

College of Alberta Dental Assistants Standards of Practice

Core Professional Standards for Regulated Dental Assistants

Draft status

This document is a proposed modernization of the College of Alberta Dental Assistants (“College”) 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

These Standards of Practice (Standards) are mandated by section 3(1)(c) of the *Health Professions Act* of Alberta (*Health Professions Act*) and establish the minimum enforceable expectations for safe, competent, ethical, people-centered, and accountable dental assisting practice in Alberta. They protect patients and the public by stating what a regulated dental assistant must do or refrain from doing in professional practice.

These Standards must be read together with applicable legislation and regulations, the Bylaws of the College of Alberta Dental Assistants (College), the Code of Ethics, registration and authorization requirements, continuing competence requirements, and other binding College instruments.

Scope and interpretation

These Standards apply across dental assisting roles, practice settings, employment arrangements, delivery methods, and areas of practice. How a requirement applies depends on the dental assistant's role, authorization, competence, patient circumstances, practice environment, and applicable legislation and regulations.

- A dental assistant remains personally accountable when acting on a prescription, under direction or supervision, following employer instruction, or participating in team processes.
- A dental assistant must meet any applicable requirement imposed by applicable legislation, regulations, permit conditions, or another binding College instrument.
- A workplace policy, instruction, or customary practice does not excuse non-compliance with applicable legislation, regulations, or a binding College instrument, including these Standards.
- 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 these Standards

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 of the Standard but does not create an additional authorization or obligation beyond the Requirements of the Standard.

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 these Standards:

- 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

These Standards are one linked component of the College’s regulatory lifecycle and mandate under the *Health Professions Act*. The Code of Ethics sets ethical expectations, and continuing competence supports ongoing learning after entry to practice. No individual document replaces the legal effect of another.

The companion Authorized Practice, Restricted Activities, Direction, Supervision, and Additional or Advanced Practice Standard of Practice gives detailed effect to authorized practice, restricted activities, direction, supervision, and additional or advanced practice.

Standard 1

Public Interest, Professional Accountability, and Legal Practice

Dental assistants place the public interest first and practice legally, ethically, honestly, and accountably.

Public expectation

Patients and the public can expect dental assistants to be properly registered, act with integrity, comply with professional obligations, and remain accountable for their practice.

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 registration or practice permit;
2. maintain individual professional liability insurance that meets the College's current requirements while holding an active practice permit;¹
3. report any actual or potential professional liability claim to the insurer immediately, in accordance with the insurance policy and the College's requirements;
4. know and comply with applicable legislation, regulations, College Bylaws, Standards of Practice, the Code of Ethics, and requirements established by the College;
5. provide the College with required registration, practice permit and related information accurately, completely, and within the required time, including changes to contact information, education, training, practice location, and other information required by applicable legislation or the College;²
6. use protected titles, abbreviations, and professional credentials only as authorized and not represent registration status, authorization, qualifications, role, or competence in a way that could reasonably create an inaccurate or misleading impression;³
7. not use a protected title, abbreviation, initials, or professional credential to endorse or promote a product, service, or independent business venture;
8. act with integrity, avoid or appropriately manage conflicts of interest, and not exploit a professional relationship or position of trust;
9. establish and maintain professional boundaries and comply with applicable requirements concerning sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, female genital mutilation, and relationships with patients;
10. recognize circumstances that may impair fitness to practice, take immediate steps to protect patients, restrict or stop practice when necessary, support appropriate handover or continuity of care within role, obtain appropriate support, and make any self-report or other report required by applicable legislation or the College;

¹ *Health Professions Act*, ss. 40(1)(c) and 132(1)(x); College of Alberta Dental Assistants Bylaws, s. 12; College of Alberta Dental Assistants, REG-POL-010 Professional Liability Insurance, s. 4.1.

² *Health Professions Act*, s. 33(4)(b) and (4.1); College of Alberta Dental Assistants Bylaws, s. 18(1).

³ *Health Professions Act*, ss. 128 and 128.1 and Schedule 4, s. 2; *Dental Assistants Profession Regulation*, s. 30.

11. make required reports accurately and within the required time, and not delay a report because another person may also have a reporting duty;
12. take appropriate action when there are reasonable grounds to believe another health care worker's ability to provide safe, competent care may be compromised, or that unsafe, illegal, abusive, or unprofessional conduct may place a patient or the public at risk, including making a report when required by applicable legislation or a binding College requirement;
13. cooperate honestly and within the required time with College inquiries, investigations, audits, reviews, and other legally authorized regulatory processes, including providing information or records as required;
14. take responsibility for professional decisions, actions, omissions, and outcomes regardless of direction, supervision, employer expectations, or workplace pressure; and
15. seek clarification and refuse, limit, pause, or escalate an activity when a workplace expectation would prevent compliance with applicable legislation, regulations, or a binding College requirement.

Application

Registration: Registration policies and procedures govern eligibility, registration decisions, review rights, practice permit renewal, and mobility. These Standards establish the ongoing professional duty to maintain the registration and permit required for practice.

Protected titles and representations: A representation may create an inaccurate or misleading impression where it could reasonably cause a patient, employer, colleague, or member of the public to misunderstand the dental assistant's registration status, authorization, qualifications, role, or competence.

Fitness to practice: Circumstances that may impair fitness to practice include illness, injury, impairment, medication, fatigue, substance use, cognitive or psychological factors, or other circumstances that may affect safe and competent practice. A dental assistant must make any self-report required by the College when their ability to provide safe, competent care is compromised or may be materially affected.

Standard 2

People-Centered Care, Communication, and Team-Based Practice

Dental assistants provide respectful, people-centered care and communicate and collaborate in ways that protect dignity, safety, understanding, and continuity of care.

Public expectation

Patients can expect to be treated with dignity and respect, receive understandable information within the dental assistant's role, and experience coordinated team-based care.

Requirements

A dental assistant must:

1. place the patient's safety, well-being, dignity, rights, and interests at the center of professional practice;
2. provide care without harassment, bullying, coercion, retaliation, or abuse, and respond appropriately when such conduct is observed;
3. recognize and respond to individual needs, preferences, health literacy, language, disability, age, culture, emotional state, and other circumstances affecting care;
4. support patients, within the dental assistant's role, in understanding next steps and accessing appropriate follow-up or oral health services when needs or barriers are identified;
5. recognize when previous experiences, trauma, anxiety, fear, or vulnerability may affect a person's ability to receive care and adapt communication and interactions appropriately within role;
6. communicate honestly, clearly, respectfully, and within professional role boundaries;
7. respond to requests for information within role accurately, promptly, professionally, and in accordance with applicable privacy, consent, and authorization requirements;
8. verify, support, recognize, communicate, and document consent within role, including uncertainty, refusal, amendment, or withdrawal of consent;
9. communicate material information, changes, concerns, and required follow-up accurately and promptly during handovers, referrals, consultations, and team interactions;
10. communicate promptly and honestly, within role, about incidents, unexpected outcomes, complications, or concerns affecting patient care, and promptly escalate matters requiring assessment, disclosure, or follow-up by another authorized professional;
11. work respectfully with patients, families, support persons, dental team members, and other professionals while maintaining accountability for personal practice; and
12. use electronic, virtual, written, and social media communication in a manner that protects privacy, boundaries, professionalism, and public trust.

Application

Consent: A dental assistant supports informed decision-making within role. This does not replace the legal informed consent obligations of the authorized professional responsible for the proposed treatment or diagnostic procedure.

Role boundary: People-centered care does not authorize a dental assistant to independently diagnose, prescribe, select treatment, or make decisions reserved to another authorized professional.

Standard 3

Assessment, Information Gathering, Documentation, and Clinical Judgment Support

Dental assistants gather, verify, use, document, communicate, and escalate information needed to support safe care within their professional role.

Public expectation

Patients can expect their information and records to be accurate, timely, confidential, and secure, and can expect important concerns to be recognized and communicated to the appropriate professional.

Requirements

A dental assistant must:

1. obtain and review the patient information and records needed for the care or activity being provided;
2. verify patient identity and identify information that is missing, inconsistent, unexpected, outdated, or concerning;
3. recognize and communicate medical, medication, allergy, oral health, behavioral, consent, or other information that may affect safe care;
4. perform or support assessment and diagnostic procedures only when they are within authorization and competence and any required prescription or direction has been provided;
5. document services, observations, communications, consent information, directions, incidents, follow-up, and patient responses accurately, objectively, legibly, and within the required time;
6. preserve the accuracy, chronology, authorship, integrity, confidentiality, security, retention, and authorized correction of patient records whether in hard copy or electronic format;
7. access, use, collect, disclose, transmit, store, and dispose of personal and health information only as authorized and required;⁴ and
8. report privacy breaches, documentation errors, information system concerns, and other material information risks through required processes.

Application

Clinical judgment support: Determining whether information is relevant, and recognizing when information is incomplete, inconsistent, unexpected, or concerning, is not the same as independently diagnosing a condition or determining treatment.

Technology: Use of templates, automated systems, artificial intelligence, or other digital tools does not replace verification, privacy safeguards, professional judgment, or accountability.

⁴ Health Information Act, RSA 2000, c H-5; Personal Information Protection Act, SA 2003, c P-6.5, as applicable.

Standard 4

Infection Prevention and Control, Reprocessing, and Safety Assurance

Dental assistants apply infection prevention and control, reprocessing, occupational health, equipment, and safety assurance requirements consistently to prevent harm.

Public expectation

Patients and the public can expect dental assistants to use safe infection prevention and control practices, properly processed instruments, functioning equipment, and to act promptly when safety concerns arise.

Requirements

A dental assistant must:

1. comply with the College of Dental Surgeons of Alberta Standard of Practice: Infection Prevention and Control Standards and Risk Management for Dentistry as approved by the College from time to time (Applicable IPC Standard);⁵
2. apply point-of-care risk assessment and the precautions required by the circumstances, including hand hygiene, personal protective equipment, respiratory hygiene, sharps safety, and additional precautions where indicated;
3. maintain aseptic technique and prevent cross-contamination during patient care, clinical support, environmental, laboratory, imaging, and reprocessing activities;
4. follow validated processes, manufacturer instructions for use, applicable technical standards, and workplace procedures when using, testing, monitoring, maintaining, or releasing equipment, devices, instruments, and materials;
5. review required monitoring and quality assurance information within their role, and not use equipment, devices, instruments, materials, or processes when safety or effectiveness has not been established;
6. stop use, isolate or quarantine affected items where appropriate, preserve relevant information, communicate, document, and escalate when a failure, nonconformity, recall, exposure, or other safety concern is identified;
7. respond promptly and appropriately to occupational exposure, sharps injury, spill, contamination, equipment failure, environmental hazard, or other safety incident; and
8. not use unsafe shortcuts or abbreviated practices; and
9. raise unresolved concerns through workplace, regulatory, or other required channels.

⁵ The College publishes the applicable edition, scope, effective date, and any transition requirements for the College of Dental Surgeons of Alberta Standard of Practice: Infection Prevention and Control Standards and Risk Management for Dentistry. A new or revised edition applies after the College has reviewed and approved it. See the College of Alberta Dental Assistants Applicable IPC Standard Approval and Review Process, for the approved edition, scope, effective date, transition requirements and approval record.

Application

Applicable IPC Standard: The College identifies and publishes the edition and scope of the Applicable IPC Standard that applies to dental assistants. For this Standard, “from time to time” means a new or revised edition becomes applicable after the College has reviewed and approved it, identified the effective date, and published the applicable requirements.

Individual accountability: Employers and other professionals may hold system responsibilities, but a dental assistant remains accountable for personal actions, for stopping unsafe use within their control, and for communicating and escalating identified risk.

Standard 5

Foundational Oral Health Sciences and Applied Knowledge

Dental assistants apply current professional knowledge, reliable evidence, and role-appropriate judgment to support safe care and recognize when additional information or direction is required.

Public expectation

Patients can expect dental assistants to use current knowledge and reliable information, recognize limitations and uncertainty, and obtain help before proceeding when safe care cannot be assured.

Requirements

A dental assistant must:

1. apply relevant and current oral health, medical, behavioral, material, equipment, pharmacological, infection prevention and control, imaging, and safety knowledge to the circumstances of practice;
2. use accurate terminology and current professional information when communicating, documenting, educating, or supporting care;
3. consider relevant patient history, medications, allergies, contraindications, risks, materials, equipment, and procedural requirements before and during care;
4. use reliable and current evidence, standards, protocols, manufacturer instructions, College resources, and other authoritative information applicable to practice;
5. recognize findings, changes, patterns, complications, limitations, or uncertainty that require clarification, direction, modification, referral, or escalation; and
6. provide prevention and oral health information within competence and role and not provide advice or treatment outside authorization.

Application

Applied knowledge: This Standard regulates how knowledge is used in practice. It does not duplicate academic subject lists or create independent authority to diagnose, prescribe, or determine treatment.

Reliable information: An employer's customary practice, unsupported online content, or a technology-generated output is not a substitute for authoritative information and professional judgment.

Standard 6

Clinical Procedures, Treatment Support, and Authorized Practice

Dental assistants perform or support clinical activities only when legally authorized, currently competent, appropriate in the circumstances, and consistent with applicable prescription, direction, supervision, permit, safety, and College requirements.

Public expectation

Patients can expect dental assistants to perform only those activities they are authorized and competent to perform, with the required safeguards, and to stop when an activity is unsafe or outside their role.

Requirements

A dental assistant must:

1. know the activities they are authorized to perform and every condition or limitation that applies;
2. perform or support an activity only when it is within dental assisting practice, authorized, within current competence, and appropriate to the patient and circumstances;
3. meet every applicable prescription, direction, supervision, on-site presence, patient condition, education, permit, equipment, consent, safety, documentation, and other requirement;
4. prepare for, perform or support, monitor, communicate, document, and follow up on an activity safely within role, and obtain assistance or escalate when a concern arises; and
5. decline, limit, pause, or stop an activity when authorization, competence, required safeguards, or safe circumstances are not established.

Application

Detailed authorized practice requirements: The companion Authorized Practice, Restricted Activities, Direction, Supervision, and Additional or Advanced Practice Standard of Practice sets detailed enforceable requirements. It must be read with this Standard.

Additional competence: Additional education or training does not by itself change legal authorization for an activity. A dental assistant must meet every applicable legislative and College authorization requirement before performing an activity.

Activity information: Current activity categories, modality-specific requirements, and authorization evidence are maintained in applicable legislation, College authorization instruments, the public register required to be maintained by the College under the *Health Professions Act*, and current College public authorization information.

Standard 7

Practice Improvement, Leadership, and System Awareness

Dental assistants maintain competence, reflect on practice, contribute to quality and safety, use established systems responsibly, and adapt to changes affecting professional practice.

Public expectation

Patients and the public can expect dental assistants to maintain competence throughout their careers, learn from outcomes and incidents, contribute to safer systems, and raise concerns when conditions may compromise care.

Requirements

A dental assistant must:

1. participate in and meet the requirements of the College's Continuing Competence Program, including, where applicable, required self-assessment, learning planning, professional development, evidence, audit, review, assessment, or remediation processes, and retain the required evidence for the period required by the College;
2. regularly reflect on practice, identify strengths, limitations, risks, and learning needs, and take timely action to maintain or improve competence;
3. apply learning to practice and evaluate whether it has improved safety, quality, judgment, communication, or performance;
4. restrict, modify, or stop practice and obtain education, training, assistance, reassessment, or supervised practice where legally permitted when competence is insufficient for an activity or circumstance;
5. demonstrate role-appropriate leadership through accountability, initiative, follow-through, respectful communication, speaking up, and contribution to safe team practice;
6. participate within role in quality and safety improvement by identifying concerns, errors, near misses, recurring problems, or inefficiencies, contributing accurate information, and supporting evaluation of improvement actions;
7. organize and prioritize work, support effective handovers and continuity, adapt safely to interruptions or changing circumstances, and not use workload or efficiency pressure to justify unsafe shortcuts;
8. contribute to team learning, consistency, and competence through appropriate knowledge sharing, feedback, mentorship, and role modelling within the dental assistant's competence and authority; and
9. recognize when staffing, workload, equipment, supplies, systems, access barriers, or workflow may compromise care and communicate or escalate the concern through appropriate channels.

Application

Competence assessment: The Competence Committee is authorized, as part of the College's Continuing Competence Program, to provide for and conduct assessments of regulated members' competence in accordance with the *Health Professions Act*, these Standards, and applicable College Continuing Competence Program policies.⁶

Continuing competence: The College's Continuing Competence Program is established through these Standards in accordance with the *Health Professions Act*. It provides for self-directed professional development to maintain competence and enhance the provision of professional services. Continuing Competence Program policies and procedures establish administrative requirements for self-assessment, learning plans, learning activities, evidence, audit, remediation, and appeals.⁷

Where the College requires specified education or training as part of the Continuing Competence Program, the requirement must relate only to maintaining professional competence or ethical standards, and the College must provide the exemption process required by the *Health Professions Act*.⁸

Record retention: Regulated members must retain Continuing Competence Program records for the period established in College policy. The current retention period is five years.⁹

Quality and system learning: The College may use non-identifiable quality and system information to inform regulatory learning, quality improvement, and evaluation. This does not replace the College's authority, the dental assistant's professional judgment, or a binding legal or College requirement.

Leadership: Role-appropriate leadership does not create authority to manage staff, govern an organization, approve clinical decisions, or supervise another person's practice unless the dental assistant is competent, authorized where required, and formally assigned that responsibility.

⁶ *Health Professions Act*, ss. 10(6)(b), 50(2)(b), and 51(2).

⁷ *Health Professions Act*, s. 1(1)(k) and s. 50.

⁸ *Health Professions Act*, s. 50(3) and s. 50.1; College of Alberta Dental Assistants, CCP-POL-002 Continuing Competence Requirements.

⁹ College of Alberta Dental Assistants, CCP-POL-002 Continuing Competence Requirements.

Defined terms

Additional practice

An activity that is beyond entry-to-practice preparation or that requires additional education, training, assessment, competence, or distinct evidence.

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.

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.

Core Standards of Practice

The College's seven broad Standards of Practice that apply to all regulated dental assistants.

Dental assistant

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

Direction

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

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

For the purposes of the Core Standards, an individual who receives, has received, or is seeking professional services from a dental assistant, or for whom the dental assistant otherwise has a professional responsibility. The Professional Boundaries, Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct, and Female Genital Mutilation Standard of Practice establishes the patient definition that applies to 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 of the practice permit.

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.¹⁰

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.

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.

¹⁰ *Health Professions Act*, Schedule 4, s. 3.