

The Canadian Dental Assistants' Association (CDAА) is the national professional association for dental assistants (DAs) in Canada. For the past 77 years, the goal of the CDAА is to bring forward the perspective of DAs on the issues facing Canada's health workforce, and those issues impacting the provision of oral healthcare to Canadians.

CDAА is always striving to improve the dental assisting profession. We work with industry partners, like the hygiene and dental associations to address common issues. We also engage with Government and health sector stakeholders. By raising awareness, increasing the profession's visibility, and advocating for the perspectives of dental assistants to be considered when developing policies and initiatives related to health, labor, and the care economy, the CDAА works tirelessly to improve the working conditions of dental assistants and improve patient care.

Over the past decade, the CDAА has made great strides in ensuring the profession of dental assisting is recognized as a skilled profession. In 2021, following numerous submissions to government by the CDAА, the Government of Canada's National Occupational Classification (NOC) was revised to describe and categorize the skillset of dental assistants more precisely. CDAА is pleased to see that for the first time in history, our efforts have resulted in the profession of dental assisting being properly categorized and recognized **as a skilled profession** in the NOC database.

Given that DAs in most regions across the country are performing direct hands-on patient care and tasks critical to patient health and safety, prudence suggests policymakers would want consistent provincial regulation of the profession to maintain a record of DAs who provide such services and to ensure that the standard of care is being met. Greater awareness in recognizing the critical role DAs play as defenders of public health is a fundamental step in helping provincial/territorial governments understand that the self-regulation, formal education, licensing, and/or credentialing of DAs is necessary. Regulatory consistency ensures mobility between regions across the country and ensures public protection is safeguarded regardless of where an individual accesses oral healthcare provided by dental assisting practitioners.

The CDAА is also focused on profession-specific research that informs policy development and workplace improvements. In 2018, the CDAА examined the working environments of dental assistants which resulted in the establishment of an inter-professional working group that developed anti-bullying and effective communication resources to support all members of the oral health team and improve the working environment in a dental office. In 2019, the CDAА conducted a study that examined the factors, realities, and experiences of dental assistants across Canada (FREEDAC) in relation to their employment. The findings of this FREEDAC study, based on direct input from dental assistants, has translated into an inter-professional collaboration with the Canadian Dental Association that will work to address the long-standing recruitment and retention issues facing the profession. Later this year in 2022, the CDAА will conduct a national job market survey to evaluate the compensation and benefit issues facing the dental assisting workforce.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought to light the vast gaps in services, lack of oversight, and the staff shortages long-term care facilities have been navigating for many years. Over the past several months, the CDAА has been engaged in providing feedback from the dental assisting perspective on the proposed national standards for long-term care facilities. It is the CDAА's position that DAs are uniquely trained to provide support to residents of long-term care facilities to address their oral health care needs. Government employment of DAs in long-term care facilities would be a logical and cost-effective means of monitoring residents' oral health care needs, ensuring proper daily oral care, and providing an assessment by a trained oral health professional for those conditions that would require referral to a dentist, dental hygienist, or denturist. It is the CDAА's position that DAs play a key role in addressing these gaps in oral health care in long-term care facilities.

The CDAА views the issues facing the dental assisting profession and the oral health sector's response to the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to address long-standing workplace environment issues through inter-professional collaboration. Working together across not only the oral health sector, but across the health care sector writ-large, is critical to addressing the issues facing Canada's health work force. For this reason, the CDAА is pleased to be a member of the Organization for Health Action (HEAL) where our Association can collaborate, network, and develop solutions to the issues facing the sector.

**What does this all mean for dental assistants in practical terms? When a dental assistant is a member of their provincial association, and that provincial association is also a member of the CDAА, you contribute to a group that is working together toward common professional goals, positively impacting the working experience of dental assistants, and improving patient care for all Canadians.**

Without the strong support of provincial associations, like the Association of Alberta Dental Assistants, the CDAА would not be able to work and advocate on your behalf. We are grateful for each individual dental assistant who supports their local, provincial and national association and in doing so, strengthens the profession of dental assisting.

**Stephanie Mullen-Kavanagh, Executive Director CDAА**



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