

College of Alberta Dental Assistants

Code of Ethics

Draft status

This document is a proposed modernization of the College of Alberta Dental Assistants (“College”) Code of Ethics. It is not in force and does not replace the current Code of Ethics unless approved by Council through the applicable process.

Purpose and Authority

The College of Alberta Dental Assistants (College) establishes the Code of Ethics (“Code”) in the public interest and as required by section 3(1)(d) of the *Health Professions Act* of Alberta (“*Health Professions Act*”).

The Code sets out the ethical principles that guide professional judgment, decision making, conduct, and accountability in dental assisting practice. It supports dental assistants in providing safe, competent, ethical, and people-centered care while maintaining the trust placed in regulated health professionals.

The Code also helps the public understand the ethical responsibilities of dental assistants and provides a basis for the College to consider ethical conduct in carrying out its regulatory responsibilities.

Ethical responsibilities arise in everyday practice as well as in situations involving uncertainty, competing responsibilities, risk, workplace pressure, or difficult decisions. The Code is intended to be a practical tool for navigating these situations.

Scope and Relationship to Other Requirements

The Code applies to every regulated member of the College, regardless of register, professional role, practice setting, employment arrangement, or area of practice.

In this Code, dental assistant means a regulated member of the College to whom the Code applies.

Dental assistants are responsible for understanding and applying the Code together with applicable legislation, regulations (including the *Dental Assistants Profession Regulation*), Standards of Practice, registration and authorization requirements, continuing competence requirements, and other binding College requirements.

The Code and the Standards of Practice are connected but serve different regulatory purposes.

Instrument	Primary Role
Code of Ethics	Establishes the ethical principles that guide professional judgment, decision making, conduct, and accountability.
Standards of Practice	Establishes the minimum enforceable professional practice expectations that dental assistants must meet in professional practice.

The Code does not independently authorize an activity or replace a more specific legal or regulatory requirement.

Where legislation or another binding requirement establishes a more specific obligation, that requirement applies. Legislation prevails if there is a conflict.

Workplace policies, employer expectations, team processes, direction, and supervision can support professional practice, but they do not reduce or replace a dental assistant’s legal, ethical, or regulatory responsibilities including pursuant to this Code.

Dental assistants remain personally accountable for their professional decisions, actions, and omissions.

Contravention of the Code of Ethics may constitute unprofessional conduct under the *Health Professions Act*.

Professional Conduct and Interpretation

The Code applies to professional practice and professional conduct, including circumstances in which a dental assistant's professional knowledge, authorization, title, status, access to information, or position of trust is relevant.

The Code addresses professional conduct. It does not require dental assistants to adopt or express particular political, ideological, religious, social, or cultural beliefs.

Ethical expectations concerning dignity, respect, communication, accommodation, professional boundaries, and public trust are applied through observable professional conduct and professional responsibilities.

Personal beliefs do not excuse conduct that is inconsistent with a dental assistant's legal, ethical, or professional obligations.

The Code is interpreted and applied consistently with applicable legislation.

How to Use the Code

The ethical principles in this Code are connected. More than one principle will often apply to the same situation.

Each principle includes:

Ethical Principle

The ethical commitment that guides professional judgment and conduct.

In Practice

How the ethical principle is applied and demonstrated through professional behavior and decision making. The statements are not exhaustive and are to be read together with the Ethical Principle.

Ask Yourself

A practical question that supports reflection before acting.

The examples provided are not exhaustive. Dental assistants exercise professional judgment based on the circumstances, the people affected, applicable requirements, available information, and the potential consequences of a decision.

Ethical Principles

Principle 1: Public Interest and Professional Integrity

Ethical Principle

Dental assistants act in the public interest with honesty, responsibility, and integrity.

IN PRACTICE

Dental assistants:

- meet applicable legal, ethical, and regulatory obligations
- communicate honestly and provide information that is accurate and not misleading
- accurately represent their education, competence, authorization, credentials, protected titles, and professional status
- accept responsibility for their professional decisions, actions, and omissions
- respond to all College communications and requests honestly, professionally, and within required timeframes
- make required reports and self-reports accurately and within required timeframes
- cooperate honestly with legally authorized regulatory processes and requirements
- identify and appropriately manage circumstances in which personal, financial, workplace, or other interests could interfere with professional responsibilities
- recognize that employer expectations, workplace hierarchy, convenience, customary practice, or pressure from others do not justify unsafe, unauthorized, illegal, or unethical conduct
- recognize when health or other circumstances could affect fitness to practice and take appropriate action
- immediately limit or stop practice and immediately meet applicable reporting obligations when they are unable to provide safe, competent, and ethical care
- consider how professional conduct can affect public confidence in regulated dental assisting practice

ASK YOURSELF

Could I explain this decision openly and show how it supports the public interest and my professional obligations?

Principle 2: Respect, Dignity, and People-Centered Care

Ethical Principle

Dental assistants respect each person's dignity, rights, autonomy, values, choices, needs, and circumstances and contribute to people-centered care.

IN PRACTICE

Dental assistants:

- treat each person with dignity, respect, fairness, and compassion
- place the person's safety, well-being, rights, and interests at the center of professional interactions
- recognize each person's right to participate in decisions about their care
- support informed decision making, consent, and the right to ask questions, decline care, or withdraw consent
- communicate honestly and in a way the person can understand
- recognize and respond appropriately to circumstances that can affect communication or care, including language, health literacy, disability, age, culture, anxiety, fear, trauma, or vulnerability
- respect different values, beliefs, identities, perspectives, and experiences
- provide professional interactions without harassment, bullying, coercion, retaliation, abuse, or degrading treatment
- respect a person's right to seek clarification, obtain another opinion, raise a concern, or make a complaint without discouragement or retaliation
- work appropriately with support persons and others involved in care while respecting the person's rights, wishes, privacy, and consent
- advocate for the person's needs within the dental assistant's professional role
- promptly seek assistance, clarification, or appropriate referral when the person's needs exceed the dental assistant's authorized practice or competence

ASK YOURSELF

Am I respecting this person's rights, dignity, choices, needs, and circumstances?

Principle 3: Professional Judgment and Competence

Ethical Principle

Dental assistants exercise professional judgment consistent with their authorized practice, competence, and the circumstances of practice.

IN PRACTICE

Dental assistants:

- understand the activities they are authorized to perform and any conditions or limitations that apply
- perform only activities they are authorized and competent to perform
- apply current, reliable, and relevant knowledge when making professional decisions
- consider available information and the person's circumstances before acting
- recognize when information is incomplete, inconsistent, unexpected, or uncertain
- recognize the limits of their knowledge, skill, judgment, experience, and authority
- seek clarification, consultation, assistance, direction, or supervision when required
- ask questions when an instruction, request, treatment plan, or expected action is unclear or appears inconsistent with professional obligations
- remain personally accountable for professional conduct and safe performance when acting on a prescription, under direction or supervision, following employer instruction, or participating in team processes
- decline, limit, pause, or stop an activity when it is unauthorized, outside current competence, unsafe, insufficiently supported, or inconsistent with applicable requirements
- obtain required education, training, assessment, and authorization before undertaking additional or advanced practice
- reflect on decisions and outcomes and apply learning to future practice

ASK YOURSELF

Am I authorized, competent, sufficiently informed, and able to act safely in these circumstances?

Principle 4: Privacy, Confidentiality, and Responsible Use of Information

Ethical Principle

Dental assistants protect personal and health information and use information responsibly, accurately, securely, and only for appropriate professional purposes.

IN PRACTICE

Dental assistants:

- respect privacy and maintain confidentiality
- comply with applicable privacy and health information legislation
- access, use, discuss, or disclose information only for appropriate professional purposes and in accordance with applicable requirements
- protect information from inappropriate access, use, disclosure, alteration, or loss
- gather, document, and communicate information accurately, objectively, and within required timeframes
- recognize and clarify information that is missing, inconsistent, unexpected, or concerning
- verify information when its accuracy, reliability, or source can affect professional judgment or care
- protect confidentiality in verbal, written, electronic, virtual, and social media communication
- support continuity of care through accurate documentation and appropriate communication
- use digital systems, automated tools, and artificial intelligence responsibly
- verify information and technology-generated outputs before relying on them in professional practice
- recognize that technology can support professional practice but does not replace professional judgment or accountability

ASK YOURSELF

Do I need this information, is it reliable, and am I accessing, using, protecting, documenting, or sharing it appropriately?

Principle 5: Professional Relationships, Boundaries, and Conflicts of Interest

Ethical Principle

Dental assistants protect the integrity of professional relationships and do not use professional position, access, influence, or information for improper benefit or advantage for themselves or others.

IN PRACTICE

Dental assistants:

- recognize the position of trust associated with professional practice
- recognize power differences that can affect professional interactions and decision making
- establish and maintain appropriate professional boundaries
- avoid conduct, relationships, or interests that could compromise professional judgment or the interests of a person receiving care
- avoid real, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest where reasonably possible
- disclose and appropriately manage conflicts of interest that cannot be avoided
- ensure that gifts, financial interests, business relationships, personal relationships, social media interactions, or outside activities do not improperly influence professional decisions
- do not exploit professional relationships, information, access, authority, or influence
- seek guidance when uncertain about an appropriate boundary or potential conflict of interest

When managing a conflict of interest, dental assistants protect professional judgment, the interests of the person receiving care, and the public interest.

Specific legal and enforceable requirements concerning patient relationships, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, and professional boundaries are established in applicable legislation and Standards of Practice.

ASK YOURSELF

Could this relationship, interest, benefit, or circumstance affect, or reasonably appear to affect, my professional judgment or responsibilities?

Principle 6: Communication, Collaboration, and Raising Concerns

Ethical Principle

Dental assistants communicate respectfully, collaborate effectively, and promptly raise concerns when safety, ethical practice, competence, authorized practice, professional conduct, or quality of care may be compromised or adversely affected.

IN PRACTICE

Dental assistants:

- communicate respectfully, clearly, honestly, promptly, and professionally
- listen to people receiving care, colleagues, and others involved in professional interactions
- share relevant information needed to support safe, coordinated, and continuous care
- communicate their own role, responsibilities, authorization, and limitations accurately
- recognize and respect the roles, expertise, and contributions of colleagues and other team members
- clarify professional roles, responsibilities, instructions, expectations, and uncertainties
- contribute constructively to team-based practice
- communicate changes, observations, or concerns that can affect care
- raise concerns when they reasonably believe that safety, ethical practice, competence, authorization, professional conduct, or quality of care may be compromised
- raise, report, or escalate concerns through appropriate channels
- do not investigate matters beyond their professional role or authority
- escalate concerns when they cannot be safely or appropriately resolved at the immediate level
- make reports when required by legislation, regulatory requirements, or Standards of Practice
- do not participate in retaliation against a person for raising a concern, seeking assistance, making a report, or participating in a regulatory or workplace process
- contribute to a professional culture in which questions, appropriate reporting, reflection, and learning are supported

When an error, incident, or harm occurs, dental assistants take timely action within their role to protect the person and minimize further harm. They communicate the concern through appropriate channels, participate in disclosure processes as appropriate to their role and applicable requirements, and participate in follow-up and learning to reduce the risk of recurrence.

ASK YOURSELF

Is there something I need to clarify, communicate, question, report, or escalate?

Principle 7: Learning, Improvement, and Professional Stewardship

Ethical Principle

Dental assistants maintain competence, learn from experience, contribute to safer practice, and support public trust in regulated dental assisting practice.

IN PRACTICE

Dental assistants:

- maintain the knowledge, skills, judgment, and professional behaviors needed for their practice
- meet applicable continuing competence requirements
- participate meaningfully in professional learning
- reflect on practice, decisions, experiences, outcomes, incidents, complaints, and feedback
- seek and respond constructively to feedback
- identify learning needs and take appropriate action to address them
- apply learning to professional practice
- learn from errors, incidents, near misses, changing evidence, and emerging risks
- adapt appropriately to changes in practice, evidence, technology, legislation, and professional requirements
- support evidence-informed oral health promotion, prevention, and public education within their role and competence
- contribute within their role to quality improvement, safer systems, and a safe and healthy practice environment
- support learners and colleagues within their competence and authority
- share knowledge responsibly and contribute to consistent professional practice
- demonstrate role-appropriate leadership through accountability, respectful communication, follow-through, and appropriate action
- recognize when workload, staffing, equipment, supplies, access barriers, systems, or workflow can compromise care and communicate or escalate the concern appropriately
- use professional and health care resources responsibly
- act in ways that preserve public confidence in regulated practice

Professional stewardship means taking responsible care of competence, ethical practice, learning, safe systems, and the public trust attached to regulated practice. It does not mean placing the interests of the profession ahead of the public interest.

ASK YOURSELF

What have I learned from this situation, and what should I maintain, strengthen, communicate, or change?

Definitions

For the purposes of this Code:

Authorized practice

Professional activities a dental assistant is permitted to perform in accordance with applicable legislation and College requirements, including any relevant authorization, condition, or limitation.

Competence

The integration of the knowledge, skills, abilities, professional behaviors, and judgment required to perform safely and effectively in the circumstances.

Conflict of interest

A real, potential, or perceived conflict between a professional responsibility and another interest that could improperly influence professional judgment, professional conduct, care, or public trust.

Ethical issue

A situation in which rights, values, responsibilities, interests, professional obligations, uncertainty, or possible consequences require ethical judgment.

Fitness to practice

The capacity to provide safe, competent, and ethical professional services, considering any circumstances that could affect professional performance.

People-centered care

Care and professional interaction that recognize and respond to the needs, values, preferences, rights, experiences, and circumstances of the person receiving care.

Professional integrity

Consistency between professional responsibilities, ethical principles, professional communication, decisions, and actions.

Professional judgment

The application of professional knowledge, information, experience, ethical principles, and critical thinking to make an appropriate decision in the circumstances.

Public interest

The collective interest in safe, competent, ethical, and trustworthy regulated practice and in regulation that places the needs and interests of the public first.

Reliable information

Current and credible information from applicable legislation, standards, authoritative guidance, manufacturer instructions, evidence, and other appropriate professional sources.

Technology

Digital communication, information systems, automated tools, artificial intelligence, social media, devices, and other technologies used in or connected with professional practice.