

Information for oral health practitioners

Understanding the Dental Council audit process

The Dental Council protects the health and safety of the public by ensuring oral health practitioners are competent and fit to practise. One of the key ways we do this is through the [Standards Framework for Oral Health Practitioners](#). This Framework sets the minimum standards of ethical conduct, clinical competence, and cultural competence that patients and the public can expect from oral health practitioners.

Standards Framework

The Standards Framework is made up of several components that work together to set clear expectations for professional behaviour, practice, and competence:

- Ethical principles – the ethical principles of oral health practice
- Professional standards – what practitioners must do to ensure they uphold the ethical principles of oral health practice
- Practice standards – the detailed standards related to specific practice areas

All oral health practitioners must meet the ethical principles and standards outlined in the Standards Framework to practise safely and competently.

The audit process helps us understand how well practitioners are applying the Standards Framework in their day-to-day practice. It also gives us the opportunity to proactively address any areas of non-compliance through education and guidance.

This guide explains:

- why audits take place
- what the audit involves
- what to expect if you are selected for a practice visit

Why audits happen

Under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (the Act), all oral health practitioners must meet the Council standards. These cover key areas of safe and effective care, including:

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

Each year, when you apply for your Annual Practising Certificate (APC), you confirm that you meet these standards.

To check compliance, the Council:

1. Selects 10% of practitioners from each oral health profession at random to complete a practice standards questionnaire.
2. Selects a smaller number from that group for an in-person practice visit.

Selection is random to ensure fairness across professions, practice settings, and regions. Being selected **does not** indicate any concerns about you or your practice; it is a routine quality assurance process.

Purpose of a practice visit

A practice visit allows you to demonstrate how you meet the practice standards in your everyday work. It also helps maintain public confidence that oral health services in Aotearoa New Zealand are safe and consistent.

During the visit, one of the Council's Professional Advisors (PA), a practising oral health practitioner, will:

Review your compliance with the Practice Standards

This involves considering how your systems, processes, and clinical records demonstrate safe, effective, and professional practice. The PA will look at areas such as:

- Infection prevention and control
- Preparedness for, and management of, medical emergencies
- Patient records, privacy, and consent processes
- Use and monitoring of sedation (if applicable)
- Management of blood borne virus risks
- Advertising and information provided to patients
- Professional boundaries and working relationships
- Cultural competence and cultural safety in patient care
- Professionalism and communication
- The suitability and safety of your practice environment and systems
- Your training, recertification activities, and currency of practice

Review your professional development plan

The PA will check that you are meeting your recertification requirements.

Provide guidance and support

The audit is educational and not punitive. If any gaps are identified, you will be given guidance and opportunities to make the required improvements.

What to expect during the visit

We understand a practice visit can feel stressful, but practitioners consistently describe the process as constructive and collegial.

You can expect:

- The PA will observe your practice environment, review key documents, and discuss your systems and processes
- You will have opportunities to ask questions and seek clarification
- You may have a support person present

How to prepare for your practice visit

You do not need to make major changes before the visit. The audit is designed to reflect your usual practice. A little preparation can help things run smoothly.

Make key documents easy to access

Have the following ready for the PA:

- Infection prevention and control policies, sterilisation records, and tracking logs
- Emergency equipment checklists and training records
- Patient record examples and consent documentation
- Sedation protocols and records (if applicable)
- Policies or procedures on privacy, advertising, and professional boundaries
- Cultural competence and safety resources or training records
- Your recertification documents, including your professional development plan and evidence of your professional development activities

You do not need new documents - just ensure your usual records are organised and available.

Check your environment

Checking the sterilisation areas, emergency equipment, signage, and patient information can help you feel prepared.

Inform your team

Make sure colleagues understand the purpose of the visit and are comfortable with a visitor onsite.

Consider a support person

You may invite a colleague, mentor, employer, or another oral health practitioner to accompany you during the visit.

Note any questions you'd like to ask

The visit is a two-way discussion. You may want to ask about interpreting specific standards, improving systems, strengthening cultural safety, or meeting recertification requirements.

Refresh your familiarity with key standards

A brief review of the Standards Framework and practice standards can be useful, but you are not expected to recall them in detail - the PA is there to support you.

If improvements are required

If the PA identifies any areas where you are not yet fully meeting the standards, you will receive:

- clear guidance on what needs to change
- support to make improvements
- time to remedy any issues

The focus is on strengthening your practice, not penalising you.

After the visit

- You will receive a draft report of the PA's findings
- You will have an opportunity to correct any factual inaccuracies and comment on the findings
- The final report, along with any response you provide, is referred to the Council
- If everything is compliant, no further action is required.
- If improvements are needed, we will explain the next steps and expected timeframes

If a risk of harm is identified

The audit process is educative. If improvements are needed, you are given guidance and time to make changes. However, if at any point we believe you may be practising below the required standard and may pose a risk of harm, we may move out of the audit process and take steps under section 34 of the Act.

This is a separate process focused on public safety. We will explain this to you fully, including what it means, and what will happen next.

Our commitment to you

The Dental Council is committed to a fair, supportive, and transparent audit process.

Our aims are to:

- support you in providing safe, competent care
- promote consistent understanding and application of the Standards Framework (including ethical principles, professional standards, and practice standards)
- strengthen public trust in the oral health professions

If you have questions or need clarification about the audit, we are here to help.

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