

# DENTAL ASSISTING ACROSS CANADA

*An overview of the organization of the profession in each region  
of Canada*



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# DENTAL ASSISTING ACROSS CANADA

*An overview of the organization of the profession in each region of Canada*

*A profile of the profession: Spring 2013*

## Introduction

Professional Dental Assistants are registered, certified and/or licensed dental team members who work together to provide high quality dental health care. The scope of practice and duties of the Dental Assistant will differ in each province. Dental Assistants may work with dentists, hygienists and dental therapists autonomously and in four-handed dentistry during the examination and treatment of patients. Qualified Dental Assistants take x-rays; take impressions and bite registrations; apply and remove rubber dams; place and remove matrix bands and wedges; apply cavity bases and liners; polish teeth and provide fluoride applications; provide dietary counseling, oral hygiene instruction, and post operative instruction; place topical anesthetic; perform coronal whitening; apply pit and fissure sealants and apply desensitizing agents. Many dental assistants who receive additional training in direct patient care may: remove sutures; fabricate/place/remove temporary crowns and temporary restorations; place a gingival retraction cord; perform restricted scaling; and provide other restorative, orthodontic and preventive services. The Dental Assistant is responsible for ensuring the process and practice of infection control is conducted to accepted professional standards. Dental Assistants may also be educators, administrators, clinical technicians, treatment coordinators, receptionists, office managers and sales representatives.

The practice of these skills and others dental assistants may undertake in their respective jurisdictions is regulated by a variety of governing bodies.



*Dental Assistants are highly trained individuals committed to the oral health of Canadians*

This paper is a brief overview of how the profession of dental assisting is organized in Canada and how the profession relates to the Canadian Dental Assistants Association in each jurisdiction.

## Who governs the profession in Canada?

Nationally, accreditation of educational programs in dental assisting is achieved through the Commission on Dental Accreditation of Canada (CDAC). CDAC conducts curriculum and on-site reviews on a regular basis.

As with other oral health professions, the governance of dental assisting is largely handled at the provincial/ territorial level. However, all regulated jurisdictions in Canada recognize the National Dental Assisting Examining Board to develop and manage a common examining process for individuals entering the profession. The Canadian Dental Assistants Association is the national association for the profession whose membership is comprised of provincial and military dental assisting organizations who adhere to advancing the interests of dental assisting in Canada. These organizations range from membership associations to full regulating bodies.

Overall, there are 6 different means under which dental assistants in Canada find their profession governed:

1. The profession of dental assisting is regulated by the profession itself under provincial statute. The provincial body regulating dental assistants has 100% of dental assistants amongst its membership.
2. The profession of dental assisting is regulated by an external body, a dental college, and there is a dental assisting association offering member services to dental assistants. Membership in these associations can be either voluntary or mandatory. In some instances, the total population of dental assistants may not be completely represented by the provincial dental assisting association.
3. The profession is regulated by an external body, a dental college, but there is no provincial dental assisting association or organization.
4. There is a dental assisting association which delivers member services but there is no formal regulation of the profession. Instead, the association acts as the certifying body for dental assistants. Because the profession is not regulated, not all dental assistants are members of the association nor are they certified. Under this scenario, dentists may engage dental assistants into their profession without any formal training.

5. There is a provincial dental assisting association offering member services but there is no formal regulation of the profession. Under this scenario, dentists may engage dental assistants into their profession without any formal training.
6. There is no dental assisting organization nor is there any formal regulation of the profession. Under this scenario, dentists may engage dental assistants into their profession without any formal training.

# A VIEW FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY

## British Columbia



Dental assisting in British Columbia is regulated by an external body. In this province, the College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia (CDSBC) is responsible for the registration and discipline of the profession in addition to dentists. Dental Hygienists have their own regulatory body.

For the profession, British Columbia falls into the category of having a dental assisting association offering member services to dental assistants. However, membership in this association is voluntary and not tied to the regulatory body. The membership association for dental assistants in BC is the Certified Dental Assistants of British Columbia (CDABC). In BC, the total population of dental assistants is not completely represented by the provincial dental assisting association. Of the estimated 6000 dental assistants registered with CDSBC, membership in CDABC is estimated at 1200.

In order to practice dental assisting in the province of British Columbia, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a diploma from an approved school and present a National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. Dental assistants must register each year with the College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia. However, malpractice insurance is not required for dental assistants.

Dental assistants in BC are not represented nationally through a membership in the Canadian Dental Assistants Association.

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## Alberta



Alberta fits into the category of being a self-regulating jurisdiction for the profession of dental assisting. In Alberta, it is the College of Alberta Dental Assistants (CADA) who acts as the regulating and disciplining body for the profession. Under the Alberta Health Professions Act, CADA's primary mandate is protection of the public. This is achieved through the enforcement of standards for registration including examination, continuing competence and dental assisting program approval.

In order to practice dental assisting in the province of Alberta, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a diploma from an approved school and present a National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. Dental assistants must register with CADA. The College of Alberta Dental Assistants collects insurance premiums from dental assistants and remits them to CDAA's insurance broker.

Independent of the College, there is a new membership services organization for dental assistants in Alberta that is available to those Edmonton and Calgary local members who choose to voluntarily join: the Association of Alberta Dental Assistants.

There are an approximately 4800 registered dental assistants in Alberta. As CADA is an Organizational Member of CDAA, dental assistants in the province are represented on national issues by the Canadian Dental Assistants Association.

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## Saskatchewan



Saskatchewan fits into the category of being a self-regulating jurisdiction for the profession of dental assisting. The Saskatchewan Dental Assistants' Association (SDAA) provides public protection through regulation, participates in oral health initiatives and advocates for the health and safety of dental assistants. As part of this mandate, SDAA also acts where required, as a disciplinary body for dental assistants in Saskatchewan.

In order to practice dental assisting in the province of Saskatchewan, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a diploma from an approved school and present a National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. Dental assistants must also register with SDAA. Malpractice insurance in Saskatchewan is also required of dental assistants in order to practice. The Saskatchewan Dental Assisting Association collects insurance premiums from dental assistants and remits them to CDAA's insurance broker.

There are an estimated 1275 dental assistants in Saskatchewan. 100% of dental assistants in the province are registered with SDAA. As SDAA is an Organizational Member of CDAA, dental assistants in the province are represented on national issues by the Canadian Dental Assistants Association.

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## Manitoba



Dental assisting in the province of Manitoba is regulated by an external body. In this province, the Manitoba Dental Association regulates and disciplines dental assistants and dentists. Dental Hygienists in Manitoba have their own regulatory body, the College of Dental Hygienists of Manitoba. The Manitoba Dental Association acts both as a regulatory body for both professions and as the member services organization for dentists. In order to practice dental assisting in the province of Manitoba, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a diploma from an approved school and present a National

Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. While all dental assistants in Manitoba are required to register with the Manitoba Dental Association as licensed practitioners, some dentists do continue to hire non-certified assistants.

Under the arrangement dental assistants have with the Manitoba Dental Association, regulatory fees are collected from dental assistants and from these fees, a membership transfer grant is forwarded to the membership services association for dental assistants, the Manitoba Dental Assistants Association (MDAA). As a result, MDAA's membership does comprise the majority of dental assistants in the province. MDAA's membership is estimated at 1175 dental assistants.

The Manitoba Dental Assistants Association is an Organizational Member of the Canadian Dental Assistants Association. As a result, Manitoba dental assistants are represented nationally through the CDAA.

Malpractice insurance in Manitoba is required of dental assistants in order to practice. The Manitoba Dental Association collects insurance premiums from dental assistants and remits them to CDAA's insurance broker.

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## Ontario



Dental assisting remains an unregulated profession in Ontario with no official legal standing. As a result, there is no governing body that regulates or disciplines dental assistants. The Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario (the regulating body for dentists) does recognize the National Dental Assisting Written Exam and does encourage the dentists it regulates to hire trained dental assistants. While many dental assistants are trained in their profession, there are no requirements upon dentists to hire qualified assistants.

A review of the legal status of dental assistants in Ontario is currently underway with consideration of a self-regulating order of dental assistants a possibility.

The Ontario Dental Assistants Association (ODAA) is the certifying body and professional membership association for dental assistants. Membership in this association is voluntary. It is estimated that there are as many as 15,000 dental assistants in Ontario. ODAA's membership stands at approximately 8,000.

Dental assistants in Ontario are not represented nationally through a membership in the Canadian Dental Assistants Association. Malpractice insurance in Ontario is not required.

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## Quebec



The scope of practice for dental assisting is a recognized profession taught through the Ministry of Education's curriculum. However, dental assisting remains an unregulated profession in Quebec with no legal standing in the provincial oral health professions code. As a result, there is no governing body that regulates or disciplines dental assistants. While many dental assistants are trained in their profession, there are no requirements upon dentists to hire qualified assistants.

A review of the legal status of dental assistants in Quebec has been underway for some time. The *Office des Professions*, the provincial body charged with establishing professional orders and reviewing the legislative or regulatory framework for them came out with the *Bernier Report* in March 2013. Its recommendations included an official recognition of the dental assisting profession in law. It remains to be seen if consideration of a self-regulating order of dental assistants is a possibility. The *Association des Assistant(e)s Dentaires du Québec* (AADQ) is the professional membership association for dental assistants. Membership in this association is voluntary. It is estimated that there are between 5,000 to 6,000 dental assistants in Quebec. AADQ's membership stands at about 135 and growing. AADQ is an Organizational Member of CDAA and by extension, dental assistants who are a member of AADQ have national representation through the Canadian Dental Assistants Association.

Dental assistants Quebec have been informed that their dentist's malpractice insurance may not completely cover the fees incurred in proceedings in case of error, negligence or acts of omission. AADQ has recently included malpractice insurance premiums into their membership fees. The AADQ strongly suggests a dental assistant to guard against malpractice insurance offered through its program.

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## New Brunswick



Dental Assisting in the province of New Brunswick is a regulated profession by an external body. In this province, it is the New Brunswick Dental Society (NBDS) that regulates and disciplines dental assistants. NBDS regulates the practice of dentists and dental assistants. Dental hygienists in New Brunswick have their own regulating college.

In order to practice dental assisting in the province of New Brunswick, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a diploma from an approved school and present a National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. In addition, proof of membership in the New Brunswick Dental Assistants Association is required in order for a dental assistant to be licensed.

The New Brunswick Dental Assistants Association (NBDAA) is the membership body for dental assistants in the province. There are an estimated 600 dental assistants in the province all falling under the regulation of NBDS. NBDAA is an Organizational Member of CDAA and by extension, dental assistants in New Brunswick have national representation through the Canadian Dental Assistants Association.

Malpractice insurance in New Brunswick is not required of dental assistants although many do purchase their own through CDAA.

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## Prince Edward Island



Dental assisting in the province of Prince Edward Island is a regulated profession by an external body. In PEI, responsibility for the regulation and discipline of dental assistants, dentists, and dental hygienists falls to the Dental Council of Prince Edward Island (DCPEI). The Dental Council operates under the supervision of the

Dental Association of Prince Edward Island.

In order to practice dental assisting in the province of Prince Edward Island, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a diploma from an approved school and present a National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. An individual must also register with the PEI Dental Council. However, there are no requirements for continuing education and there is no provincial membership association for dental assistants. Because there is no provincial organization for the profession, dental assistants in the province do not currently have national representation through the Canadian Dental Assistants Association.

Malpractice insurance in Prince Edward Island is not required. There are an estimated 150 dental assistants in Prince Edward Island.

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## Nova Scotia



Dental Assisting in Nova Scotia is a regulated profession by an external body - the Provincial Dental Board of Nova Scotia (PDBNS). PDBNS is a legislated body mandated to protect the general public interests in matters related to the delivery of dental care.

This mandate is fulfilled by assuring that only properly trained, qualified and licensed personnel render dental treatment and that the treatment is of a reasonable standard. PDNS governs the conduct of both dentists and dental assistants. There are 15 members of the Board with one seat reserved for dental assistants. Dental hygienists in Nova Scotia have their own regulating college.

In order to practice dental assisting in the province of Nova Scotia, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a diploma from an approved school and present a National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. The Nova Scotia Dental Assistants Association (NSDAA) is the membership association for dental assistants in the province. NSDAA is an Organizational Member of the Canadian Dental Assistants Association (CDA) and by virtue of this association, dental assistants in the province are represented on national issues by the CDA. The regulatory requirements of Nova Scotia tie dental assistants to membership in NSDAA and by extension, representation from CDA. Malpractice insurance in Nova Scotia is not required of dental assistants although many do purchase their own through CDA.

There are an estimated 780 dental assistants in Nova Scotia all falling under the regulation of the PDBNS.

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## Newfoundland and Labrador



Dental assisting in Newfoundland and Labrador is a regulated profession by an external body. In this province, it is the Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Board (NLDB) that regulates and disciplines dental assistants. This body acts on behalf of the public to maintain access to safe dental service and to ensure that persons provided with the right to provide such service are properly trained and continue to maintain a satisfactory level of competence appropriate to their individual license. The NLDB governs the practice of dentistry, dental hygienists, dental assistants and dental technicians. Dental assistants have one representative on the Board of Directors of NLDB.

In order to practice dental assisting in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a diploma from an approved school and present a National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. The Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Assistants Association (NLDA) is the provincial membership association for dental assistants offering membership services. NLDA is an Organizational Member of the Canadian Dental Assistants Association (CDA) and by virtue of this association, dental assistants in the province are represented on national issues by the CDA. Dental assistants in Newfoundland and Labrador have recently been required to carry malpractice insurance. This insurance is now added onto their registration fees which NLDB collects and remits to CDA's malpractice insurance provider.

There are an estimated 150 Level II dental assistants in the province which fall under the regulation of the NLDB. Beyond Level II assistants, Newfoundland and Labrador has a small number of Level I assistants who practice with much a more limited scope of practice. Level I assistants are not regulated by the NLDB and are not members of NLDA.

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## The Territories



In Canada's north, there are no dental assisting organizations nor are there any processes for the formal regulation of the profession. Under this scenario, dentists may engage dental assistants into their practice without any formal training. However, many dental assistants in Canada's North are registered in one of Canada's western provincial jurisdictions.

As there are no dental assisting organizations in the territories of Canada, dental assistants in the North are not represented at the national level. The territorial governments act as the registrar for dentists and hygienists.

## Canadian Forces Dental Services



Dental assistants in the Armed Forces are referred to as Dental Technicians. The Canadian Armed Forces Dental Service (CFDS) is an Organizational Member of the Canadian Dental Assistants Association. CFDS acts as a disciplinary body for an estimated 300 dental assistants in the armed forces. Dental assistants wishing to perform their trade in the forces must be trained at an accredited civilian school as there is no military training institute for the profession. At this time, there is no requirement for dental technicians to be registered with a regulatory body in Canada. By the Fall of 2013, a process will begin whereby CFDS Dental

Technicians will be required to hold a license with a Canadian Dental Assistant Regulatory Authority.

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