



# **Guidelines for Dental Hygienists in Alberta**

## **Fees and Billing**

August 2023



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The Alberta College of Dental Hygienists (the College) provides guidelines to support dental hygienists in understanding and meeting their legislated requirements, Standards of Practice, and Code of Ethics. Guidelines establish professionally accepted means by which dental hygienists can achieve compliance with the College's standards.

Failing to comply with a guideline may be considered unprofessional conduct if the dental hygienist does not achieve compliance with the Standards of Practice, or if the departure from the guideline compromises the quality of dental hygiene services or the integrity and/or credibility of the dental hygiene profession.

A dental hygienist may only depart from a guideline if they can demonstrate their chosen conduct:

- Achieves compliance with the Standards of Practice;
- Maintains the safety, effectiveness, or appropriateness of care required by the Standards of Practice; and
- Upholds the integrity of the dental hygiene profession.

While these guidelines reflect the requirements for dental hygienists at the time of development, these requirements may change from time to time. Dental hygienists remain responsible for ensuring their practice meets current legislated requirements, the Standards of Practice, and the Code of Ethics.



## Dental Hygienists' Responsibilities

All dental hygienists are responsible for the billing practices relating to the dental hygiene services they provide to patients. Approach fee and billing-related decisions by applying the Standards of Practice and ethical principles from the Code of Ethics.

### Code of Ethics

- Principle 1: Beneficence and Non-Maleficence
  - The dental hygienist provides dental hygiene services that are intended to promote wellness (Responsibility 1.1).
  - The dental hygienist puts the needs, values, interests, and goals of the patient first (Responsibility 1.3).
- Principle 2: Veracity and Integrity
  - The dental hygienist provides truthful, accurate, and complete information that does not mislead or misinform the recipient (Responsibility 2.1).
  - The dental hygienist denounces and never knowingly participates in, condones, or associates with dishonesty, fraud, misappropriation, or misrepresentation (Responsibility 2.3).

### Informed Consent Standard of Practice

- The dental hygienist must ensure the patient receives a proper explanation that includes but is not limited to: common risks, significant risks, side effects, and costs (Performance Expectation 3(c)(iii)).

### Patient-Centred Care Standard of Practice

- The dental hygienist must plan dental hygiene services in partnership with the patient, prioritizing the patient's interests, needs, goals, and values (Performance Expectation 4).

### Conflicts of Interest Standard of Practice

- The dental hygienist identifies and manages potential, perceived, or real conflicts of interest to protect the patient's best interests and the dental hygienist's professional integrity.



## Incorporating Ethical Principles into Billing Practices

Ethical billing requires you to incorporate principles from the Code of Ethics into your billing practices, including the principles for veracity, integrity, beneficence and non-maleficence.

Provide truthful, accurate, and complete billing information in your invoices to incorporate veracity and integrity into your billing practices.

- Invoice information should not mislead or misinform the invoice's recipient (e.g., the patient, their insurance company, etc.).
- You must not:
  - Falsely identify the cost of a service (i.e., misrepresent fees);
  - Overbill or wrongly take money from a patient for your own use (i.e., misappropriate funds);
  - Dishonestly or fraudulently bill (e.g., incorrectly bill for a unit of scaling when the service performed was polishing).

Refrain from billing for services that are unnecessary or unbeneficial to your patient (e.g., polishing or "routine" radiographs without clinical justification) to incorporate beneficence and non-maleficence into your billing practice.

- You should deliver and bill for services that are clinically appropriate for the patient and consistent with the patient's informed consent.

It is reasonable for patients to expect a professional to be transparent with their billing practices and have systems in place to ensure that billing is accurate. Policies and processes can support ethical billing (e.g., auditing charts for billing errors including discrepancies between services provided to and received by the patient, identifying the staff members involved in billing for a patient).

- You are responsible for the accuracy of billing and how your services are documented, even when aspects of your billing (e.g., collection of fees, submission of claims to insurance companies, disclosing of costs for informed consent) are managed or communicated by another person.

Establishing and referring to a fee schedule increases billing transparency. It is unethical to submit a claim to an insurance company for a fee that is different from the practice's fee schedule.

- You may provide a discount on your services, but the discount must be applied and stated clearly on the invoice or receipt submitted with the insurance claim (i.e., the invoice should state the total fee for service and the discount applied).
- An example of inappropriate billing is to submit a claim to an insurance company for a service fee if you intend to write off the patient's portion.
  - You have no expectation of receiving the full fee that was submitted to the insurance company since you will be writing off a portion of the fee.
  - The accurate representation of the fee to the patient is the amount submitted to the insurance company less what is intended to be written off. Submitting the full price to the insurance company would be fraudulent.

If you are billing to a government program that provides dental coverage to eligible individuals, you may be required to bill according to that fee schedule. This schedule



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may be different from your practice's established fee schedule ([see section below](#) for more about government programs).

If you know that someone is billing unethically, misrepresenting fees, or misappropriating funds, report that person to ensure the public's protection.

- If the person is a regulated health professional, the individual's professional regulatory body must be informed.
- If the person is not a regulated professional, the employer should be informed of their employee's conduct.
- Failing to report unethical behaviour could be considered unprofessional conduct.

Please refer to the [Code of Ethics](#) for more information about the ethical principles that inform billing. The [Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association](#) is another resource to learn more about avoiding dental benefits fraud.

## Accurate Use of Service Codes

Dental hygienists are responsible for ensuring the services they provide are accurately represented by the service code they bill the patient. You must know which service code system you are billing through and be familiar with the codes and descriptions for the services you provide. Only use service codes that reflect the service you provided to your patient to ensure the codes are used consistently and appropriately according to the system establishing the codes.

Typically, an office will bill under one of these two systems:

- [Canadian Dental Association's Uniform System of Codes and List of Services](#) where the Alberta Dental Association establishes a fee guide for the use of these service codes; or
- [Canadian Dental Hygienists Association's National List of Service Codes](#).

The lists of service codes typically define the service and provide explanations for the use of each code, including how long a unit of time is and what is included within the code.

The *Health Professions Act* prevents the College from setting professional fees, providing guidelines for professional fees, or negotiating professional fees on behalf of registrants. Because of this, questions about what service code is appropriate to bill for a particular service should be directed to the professional association that is responsible for the list of codes (e.g., Canadian Dental Association, Alberta Dental Association, Canadian Dental Hygienists Association).

## Clearly Identifying the Service and the Cost in Advertising

Dental hygienists are responsible for ensuring their advertising activities comply with the *Health Professions Act*, Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics whether they conduct the advertising themselves or a third party does so on their behalf. If you work for an employer and your employer is advertising to promote you and/or your dental hygiene services, this would be considered your advertising and the College's advertising standards would apply.



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Any fees included in your advertising should be:

- Precise to the services offered for each fee quoted;
- Descriptive of whether additional amounts will be charged in addition to the fee (e.g., taxes, disbursements);

If you choose to advertise fees, clearly identify the service and its cost so there is no confusion.

Avoid advertising that compares fees to another health professional or clinic to prevent implying superiority over the other professional and to ensure your advertising remains accurate.

- Other offices may change their fees, which would result in you advertising incorrect information.

Please see the [Advertising Standard of Practice](#) and [Guidelines](#) for more information.

## Discounts May Be Offered in Certain Circumstances

Dental hygienists may offer a percentage discount to a segment of the population if the discount:

- Is universal to that group (e.g., minors, seniors);
- Is also applied to those in the group with third-party coverage; and
- Complies with [human rights legislation](#).

Fees cannot be based on a patient's insurance coverage. For those patients whose treatment is paid for in whole or in part by a third party, dental hygienists cannot advertise or charge them a different fee than patients who pay for the treatment themselves.

- The only exception is for patients who are enrolled in [government-funded dental programs](#).

Avoid billing practices that:

- Use coupons, special offers, or time-limited offers as advertising or promotional materials.
  - It is inappropriate to advertise on discount websites.
- Offer a "Packaged Deal" that does not represent patient-centred care.
  - Each patient's care must be individualized and should not be pre-packaged.

## Informed Consent Includes Discussing Fees

Informed consent includes disclosing the cost of the service or product being offered. Ensure you adhere to the costs that are quoted during the informed consent process.

Before initiating services, patients should be informed about financial arrangements, including fee structures, missed appointments, and bill collection.

Please see the [Informed Consent Standard of Practice](#) for more information.



## Government Dental Programs Must Be Billed According to Contract Terms

Government dental programs assist the public in accessing dental hygiene services. When providing services to patients enrolled in these programs, ensure you are familiar with and adhere to the terms of the program.

- Any questions regarding a government program should be directed to the appropriate program facilitator.

Follow these links to learn more about these government dental programs:

- [Alberta Dental Service Corporation \(ADSC\)](#)
  - Alberta Seniors Benefit Program
  - Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH)
  - Alberta Adult Health Benefit
  - Alberta Child Health Benefit
- [Non-Insured Health Benefits \(NIHB\)](#)
- [Veterans Affairs Canada](#)

## Acknowledgments

ACDH acknowledges the Alberta College of Pharmacy, College of Alberta Psychologists, College of Dental Surgeons of Alberta, College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, and College of Physiotherapists of Alberta as references for content in this guideline's development.