

8 November 2021

Dear practitioner,

### [Outcome from consultation on updating professional competencies and changing related scopes of practice for oral health professions](#)

The Dental Council (the Council) issued a consultation on proposed updates to the professional competencies and changes to related scopes of practice (excluding those for dental specialists) on 26 July 2021. The consultation closed on 17 September 2021.

#### Outcome

Having considered the submissions received, the Council has approved, **with effect from 8 December 2021**, the proposed scope of practice changes and the following professional competencies:

- Dentist competencies
- Oral health therapist competencies
- Dental therapist competencies
- Dental hygienist competencies
- Orthodontic auxiliary competencies
- Dental technician competencies
- Clinical dental technician competencies.

The updated competencies and scopes of practice will be gazetted shortly and are available on [our website](#).

#### Submissions received

The Council received limited submissions (total of 15) from:

- dentists (5)
- oral health therapists (2)
- dental therapists (1)
- dental technicians (1)

- professional associations (3)
- educational institutions (1)
- Māori oral health providers (1)
- regulatory authorities (1).

The Council considered and responded to the following suggestions or areas of concern from submissions:

1. The Kaiakatanga ahurea - cultural competence and Haumarutanga ahurea - cultural safety domains were overwhelmingly supported by submitters, and unanimously supported by the two Māori professional organisations who provided detailed feedback on these – Te Aō Marama and the Māori Oral Health Quality Improvement Group. The competencies have been updated to incorporate their suggestions.

The major changes relate to the Council adopting Te Tiriti and the articles of the Treaty as set out in Wai 2572 (except in the Kaiakatanga ahurea domain – reflecting practitioners' current cultural competence capabilities).

The English translation for Kupu Māori was removed from the main content in the competencies – but continues to be available in the glossary of the competency document. To support practitioners, the Microsoft Word competency documents available on our [website](#) include hover text with the English translation for the Te Reo Māori words. This feature is not available for the pdf versions, due to compatibility issues with different pdf readers.

The transition period of a year from Kaiakatanga ahurea to Haumarutanga ahurea was also approved. The Haumarutanga ahurea domain comes into effect on 1 January 2023. Practitioners are strongly encouraged to incorporate learning and experiences in this area into their professional development plans.

2. The only proposals on specific competencies where submitters disagreed related to the dentist professional competencies. Concerns were raised about:
  - the proposed replacement of the existing scope of practice definition with a list of minimum prescribed competencies. The view expressed was that the existing definition better encompasses the realities of dental practice and scope.
  - dentists not maintaining competence across the full dentistry scope of practice.
  - the existing list of scope activities not being fully represented in the proposed competencies.

The Council carefully considered these concerns but did not make any changes in response to these concerns for the following reasons:

1. Professional competencies for general dental practice currently exist and include detailed “lists” of clinical activities within specified areas of practice. These are currently used in the same ways as described for the proposed competencies in the consultation document.

The Council considered that the existing competencies, while providing excessive detail in some clinical areas are lacking in others, and no longer fully represent the range of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours (competencies) an oral health practitioner must have to practise safely, competently, and professionally in their scope of practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The proposed competencies reflect this thinking, covering a broader range of practitioner capabilities, adopting a patient-centred approach and being outcomes-focussed rather than focussed on accomplishment of specific procedures and activities to demonstrate practitioner competence.

2. Regarding dentists maintaining competence across their full scope, the Council noted that the introduction to the consultation document clearly states that “some practitioners may choose to limit their individual practice to certain clinical areas within their scope of practice.”

Dentists may already limit their scopes of practice – and choose not to provide clinical care across the full range of the scope activities. The scope and competencies need to recognise this reality.

This is also consistent with the new recertification framework which encourages practitioners to develop their own professional development plans to support their individual practice.

The Council specifically noted that practitioners cannot limit their practice to exclude ‘cultural competence’ or ‘opt-out’ of the competencies that are intrinsically linked to the ethical principles, professional standards and practice standards described within the standards framework.

3. To re-confirm that the proposed competencies cover all the existing scope of practice activities listed for general dental practice, the Council undertook a mapping exercise.

The Council found all activities are adequately covered, and in many cases, the proposed competencies more accurately and comprehensively reflect contemporary practice.

The competencies were shared with the education providers more than once during their development and were also considered by the accreditation committee that includes Australian dental academics.

The review identified one new competency to be included for dentists under domain 6:  
*Perform minor surgical procedures on the soft tissues of the mouth.*

[Thank you for your feedback](#)

The Council thanks submitters for taking the time to share their views.

If you have any further comments or questions, please do not hesitate to email us at [consultations@dcnz.org.nz](mailto:consultations@dcnz.org.nz).

Yours sincerely



Marie Warner

Chief Executive