

Code of Ethics



REGISTERED DENTAL HYGIENISTS

BACKGROUND

The College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta (the College) is the regulatory body for the dental hygienist profession in Alberta. The College's authority is granted by the Government of Alberta through the [Health Professions Act \(HPA\)](#).

The College's mandate is to protect the public from unsafe and unethical practice and hold dental hygienists accountable for the care they provide. The College does this by developing, maintaining, and enforcing professional regulations, Standards of Practice, and Code of Ethics.

PURPOSE

The Code of Ethics sets permissible professional behaviour and conduct for dental hygienists as regulated health professionals. It is the responsibility of the dental hygienist to understand the College's Code of Ethics and apply the ethical principles to their practice of dental hygiene. Non-compliance with the Code of Ethics may be the basis for disciplinary action under the HPA.

The Code of Ethics serves several purposes, including:

- Outlining the ethical principles and responsibilities to which dental hygienists are accountable.
- Providing the public, employers, and other health professionals with benchmarks against which the professional practice of a dental hygienist can be measured.
- Fulfilling the requirements for the profession as set out by the Government of Alberta in the HPA.
- Equipping the College with a legal framework for investigating complaints and pursuing disciplinary actions.

CONTEXT

The Code of Ethics:

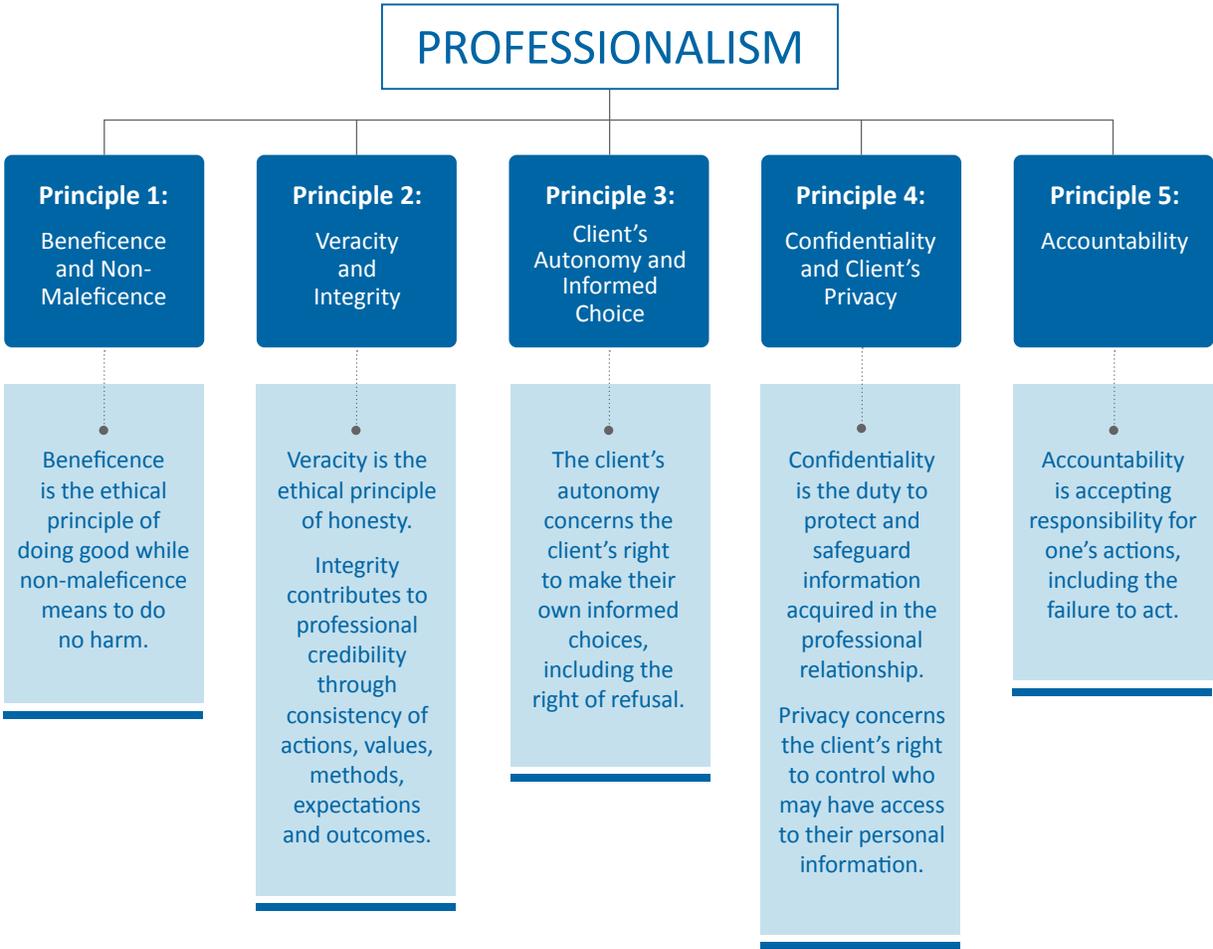
- exists to support the College's mandate to ensure Alberta dental hygienists have the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and judgment to provide safe, effective, ethical, and beneficial oral healthcare services to the Alberta public.
- is applicable to all dental hygienists in Alberta regardless of practice setting.
- aligns with and is mutually supportive of other regulatory documents that guide the profession, including the *Health Professions Act*, *Dental Hygienists Profession Regulation*, and the College's Standards of Practice, Bylaws and various guidelines and policies.
- will evolve over time, and substantive changes will be adopted only after consultation with the profession and others as prescribed under the HPA.

PRINCIPLES

The dental hygienist has the privileged status of a health professional in Alberta. The Code of Ethics articulates how dental hygienists demonstrate professionalism. Professionalism is the commitment to serve the public by using and advancing professional knowledge and skills. The dental hygienist exhibits professional behaviour by applying the five fundamental principles that form the foundation of the Code of Ethics:

- **Principle 1:** Beneficence and Non-Maleficence
- **Principle 2:** Veracity and Integrity
- **Principle 3:** Client’s Autonomy and Informed Choice
- **Principle 4:** Confidentiality and Client’s Privacy
- **Principle 5:** Accountability

Each principle has associated responsibilities that clarify its application and provide guidance.



Principle 1: Beneficence and Non-Maleficence

Beneficence is the ethical principle of doing good while non-maleficence means to do no harm. Together these principles guide the dental hygienist to provide services that benefit the client and minimize harm.

To uphold beneficence, the dental hygienist:

1. Provides dental hygiene services that are intended to promote wellness;
2. Puts the needs, values, interests and goals of the client first;
3. Interacts with the client in a respectful manner, considering their diverse individual needs, values, life circumstances, culture, and inherent dignity;
4. Provides services fairly and without discrimination, in recognition of fundamental human rights;
5. Promotes equitable, inclusive, and culturally safe access to **quality** oral health care and health care resources;
6. Maintains a therapeutic and professional client-dental hygienist relationship and ensures the relationship is always for the benefit of the client;
7. Exercises the right to refuse to perform or provide services requested by the client when the risks associated with that service outweigh the benefits for the client;
8. Treats all others with dignity and as persons worthy of respect;
9. Refrains from making disparaging comments about others, including other professions or professionals.

Principle 2: Veracity and Integrity

Veracity is the ethical principle of honesty. Integrity contributes to professional credibility through consistency of actions, values, methods, expectations, and outcomes. Together veracity and integrity guide the dental hygienist to be consistently honest, truthful, and to do the right thing.

To uphold veracity and integrity, the dental hygienist:

1. Provides truthful, accurate, and complete information that does not mislead or misinform the recipient;
2. Refrains from providing misinformation, including comments that are unverifiable;
3. Denounces and never knowingly participates in, condones, or associates with dishonesty, fraud, misappropriation, or misrepresentation;
4. Provides an accurate representation of themselves, their professionally recognized titles, and their earned academic credentials, qualifications, and competencies (subject to limitations in legislation, standards, and guidelines);
5. Avoids using their professional title or misleading the public that they are acting as a dental hygienist when providing or promoting services and products outside the practice of dental hygiene;
6. Separates other non-dental hygiene businesses, practices, and services so there is no intentional or unintentional implication that the business or service is part of the practice of dental hygiene.

Principle 3: Client's Autonomy and Informed Choice

The client's autonomy concerns the client's right to make their own **informed choices**, including the right of refusal.

To uphold the client's autonomy and informed choice, the dental hygienist:

1. Involves the client in their oral health care and promotes informed choice;
2. Involves the individual receiving the dental hygiene services to the extent that is appropriate for the individual in the event there is a substitute decision-maker;
3. Provides relevant information to assist the client in making informed choices;
4. Respects the client's informed choice regarding dental hygiene services;
5. Respects and supports the client's right to choose the practitioner to perform dental hygiene services;
6. Recognizes the inherent power differences between the dental hygienist and the client and refrains from misusing that power.

Principle 4: Confidentiality and Client's Privacy

Confidentiality is the duty to protect and safeguard information acquired in the professional relationship. Privacy concerns the client's right to control who may have access to their personal information.

To uphold privacy and the duty of confidentiality, the dental hygienist:

1. Promotes and participates in practices, policies, and information systems designed to respect and protect privacy and confidentiality;
2. Mitigates the potential risk of compromising privacy and confidentiality of information acquired in the professional relationship;
3. Collects, uses, and discloses only as much information as is necessary to benefit the client or as required by legislation;
4. Limits access to **health information** to only those purposes consistent with dental hygiene services.

Principle 5: Accountability

Accountability is accepting responsibility for one's actions, including the failure to act. The dental hygienist is responsible for their behaviour and decisions. They are also responsible for practicing competently and professionally according to legislation, ethical principles, and standards. The dental hygienist is accountable to themselves, the client, the profession, and the public.

To uphold accountability, the dental hygienist:

1. Accepts responsibility for knowing and complying with the legislation, ethical principles, and standards to which they are accountable;
2. Accepts responsibility for safe professional practice and quality care;
3. Self-evaluates their own competence, quality of care, and ability to practice safely;
4. Practices within the bounds of their competence, scope of practice, personal and/or professional limitations;
5. Addresses personal and/or professional issues that may adversely affect their **fitness to practice**;
6. Ensures continuity of care for their client;
7. Acknowledges mistakes and prevents recurrence;
8. Ensures that if the dental hygienist assigns duties to others, those team members have appropriate qualifications for the task;
9. Avoids conduct that would harm the integrity of the profession.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge the following organizations as references for content in this revision of the Code of Ethics:

- Alberta College of Pharmacists
- Canadian Dental Hygienists Association
- Canadian Medical Association
- Canadian Nurses Association
- Canadian Psychological Association
- College of Dental Surgeons of Alberta
- College of Dietitians of Alberta
- College of Physiotherapists of Alberta
- Federation of Dental Hygiene Regulators of Canada
- Government of Alberta
- Health Quality Council of Alberta

GLOSSARY

CLIENT

Refers to an individual, family, group, community, or organization accessing dental hygiene services. The term client in these standards also includes the client’s legal guardian or substitute decision-maker legally authorised to act on behalf of a client when appropriate. An individual client may also be referred to as a patient.

DENTAL HYGIENE SERVICES

Dental hygiene services include the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of oral health conditions through therapeutic, educational, and preventive dental hygiene procedures and strategies that promote wellness. These procedures and strategies include restricted activities authorized by the Alberta Dental Hygienists Profession Regulation. Dental hygiene services are provided to individual clients by dental hygienists in their roles as clinicians, educators, researchers, administrators, health promoters, and consultants.

DENTAL HYGIENISTS PROFESSION

Dental hygiene is a health profession involving theory and evidence-based practice. Dental hygiene theory and practice draw on biomedical, social, and behavioural sciences, and the body of dental hygiene knowledge. The practice of dental hygiene involves collaboration with clients, other health professionals, and society to achieve and maintain optimal oral health, an integral part of well-being.

FITNESS TO PRACTICE

The qualities and capabilities of the dental hygienist that are relevant to their capacity to practice and safely perform dental hygiene services.

HEALTH INFORMATION

Defined in the *Health Information Act* as one or both of the following:

- (i) diagnostic, treatment and care information
 - includes any of the following:
 - o the physical and mental health of an individual;
 - o a health service provided to an individual, including the following information respecting a health services provider who provides a health service to that individual

- (ii) registration information
 - includes information relating to an individual that falls within the following general categories and is more specifically described in the Health Information Regulation:
 - o demographic information, including the individual’s personal health number;
 - o location information;
 - o telecommunications information;
 - o residency information;
 - o health service eligibility information;
 - o billing information,
 - but does not include information that is not written, photographed, recorded or stored in some manner in a record;

[health information - HIA 1(1)(k); diagnostic, treatment and care information s1(1)(i); registration information; registration information s1(1)(u)]

INFORMED CHOICE

Critical elements of informed choice include disclosure (e.g., revealing pertinent information, including risks and benefits), voluntariness (e.g., the choice is not coerced or manipulated), and capacity. “Informed choice” encompasses “informed consent.”

QUALITY

Refers to the acceptability, accessibility, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency and safety of the dental hygiene services provided.