

Code of Ethics



BACKGROUND

The Alberta College of Dental Hygienists (the College) is the regulatory body for the **dental hygiene profession**¹ in Alberta. The Government of Alberta grants the College authority to govern the profession 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 the 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 dental hygienist's responsibility to understand the College's Code of Ethics and apply the ethical principles to their professional practice. 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 dental hygienists in Alberta have the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and judgment to provide safe, effective, ethical, and beneficial oral health care services to the public.
- Applies to all dental hygienists in Alberta regardless of practice setting.

¹ Terms that are defined in the glossary will be **bolded** the first time they appear in the document.

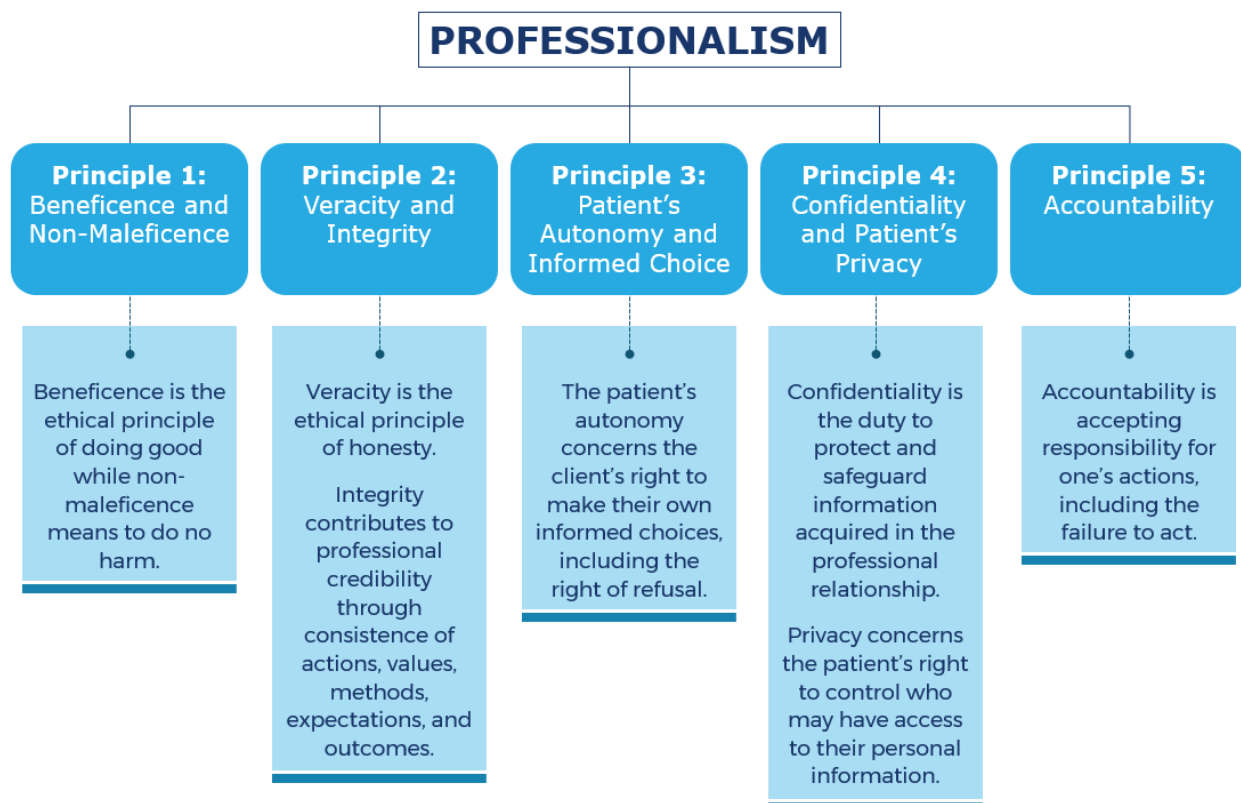
- Refers to the term “**patient**” throughout; however, the terms “patient” and “**client**” are interchangeable, depending on the circumstances surrounding the provision of dental hygiene services.
- Aligns with and is mutually supportive of other regulatory documents that guide the profession, including the HPA and other legislation, Dental Hygienists Profession Regulation, Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation, and the College’s Standards of Practice, Bylaws, Guidelines and Policies.
- Will evolve over time, and substantive changes will be adopted only after consultation as prescribed by 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:** Patient’s Autonomy and Informed Choice
- **Principle 4:** Confidentiality and Patient’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 dental hygiene services that benefit the patient and minimize harm.

To uphold beneficence and non-maleficence, the dental hygienist:

- 1.1 Provides dental hygiene services that are intended to promote wellness;
- 1.2 Uses their knowledge, skills and judgment to assist the patient in determining and achieving their oral health goals;
- 1.3 Puts the needs, values, interests and goals of the patient first;
- 1.4 Interacts with the patient in a respectful manner, considering their individual needs, values, life circumstances, culture, and inherent dignity;
- 1.5 Provides services fairly and without discrimination, in recognition of fundamental human rights;
- 1.6 Promotes equitable, inclusive, and **culturally safe** access to **quality** oral health care and health care resources;
- 1.7 Maintains a therapeutic and professional patient-dental hygienist relationship and ensures the relationship is always for the patient's benefit;
- 1.8 Exercises the right to refuse to perform or provide services requested by the patient when the risks associated with that service outweigh the benefits for the patient;
- 1.9 Treats all others with dignity and as persons worthy of respect;
- 1.10 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 make decisions that are professionally appropriate and be consistently honest and truthful.

To uphold veracity and integrity, the dental hygienist:

- 2.1 Provides truthful, accurate, and complete information that does not mislead or misinform the recipient;
- 2.2 Refrains from providing misinformation, including comments that are unverifiable;
- 2.3 Denounces and never knowingly participates in, condones, or associates with dishonesty, fraud, misappropriation, or misrepresentation;
- 2.4 Provides an accurate representation of themselves, their **professional title**, and their earned academic credentials, qualifications, and competencies (subject to limitations in legislation, standards, and guidelines);
- 2.5 Does not use their professional title or mislead the public that they are acting as a dental hygienist when providing or promoting services and products outside the practice of dental hygiene;
- 2.6 Does not imply intentionally or unintentionally that a non-dental hygiene business, practice or service is part of the practice of dental hygiene.

PRINCIPLE 3: PATIENT'S AUTONOMY AND INFORMED CHOICE

The patient's autonomy concerns the patient's right to make their own **informed choices**, including the right of refusal. This principle guides the dental hygienist to support the patient in the decision-making process.

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

- 3.1 Involves the patient in their oral health care and promotes informed choice;
- 3.2 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**;
- 3.3 Provides relevant information to assist the patient in making informed choices;
- 3.4 Respects the patient's informed choice regarding dental hygiene services;
- 3.5 Respects and supports the patient's right to choose the provider to perform dental hygiene services;
- 3.6 Recognizes the inherent power differences between the dental hygienist and the patient and refrains from misusing that power to influence the patient's choices.

PRINCIPLE 4: CONFIDENTIALITY AND PATIENT'S PRIVACY

Confidentiality is the duty to safeguard information. Privacy concerns the patient's right to control who may have access to their information. This principle guides the dental hygienist to protect the information they acquire in the professional relationship.

To uphold confidentiality and the patient's privacy, the dental hygienist:

- 4.1 Promotes and participates in practices, policies, and information systems designed to respect and protect privacy and confidentiality;
- 4.2 Mitigates the potential risk of compromising privacy and confidentiality of information acquired in the professional relationship;
- 4.3 Collects, uses, and discloses only as much information as is necessary to benefit the patient or as required by legislation;
- 4.4 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 patient, the College, the profession, and the public.

To uphold accountability, the dental hygienist:

- 5.1 Accepts responsibility for knowing and complying with the legislation, ethical principles, and standards to which they are accountable;
- 5.2 Accepts responsibility for safe professional practice and quality care;
- 5.3 Self-evaluates their own competence, quality of care, and ability to practice safely;
- 5.4 Practices within the bounds of the legislated practice of dental hygiene, their own competence, and their personal and/or professional **limitations**;
- 5.5 **Collaborates** appropriately with others when the patient's needs are outside the bounds of the legislated practice of dental hygiene, their own competence, and their personal and/or professional **limitations**;
- 5.6 Addresses personal and/or professional issues that may adversely affect their **fitness to practice**;
- 5.7 Promotes continuity of care for their patient;
- 5.8 Acknowledges mistakes and prevents recurrence;
- 5.9 Ensures that if the dental hygienist assigns duties to others, those team members have appropriate **qualifications** for the task;
- 5.10 Does not engage in conduct that would harm the integrity of the profession.

GLOSSARY

CLIENT: An individual, family, group, community, or organization accessing dental hygiene services. The term client also includes the patient's legal guardian or substitute decision-maker legally authorized to act on behalf of a patient when appropriate.

COLLABORATE: To work in partnership with the patient and/or others while maintaining a focus on the needs and goals of the patient. Collaboration may include consultations, referrals or other relationships that benefit the patient.

CULTURALLY SAFE: An outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the health care system. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving health care.²

DENTAL HYGIENE SERVICES: Any service that falls within the practice of the profession of dental hygienists as outlined in the [Health Professions Act](#) (Schedule 5, section 3).

DENTAL HYGIENE PROFESSION: The profession practiced by dental hygienists. In Alberta, the dental hygiene profession is governed by the [Health Professions Act](#). In this profession, dental hygienists provide dental hygiene services as clinicians, educators, researchers, administrators, health promoters and consultants.

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
- (ii) registration information

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."

LIMITATIONS: Occur when the patient's needs for assessment, diagnosis, or treatment are best met by another provider or in another practice setting. This can include when the patient's needs fall outside the practice of dental hygiene or the dental hygienist's individual competence.

PATIENT: An individual awaiting or receiving oral health care services and/or treatment from a dental hygienist.

PROFESSIONAL TITLE: Includes any words or titles listed in section 30 of the [Dental Hygienists Profession Regulation](#).

SUBSTITUTE DECISION-MAKER Someone legally authorized to make health decisions on behalf of another individual (e.g., guardian, trustee, or agent under a personal directive in accordance with legislation).

² First Nations Health Authority. (2023) Cultural Safety and Humility. Accessed from: www.fnha.ca/culturalhumility

QUALIFICATION: An ability, characteristic or experience that makes an individual suitable (e.g., they have the appropriate knowledge and skills) for a particular job or activity.

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