

Setting professional goals

Guidance for oral health professionals

Purpose

Setting professional goals is an important part of maintaining safe, ethical and responsible care. As part of the Quality Assurance program, oral health professionals are asked to reflect on their practice and identify areas where they would like to learn, improve or grow.

This document provides guidance on what a strong professional goal can look like and offers examples of goal-setting approaches that may help you structure your goals.

You may choose the approach that works best for you, as long as your goal supports your professional development and aligns with BCCOHP standards.

What makes a helpful professional goal?

A professional goal does not need to be complicated. A helpful goal simply identifies an area of your practice where you would like to learn, improve or strengthen your skills.

Strong professional goals often:

- Relate to **your role, responsibilities and practice setting**
- Support **safe, ethical and responsible care**
- Help you **maintain or improve your professional knowledge, skills or judgment**
- Include a **clear action or plan** for improvement
- Can be **reflected on or evaluated over time**

Your goal should feel relevant to your own experiences in practice. It may relate to a situation you encountered, feedback you received, something you would like to understand better or an area where you want to feel more confident.

Professional goals should not focus only on clinical procedures. They can relate to many aspects of professional practice, including communication, teamwork, documentation, leadership, cultural safety or improving practice systems.

Mailing Address

110 - 1765 8th Ave W
Vancouver, BC V6J 5C6

Office Locations

Vancouver
Victoria

Phone: 672.202.0448
Toll free: 1.888.202.0448
info@oralhealthbc.ca
www.oralhealthbc.ca

Choosing a goal-setting approach

Many people find it helpful to use a goal-setting framework to organize their thinking. Below are several approaches that can support professional development:

- GROW model
- Narrative / reflective practice model
- SMART/SMARTER goals
- WOOP model
- Golden circle approach

You are not required to use any specific framework. These are simply tools that may help you structure your goal.

GROW model

The **GROW model** helps structure reflective thinking.

G	R	O	W
GOAL	REALITY	OPTIONS	WILL
What would you like to improve in your practice?	What is your current situation?	What actions could help you improve?	What will you do and when?

Example

Goal: Ensure comprehensive documentation meeting BCCOHP standards for recordkeeping.

Reality: Recent chart reviews have shown gaps in documentation impacting patient safety and continuity of care.

Options:

- Review the BCCOHP's recordkeeping practice resource
- Create checklist to ensure records are comprehensive and meeting BCCOHP's standards for recordkeeping
- Review five patient records every month for the next three months

Will: Create a documentation checklist after reviewing BCCOHP's recordkeeping practice resource and review five patient records a month for the next three months.

Narrative / reflective practice model

Some professionals prefer a reflective approach, where goals emerge from experiences in practice.

Reflective goals often begin with thinking about a situation in practice and identifying opportunities for improvement.



Examples

“Over the past year I have noticed that chart reviews have shown gaps in documentation. Reflecting on this, I realize this is impacting patients' continuity of care. To improve my documentation, I plan to review the BCCOHP's recordkeeping practice resource, create a checklist to ensure records are comprehensive and meeting BCCOHP's standards and review five patient records every month for the next three months.”

SMART/SMARTER goals

SMART goals are one of the most widely used goal-setting methods.

This approach works well because it creates clear and practical goals.

S	M	A	R	T
SPECIFIC	MEASUREABLE	ATTAINABLE	RELEVANT	TIME-BASED
Clearly describe what you want to improve	Progress can be observed or evaluated	Realistic within your context	Connected to your professional practice	Includes a time-frame

SMARTER goals add two additional steps:

- **Evaluate** progress
- **Re-evaluate** and adjust your approach

Example

Goal: *By March 31, I will review BCCOHP’s recordkeeping practice resource, create a checklist to ensure records are comprehensive and meet BCCOHP’s standards, and review five patient records every month for the next three months.*

WOOP method

The **WOOP method** is another simple tool that can help you think through a professional goal and identify possible challenges.

W	O	O	P
WISH	OUTCOME	OBSTACLE	PLAN
What would you like to improve in your practice.	What positive impact would achieving this goal have?	What challenges might make this difficult?	What steps will you take to address those challenges?

Thinking about obstacles in advance can help you create a more realistic plan for achieving your goal.

Example

Wish: *I want to ensure my documentation is comprehensive and is meeting BCCOHP standards for recordkeeping.*

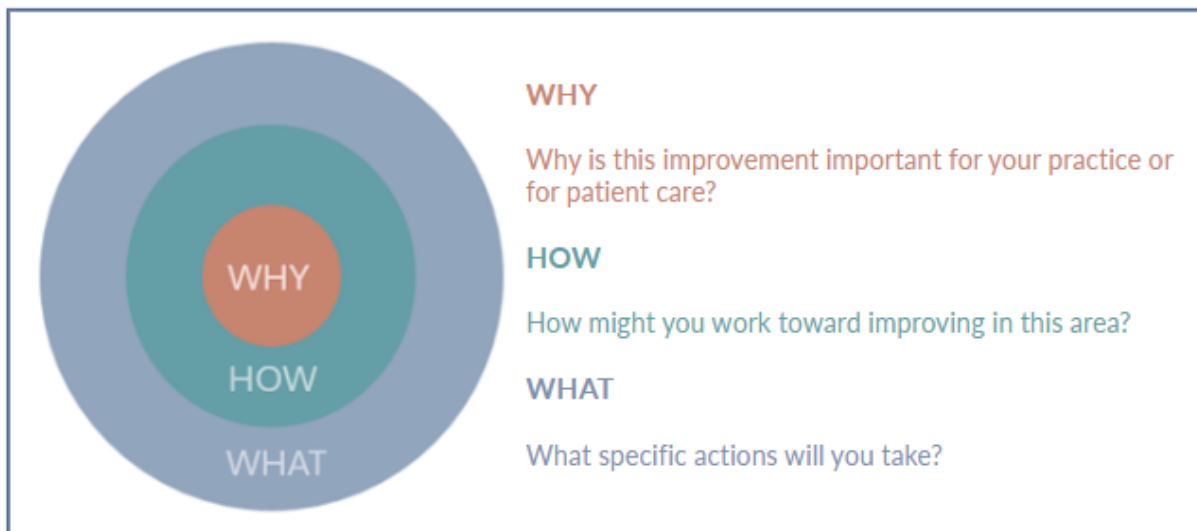
Outcome: *This will ensure patient safety and continuity of care.*

Obstacles: *There have been changes to BCCOHP standards for recordkeeping and I am not sure if my documentation is comprehensive and meeting these standards.*

Plan: *I will review BCCOHP's recordkeeping practice resource, create a checklist to ensure records are comprehensive and meet BCCOHP's standards and review five patient records every month for the next three months.*

Golden circle approach

The **golden circle** approach begins by identifying the purpose behind a professional goal. It focuses on three questions:



This approach can be helpful for identifying the motivation and purpose behind a goal. It is most effective when combined with a structured goal-setting approach (such as SMART) to ensure the goal includes clear actions and timelines.

Example

Why: *Comprehensive documentation supports patient safety, continuity of care, and adherence to standards.*

How: *Strengthen my understanding and consistent application of BCCOHP’s recordkeeping requirements.*

What: *I will review BCCOHP’s recordkeeping practice resource, create a checklist to ensure records are comprehensive and meet BCCOHP’s standards and review five patient records every month for the next three months.*

Flexibility in goal setting

There is no single “correct” format for a professional goal.

Oral health professionals may choose the structure that best supports their learning and reflection. What matters most is that the goal helps you improve or maintain safe, ethical and competent practice.

Examples: strengthening professional goals

Sometimes the first idea that comes to mind when setting a goal is broad or general. This is normal. Looking at the various models, goals often begin by naming why learning in this area matters or what you hope will improve in your practice and patient care. With a little more detail, these goals can become clearer and easier to work toward.

The examples below illustrate how a general goal can be developed into a more specific professional goal.

Initial goal idea	Example of a developed goal
Improve my documentation.	<i>Review my documentation practices and implement a checklist to help ensure patient records are complete, accurate and up to date over the next three months.</i>
Improve communication with patients.	<i>Complete a course on trauma-informed communication and begin using plain-language explanations when discussing treatment options with patients.</i>

Learn more about infection prevention and control.

Review current infection prevention and control guidance and discuss any needed updates to clinic protocols with my team before the end of the year.

Improve teamwork in my workplace.

Participate in quarterly case discussions with colleagues to strengthen collaboration and improve care coordination.

Improve my cultural awareness.

Complete an Indigenous cultural safety learning module and reflect on ways to incorporate culturally respectful communication into patient interactions.

Final Thoughts

Professional goal setting is an opportunity to pause, reflect and identify areas where you would like to grow in your practice.

Thoughtful goals can support lifelong learning, strengthen professional confidence and ultimately contribute to high-quality care for patients and communities.