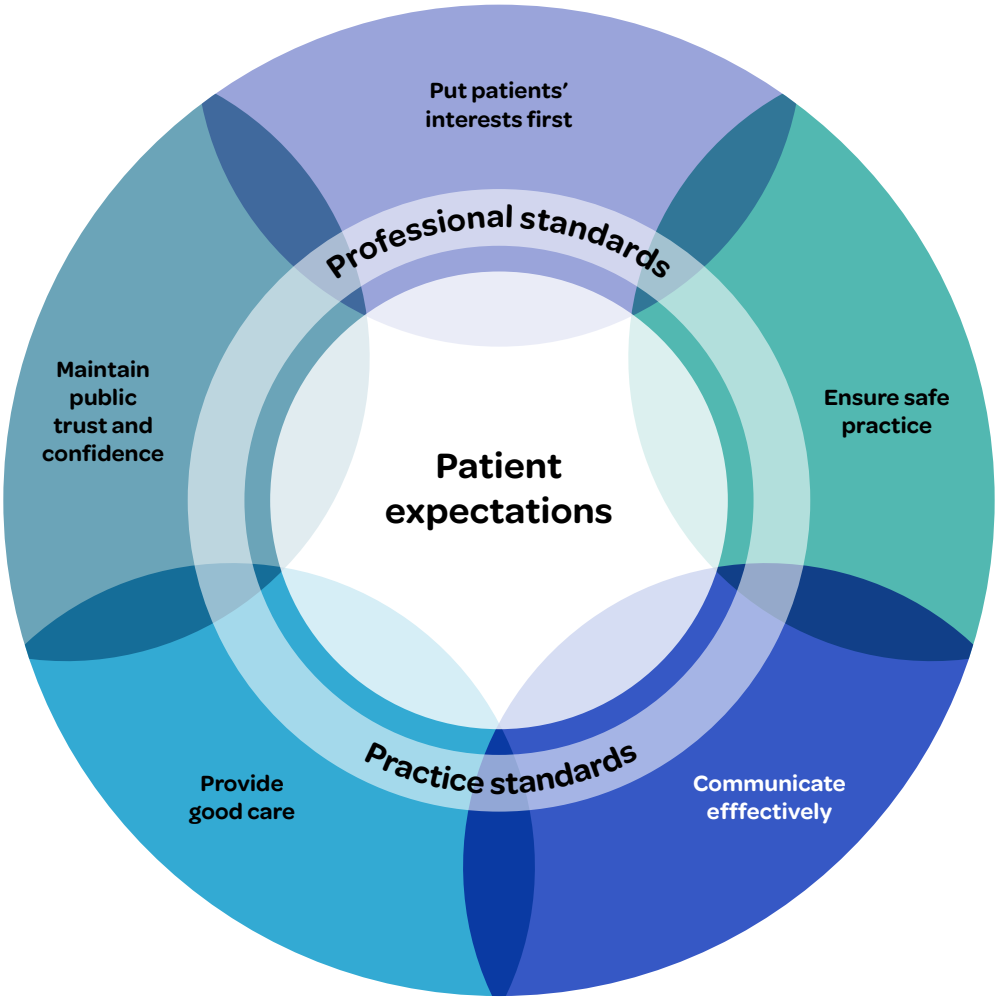


STANDARDS FRAMEWORK

For oral health practitioners

Dental Council
Te Kaunihera Tiaki Niho

DENTAL COUNCIL STANDARDS FRAMEWORK



The standards framework describes standards for ethical conduct, and clinical and cultural competence that must be met by all oral health practitioners.

CONTENTS

DEFINITIONS

See page 02

PURPOSE

See page 03

COMPLIANCE

See page 03

STANDARDS THAT PRACTITIONERS MUST MEET

See page 04

STANDARDS WITH PATIENT EXPECTATIONS AND GUIDANCE

See page 07

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Put patients' interests first

See page 08

Ensure safe practice

See page 10

Communicate effectively

See page 12

Provide good care

See page 14

Maintain public trust and confidence

See page 16

DEFINITIONS

The components of the standards framework are the ethical principles, professional standards, practice standards and patient expectations.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

There are five ethical principles which are the foundation for the professional standards. They are not listed in any order of priority; they all have equal importance.



Put patients' interest first



Ensure safe practice



Communicate effectively



Provide good care



Maintain public trust and confidence

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Professional standards describe the actions and behaviours required of practitioners to ensure they provide competent and safe care and meet the Dental Council's standards for ethical conduct.

PRACTICE STANDARDS

Practice standards contain standards for specific areas of practice where additional detail is needed.

PATIENT EXPECTATIONS

Patient expectations represent the patient centred nature of the framework. They describe what a patient can expect when a practitioner meets a professional standard.

PURPOSE

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

These standards apply to dentists, dental specialists, oral health therapists, dental therapists, dental hygienists, orthodontic auxiliaries, clinical dental technicians and dental technicians. These are minimum standards for professional behaviour and competence that patients and the public can expect oral health practitioners to meet.

The standards framework may be used by the courts, Health and Disability Commissioner, Health Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal and the Dental Council when a practitioner's conduct, competence or fitness to practise is brought into question.

COMPLIANCE

All oral health practitioners are required to meet the standards set by the Dental Council.

Failure to meet the standards may result in investigation or action by the Dental Council and may impact a practitioner's practice.

There may be circumstances where factors outside a practitioner's control affect their ability to fully meet the standards. In such situations, practitioners must be guided by the ethical principles, demonstrate insight, and exercise sound professional judgement to minimise risk and act in the best interests of patients and the public. Practitioners must be able to justify and document any departure from Dental Council standards.

See pages 04 to 06 for the standards that practitioners must meet.

STANDARDS THAT PRACTITIONERS MUST MEET

All oral health practitioners are required to meet professional standards 1–26 and comply with the practice standards. These are listed below.

Professional standards



Put patients' interests first

1. You must ensure the oral health needs and safe care of your patients are your primary concerns
2. You must put the interests of your patients ahead of personal, financial or other gain
3. You must treat patients with dignity and respect at all times
4. You must treat patients fairly and without discrimination, respecting cultural values, personal disabilities and individual differences
5. You must respect patients' autonomy and freedom of choice
6. You must respect patients' right to complain and enable them to seek resolution
7. You must protect the confidentiality of patient information



Ensure safe practice

8. You must practise within your professional knowledge, skills and competence, and offer referral to another health professional where appropriate
9. You must keep your professional knowledge and skills up-to-date through ongoing learning and professional interaction
10. You must maintain your skills to manage medical emergencies and have ready access to emergency drugs and equipment
11. You must maintain accurate, time-bound and up-to-date patient records
12. You must identify health and safety risks within your practice environment, and take reasonable steps to manage these risks



Communicate effectively

13 You must communicate honestly and provide accurate, factual information without exaggeration

14 You must listen to your patients and consider their preferences and concerns

15 You must give patients the information they need or request, in a way they can understand, so they can make informed decisions

16 You must ensure informed consent remains valid at all times

17 You must communicate effectively with others to co-ordinate and support patient care

18 You must behave respectfully in communication to and about your colleagues and other health professionals



Provide good care

19 You must provide clinically justified care that considers a person's overall health and wellbeing, and is based on the best available evidence

20 You must take responsibility for the assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, and care you provide, and use your professional judgement when making use of technologies, external advice and services

21 You must collaborate with others to facilitate appropriate care

22 You must promote the oral health of patients and the public



Maintain public trust and confidence

23 You must act with honesty and integrity to ensure your professional and personal conduct enables trust in you and your profession

24 You must be familiar and comply with your legal and professional obligations

25 You must maintain appropriate boundaries in your interactions with patients, colleagues, and the public

26 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

Practice standards

Oral health practitioners **must** comply with the practice standards.

- Advertising
- Blood borne viruses
- Best practice when providing care to Māori patients and their whānau
- Cultural competence
- Infection prevention and control
- Informed consent
- Medical emergencies
- Patient records and privacy of health information
- Professional boundaries
- Sedation

STANDARDS WITH PATIENT EXPECTATIONS AND GUIDANCE

The Code of Health and Disability Service Consumers' Rights establishes the rights of patients and the duties of healthcare providers.

Right 4 describes the right to services of an appropriate standard, which involves

- services provided with reasonable care and skill;
- services provided that comply with legal, professional, ethical, and other relevant standards;
- services provided in a manner consistent with the consumer's needs;
- services provided in a manner that minimises the potential harm to, and optimises the quality of life of, that consumer;
- co-operation among providers to ensure quality and continuity of services.[1]

The professional standards are supported by descriptions of patient expectations and practitioner guidance. Practitioner guidance is also provided in the practice standards.

Guidance describes actions and behaviours to enable practitioners to meet the relevant standard.

Guidance is **not** mandatory and a practitioner may meet a standard with alternative actions to those described in the guidance.

1 Right 4 of the Code of Health and Disability Service Consumers' Rights.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLE:

Put patients' interests first

	Professional standards	Patient expectations
1	You must ensure the oral health needs and safe care of patients are your primary concerns	Your oral health needs will be prioritised and your oral health practitioner will provide safe care
2	You must put the interests of your patients ahead of personal, financial or other gain	Your oral health practitioner will put your best interests ahead of their own
3	You must treat patients with dignity and respect at all times	You will be treated with dignity and respect
4	You must treat patients fairly and without discrimination, respecting cultural values, personal disabilities and individual differences	You will be treated fairly, without discrimination, and with consideration for your individual needs
5	You must respect patients' autonomy and freedom of choice	Your freedom to choose and make decisions will be respected by your oral health practitioner
6	You must respect patients' right to complain and enable them to seek resolution	You can make a complaint if you are unhappy with the care or treatment you receive from your oral health practitioner who will help you to find a resolution
7	You must protect the confidentiality of patient information	Your oral health practitioner will protect your privacy and keep your information confidential, except in situations where the law requires it to be shared

Practitioner guidance to professional standards 1–7:

- Consider patients' individual needs, values, and preferences.
- Be open and honest, courteous, empathetic and supportive in all your interactions with patients.
- Do not discriminate against patients by reason of sex, marital status, religious or ethical belief, colour, race, ethnic or national origins, disability, age, political opinion, employment status, family status or sexual orientation; or because of your own political, religious or moral beliefs.
- "Cultural values" are the beliefs common to a particular group of people; culture is not confined to ethnic origin.
- Be aware of cultural diversity when treating people of all cultural backgrounds and treat patients in a culturally sensitive manner.
- Recognise the unique place Māori hold as tangata whenua in New Zealand and honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- Respect patients' views and preferences, including their right to a support person; and do not make assumptions about how they want to be treated.
- Respect patients' freedom of choice, including the choice to decline treatment or seek a second opinion.
- Do not coerce a patient's treatment choice for financial purposes, professional development or inappropriate self-gain.
- Make patients aware that they have options to find resolution if they have concerns about the care received.
  - Ensure patients are aware of the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights.
  - Follow your complaints process to facilitate fair, simple and timely resolution of complaints.
  - Inform the patient of any relevant external complaints procedures if they do not wish to engage in the internal complaints process, or resolution can't be reached.
- Protect patient records so information is not revealed to unauthorised staff, patients or members of the public, including when using new technology to support your practice.
- Obtain the written consent of the patient before you use patient information for any reason other than the purpose for which it was gathered.
- Allow patients to access the information you hold about them. Do not withhold information on the basis of an unresolved dispute.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLE:

Ensure safe practice

	Professional standards	Patient expectations
8	You must practise within your professional knowledge, skills and competence, and offer referral to another health professional where appropriate	Your oral health practitioner will work within their knowledge and capabilities and offer to arrange referrals where appropriate
9	You must keep your professional knowledge and skills up-to-date through ongoing learning and professional interaction	Your oral health practitioner will continually update their knowledge and skills to provide safe, effective care
10	You must maintain your skills to manage medical emergencies and have ready access to emergency drugs and equipment	Your oral health practitioner has the skills, emergency drugs and equipment needed to manage a medical emergency
11	You must maintain accurate, time-bound and up-to-date patient records	Your oral health practitioner will keep accurate and up-to-date records of the care provided to you
12	You must identify health and safety risks within your practice environment and take reasonable steps to manage these risks	Your oral health care will be provided in a safe environment

Practitioner guidance to professional standards 8–12:

- Only carry out a task or a type of treatment if you have the knowledge and skills to do so competently within your scope of practice.
- Recognise your own limitations and the special skills of others in diagnosis, prevention and treatment.
- Where referral is appropriate, it might be to another oral health practitioner, other health professional or support agency.
- Comply with Dental Council's annual recertification programme.
- Ensure you have the appropriate understanding and training before you start using new technology; and apply your professional judgement to ensure safe and competent care, appropriate for the patient's particular circumstances.
- Check patient records for accuracy and completeness, including when records have been prepared using new technology.
- The medical emergencies practice standard details the specific emergency drugs and equipment required for the different professions.
- Manage health and safety risks within your control, which may include knowing who the health and safety officer is, raising concerns, following workplace policies, and reporting risks where they cannot be addressed directly.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLE:

Communicate effectively

	Professional standards	Patient expectations
13	You must communicate honestly and provide accurate, factual information without exaggeration	Your oral health practitioner will communicate with you honestly and provide clear, accurate information
14	You must listen to your patients and consider their preferences and concerns	Your oral health practitioner will listen carefully to your concerns and preferences and take them into account in your care
15	You must give patients the information they need or request, in a way they can understand, so they can make informed decisions	Your oral health practitioner will share information in a way you can understand, so you can make informed decisions about your care
16	You must ensure informed consent remains valid at all times	Your oral health practitioner will check that you understand and agree to care as it progresses or changes
17	You must communicate effectively with others to co-ordinate and support patient care	Your oral health practitioner will communicate effectively and co-ordinate with others to support your care
18	You must behave respectfully in communication to and about your colleagues and other health professionals	Your oral health practitioner will communicate respectfully with their colleagues and other health practitioners

Practitioner guidance to professional standards 13–18:

- Ensure all information, including any health claims or images used in any communications with the public or patients, including social media or advertising, is accurate, factual, and not misleading.
- Recognise communication barriers and meet patients' individual communication needs.
- Before providing a virtual consultation, check your patient can access and use the digital platform, and that this method will not create communication barriers.
- Give your patients the opportunity to discuss their preferences and concerns with you and encourage patients to ask questions.
- Confirm your patients' understanding of the information given to them and allow them the time they need to make an informed decision.
- Giving and obtaining informed consent is an ongoing process of communication between patients and all members of the dental team involved in patient care, and should be revisited where circumstances change.
- If a patient lacks the ability to make decisions, whether due to age or illness, information may need to be shared with the patient's guardian or substitute decision-maker to support informed decision-making on the patient's behalf.
- Before using emerging technologies in patient care, explain how it will be used, its benefits and limitations, so patients can make an informed decision. For example, the use of artificial intelligence, remote patient monitoring technology, or virtual consultations.
- When there is a request for information or making a referral, provide detailed and accurate patient records to the health provider involved in your patient's care in a timely manner.
- Ensure data safety and security when sharing health information with other health professionals or service providers.
- When using an artificial intelligence tool a practitioner needs to understand how the tool collects, stores and uses patient data so they can assess if the tool is consistent with relevant privacy obligations. Links to other helpful resources are available in Council's guidance on responsible use of artificial intelligence in oral health practice.[2]
- Treat your colleagues and those you engage with in a professional setting courteously, respectfully and reasonably in all forms of communication – verbal or written, or in any public media – including social media.
- Respect the right of your colleagues and patients to hold different views.

2 Dental Council guidance: Responsible use of AI in oral health practice.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLE:

Provide good care

	Professional standards	Patient expectations
19	You must provide clinically justified care that considers a person's overall health and wellbeing, and is based on the best available evidence	Your oral health practitioner will provide care that meets your needs, taking into account your overall health and wellbeing, and the best available evidence
20	You must take responsibility for the assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, and care you provide, and use your professional judgement when making use of technologies, external advice and services	Your oral health practitioner will take responsibility for your assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, and care they provide, and use their professional judgement when making use of technologies, external advice and services
21	You must collaborate with others to facilitate appropriate care	Your oral health practitioner will collaborate with others to help achieve good outcomes
22	You must promote the oral health of patients and the public	Your oral health practitioner will act in ways that enhance your oral health, and that of the public

Practitioner guidance to professional standards 19–22:

- Provide patients with oral health advice and treatment options relevant to their situation, having considered the patient's overall health, their psychological and social situation, their oral health needs (immediate and long term), and desired outcomes.
- Carefully balance the patient's oral health needs with their wishes, and be able to explain your approach to care, which may include declining to treat.
- Ongoing evaluation of treatment outcomes is part of professional accountability and is particularly important when treatment occurs over an extended period.

Practitioner guidance to professional standards 19–22 continued:

- Radiographs should be individually prescribed when there is a clear, documented clinical justification. Dental radiology requirements are described on the Ministry of Health website.[3]
- Prescribing should follow principles for quality and safe prescribing. National principles for prescribing practice can be found on the Dental Council website.[4]
- Assess treatment outcomes at regular intervals to determine whether treatment should continue, change, or stop, and whether referral to another health practitioner is appropriate.
- Use the best available evidence to inform your care, drawing on scientific research where available, or, where evidence is limited, a strong theoretical rationale, suggestive evidence, or the opinions of respected authorities.
- You remain responsible for clinical decisions when using artificial intelligence tools. This may involve overriding digital outputs to ensure they are accurate and appropriate for the individual patient.
- Practitioners may consult other health practitioners, locally or overseas, to inform or support the care they provide, or outsource some services to others. When using external sources to inform or support care, use your professional judgement to ensure they are legitimate and appropriate for the circumstances.
- Clinical practice goes wider than clinical dentistry to include teaching, research, and management, given that such roles influence clinical practice and public safety. When students provide care to patients as part of their learning, the supervising practitioner is responsible for the care provided.
- Further guidance on responsible use of artificial intelligence in oral health practice can be found on the Dental Council website.[5]
- Work effectively with your colleagues, health practitioners, and others to provide appropriate care to patients.
- Respect the contribution of all team members involved in patients' care.
- Enable patients to maintain and enhance their individual wellbeing by increasing their awareness and understanding of oral health matters.
- Initiate and/or participate in broader based community intervention or setting of public policy, where necessary and practicable.
- If your personal position on any aspect of oral health differs from that of the relevant profession, inform your patients and the public of this fact and of the extent to which your position differs from the collectively held view.

3 Code of Practice for Dental Radiology: ORS C4 and Code of Practice for Diagnostic and Interventional Radiology: ORS C1 2024, MInistry of Health – Manatū Hauora.

4 Principles for quality and safe prescribing practice, joint statement by seven New Zealand responsible authorities who regulate prescribers.

5 Dental Council guidance: Responsible use of AI in oral health practice.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLE:

Maintain public trust and confidence

	Professional standards	Patient expectations
23	You must act with honesty and integrity to ensure your professional and personal conduct enables trust in you and your profession	Your oral health practitioner will act with honesty and integrity
24	You must be familiar and comply with your legal and professional obligations	Your oral health practitioner will meet their legal and professional obligations
25	You must maintain appropriate boundaries in your interactions with patients, colleagues and the public	Your oral health practitioner will maintain appropriate boundaries, so you feel safe and comfortable receiving oral health care
26	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	Your oral health practitioner will protect your interests, provide safe care, and take action if they are concerned about a colleague or employee's ability to do the same

Practitioner guidance to professional standards 23–26:

- You are always a professional. Treat all team members, colleagues, patients and members of the public fairly, with respect and in accordance with the law, in all personal and professional dealings.
- Do not make malicious or unfounded criticisms of colleagues or patients that may undermine patients' trust in the care or treatment they receive, or the profession.
- Be honest and open in dealings with patients, employers, insurers or other organisations and individuals.
- Understand that laws and regulations may change and it is your responsibility to keep up to date with those affecting your work.
- Co-operate fully with any investigatory or legal processes and be honest and accurate in your responses.
- Address issues with colleagues in a collaborative, supportive manner and elevate if necessary.
- Do not take advantage of your position as an oral health professional in your interactions with patients and the public.
- Maintain clear professional boundaries in all interactions, including avoiding inappropriate personal, financial, or social relationships.
- You must be familiar with your obligation to notify the Council if:
  - a matter arises that could impact on your fitness to practise, such as a significant health condition, an investigation into your practice or conduct (in New Zealand or overseas), criminal proceedings, or a conviction.
  - you are an employer of a practitioner who resigns or is dismissed from their employment for reasons relating to competence[6].
  - you know, or suspect, that patients or colleagues may be at risk because of your health[7], competence or conduct, or that of a colleague or an employee.
- Mental and physical health conditions may include substance use disorders (including addictions). Seek appropriate medical advice as soon as possible.

6 Section 34 of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003.

7 Section 45 of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003.

November 2026

Dental Council
Te Kaunihera Tiaki Niho

dcnz.org.nz