

Consultation findings summary report: *Professional Standards for the Oral Health Team*

June 2025



Introduction

The BC College of Oral Health Professionals (BCCOHP) regulates over 16,000 oral health professionals in British Columbia, including certified dental assistants, dental hygienists, dental technicians, dental therapists, dentists, and denturists. As part of its public protection mandate, BCCOHP sets standards to support the delivery of safe, ethical, and patient-centred oral health care.

Modernizing core regulatory functions—particularly by establishing a unified set of professional standards for the oral health team—is a strategic priority for BCCOHP. Under the oversight of the Standards and Guidance Committee, BCCOHP developed Draft *Professional Standards for the Oral Health Team*, which set out the minimum expectations for professional conduct, performance, and behaviour across all regulated oral health professions in BC.

This report summarizes feedback received during the consultation process and outlines how that feedback has informed the final standards. For more information on standards, visit BCCOHP's [standards development webpage](#).

Consultation process overview

Throughout the development of the *Professional Standards for the Oral Health Team* (Professional Standards), BCCOHP engaged with oral health professionals and the public through a range of consultation activities. These activities were designed to gather feedback at key stages of the process and help frame and inform Professional Standards development.

Consultations with Oral Health Professionals

OHP Advisory Panel Feedback on Draft Standards Framework

July 2023

Members of BCCOHP's Oral Health Advisory Panel were invited to provide feedback on BCCOHP's draft Standards Framework. 85 panelists shared their perspectives through a survey that included both closed- and open-ended questions.

Oral Health Professionals Research Study

June 2024

As part of BCCOHP's annual research, oral health professionals were invited to respond to statements about existing standards and guidance. The survey received 1,551 responses and offered insights into current understanding, awareness, and use of existing standards to help inform development of new standards.

Online Bulletin Board Engagement

August 2024

20 oral health professionals participated in an online engagement forum to provide in-depth feedback on the draft ethical principles. Facilitated by Pivotal Research, this activity combined private reflection with anonymous group discussion to explore areas of agreement, gaps, and opportunities.

Consultations with the Public

Focused Session #1 with the BC-PAN

May 2024

BCCOHP hosted a virtual session with 10 BC-PAN members to explore public expectations and needs related to professional standards. Facilitated discussions provided early-stage feedback that helped shape the draft.

Voice of Patient Research

December 2024-January 2025

Through the *Voice of the Oral Health Patient in BC* research program, 2,000 members of the public provided input on their experiences of oral health care and regulation. This round of research also included focused questions and gathered valuable insights on the draft standards from a public perspective.

Focused Session #2 with the BC-PAN

December 2024

A second virtual session with 15 BC-PAN members focused on the draft standards document. Discussions explored accessibility, accountability, collaboration and public usability of the standards.

Final Consultations on Draft Standards: Oral Health Professionals and the Public Online Consultation Survey

December 2024 – January 2025

An online survey was conducted to collect public and professional feedback on the draft standards. Outreach included website postings, social media, and direct emails.

- **Public survey:** 687 accessed, 56 submitted responses
- **OHP survey:** 327 accessed, 132 submitted responses
- **Additional feedback:** 12 email submissions via Pivotal Research

While the oral health professional survey used a controlled distribution, the public survey was open-link. As a result, findings are directional and represent the views of those who chose to participate.

Summary of Feedback

Theme	What we heard	BCCOHP's response
Ethical Principles and Clarity of Standards	Participants emphasized the value of clear ethical principles and professional standards in supporting good practice and defining the relationship between oral health professionals and patients. Many supported the shift toward a unified, team-based framework, but some expressed concern that streamlined standards may oversimplify professional nuances.	We developed the Professional Standards in consultation with subject matter experts and diverse audiences. The Professional Standards are grounded in ethical principles and written in plain language to ensure expectations are clear and accessible.
Safe, Competent, and Accountable Care	Respondents saw the value of guidance and patient outcomes in supporting safe, effective care, but noted concerns about overly broad language and the challenge of enforcing standards or measuring	We took a principles-based approach to the development of the Professional Standards, while ensuring that

	outcomes when factors are beyond oral health professionals' control. There were calls for stronger accountability and clearer processes for raising concerns—especially in practice settings where employer influence may affect safety or reporting.	outcomes remain measurable and keep patients at the heart. Accountability, raising concerns, and the role of professional judgement in ensuring safe care remain integrated in the Professional Standards.
Structure, Navigation, and Ease of Access	Feedback highlighted the importance of a clear, accessible structure, and consideration of accessibility needs. Many supported the consolidation of principles and standards into one document, and the public expressed strong interest in formats that are easy to read and reference.	The framework was developed to be unified, easy to navigate, and accessible to professionals and the public. We will aim to make the Professional Standards available in multiple formats to meet the needs of different audiences.
Professional Autonomy and Patient Expectations	Feedback from oral health professionals included concerns that a patient-centred approach could be interpreted as prioritizing patient requests over clinical judgement. This included questions about when it is appropriate to decline care, refer patients, or navigate complex expectations.	The Professional Standards emphasize the priority of patients' wellbeing while recognizing that oral health professionals may need to exercise professional judgement. Where patient preferences and professional recommendations differ, care must remain respectful and focused on safe, ethical outcomes.

Collaboration and Team Dynamics	There was some feedback about the expectations placed on oral health professionals to monitor or be accountable for team members they do not supervise directly. Some questioned how collaboration is defined, especially across diverse roles, scopes of practice, and power dynamics in practice settings.	We've reinforced that team-based care is essential to safety and effectiveness. The Professional Standards address collaborative care for the entire oral health team and recognizes each oral health professional's accountability for safe patient care. This allows each oral health professional autonomy to decline care when they do not have the necessary knowledge, skills, and ability. This addresses power dynamics in working relationships.
Applicability Across Roles and Settings	Some questions were raised about how the standards apply across practice contexts, including public health, mobile clinics, and rural settings. Concerns also included the need for clearer definitions (e.g., "qualified professional") and how the standards would reflect different scopes of practice.	We designed the Professional Standards to be broad and principle-based, allowing for flexibility across various roles and contexts. We have clarified key terms to support consistent understanding across the oral health team.
Cultural Safety, Equity, and Inclusion	Cultural safety was widely recognized as essential, but there were differing views	We have included a dedicated principle on

	<p>about how it should be addressed. Some questioned its relevance, while others strongly supported its inclusion and called for expanded guidance, especially for working with Indigenous communities and other equity-deserving groups.</p>	<p>cultural awareness, equity and inclusion, and have embedded these considerations throughout the Professional Standards. As a health regulator with the public interest at heart, we are committed to addressing discrimination and health inequities across BC's oral health sector.</p>
<p>Communication, Consent, and Accessibility</p>	<p>Some feedback highlighted a need for clarity around valid consent, particularly regarding language accessibility and ensuring patients fully understand what they're agreeing to. Participants also emphasized the need for formats that are accessible to people with disabilities, limited English proficiency, and other accessibility needs.</p>	<p>We have emphasized clear communication and patient understanding as integral to providing patient care. The Professional Standards are written broadly to support flexibility and adaptation in diverse patient care situations.</p> <p>We are also committed to supporting accessible communication tools.</p>
<p>Public Awareness and Confidence</p>	<p>Members of the public emphasized the importance of knowing what to expect from their oral health providers. They valued clear, simple language, and expressed a desire for visible, practical</p>	<p>At the core of the Professional Standards is the interest of patients and the public, including respecting the patient's right for autonomy and to</p>

	tools to help them advocate for their care and raise concerns if needed.	<p>advocate for themselves. Written in plain language, they include patient outcomes so individuals can understand what to expect from their oral health team.</p> <p>We will aim to share the Professional Standards in user-friendly formats to support patient/public understanding and enhance transparency.</p>
Professional Integrity and Conflicts of Interest	Some participants commented that financial incentives or business pressures in oral health could compromise professional judgement. They called for clearer guidance on integrity, and how to manage patient expectations alongside professional standards.	<p>As outlined in the Professional Standards, oral health professionals must place the interests of patients above all other influences, including financial and organizational pressures.</p> <p>Integrity is embedded throughout the Professional Standards, and we continue to reinforce its role in safe, ethical care.</p>

Next steps

BCCOHP thanks all those who contributed feedback throughout this consultation process. The feedback received reflected a range of perspectives and provided valuable insights that helped frame and inform our approach to development of the *Professional Standards for the Oral Health Team*.

The *Professional Standards for the Oral Health Team* will come into effect on **June 30, 2025**.

In the coming months, BCCOHP will:

- Share the Professional Standards content in a variety of formats for different audiences
- Continue to engage with the oral health team and the public to support implementation and promote safe, ethical, patient-centered care across BC.

The *Professional Standards for the Oral Health Team* is a living document that will continue to evolve over time. Future updates may be informed by feedback gathered through an ongoing, systematic review process.

For more information, visit www.oralhealthbc.ca.