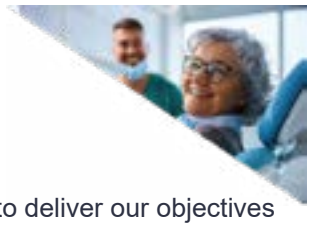
Dental Council
Te Kaunihera Tiaki Niho

Newsletter September 2026



The next six months will see a lot of change for the Dental Council as we work to deliver our objectives in the oral health sector. The three new registration pathways will be available to applicants from 1 November, improving access and timeliness for qualified practitioners to gain registration. The team are also finalising the operational processes needed to support these new pathways, along with new elearning modules for overseas-qualified practitioners once they gain registration in New Zealand.

The Council is also considering potential changes to the recertification programme as the review progresses. This work is being informed by feedback from the recent practitioner perceptions survey, as well as developments internationally, including the recent consultation undertaken by Ahpra. We are grateful to everyone who took the time to share their views through the survey, and a summary of the findings is included below.

While we await the progress and outcome of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act Amendment Bill as it moves through Parliament, we are also preparing for the changes on how we develop, consult on, and publish secondary legislation like Gazette notices. While these changes will not impact the day-to-day work of practitioners, the Council needs to update processes across the organisation to meet the requirements as a statutory body before they come into effect next November.

Finally, we also extend our best wishes to those coming to the end of their studies and heading into examination and assessment periods. We look forward to working with new graduates in 2027!

This update includes:

- Standards focus: advertising practice standard
- IT updates - 2 factor authentication being introduced for practitioner portal
- Guidance focus: updated guidance on Silver diamine fluoride use
- Workforce analysis report
- New registration pathways and elearning come into effect on 1 November

Updates from Council, including recertification review and upcoming consultations

Ngā manaakitanga,

Dr John Bridgman

Chair

Advertising your services: Lessons from recent complaints

The Dental Council continues to receive complaints and inquiries about advertising by oral health practitioners. These concerns are commonly raised by other practitioners and often relate to information published on practice websites, Google listings, social media, and other online promotional platforms.

In many cases, the concerns do not appear to arise from deliberate attempts to mislead the public. Rather, they often reflect a lack of awareness about the requirements of the Advertising practice standard or insufficient oversight of advertising content. The Council's approach is generally educative, helping practitioners understand their obligations and make any necessary changes.

Recent complaints have highlighted the importance of regularly reviewing all public-facing information about your practice, including content created or managed by third-party marketing providers. While advertising may be prepared by practice staff, marketing agencies, or website developers - practitioners remain responsible for information published in their name. This means understanding how your services are represented across all platforms and ensuring any claims are accurate, evidence-based, and capable of being substantiated.

A recurring issue in recent complaints has been advertising that may mislead patients about specialist registration, particularly in relation to orthodontic services. Examples include:

- Using terms such as "orthodontist" or "orthodontic specialist" when no registered orthodontic specialist is practising at the clinic.
- Advertising orthodontic treatment without clearly identifying the practitioner providing the service and their registration status.

Practitioners may advertise services they provide within their scope of practice, as well as areas of professional interest or relevant experience. However, practitioners who are not registered specialists should ensure this information is presented in a way that is clear, accurate, and unlikely to lead members of the public to conclude that specialist registration is held.

Advertising reminders

To help ensure compliance with the advertising practice standard, practitioners should:

- Regularly review your website, Google business profile, social media accounts, and other online listings.
- Ensure all claims are accurate, evidence-based, and capable of being substantiated.
- Understand what practice staff or marketing providers are publishing on your behalf.
- Consider the overall impression your advertising creates, not just the wording of individual statements.
- Be clear and accurate when describing your registered status.
- If you are not a registered specialist, ensure your advertising does not expressly or implicitly suggest specialist training or registration.

Regular review of advertising content can help prevent avoidable complaints, support informed patient decision-making, and ensure compliance with the advertising practice standard.

READ THE STANDARDS HERE

Upcoming IT change: two-factor authentication to access the practitioner portal

As part of ongoing improvements to our digital services, and focus on protecting practitioner information, we are introducing two-factor authentication (2FA) for all users when accessing the practitioner portal. This will come into effect later in October 2026.

What is two-factor authentication?

2FA adds an extra layer of security to your log-in process. In addition to entering your username and password, you will be required to provide a one-time code sent to your registered email address.

To ensure a smooth transition, we ask that all practitioners check their contact details, particularly email addresses are up to date in the practitioner portal. You can update your contact details by completing the Change my details form in the portal.

Why this change is being introduced

Passwords alone are no longer sufficient to guard against increasingly sophisticated cyber threats. Implementing 2FA significantly reduces the risk of unauthorised access, helping to keep our online services safe.

Once 2FA is rolled out later in October:

- you will continue to log in with your usual username and password
- you will then be prompted to enter a verification code sent to your registered email address
- access to the practitioner portal will only be granted once both steps are completed.

Dental Council website

Alongside the enhanced security measures, the Dental Council is launching a redesigned website to make it easier for practitioners, applicants, employers and members of the public to find information about our role and processes. It focuses on improved access and use across different devices. This will be live in the next few weeks.

Recertification review: practitioner survey

Thank you for those who completed the practitioner survey on the annual recertification programme. The survey was sent to 5600 registered practitioners, and we had responses from over 1,300. A summary report from the survey is available to read.

Key themes

- While a high percentage of respondents said they don't experience barriers to completing recertification programme, there is room for clarity on expectations, and potentially some direction on activities required, and course availability is an issue for some.
- There was also interest in a standadised portfolio to help manage recertification activities and documentation. Respondents expressed an interest in hours or points-based recording to meet recertification requirements.
- Respondents recognised the benefit of peer interaction as part of maintaining competence, however some raised concerns around managing and maintaining peer relationships.

We are considering the outcome of this survey as part of the wider recertification review. We will keep practitioners updated on the review as it progresses.

READ THE SUMMARY REPORT HERE

Updated position: Silver diamine fluoride use by oral health practitioners

The Council has published an updated position on the application of silver diamine fluoride (SDF) by oral health practitioners, following a request from the New Zealand Oral Health Association for clarification on some aspects. The update includes expanded considerations for the use of SDF and how it relates to the relevant scope of practice competencies for the different oral health professions.

READ THE POSITION HERE

Workforce analysis 2023-2025 report

The Council has recently published the latest workforce analysis report for 2023-2025. The report provides an overview of the oral health workforce based on our registry data and information kindly provided by practitioners each year as part of their practising renewal forms, and our education providers. The Council is grateful for the continued high response rate of the workforce survey (92% in 2025). The report is used by a range of stakeholders to support workforce planning, policy settings and research across the sector.

New to the report is an analysis of overseas qualified practitioners registered during 2020-2025, and the registration and practising certificate retention rates. This will form valuable baseline information to track retention of new registrants, and the impact of any registration pathway changes.

Key points from the 2023-2025 workforce report are highlighted below. Unless specified otherwise, it reflects data based on the 2025 workforce reporting year (1).

Registration and practising certificate levels

- In 2025, registered dentists and dental specialists increased by 6% from 2022 (3,483), with 80% holding a practising certificate
- Oral health therapists have increased by about 10% year-on-year between 2023 and 2025. Of the 1,093 oral health therapists on the register, 90% held practising certificates
- With no dental therapy qualification available in New Zealand, and almost no overseas dental therapists entering, the dental therapy profession continue to decline (304). The decline rate from 2018 is at an average of 5% per year. Similarly, the number of dental hygienists will continue to remain stagnant or decline (458) with very limited new registrants each year – predominantly orthodontic auxiliaries
- Since November 2017, oral health graduates register in the oral health therapy scope of practice in New Zealand
- The number of dental technicians and clinical dental technicians remained similar between 2023 and 2025 (393 unique count), with 86% and 92% holding APCs in the respective scopes of practice

Hours worked reported

- 93 full-time equivalent (FTE) oral health practitioners per 100k population aged 15 years and over was reported
- Dentists and dental specialists reported working an average of 37 hours per week. 29% of dentists and 47% of dental specialists reported working longer than 40 hours per week. 6% of dental specialists and 2% of dentists reported working 61+ hours per week
- Oral health therapists reported 35 hours per week, with 84% working 40 hours or less on average per week 94% of dental therapists and 91% of dental hygienists and orthodontic auxiliaries reported working 40 hours or less per week (an average of 33 and 30 hours per week reported, respectively)
- A total of 47% of dental and clinical dental technicians reported working 40 hours or less on average per week, with a further 34% reporting working between 41 – 50 hours per week. An average of 43 hours per week was reported

Geographical distribution (2)

- The highest reported dentists and dental specialists FTE per 100,000 NZ population over 15 years of age were in the following health districts: Auckland (54), Southern (52) and Capital, Coast and Hutt (42). The lowest were in the West Coast (17), followed by Tairāwhiti (22) and South Canterbury (23)
- Southland had no reported oral health therapists or dental therapists, while the West Coast still reported no oral health therapists with one reported dental therapist
- All public health districts had dental hygienists and orthodontic auxiliaries reported
- The West Coast still had no reported dental or clinical dental technician.

Practising characteristics

- The largest ethnicities of practising oral health practitioners are European (46%) followed by Asian (38%). Māori makes up 6% of the oral health workforce, and Pacific peoples 3%
- 54% of the workforce is self-employed, followed by 24% employed in private practice and 18% employed in public health districts
- Personal choice, parental responsibilities, semi-retirement and studying remain the main reasons reported for working part-time, with oral health therapists reporting the highest increase in those working part-time (36% of practising total)
  Of those not practising in New Zealand:
  86% of dentists and dental specialists reported that they were practising overseas, with only 4% in New Zealand while not practising
- 52% of oral health therapists reported that they were practising overseas
- 39% of dental therapists and dental hygienists reported practising overseas, while the same volume of dental hygienists reported being overseas but not practising (the latter being the highest across all professions)
- 49% of dental and clinical dental technicians reported that they were in New Zealand but not practising, the highest across the professions
- With regards to future practising expectations, a range between 90% - 95% reported their intention to practise in New Zealand over the next five years, with oral health therapists reporting the highest level and hygiene at the lower end of the range. Overall, still a high level of future practising commitment

Retention of new registrants

- Retention of locally trained dentists remains very high. From the 2012 University of Otago dentist graduate cohorts onwards (except for the 2021 cohort), over 90% remain registered with APCs
- Of the overseas qualified practitioners who registered during the 2020 reporting year, by 2025 76% remained on the register with 44% holding APCs
- Tracking the overseas qualified practitioners that registered between 2020 – 2025, the higher yearly registration attrition occurred in years 2 and 3 after registration, with an annual attrition range of 4% – 10% during those periods
- The highest APC attrition occurred during the first 3 years, with the maximum annual drop in APCs between 14% - 18% per year

Overseas registration pathways

- Dentists and dental specialists represented 80% of overseas registrations during 2020-2025
- The proportion of overseas qualifications by practising dentists and dental specialists was 33% in 2025, the same as in 2017
  The greatest number of overseas qualifications for dentists and dental specialists were from Australia (8%), United Kingdom (7%), India (6%) and South Africa (3%)
- Of the total overseas qualified dentists on the register that held practising certificates, 46% had prescribed overseas qualifications, 31% passed the New Zealand Dentist Registration Examination, 7% of overseas qualified dentists were registered by having their overseas qualifications and experience individually assessed, while 17% registered from Australia (via TTMR).

1 For dentists: 30 September 2025, other professions: 31 March 2025. Due to different reporting timeframes, and using practising statuses that practitioners held for most of the workforce reporting year, data may differ from annual report data, reported as at the end of each financial year on 31 March

2 Limitation: substantial hours were reported where the public health district and territorial authority were unknown. Initiatives are underway to improve the geographical location data quality. These hours were included in the overall analysis, but cannot be allocated against specific regions/districts

The full report with detailed data analysis, and an executive summary are available.

READ THE SUMMARY REPORT HERE

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1 November: new registration pathways and *Oral health practice in New Zealand* e-learning programme

Good progress is being made in preparation for the new pathways for overseas practitioners to register with us, that come into effect on 1 November 2026. The three pathways are:

- **Competent authority - registration pathway**
- **Comparable health system pathway**
- **Teaching and research pathway.**

Together, these pathways are expected to provide a more expansive, streamlined, cost-effective route to registration for eligible overseas qualified practitioners while ensuring appropriate safeguards remain in place through oversight or supervision, and supported introduction to the New Zealand practice environment.

To support the entry to the New Zealand practice environment, the Dental Council is introducing a *Oral health practice in New Zealand* e-learning programme for overseas-qualified practitioners, as consulted on. The programme contains a series of modules that have been developed to help practitioners understand the legal, professional, cultural and regulatory expectations of practising here.

The training will offer introductory information, context and helpful links to external resources to support their start of practice in New Zealand. It will also ensure that new overseas registrants have comparable understanding of the New Zealand health, oral health and cultural competence context to that of New Zealand qualified practitioners.

The material will provide valuable insight into areas such as:

- New Zealand's legal framework for health practitioners and most relevant legislation and obligations related to oral health practice
- Patients' rights and expectations from their oral health practitioners
- The Council's regulatory framework and professional standards, and how these shape oral health practice in New Zealand
- Cultural competence for providing care for all patients and why it matters, and an introduction to hauora Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi – specific to the New Zealand context.

From 1 November 2026, the programme must be completed by all newly registered overseas trained practitioners within six months of obtaining their practising certificate.

READ ABOUT THE PATHWAYS HERE

Updates from the Dental Council

Consultations

Accreditation standards

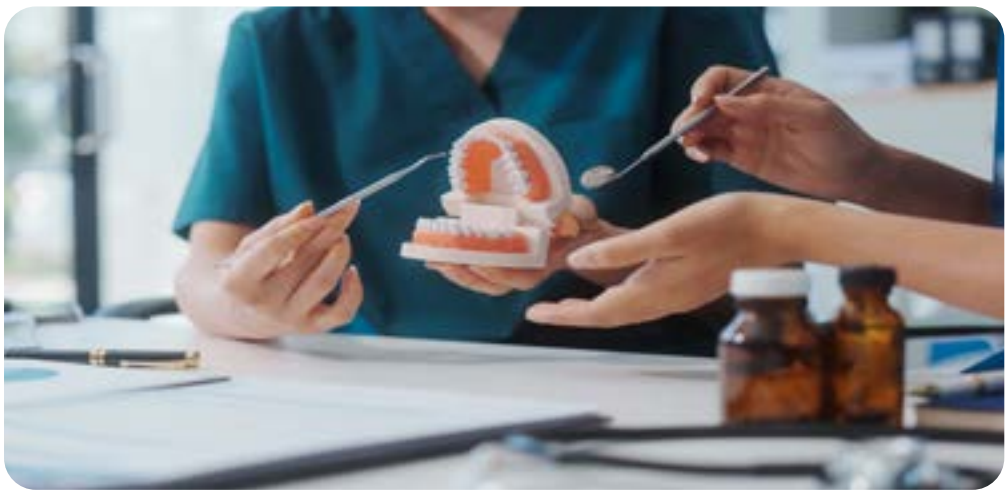
Last month we published the new accreditation standards and supporting guidelines, shared with the Australian Dental Council. You can read these here.

Consultation outcome on prescribed three new accredited specialist qualifications, and amendment to dental hygiene and dental therapy examinations

We recently published the outcome on the three new accredited specialists qualifications, and amendment to dental hygiene and dental therapy examinations. The proposals were strongly supported. Accordingly, the Council approved the proposed changes and updated prescribed qualifications will be gazetted soon. Read the outcome here.

Standards framework for oral health practitioners

The consultation on proposed changes to the standards framework closed 21 September. The Council will now review the feedback from the consultation and update practitioners on the outcomes as soon as available.

Upcoming consultations with practitioners and stakeholders in the next quarter:

- 2027/28 fees and levies
- Medical emergencies practice standard
- Professional boundaries policy
- Compliance framework