

27 July 2026

Tēnā koe,

Consultation on proposed updates to the standards framework

A cyclical review of the Dental Council's *Standards Framework for Oral Health Practitioners* (standards framework) has been undertaken to ensure the standards remain contemporary and fit for purpose.

The standards framework describes standards of professional behaviour, and clinical and cultural competence that must be met by all oral health practitioners.

The review focussed on ensuring adequate professional obligations in the rapid developing areas of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and virtual health. To expand on the patient-centred focus of the standards framework, new patient expectations were developed as plain language descriptions of patient expectations when oral health practitioners meet their obligations. Six professional standards were combined, where overlap was identified. Revised illustration, layout and additional explanatory information aim to improve usability. The consultation document further details the proposed changes.

The consultation does not include any changes to existing practice standards.

The Council invites your feedback on the proposed updates to the standards framework.

[Draft standards framework](#)

Have your say

Stakeholders are invited to comment on the proposed updates to the standards framework by responding to the following questions using the [online survey](#).

- Q1. Do you agree/disagree with the proposed updates to the standards framework? If you disagree, please detail why.
- Q2. Are there any areas of the proposed standards framework that you feel require further clarification or guidance? If yes, please tell us which areas and why.

The consultation document is made available to all oral health practitioners, relevant associations and societies, the Ministry of Health - Manatū Hauora, Health New Zealand - Te Whatu Ora, educational institutions, and other organisations with an interest in this area. The consultation document is also published on the Council's website, with a similar invitation to comment.

Submissions

Your submissions must reach us by **5pm on 21 September 2026**.

You can submit your feedback by completing the [online survey](#).

Submissions received will be published on our website and will record the submitter's name and profession (for registered oral health practitioners). All personal contact details will be removed. We will not publish any derogatory or inflammatory content.

As this is a public consultation, "in confidence" information will only be accepted under special circumstances. Please contact us before submitting material in confidence.

If you have any questions about this consultation, you can contact us by [email](#) or phone 04 499 4820. I look forward to receiving your views on the proposals.

Ngā mihi,

Marie MacKay
Chief Executive

Consultation on proposed updates to the Standards Framework

Issued: 27 July 2026

Closing date: 21 September 2026

Proposed updates to the Standards Framework for Oral Health Practitioners

1. Introduction

A cyclical review of the *Standards Framework for Oral Health Practitioners* (standards framework) has been undertaken to ensure the standards remain contemporary and fit for purpose.

The Council sets standards for clinical competence, cultural competence and ethical conduct under section 118(1)(i) of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003, and describe the minimum standards expected from oral health practitioners.

The standards framework describes standards of professional behaviour, and clinical and cultural competence that must be met by all oral health practitioners.

The standards framework consists of:

1. Ethical principles - There are five ethical principles that form the foundation for the professional standards.
2. Professional standards - Describe the actions and behaviours expected from oral health practitioners to support competent and safe practice.
3. Practice standards – Developed for specific practice areas where additional detail is required to ensure practitioners meet the professional standards.

Guidance is provided for the professional standards and practice standards which describes actions and behaviours that enable practitioners to meet the relevant standards. Guidance is not mandatory and the practitioner may choose to meet a professional standard or practice standard with alternative actions to those described in the guidance.

2. Focus of the review

Emerging technologies

The professional standards review specifically examined whether emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and virtual health, are appropriately and consistently incorporated throughout the standards framework. This was considered an important focus area given the rapid pace at which digital technologies are evolving and becoming increasingly embedded in everyday oral health practice.

Following detailed consideration, it was determined that a stand-alone practice standard addressing the use of digital technologies was not required due to the breadth of digital technology and continued evolution in its clinical application.

The existing professional standards, with one addition, were considered to adequately cover practitioners' ethical and clinical obligations in this area. This approach ensures that obligations relating to emerging technology are integrated within the broader context of professional practice, rather than treated as a separate or isolated consideration.

Consequently, one new professional standard has been introduced mandating oral health practitioners' ongoing responsibility for assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, and care — including when using emerging technologies or external advice.

This is an important clarification as artificial intelligence, other digital tools, and overseas parties' involvement become more prevalent in supporting clinical decision-making and patient care.

Additional guidance to existing professional standards also embedded emerging technology advice and examples. A link to the Dental Council's guidance on the responsible use of artificial intelligence in oral

health practice has been included, providing practitioners with an existing Council resource to support safe and ethical use of these technologies.

Patient expectations

In response to a need for a more patient-centred focus, plain language descriptions of patient expectations have been introduced for each professional standard.

These descriptions clearly outline what patients can expect when each professional standard is met, making the standards framework more transparent and accessible to the communities it is designed to serve. This addition reflects a broader commitment to placing patients at the centre of professional practice and regulatory expectations.

Clarity on compliance requirements

To address practitioner misunderstandings around regulatory compliance, clearer distinctions have been drawn between professional and practice standards that must be met, and advisory guidance.

Revised illustration, layout and additional explanatory information have been provided throughout the standards framework to more clearly articulate its components, helping practitioners navigate their responsibilities with more confidence and clarity.

Link to proposed [Standards Framework](#).

3. Summary of key proposed changes

4. Introduction to the standards framework

The standards framework comprises several components: an introduction, ethical principles, professional standards, practice standards, guidance, and newly developed patient expectations.

As the standards set by Council under section 118(1)(i) constitute secondary legislation, it is essential that Council clearly articulates the standards that practitioners are required to meet. Accordingly, Council assesses compliance against the professional standards and practice standards.

The introduction to the standards framework has been revised to clarify that the binding standards practitioners must meet are the professional standards and the practice standards, while the ethical principles provide the foundational framework that informs and underpins those standards.

The ethical principles underpin the professional behaviour expected of oral health practitioners, as described in the professional standards. Guidance is advisory in nature, does not create additional mandatory obligations, and is intended to support safe practice without being prescriptive. Patient expectations complement the professional standards by assisting the public to understand what compliance with those standards looks like in practice.

New professional standard

A new professional standard has been introduced to emphasise oral health practitioners' ongoing responsibility for assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning and care.

This has become an important clarification with introduction of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and emerging technologies supporting diagnosis, treatment planning and provision. Overseas practitioners not registered in New Zealand are becoming increasingly involved in patient care. The New Zealand practitioner's obligation is clarified through this standard.

Professional Standard 20

You must take responsibility for the assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, and care you provide including when you rely on external advice, technologies, and services directly related to the care.

Other proposed changes to existing professional standards

A few amendments have been made to existing professional standards to ensure they remain current, clear, achievable and reflective of contemporary practice. These include refinements to language, broadening of scope, and the merging of related standards for greater clarity and coherence.

Key changes include:

- expanding communication requirements to include whānau, carers, and health-related organisations
- broadening collaboration requirements beyond health practitioners to include non-clinicians and organisations
- updating standards related to medical emergencies, referral, and clinical justification of care.

Merging of following existing professional standards to remove repetition:

- professional standards 27 and 28: addressing practitioner responsibility to protect patients and colleagues from any risk of harm posed by a practitioner's health, competence, or conduct, or that of a colleague or employee.
- professional standards 19 and 20: addressing practitioner responsibility to provide clinically justified care that addresses a person's overall health needs.
- professional standards 23 and 25: addressing behaviour that enables trust in a practitioner and the profession.

Additionally, professional standards aligned with the "Ensure safe practice" ethical principle have been reordered. It now groups standards related to the maintenance of competence together for improved readability.

Appendix 1 describes the proposed changes to professional standards.

Proposed changes to guidance

New guidance addresses gaps identified through staff experience to date. These include prompts where new emerging technologies, artificial intelligence, virtual health should be considered to ensure they continue to meet their professional standards.

The Council has recently published separate guidance for responsible use of artificial intelligence in oral health practice. The guidance addresses key considerations including privacy and secure storage of information, transparency and informed consent prior to using AI in patient care, and practitioner responsibility and accountability for clinical decisions and outcomes. A [link](#) to the guidance is incorporated within the standards framework.

New guidance addressing safe pharmacological prescribing and radiography practice have been introduced with links to current national guidance documents.

Guidance were grouped together as a sub-set under each of the ethical principles and related professional standards. This offers a more holistic, high-level perspective on the obligations.

New ref	Proposed update	Rationale
20	You must take responsibility for the assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, and care you provide including when you rely on external advice, technologies, and services directly related to the care	A new professional standard to confirm a practitioners' ongoing responsibility for assessment, treatment planning and care. This has become an important clarification with introduction of artificial intelligence and digital tools, as well as external clinical advice sought (sometimes overseas), to support diagnosis, treatment planning and provision of care.
6	You must respect patients' right to complain and facilitate resolution. and enable them to seek redress	Plain English rephrase, aligned with terminology used in Right 10 of the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights
8	You must practise within your professional knowledge and skills and competence, and offer referral to another health professional where appropriate	Changes the advice from must refer, to offer referral where appropriate. Referral may not always be accepted by a patient, or even be possible within resource constraints. Additional guidance offer further context for such scenarios.
10	You must have arrangements in place to maintain appropriate skills and equipment to manage medical emergencies.	Requires maintenance of skills and equipment for managing medical emergencies rather than have arrangements - offer greater clarity.
13	You must communicate honestly and provide accurate, factually information without exaggeration	Enhances and expands the description of factual and accurate information This reflects the challenges associated with the impact of social influence, and emerging technologies.
17	You must communicate effectively with others to coordinate and support patient care openly in inter- and intra- professional healthcare teams for the enhancement of patient care.	Broadens the communication requirements to 'others'. This reflect the need to communicate with whānau, carers, as well as other health professionals and social agencies.
18	You must behave respectfully in communication to and about your colleagues, other health professionals and health related organisations. colleagues or other health professionals	Adds health related organisations in the requirement for respectful communication. These could include health employers, professional bodies, regulatory bodies, government departments.
19	You must take a holistic approach to care appropriate to the individual patient. You must provide care that is clinically justified and based on the best available evidence You must provide clinically justified care that considers a person's overall health and well-being, and is based on the best available evidence.	Removes the term holistic and combines standards 19 and 20.

21	You must collaborate with other health practitioners and contribute to teamwork for enhanced patient outcomes. appropriate care others to facilitate	Broadens the collaboration requirements from health practitioners to others – which can include non-clinicians and organisations.
22	You must protect and promote the oral health of patients and the public promote the oral health needs of the community	Removes the requirement to protect the health needs of patients and the public because this is not always achievable. Describes the public and patient group as a community, more contemporary language
23	You must ensure your professional and personal conduct justifies trust in you and your profession. You must act with honesty and integrity at all times with patients, colleagues and the public. You must act with honesty and integrity to ensure your professional and personal conduct enables trust in you and your profession.	Describes behaviour that enables trust in a practitioner. Standard 23 and 25 are combined; similar objectives.
26	Professional Standard 27. You must protect the interests of patients and colleagues from any risk posed by your personal issues or health, or those of a colleague Professional Standard 28. You must protect the interests of patients and colleagues from any risk of harm posed by your competence or conduct, or that of a colleague or an employee You must protect the interests of patients and colleagues from any risk of harm posed by your health, competence or conduct, or that of a colleague or an employee.	Addresses risk from adverse conduct, health and competency and practitioner responsibilities. Standards 27 and 28 are combined.
	Re-ordering of Professional Standards within the 'Ensure Safe Practice' Ethical Principles section.	Groups the professional standards related to maintenance of clinical skills together.