

College of Alberta
Dental Assistants

Code of Ethics

**Approved by Council
April 9, 2016**

CADA Code of Ethics: Preamble Statement

Introduction

The Code of Ethics was developed by the College of Alberta Dental Assistants (the College) in consultation with Registered Dental Assistants and Dental Assistants¹ in Alberta under the authority of the *Health Professions Act*² (HPA) and the College Bylaws³.

The Code of Ethics supports the College Mission, Vision and Values and provides a framework for dental assistants' safe, competent and ethical practice. The HPA states that the College must establish, maintain and enforce a Code of Ethics⁴.

Guiding Principles

The foundation of the Code of Ethics is the Mission, Vision and Values developed by Council.

Mission

The College of Alberta Dental Assistants regulates its members in the public interest, promoting the delivery of safe, quality oral health care.

Vision

Alberta Dental Assistants are recognized leaders in regulation and governance, supporting research and practice that establish universally accepted standards of competence, professionalism, quality and safety for the profession.

Values

Dental Assistants take pride in the privilege of self-regulation, demonstrating professionalism through dedication to protecting the public interest and striving to meet the highest standards of care.

Dental Assistants abide by all applicable legislation governing practice, privacy, confidentiality and human rights.

Dental Assistants maintain and enhance their competence throughout their careers with self-assessment, life-long learning and collaborative practice.

Dental Assistants provide quality services, maintaining and improving patients' oral health without causing undue harm or risk.

Dental Assistants treat others with honesty, dignity and respect.

¹ See Definitions, page 4

² Health Professions Act (2000) s. 133

³ College of Alberta Dental Assistants Bylaws (2014) s. 9

⁴ Health Professions Act (2000) s. 3(1)(d)

Purpose of the Code of Ethics

As a member of a self-regulated profession, each individual Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant is accountable for practicing in accordance with the Code of Ethics regardless of role, practice area or practice setting.

The Code of Ethics provides guidance:

- for each Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant to reflect on their own practice and ethical conduct;
- for the College to assess the ethical conduct of Registered Dental Assistants and Dental Assistants; and,
- for the public to understand the responsibility and accountability of dental assistants.

An ethical decision-making framework is provided as an appendix to this document.

Development

The Code of Ethics was developed by the Council of the College of Alberta Dental Assistants. Registered Dental Assistants and Dental Assistants in Alberta were invited to provide feedback throughout the consultation process. The Minister and stakeholders also provided comments and suggestions. Prior to final approval, Council considered all feedback received.

Professional Conduct

Registered Dental Assistants and Dental Assistants must adhere to all applicable legislation including the HPA, *Health Information Act* (HIA), occupational health and safety legislation, the *Dental Assistants Profession Regulation* and any other relevant laws. The Standards of Practice and the Code of Ethics must also be followed. Failure to comply with these documents is defined as unprofessional conduct under the HPA and may result in discipline proceedings⁵.

Practice of a Dental Assistant

Registered Dental Assistants and Dental Assistants are regulated professionals with a diverse knowledge-base. Each one is accountable for their own practice regardless of direction or delegation of duties, practice role or practice setting. Registered Dental Assistants and Dental Assistants communicate effectively and collaborate with all members of the health care team in the delivery of patient-centred care. The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant are educated professionals who maintain and enhance professional competence through self-assessment and life-long learning.

⁵ Health Professions Act (2000) s. 1(pp)(ii) and (iii)

Definitions

For the purposes of this Code of Ethics:

Advocate

Actively support a person, cause, idea or policy.

Affiliate

In the HIA, a person employed by a custodian (e.g. dentist, denturist, dental hygienist⁶) who collects, discloses and uses information on behalf of and at the direction of the custodian.

Consent

Permission received from the patient for the Registered Dental Assistant/Dental Assistant to proceed with the provision of specific prescribed treatments and/or services based on the patient being informed of and confirming his/her understanding of the reasons for the treatment and/or service, benefits, risks and any alternatives considered and discussed with the prescribing health care professional.

Consent should be obtained by the prescribing healthcare professional and the Registered Dental Assistant/Dental Assistant can only provide treatments and/or services if he/she has confirmed that consent to treatment has been provided to the prescribing healthcare professional by the patient.

If a patient has significant questions about treatments and/or services OR the patient advises the Registered Dental Assistant/Dental Assistant that he/she wants to amend or withdraw consent then the Registered Dental Assistant/Dental Assistant should not proceed with treatment and/or services and should immediately advise the prescribing healthcare professional before taking further steps.

Dental Assistant

A regulated member of the College on the Provisional Register who may still be completing requirements for full registration, holds a provisional Practice Permit and requires supervision for all skills and services provided to patients.

Registered Dental Assistant

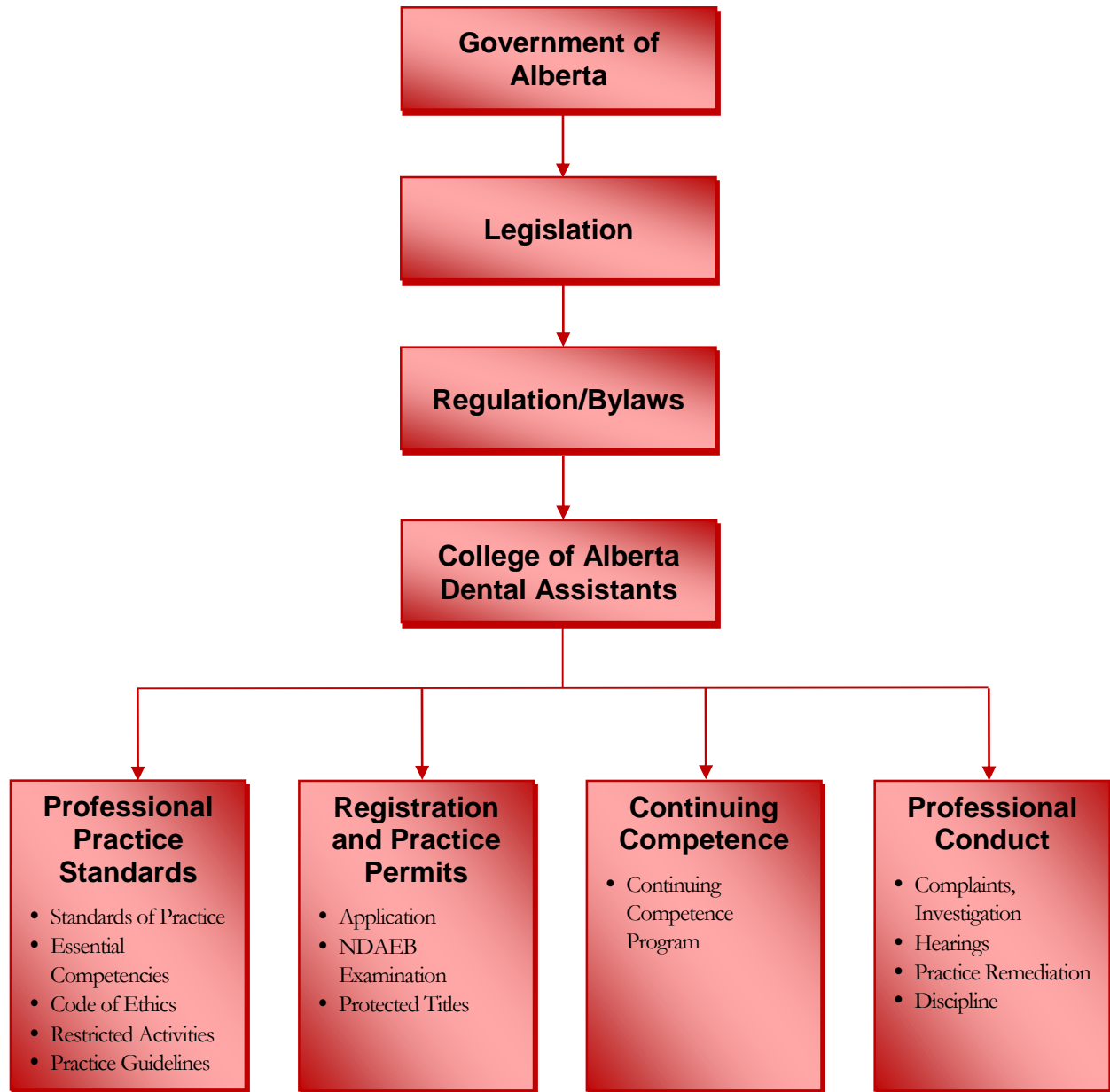
A regulated member of the College on the General Register who has completed all requirements for registration, holds a Practice Permit and requires supervision for restricted activities.

Effective

This Code of Ethics was approved and adopted by the Council of the College of Alberta Dental Assistants effective April 9, 2016.

⁶ Health Information Regulation 49/2014, s. 2(2)(d), (f), (k)

Regulatory Framework for Dental Assisting Practice



Code of Ethics

1.0 Responsibilities to Patients

1.1 Generally

- a) Registered Dental Assistants and Dental Assistants take professional responsibility for all professional actions. By engaging in best practices and competent application of knowledge and skills, the Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant strive to do no harm. If harm occurs, the Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant disclose the issue, take appropriate steps to minimize the harm and evaluate processes to prevent recurrence.
- b) The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant are knowledgeable of and practice to the current standard of care, seeking sound scientific information to support practice decisions. The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant meet or exceed the current infection prevention and control standards.
- c) The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant provide services without bias or discrimination⁷ and communicate respectfully and truthfully.

1.2 Privacy

The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant comply with all applicable privacy legislation including the *Health Information Act* (HIA) and the *Personal Information Protection Act* (PIPA). As an Affiliate under the HIA, the Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant can collect, access, disclose and use patient information only for the purposes authorized under the HIA and in accordance with the Custodian's policies and procedures.

1.3 Consent

The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant respect the patient's right to choose and therefore seek informed consent from the patient prior to providing services by presenting complete information, recognizing the patient's right to withdraw consent at any time⁸.

1.4 Competence

- a) The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant are responsible for their own professional practice while working under the direction of another health professional regardless of role, practice area or practice setting. Working under the direction of an authorized dental health professional, the Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant provide only those services authorized by legislation and which they are currently competent to perform. The services provided are those appropriate to the diagnosis, prescribed treatment plan, patient consent and specific circumstances.
- b) The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant will seek assistance with any services they are not currently competent to perform, including referral to another health care professional who is authorized and competent to provide the necessary care.

1.5 Professional Boundaries

The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant place the health and welfare of the patient first and foremost, establishing and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries in the patient/dental assistant therapeutic relationship⁹. Placing the needs of the patient first means the Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant will not allow self-interest of any kind to influence care of the patient. Professional boundaries clearly separate personal/social relationships from the professional/patient relationship.

⁷ Alberta Human Rights Act (2000), Preamble

⁸ Reference – Definitions page 4

⁹ Reference - *Therapeutic Relationships and Professional Boundaries: A Guide for Dental Assistants* www.abrda.ca

2.0 Responsibilities to the Public

2.1 Professional Qualifications

The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant meet all requirements for initial registration, practice permit renewal and continuing competence to ensure their practice meets the standards expected by the College and the public of a self-regulating profession. The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant represent their qualifications honestly and accurately, using the protected titles of “registered dental assistant” or “RDA” and “dental assistant” or “DA” only as authorized¹⁰.

2.2 Community

- a) The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant support oral health initiatives to improve oral health knowledge and awareness in the community. The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant advocate on behalf of patients including vulnerable populations such as children, elderly and special needs persons.
- b) The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant support the advancement of the dental assisting profession for current and future generations of dental assistants through giving back to the profession by volunteering and contributing time, skill, talent and expertise throughout their career.

3.0 Responsibilities to the Profession

3.1 Accountability

The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant are responsible for knowing and complying with the legislation applicable to the dental assisting profession and the Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics and policies and guidelines of the College. The privilege of self-regulation and the integrity of the dental assisting profession depend on the profession governing itself in the public interest and enforcing ethical standards.

3.2 Conflict of Interest

The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant have a responsibility to their patients, colleagues and the public to recognize and avoid conflicts of interest. A conflict of interest is anything that creates a risk of professional judgment or actions regarding the health and welfare of the patient being influenced or superseded by a secondary interest that may not be solely for the patient’s benefit.

3.3 Competence

- a) The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant participate in professional activities that support and enhance their ability to provide safe, competent services meeting the current standard of care.
- b) The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant are responsible for maintaining their own competence and fitness to practice, self-reporting issues that may affect their ability to practice safely such as infectious disease, incapacity or substance dependency and voluntarily withdrawing from practice if their ability to meet the standard of care is compromised.

3.4 Veracity

The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant are open and honest in their practice.

¹⁰ Dental Assistants Profession Regulation (AR252/2005), s. 3

3.5 Communication

- a) The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant communicate with the College and stakeholders in a professional and timely manner. Correspondence, communications and requests from the College and/or other colleges are given timely attention and appropriate professional response.
- b) The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant communicate in a professional, respectful and timely manner with all healthcare providers and persons involved in the provision of dental treatment to patients.
- c) The Registered Dental Assistant and Dental Assistant demonstrate professional decorum including appropriate use of social media.

Ethical Decision-Making Framework

Ethical challenges arise in a variety of contexts and require careful reflection and analysis to determine the best decision or course of action under the circumstances. Ethical decisions should not be rushed, but should be made carefully after considering all relevant factors and perspectives.

1. Collect information to identify the issue.

- a) What is the issue?
- b) Who does the issue impact and how? What is their view of the situation?
- c) What ethical principles are at stake?
- d) What legislation, policy or regulation is involved?
- e) Who needs to be involved in the decision making process?

2. Determine feasible alternatives.

- a) Identify alternatives for dealing with the issue.
- b) What makes each a good alternative? What are the drawbacks of each alternative?
- c) Identify morally significant factors for each alternative.
- d) If you were one of the principle people affected by the alternative chosen, which alternative would you want?
- e) Which alternative will provide the best outcome for the patient?

3. Propose and test possible solutions.

- a) What is the impact on the patient? The public? Colleagues? Who else would be impacted and how?
- b) What is the impact on systems, protocols and procedures?
- c) Would a good person make this choice?
- d) Does it feel right?

4. Make your choice.

- a) Choose the solution which provides the best possible outcomes, considering all the information you have.
- b) Accept responsibility for your decision. Learn from it.
- c) Would you do the same thing again? Why? Why not?
- d) Could a better outcome have been achieved? How?
- e) Do policies, procedures or practices need to be revised? Who will do it?