



# NOVA SCOTIA REGULATOR OF DENTAL HYGIENE, DENTAL TECHNOLOGY, & DENTURISM

## Practice Standards: Dental Assistants — Supervision and Delegation by Dental Hygienists

**APPROVED BY NSRDHDTD BOARD: May 1, 2025**

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# Practice Standards: Dental Assistants —Supervision and Delegation by Dental Hygiene NSRDHDTD Registrants

Dental assistants are essential members of the oral health care professionals serving Nova Scotians. While dental assistants are regulated by the Nova Scotia Regulator of Dentistry and Dental Assisting (the “NSRDDA”), all oral health care professionals, including dental hygienists, dental technologists, and denturists, may work closely together with dental assistants.

These Standards provide the parameters around which this supervision and delegation may occur for dental hygienists. The dental hygienist who supervises the performance of dental services by a dental assistant must ensure this is done in compliance with the legislation, these Standards, and is within their own scope of practice, competence, including any relevant advanced practice authorizations.

## (1) Definitions for the purpose of this document

“**Board**” means the Board of the NSRDHDTD

“**dental assistant**” means a person who is currently registered and licensed as a dental assistant in Nova Scotia with the Nova Scotia Regulator of Dentistry and Dental Assisting (NSRDDA)

“**dental hygienist**” is one of the protected titles under the Profession-Specific Regulations, and means a person who is currently registered and licensed as a dental hygienist with the NSRDHDTD

“**dentist**” means a person who is currently registered and licensed as a dentist in Nova Scotia with the NSRDDA

“**individual scope of practice**” means the services for which a registrant is educated, authorized and competent to perform<sup>1</sup>;

“**intra-oral dental services**” means services performed within the oral cavity, used interchangeably with ‘intra-oral services’ or ‘intra-oral procedures’

“**OHCP**” means an oral health care professional licensed in Nova Scotia

“**Regulator**” means the Nova Scotia Regulator of Dental Hygiene, Dental Technology, and Denturism (NSRDHDTD)

“**registrant in good standing**” means a registrant who:

- holds a practising licence or a conditional licence, unless there is a condition on the licence restricting the registrant from supervising, or delegating to, a dental assistant;
- is current in their continuing competence requirements;
- is current in their practice hour requirements;
- does not owe any outstanding fees or costs to the Regulator; and
- is not subject to any licensing sanction or ongoing regulatory process that in the opinion of the Registrar impacts their ability to competently and safely supervise, or delegate to, a dental assistant.)

“**Standards**” means the NSRDHDTD *Practice Standards: Dental Assistants —Supervision and Delegation by Dental Hygiene NSRDHDTD Registrants*

“**under the supervision of a licensed dental hygienist or dentist**” means that the supervising dental hygienist or dentist is physically present within the office premises and is available to assist.

- **direct supervision:** the dentist or dental hygienist is physically present at the point-of-care (i.e., in the operatory).

- **indirect supervision:** the dentist or dental hygienist while not necessarily present at the point-of-care, is within the office premises, and, available for consultation, guidance, or assistance.

## (2) Supervision, Delegation, and Responsibility

Intra-oral dental services provided by a dental assistant must be under the supervision of a dentist or dental hygienist;

- within the scope of practice of dental assisting (see Section 4 of this Standard);
- within the individual scope of practice of the dental assistant;
- within the scope of practice of the supervising practitioner; and
- within the individual scope of practice of the supervising practitioner.

*If* a dental hygienist consents to supervise another person performing intra-oral dental services, the dental hygienist is ultimately accountable for the performance of that restricted activity. Any supervised activities will be held to the Standards of Practice of the dental hygienist.

A supervising dentist or dental hygienist shall be responsible for all services performed by a dental assistant under their supervision and the supervising dentist or dental hygienist shall be, along with the dental assistant, held accountable for the quality and delivery of those services.

If a dental assistant is delegated to take a final impression (physical or digital) for an intra-oral appliance or prosthesis, the delegating/supervising practitioner is ultimately responsible for the evaluation of the impression.

## (3) Performance Expectations of the Dental Hygienist

If the dental hygienist consents to supervise a dental assistant, the following are the performance expectations that must occur during supervision of a dental assistant. The dental hygienist must:

- 1) Consent to supervise.
- 2) Obtain the client's informed consent for the activity to be performed under supervision.
- 3) Ensure the person performing the activity is clearly identified in the client record.
- 4) Only supervise the performance of intra-oral services that they themselves are authorized and competent to perform without requiring supervision themselves.
- 5) Be responsible and accountable for the services being performed by the supervised person.
- 6) Continuously assess the knowledge, skill, and judgement of the supervised person performing the intra-oral services.
- 7) Be on-site, available to assist, and employ an appropriate level of supervision (**direct** and/or **indirect**) to maintain client safety and the provision of quality care that considers:
  - a) The competence of the supervised person;
  - b) The client care needs; and
  - c) Other factors related to the practice environment.

## (4) Scope of Practice for Dental Assisting<sup>2</sup>

4.1. The scope of practice of dental assisting is the application of specialized and evidence-based dental assisting knowledge, skills and judgement that:

- have been taught in an accredited education program<sup>3</sup>, or
- are outlined in the [\*NSRDDA's Standard of Practice for Dental Assisting\*](#).

4.2 The scope of practice of dental assisting as described in 4.1 includes the performance of any or all the following activities:

- assisting in the provision of intra-oral dental services<sup>4</sup> (which do not contravene Section 5.1 of the NSRDDA Standard noted above) and exposing radiographs while under the supervision of a dentist or dental hygienist;
- performing vital tooth whitening procedures within the guidelines outlined in Appendix A of this Document, if being delegated or supervised by a dental hygienist;
- providing oral health and hygiene instruction; and
- providing dietary counselling related to oral health.

4.3 The scope of dental assisting also includes the following activities as related to the activities and application of specialized and evidence-based dental assisting knowledge, skills and judgement:

administration	education	management
advocacy	health promotion	research
consultation	inter-professional collaboration	system development

## (5) Restriction on Services Performed by Dental Assistants

As noted in Section 6.0 of the [\*NSRDDA Standard of Practice for Dental Assistants\*](#), a dental assistant may not provide any of the following services:

- diagnosis or treatment planning;
- severing or cutting hard or soft tissue;
- prescribing or administering drugs;
- prescribing any intraoral appliance or prosthesis;
- designing any intra-oral appliance or prosthesis, except under the supervision of a dentist or dental hygienist<sup>5</sup> who is responsible for the final approval;
- placement, condensing, carving, or trimming any restorative material;
- taking an impression (other than an interocclusal impression or bite registration) with vinyl polysiloxane (VPS), polysulfide, polyether, or other elastomeric materials;
- placement or removal of bonded orthodontic appliances or try-in/cementation/removal of orthodontic bands or brackets, or the activation of orthodontic archwires<sup>6</sup>;
- the use of any rotary or mechanical device in the oral cavity, except for rubber cup or bristle brush polishing of the coronal surfaces of the teeth;
- periodontal probing;
- scaling of hard or soft deposits on teeth;
- placement of periodontal dressing;
- adjustment of nightguards/biteplanes/periodontal appliances or removable prosthesis; or
- any irreversible procedures.

## (6) Activities Performed by Non-licensed Individuals

6.1 A person who is not a licensed OHCP, and is working in an oral health care setting, may perform intra-oral suctioning with saliva ejectors or high-volume evacuators (HVEs) under the direct supervision of a dentist or dental hygienist<sup>7</sup>.

6.2 A person who is not a licensed OHCP, and is working in an oral health care setting, shall not:

- provide intra-oral dental services<sup>8</sup>, with the exception of intraoral suctioning;

- expose radiographs;
- engage in tooth whitening procedures;
- provide oral health and hygiene instruction; or
- providing dietary counselling related to oral health.

6.3 A person who is not a licensed OHCP, and is working in an oral health care setting, may perform duties which are not outlined in Section 6.2 of this Standard, but may not use the title “dental assistant”. Examples of activities a non-licensed individual may perform are operatory setup, instrument transfer, operatory disinfection, and instrument reprocessing.

6.4 A supervising dentist or dental hygienist shall be:

- responsible for all duties performed by a person who is not a licensed OHCP and is working in an oral healthcare setting under their supervision;
- Responsible for ensuring that such a person has been adequately trained for the duties being performed, either through on-site training, or through an external institution or process; and
- held accountable for the quality and performance of those duties.

6.5 A student enrolled in an accredited dental assisting education program may engage in the practice of dental assisting if the student is:

- authorized by the administrator of the dental assisting education program, and
- under the supervision of a dentist or dental hygienist<sup>9</sup>.

## (7) Appendix A – NSRDHDTD Policy on Dental Hygienists’ Delegation of Tooth Whitening Procedures to Dental Assistants

### 1.0 Preamble

The Nova Scotia Regulator of Dental Hygiene, Dental Technology, and Denturism (NSRDHDTD) and the Nova Scotia Regulator of Dentistry and Dental Assisting (NSRDDA) both consider that tooth whitening is best provided in an oral healthcare setting in the context of comprehensive care.

When tooth whitening services are performed in an oral healthcare setting, it is the dentist and/or dental hygienist who is ultimately responsible for delegating any of the tooth whitening procedures to dental assistants.

Under the [Regulations Respecting Dentistry and Dental Assisting](#) (Formal Order in Council linked), dental assistants may provide intraoral dental services under the supervision of a dentist or a dental hygienist. Various services related to tooth whitening may be delegated to dental assistants<sup>10</sup>.

When delegating to a dental assistant, a dentist or dental hygienist must ensure that the services are within the scope of practice for dental assisting and that the individual dental assistant possesses the required knowledge, skills, and judgment to deliver the services. A dentist’s or dental hygienist’s ultimate responsibility to their client is not affected by the delegation of duties.

The sections below outline the requirements for dental hygienists when delegating tooth whitening procedures to dental assistants. If a dentist is delegating tooth whitening procedures to dental assistants, they must follow the NSRDDA Policy on the Delegation of Tooth Whitening Procedures to Dental Assistants (App F in the [NSRDDA Standard of Practice for Dental Assisting](#)). When tooth whitening services are performed in an oral healthcare setting, in accordance with this policy the dental hygienist who is ultimately responsible for:

- Ensuring an appropriate examination is performed (by a dental hygienist or dentist);

- assessing the client's suitability for tooth whitening, considering their oral and general health status,
- communicating treatment options to the client,
- developing the treatment plan, including prescribing the whitening system to be used and the concentration of the whitening agent,
- obtaining informed consent for the treatment proposed,
- ensuring that all recordkeeping guidelines are met, and
- monitoring the progress of the treatment and evaluating the outcome.

These responsibilities may be fulfilled independently by a dental hygienist or collaboratively between a dentist and dental hygienist depending on the oral healthcare setting and any policies established in that setting.

## 2.0 Tray-based Whitening Systems for Home Use

Once a dental hygienist has fulfilled their obligations set out in Section 1.0, they may delegate a dental assistant to:

- take impressions,
- fabricate models and whitening trays,
- fit whitening trays,
- dispense whitening trays to clients with the tooth whitening agent and instructions for use, and
- take any photographs requested by the dental hygienist.

## 3.0 In-office External Tooth Whitening

A dental hygienist may delegate various services related to in-office external tooth whitening, including whitening which is activated or accelerated using a non-laser light source.

Once a dental hygienist has fulfilled their obligations set out in Section 1.0, they may delegate a dental assistant to:

- prepare a client for the application of the whitening agent (i.e., achieve proper isolation and soft tissue protection),
- apply the whitening agent and light<sup>11</sup> (if applicable) for the prescribed time once the dentist or dental hygienist has verified that the isolation and soft tissue protection are adequate;
- remove the whitening agent and isolation devices, and
- take any photographs requested by the dental hygienist.

## 4.0 Non-licensed Individuals Working in Oral Healthcare Settings

An individual who is not a licensed oral healthcare provider (OHCP) and who is working in an oral healthcare setting may not perform the services outlined in Sections 2.0 and 3.0 of this policy (except for taking photographs).

## 5.0 Tooth Whitening Services Performed Outside Oral Healthcare Settings

Licensed OHCPs are expected to follow all practice standards established by their regulatory body, regardless of where the services are performed. These include, but are not limited to:

- health history assessment,
- medical emergency preparedness,
- infection control,
- informed consent,
- recordkeeping,

- privacy and confidentiality,
- advertising, and
- working under supervision (as applicable).

Dental assistants are therefore not permitted to provide tooth whitening services independently, without the supervision of a dentist or dental hygienist, or in a setting where the practice standards listed above are not met.

In Canada, all tooth whitening systems (unless they contain fluoride) are considered “cosmetics” by Health Canada. The sale of such products is not restricted to healthcare providers. While tooth whitening services fall within the scope of practice of dentistry, dental hygiene, and dental assisting, tooth whitening is also considered to be in the public domain. Therefore, neither the NSRDDA nor the NSRDHDTD have regulatory authority where tooth whitening services are provided by a person who is not an OHCP in an independent business outside an oral healthcare setting.

However, both the NSRDHDTD and the NSRDDA prohibit its registrants from engaging in whitening services unless all professional standards are met, regardless of the setting.

## (8). Acknowledgements

Appreciation goes to the Nova Scotia Regulator of Dentistry and Dental Assisting (NSRDDA) for their collaboration on the development of this document.

Appreciation also goes to the following organizations whose documents were helpful in the development of this Standard: the Alberta College of Dental Hygienists, (ACDH), *Supervision of Restricted Activities* (Feb 10, 2023), the College of Alberta Dental Assistants (CADA), the College of Dental Assistants of Saskatchewan (CDASK), the Manitoba Dental Association (MDA), the National Dental Assisting Examining Board (NDAEB), the New Brunswick Dental Society (NBDS), and the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario (RCDSO).

Over time, the NSRDHDTD will work collaboratively with the NSRDDA, in consultation with interested parties, to ensure that the parameters for the supervision of dental assistants remain aligned.

## (9). Document History

First approved by the CDHNS on March 17, 2025, for circulation to registrants for consultation.

Following the consultation period, the final version was approved by the CDHNS Council on April 28, 2025, to come into effect when the CDHNS transitions to the [Regulated Health Professions Act \(RHPA\)](#).

The Initial Board for the NSRDHDTD subsequently approve this Standard, upon migration, on May 1, 2025.

Approximate date of next review: 2028

## (10) End Notes

<sup>1</sup> [NS Gov't. Regulated Health Professions Act. \(Interpretation section\).](#)

<sup>2</sup> This is in accordance with Section 8 of the [Regulations Respecting Dentistry and Dental Assisting](#)

<sup>3</sup> As per NSRDDA's definition: "An 'accredited education program' is a dental assisting program which has been accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation of Canada (CDAC)."



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<sup>4</sup> An inexhaustive list of examples of such intra-oral dental services can be found in Appendix D of the [NSRDDA Standard of Practice for Dental Assisting](#).

<sup>5</sup> The intra-oral appliance being designed by the dental assistant must be within the scope of practice of the supervising practitioner to prescribe and design.

<sup>6</sup> It is expected that by 2026, qualified dental assistants will be able to apply for orthodontic advance practice authorization through a process yet to be developed and approved by the NSRDDA Board.

<sup>7</sup> This is in accordance with Section 21(d) of the *Regulations Respecting Dentistry and Dental Assisting*.

<sup>8</sup> An inexhaustive list of examples of such intra-oral dental services can be found in Appendix D of the [NSRDDA Standard of Practice for Dental Assisting](#)

<sup>9</sup> As per Section 62(3)(a) of the [Regulated Health Professions Act](#).

<sup>10</sup> **dental assistant**” means a person who is currently registered and licensed as a dental assistant in Nova Scotia with the NSRDDA

<sup>11</sup> Dental assistants are not permitted to activate or accelerate whitening agents with a laser.