

Facing a Dental Council inquiry?

# Here's what you need to know

**Being the subject of an inquiry can feel stressful – but you're not alone.**

This guide explains what to expect from the Dental Council inquiry process and how to access support. Our goal is to work with you to ensure safe, quality care for the public – not to punish practitioners.

## Why an inquiry happens

The Dental Council looks into concerns about an oral health practitioner's competence, conduct, or health under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003.

Our role is to protect public health and safety – not to punish.

We can receive concerns from anyone, including patients, employers, health professionals, and every inquiry is handled fairly, discreetly, and with a focus on supporting safe, quality care.

If we receive a complaint where a health consumer has been affected, we must first refer it to the Health and Disability Commissioner (HDC). At the same time, to help speed up the process, we may begin our own review to decide if a Dental Council inquiry is needed. The HDC may also refer the matter back to us. In both situations, we follow the process outlined below for handling notifications.

## The process at a glance



### 1. Notification received

- We assess all concerns raised.
- Some are closed immediately if there's no substance.
- We are legally required to look into concerns from certain sources (e.g., health practitioners, HDC, employers)

### 2. Initial inquiry

- You will be informed of the notification.
- You will be asked to provide comments and relevant patient records.
- A case manager will support you through the next steps.

### 3. Your response

- You will be given a specified period to submit your written comments.
- We encourage you to seek support from peers, indemnifiers, professional associations, or legal advisors.
- If you need more time, you can request an extension within the limits allowed.

### 4. Professional advisor review

The professional advisor reviews all information and recommends one of the following:

- No action, or educative feedback only (case closed)
- Further inquiries
- Referral to Council for formal consideration.

### 5. Further inquiries (if needed)

- May involve a practice visit.
- The focus is on understanding, not testing.
- You can have a support person with you.

### 6. Council consideration

- After a professional advisor completes their review or practice visit (if carried out in step 5), the matter proceeds to Council for formal consideration.
- Council reviews the case and decides whether any action is needed to protect public safety and support you in maintaining safe, quality practice.

## Possible outcomes

- No further action
- Educative advice on a specific issue – this may include a follow-up visit from a professional advisor within a set time period (usually around six months) to check on progress
- A tailored recertification programme
- Referral to a Competence Review Committee (if there are concerns about your ability to practise safely)
- Referral to a Professional Conduct Committee (for concerns about professional behaviour)
- A medical examination or testing (if there are health concerns)
- Interim conditions on your practice – e.g., excluding you from performing a particular task or requiring you to practise under supervision
- In rare serious cases, suspension.

## Important notes

- You can generally continue practising during the inquiry process.
- The process is confidential and intended to be constructive, not punitive.
- Immediate restrictions are rare and only used in high-risk cases.
- We will keep you fully informed at every stage.

## Support is available

- Contact your indemnifier, professional association, legal advisor, or wellbeing services (such as peer support groups or an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)).
- You can also contact us if you need help finding support.

## Contact us

### Dental Council

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Email: [protection@dcnz.org.nz](mailto:protection@dcnz.org.nz)

Website: [www.dcnz.org.nz](http://www.dcnz.org.nz)

Further information is available on our website.

# Dental Council

Te Kaunihera Tiaki Niho