated as restricted under the *Health Professions Act* and authorized for dental assistants only as provided by regulation and applicable College requirements.

Student

A person enrolled in a Council-approved dental assisting education program or undertaking another Council approved program of studies, where the context requires.

Supervision

Oversight of another person's performance of an activity in accordance with applicable legislation and College requirements, including the degree of observation, availability, assistance, intervention, and control required for the person, activity, and circumstances. Supervision does not replace a separate direction requirement or transfer accountability for personal performance.

Restricted activities currently authorized for dental assistants

This information summarizes section 7(1) to (3) of the *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation* for accessibility. It is not a substitute for the current official regulation. The regulation prevails if there is a conflict or uncertainty.

Section 7(1)

- (a) to apply any form of ionizing radiation in medical radiography;
- (b) to cut a body tissue or to perform surgical or other invasive procedures on body tissue in or below the surface of teeth for the purpose of performing dental probing, including periodontal screening and recording;
- (c) to fit a fixed or removable partial or complete denture for the purpose of determining the preliminary fit of the device;
- (d) to fit a periodontal appliance for the purpose of determining the preliminary fit of the device;
- (e) to fit an orthodontic appliance for the purpose of determining the preliminary fit of the device;

Section 7(2), scaling teeth

Subject to subsection (3), a regulated member referred to in subsection (1) who has advanced training approved by the council may perform in accordance with standards of practice the restricted activity of cutting a body tissue or performing surgical or other invasive procedures on body tissue in or below the surface of teeth for the purpose of scaling teeth, under the direction of a dentist or a dental hygienist authorized to perform that restricted activity.

Section 7(3), patient condition for scaling

For performing the restricted activity listed in subsection (2), the patient must have been recently assessed by the dentist or dental hygienist who has determined the patient has healthy gingival and periodontal tissues or plaque associated gingivitis, pockets of 4 mm or less and no overt or radiographic signs of alveolar bone loss.

Conditions for restricted activities

Conditions for activities listed in section 7(1)(a) to (e): These activities may be performed only by a regulated member on the general, provisional, or courtesy register who is practicing dental assisting in accordance with standards of practice and under the direction of a dentist, dental hygienist, or denturist who is on-site, able to assist, and authorized to perform or order the performance of the restricted activity.

Conditions for scaling: A regulated member referred to in section 7(1) must have advanced training approved by Council, perform the activity under the direction required by section 7(2), and ensure the patient meets every condition in section 7(3).