



## DENTAL ASSISTING ACROSS CANADA

*An overview of the organization of the profession  
in each region of Canada*



CDAA Research Series Papers  
(updated as of August 2017)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Dental Assisting Across Canada</b>	<b>3</b>
Introduction	3
Who governs the profession in Canada?	4
<b>A view from across the country</b>	<b>5</b>
British Columbia	5
Alberta	6
Saskatchewan	8
Manitoba	9
Ontario	10
Québec	11
New Brunswick	12
Prince Edward Island	13
Nova Scotia	14
Newfoundland and Labrador	15
The Territories	16
Canadian Forces Dental Services	16
Acknowledgments	17
Dental Assisting Across Canada	2

# DENTAL ASSISTING ACROSS CANADA

*An overview of the organization of the profession in each region of Canada*

*A profile of the profession: **Summer 2017***

## Introduction

Excluding the province of Québec, professional dental assistants may be required to be registered, certified and/or licensed in order to provide oral health care within the dental team. The scope of practice and skills of a dental assistant vary between provincial jurisdictions. Dental assistants may work with dentists, hygienists and dental therapists autonomously, and in a four-handed dentistry environment during a patient examination and/or treatment. Typical duties of a qualified dental assistant may include: taking x-rays, impressions and bite registrations, apply and remove rubber dams, place and remove matrix bands and wedges, apply cavity bases and liners, polish teeth and provide fluoride applications, provide dietary counseling, oral hygiene instruction, post operative instruction, place topical anesthetic, perform coronal whitening, apply pit and fissure sealants and apply desensitizing agents. Dental assistants who receive additional training in direct patient care may also perform the following: remove sutures, fabricate/place/remove temporary crowns and temporary restorations, place a gingival retraction cord, perform restricted scaling, and provide other restorative, orthodontic and preventive services. The dental assistant is responsible for ensuring the process and practice of infection control is performed to accepted professional standards. Dental assistants may also be educators, administrators, clinical technicians, treatment coordinators, receptionists, office managers and sales representatives.

The practice of these skills and others dental assistants may undertake in their respective jurisdictions is regulated by a variety of governing bodies.

Dental assistants are highly trained individuals committed to the oral health of Canadians.



This paper is a brief overview of how the profession of dental assisting is organized in Canada and how the profession in each jurisdiction is linked/interacts to the Canadian Dental Assistants' Association.

## Who governs the profession in Canada?

As with other oral health professions, the governance of dental assisting falls under the provincial review of regulators. In addition, all regulated provincial jurisdictions in Canada recognize the National Dental Assisting Examining Board to develop and manage a common exam process for individuals entering the profession. The Canadian Dental Assistants Association is the national association for the profession whose membership is comprised of provincial and military dental assisting organizations who work collaboratively to advance the interests of dental assisting in Canada.

Overall, there are 6 different models under which dental assistants in Canada find their profession governed; within their province.

1. The profession of dental assisting is regulated by the profession itself under provincial statute. The provincial body regulating dental assistants has 100% of dental assistants amongst its membership.
2. The profession of dental assisting is regulated by an external body, a dental college. The provincial body regulating dental assistants has 100% of dental assistants amongst its membership. As well, there is a dental assisting association offering member services to dental assistants. Membership in these professional associations can be either voluntary or mandatory depending on the province. In some instances, the total provincial population of dental assistants may not be completely represented by the provincial dental assisting association.
3. The profession is regulated by an external body, a dental college, but there is no provincial dental assisting association or organization in the province.
4. There is a dental assisting association which delivers member services but there is no statute that regulates the profession. Instead, the association acts as the certifying body for dental assistants. Because the profession is not regulated, not all dental assistants are members of the association nor are they all certified. Under this scenario, dentists may engage dental assistants into their profession without any formal training.
5. There is a provincial dental assisting association offering member services but there is no statute that regulates the profession. Under this scenario, dentists' may engage dental assistants into their profession without any formal training.
6. There is no dental assisting organization nor is there any formal regulation of the profession. Under this scenario, dentists may engage dental assistants into their profession without any formal training.

# A VIEW FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY

## British Columbia



Dental assisting in British Columbia (BC) is regulated by an external body. In British Columbia, the College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia (CDSBC) is responsible for the registration, continuing competency, and discipline of “certified dental assistants”, dental therapists, and dentists. Dental Hygienists, however, are regulated by their own regulatory body in BC.

For the profession, British Columbia falls into the category of having a dental assisting association offering member services to dental assistants. However, membership in this association is voluntary and not tied to the regulatory body. The membership association for dental assistants in BC is the Certified Dental Assistants of British Columbia (CDABC). In BC, the total population of dental assistants is not completely represented by the provincial dental assisting association. Not all dental assistants are even regulated, as unregulated practice of dental assisting is not illegal in BC. An estimated 6000 dental assistants are regulated or “certified” by CDSBC. The representative association membership in CDABC is estimated at less than 1000.

The regulatory college (CDSBC) recommends that in order to practice “certified” dental assisting in British Columbia, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a diploma from an approved school and present a National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. Dental assistants voluntarily renew/register each year with the College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia. However, malpractice insurance is not required for dental assistants with CDSBC.

Dental assistants in BC are not represented nationally through a membership in the Canadian Dental Assistants’ Association.

### *Contacts*

College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia Jerome Marburg - Registrar and CEO 500 - 1765 West 8 <sup>th</sup> Avenue Vancouver, BC V6J 5C6 (604) 736---3621	Certified Dental Assistants of British Columbia 102-211 Columbia Street Vancouver, BC V6A 2R5 (604) 714---1766 / 1-800-579-4440 info@cdabc.org
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## Alberta



Alberta fits into the category of being a self-regulating jurisdiction for the profession of dental assisting. In Alberta, it is the College of Alberta Dental Assistants (CADA) that acts as the regulating and disciplining body for the profession. Under the *Alberta Health Professions Act* statute, CADA's function is protection of the public. This is achieved through entry to practice requirements, continuing competence, standards of practice and dental assisting program approval.

In order to practice dental assisting in the province of Alberta, a dental assistant must provide proof of successful completion of recognized dental assisting education and hold the National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. The College of Alberta Dental Assistants includes malpractice insurance coverage for members in their registration fees.

Independent of the College, the Association of Alberta Dental Assistants was incorporated in 2012 as the provincial organization advocating for and representing the interests of Registered Dental Assistants in Alberta. Members are those Registered Dental Assistants in good standing who choose to voluntarily join as local members of the Society Partners of the AADA.

As AADA is an Organizational Member of CDAA, Registered Dental Assistants in the province who voluntarily choose to affiliate with a local association that is a Society Partner of the provincial association, are represented on national issues by the Canadian Dental Assistants Association.

There are approximately 5500 registered dental assistants in Alberta.

### *Contacts*

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## Saskatchewan



Saskatchewan fits into the category of being a self-regulating jurisdiction for the profession of dental assisting. The Saskatchewan Dental Assistants' Association (SDAA) provides public protection through regulation, participates in oral health initiatives and advocates for the health and safety of dental assistants. As part of this mandate, SDAA also acts where required, as a disciplinary body for dental assistants in Saskatchewan.

In order to practice dental assisting in the province of Saskatchewan, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a diploma from an approved school and present a National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. Registration and annual licensure with the Saskatchewan Dental Assistants' Association (SDAA) is mandatory.

In order to practice dental assisting in Saskatchewan, malpractice insurance is mandated by the provincial *Dental Disciplines Act*. The SDAA purchases a group policy on behalf of all members holding a practice licence.

In 2017, there are approximately 1400 dental assistants holding active status in Saskatchewan. Members holding a licence to practice are required to obtain 15 hours of professional development on a yearly basis. CPR is mandatory every three years.

Dental assistants in Saskatchewan are not represented nationally through a membership in the Canadian Dental Assistants' Association.

### *Contacts*

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## Manitoba



Dental assisting in the province of Manitoba is regulated by an external body. In this province, the Manitoba Dental Association regulates and disciplines dental assistants and dentists. Dental Hygienists in Manitoba have their own regulatory body, the College of Dental Hygienists of Manitoba. The Manitoba Dental Association acts both as a regulatory body for both professions and as the member services organization for dentists. In order to practice dental assisting in the province of Manitoba, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a certificate from an approved school and present a National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. While all dental assistants in Manitoba are required to register with the Manitoba Dental Association as licensed practitioners, some dentists do continue to hire non-certified assistants.

Under the arrangement dental assistants have with the Manitoba Dental Association, regulatory fees are collected from dental assistants and from these fees, a membership transfer grant is forwarded to the membership services association for dental assistants, the Manitoba Dental Assistants Association (MDAA). As a result, MDAA's membership does comprise the majority of dental assistants in the province. MDAA's membership is estimated at 1275 dental assistants.

The Manitoba Dental Assistants Association is an Organizational Member of the Canadian Dental Assistants Association (CDAA). As a result, Manitoba dental assistants are represented nationally through the CDAA.

Malpractice insurance in Manitoba is required of dental assistants in order to practice. The Manitoba Dental Association collects insurance premiums from dental assistants and remits them to CDAA's insurance broker.

### *Contacts*

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## Ontario



Dental assisting remains an unregulated profession in Ontario with no official legal standing. As a result, there is no governing body that regulates or disciplines dental assistants. The Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario (the regulating body for dentists) does recognize the National Dental Assisting Written Exam and does encourage the dentists it regulates to hire trained dental assistants. While many dental assistants are trained in their profession, there are no requirements upon dentists to hire qualified assistants.

The Ontario Dental Assistants Association (ODAA) is the certifying body and professional membership association for dental assistants. Membership in this association is voluntary. It is estimated that there are as many as 15,000 dental assistants in Ontario. ODAA's membership stands at approximately 7,000.

Dental assistants in Ontario are not represented nationally through a membership in the Canadian Dental Assistants Association. Malpractice insurance in Ontario is not required.

### *Contacts*

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## Québec



The practice of dental assisting remains unregulated in Québec and is not recognized as a profession under the provincial Professional Code; as a result, there is no governing body that regulates or disciplines dental assistants. L'Office des Professions (OPQ), the provincial body charged with establishing professional orders, has failed to recognize dental assisting as a profession despite the recommendations of the Bernier Committee which was convened by the OPQ to examine the situation of dental assistants. The Bernier Report of March 2013 again recommended regulation of the profession of dental assisting yet action was not taken.

Dental assisting training in Québec is unique in that it is provided through school boards in a 13-month program certified by the Ministry of Education. Many dental assistants are trained in their profession but there are no requirements upon dentists to hire qualified assistants. Graduates with a diploma from Québec's Ministry of Education have access to the National Dental Assisting Examining Board (NDAEB) Written exam should they wish to practice in other provinces.

The Association des assistant(e)s dentaires du Québec (AADQ) is the professional membership association for dental assistants and membership is voluntary. AADQ's membership stands at about 135 and growing. It is estimated that there are between 5,000 to 6,000 dental assistants practicing in Québec. AADQ is an Organizational Member of Canadian Dental Assistants' Association (CDAA) and by extension, dental assistants who are a member of AADQ have national representation through the Canadian Dental Assistants' Association.

Dental assistants in Québec have been informed that their dentist's malpractice insurance may not completely cover fees incurred in proceedings in case of error, negligence or acts of omission. AADQ has recently included malpractice insurance premiums into their membership fees and strongly suggest dental assistants protect themselves against malpractice by taking advantage of the insurance offered through its program.

### *Contacts*

Association des assistant(e)s dentaires du Québec  
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## New Brunswick



Dental Assisting in the province of New Brunswick is a regulated profession by an external body. In this province, the New Brunswick Dental Society (NBDS) is the regulatory body for dental assistants. NBDS regulates the practice of dentists and dental assistants. In order to practice dental assisting in the province of New Brunswick, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a diploma from an accredited program and present a National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. In addition, proof of regular membership in the New Brunswick Dental Assistants Association is required in order for a dental assistant to be licensed.

The NBDAA is the membership body for dental assistants in the province. There are an estimated 600 members in the province all falling under the regulation of NBDS. The New Brunswick Dental Assistants Association is an Organizational Member of the Canadian Dental Assistants' Association (CDAA) and by extension, dental assistants in New Brunswick have national representation through the Canadian Dental Assistants Association.

Malpractice insurance in New Brunswick is included with the regular membership fee of the NBDAA.

### *Contacts*

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## Prince Edward Island



Dental assisting in the province of Prince Edward Island is a regulated profession by an external body in PEI, responsibility for the regulation and discipline of dental assistants, dentists, and dental hygienists falls to the Dental Council of Prince Edward Island (DCPEI). The Dental Council operates under the supervision of the Dental Association of Prince Edward Island.

In order to practice dental assisting in the province of Prince Edward Island, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a diploma from an approved school and present a National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. An individual must also register with the PEI Dental Council. However, there are no requirements for continuing education and there is no provincial membership association for dental assistants. Because there is no provincial organization for the profession, dental assistants in the province do not currently have national representation through the Canadian Dental Assistants Association.

Malpractice insurance in Prince Edward Island is not required. There are an estimated 180 dental assistants in Prince Edward Island.

### *Contacts*

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## Nova Scotia



Dental Assisting in Nova Scotia is a regulated profession by an external body - the Provincial Dental Board of Nova Scotia (PDBNS). PDBNS is a legislated body mandated to protect the general public interests in matters related to the delivery of dental care.

This mandate is fulfilled by assuring that only properly trained, qualified and licensed personnel render dental treatment and that the treatment is of a reasonable standard. PDBNS governs the conduct of both dentists and dental assistants. There are 15 members of the Board with two seats reserved for registered dental assistants – one appointed by the Nova Scotia Dental Assistants Association (NSDAA) and one appointed by government. Dental hygienists in Nova Scotia have their own regulating college.

In order to obtain your license to practice dental assisting in the province of Nova Scotia, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a diploma from an approved school and present a National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. The NSDAA is the membership association for dental assistants in the province. NSDAA is an Organizational Member of the Canadian Dental Assistants Association (CDA) and by virtue of this association, dental assistants in the province are represented on national issues by the CDA. The regulatory requirements of Nova Scotia tie dental assistants to membership in NSDAA and by extension, representation from CDA. Malpractice insurance in Nova Scotia is not required of dental assistants although many do purchase their own through CDA.

There are an estimated 760 licensed dental assistants in Nova Scotia all falling under the regulation of the PDBNS.

### *Contacts*

Provincial Dental Board of Nova Scotia Dr. Martin Gillis, Registrar Suite 103 - 210 Waterfront Drive Bedford, Nova Scotia B4A 0H3 (902) 420-0083 (866) 326-1046	Nova Scotia Dental Assistants Association Lynda Foran, Executive Director P.O Box 9142, Station A Halifax, Nova Scotia B3K 5M8 (902) 405-1122 Fax: (902) 405-1133 <a href="mailto:nsdaa@eastlink.ca">nsdaa@eastlink.ca</a>
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## Newfoundland and Labrador



Dental assisting in Newfoundland and Labrador is a regulated profession by an external body. In this province, it is the Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Board (NLDB) that regulates and disciplines dental assistants. This body acts on behalf of the public to maintain access to safe dental service and to ensure that persons provided with the right to provide such service are properly trained and continue to maintain a satisfactory level of competence appropriate to their individual license. The NLDB governs the practice of dentistry, dental hygienists, dental assistants and dental technicians. Dental assistants have one representative on the Board of Directors of NLDB.

In order to practice dental assisting in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, a dental assistant must provide a copy of a diploma from an approved school and present a National Dental Assisting Examining Board certificate. The Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Assistants Association (NLDAA) is the provincial membership association for dental assistants offering membership services. NLDAA is an Organizational Member of the Canadian Dental Assistants Association (CDAA) and by virtue of this association, dental assistants in the province are represented on national issues by the CDAA. Dental assistants in Newfoundland and Labrador have recently been required to carry malpractice insurance. This insurance is now added onto their registration fees which NLDB collects and remits to CDAA's malpractice insurance provider.

There are an estimated 150 Level II dental assistants in the province which fall under the regulation of the NLDB. Beyond Level II assistants, Newfoundland and Labrador has a small number of Level I assistants who practice with a much a more limited scope of practice. Level I assistants are not regulated by the NLDB and are not members of NLDAA.

### *Contacts*

Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Board Dr. Paul O'Brien, Registrar Suite 204 49-55 Elizabeth Avenue St. John's, Newfoundland A1A 1W9 (709) 579-2391	Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Assistants Association Tonya Mugford, President PO Box 28023 Avalon Mall St. John's, Newfoundland A1B 4J8 <a href="mailto:nldentalassistants@gmail.com">nldentalassistants@gmail.com</a>
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## The Territories *(last updated in 2013)*



In Canada's north, there are no dental assisting organizations nor are there any processes for the formal regulation of the profession. Under this scenario, dentists may engage dental assistants into their practice without any formal training. However, many dental assistants in Canada's North are registered as members in one of Canada's western provincial jurisdictions.

As there are no dental assisting organizations in the territories of Canada, dental assistants in the North are not represented at the national level. The territorial governments act as the registrar for dentists and hygienists.

## Royal Canadian Dental Corps



Military Dental assistants in the Canadian Armed Forces are referred to as Dental Technicians. The Royal Canadian Dental Corps (RCDC) is an Organizational Member of the Canadian Dental Assistants Association. The RCDC has an estimated 300 military and civilian dental assistants spread amongst the 26 Dental Detachments of 1 Dental Unit, 1, 2 & 5 Field Ambulances, 1 Canadian Field Hospital, the Canadian Forces Health Services School, the Directorate and on deployment. Dental Assistants wishing to perform their trade in the forces must be trained at an accredited level two school as there is no military training institute for the profession. At this time, there is no requirement for dental technicians to be registered with a regulatory body in Canada.

## *Contacts*

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