

Dental Hygienists, Dental Technicians, and Denturists in Nova Scotia

Many dental hygienists, dental technicians, and denturists already work together in interdisciplinary practice settings. But others may have had limited interactions.

Dental hygienists, denturists, and Registered Dental Technicians play a crucial role in oral healthcare. They must be registered and hold a practising licence with their respective regulatory body to practice their profession in Nova Scotia. Dental technicians, denturists, and dental hygienists work collaboratively with other oral health professionals (e.g., dentists, dental specialists, dental assistants) and other health professionals (physicians and pharmacists) to provide safe, competent, quality care to clients.

In Nova Scotia, 833 individuals hold a practising licence with the College of Dental Hygienists of Nova Scotia (CDHNS), 27 individuals hold a licence with the Denturists Licensing Board of Nova Scotia (DLBNS), and 23 Registered Dental Technicians hold a certificate and membership with the NSDTA.

Below is a short synopsis of these professions.

Dental Hygiene Profession

Brief history

Dental hygienists began to work in Nova Scotia in 1955. The dental hygiene profession became self-regulating on May 15, 2009 – with the proclamation of the [Dental Hygienists Act](#) and the [Dental Hygienist Regulations](#). Prior to 2009, the dental hygiene profession was regulated by the Provincial Dental Board of Nova Scotia.

Scope of Practice

In Nova Scotia, a dental hygienist may act as a researcher, clinician, consultant, administrator, manager, educator, or health promoter. In Nova Scotia, dental hygienists implement the [dental hygiene process of care](#), often called by the acronym ADPIE, which includes conducting an initial dental hygiene [assessment](#), dental hygiene [diagnosis](#) (professional conclusion), [planning](#) treatment, [implementing](#) the treatment (or care) plan, and [evaluating](#) the outcomes.

Some of the key roles and services that dental hygienists are authorized to perform in Nova Scotia include:

1. Periodontal therapy: (e.g., periodontal debridement, often called scaling and rootplaning)
2. Dental X-rays: Dental hygienists can order, take, and interpret (diagnose) dental X-rays for dental hygiene purposes.
3. Oral Health Education for individual clients and communities
4. Preventive/Therapeutic Treatments: This includes fluoride applications and dental sealants.
5. Teeth Whitening

6. Dental Hygiene Practices (mobile and store-front clinics): Dental hygienists may own and operate dental hygiene clinics. At this time, there are [10 dental hygiene practices](#).
7. **Additional Authorizations:** Dental hygienists who meet the requirements set out by the CDHNS can apply for authorization to perform the following procedures:
 - a. Local anesthesia administration (under the written order of a dentist or physician)
 - b. Perform permanent restorative procedures in collaboration with a dentist
 - c. Perform orthodontic procedures in collaboration with a dentist
 - d. Prescribe the drugs set out in Section 25 (a) of the Dental Hygienist Regulations

Dental hygienists are required to maintain privacy and confidentiality, in accordance with legislation, regarding medical, dental, and personal information at all times.

Licensure Requirements

To become a dental hygienist in Nova Scotia, individuals must meet specific requirements. These include:

1. **Education:** Completion of a dental hygiene diploma or degree program at an accredited educational institution (or equivalent) is required.
 - a. Applicants who obtained their dental hygiene education from a non-accredited dental hygiene program must meet the additional requirements, as required by legislation.

- b. Currently, there are 35 educational institutions (Colleges and Universities) that offer dental hygiene programs across Canada.
 - c. In Nova Scotia, dental hygiene education is offered at Dalhousie University's [Faculty of Dentistry](#). There are two options offered at Dalhousie – a three-year diploma (includes the pre-professional year) and a Bachelor of Dental Hygiene (BDH) Program, which offers an additional year where students take a series of courses which build upon the knowledge base of the diploma program.
2. **Licensure:** To practice legally in the province, individuals must be issued a practising licence from the College of Dental Hygienists of Nova Scotia (CDHNS).
 3. **Professional Designations:** Individuals who hold a practising licence with the CDHNS are entitled to call themselves "registered dental hygienists" or "dental hygienists" or use the initials "D.H." or "R.D.H".
 4. **National Dental Hygiene Certification Examination:** In Canada, dental hygienists must pass the National Dental Hygiene Certification Board (NDHCB) examination (offered through the Federation of Dental Hygiene Regulators of Canada) to demonstrate their competency in dental hygiene.
 5. **Continuing Education:** Dental hygienists are required to engage in the [CDHNS Continuing Competency Program](#) and complete ongoing professional development and continuing education activities to maintain their licensure. Dental hygienists are expected to engage in activities that address and promote continuing competence, inter-professional collaboration, changes in practice environments, standards of practice, and the latest advancements in the field.
 6. **Practice Hours:** Dental hygienists are required to complete 600 practice hours within the three-year period immediately preceding an application, including renewals.

Denturist Profession

Brief History

In 1973, the Denturist Act came into effect legalizing the practice of denturism in Nova Scotia. Currently, denturists are governed by the [Denturists Act](#), the [Denturists Regulations](#) and [Board Regulations](#).

Scope of Practice

Denturists in Nova Scotia have a well-defined scope of practice, which includes the following key responsibilities and services:

1. **Denture Fabrication:** Denturists are trained to design, create, and construct complete and partial dentures for individuals who have lost some or all of their natural teeth.
2. **Denture Repairs and Adjustments:** Denturists can repair, reline, and adjust dentures to ensure they continue to fit comfortably and function effectively.
3. **Consultation and Patient Education**
4. **Denture Maintenance**
5. **Denture Clinics:** All denturists own and operate private denture clinics. Denturists can visit private and long-term care homes. There is a total of 29 clinics operating throughout Nova Scotia.
6. **Additional authorization (certification):** Dentures over implants – Denturists in Nova Scotia, who meet the criteria set out by the DLBNS, are authorized to do dentures over implants.

Denturists are required to maintain privacy and confidentiality regarding medical, dental, and personal information at all times.

Licensure requirements

To become a denturist in Nova Scotia, individuals must meet specific requirements. These include:

1. **Education:** Completion of a denturism program at an approved educational institution. Currently, there are five denturism programs in Canada that offer diplomas in denturism.
 - a. They are 2.5 to 3 years in length.
 - b. No denturist programs are offered in Atlantic Canada at this time.
2. **Licensure:** To practice legally in the province, individuals must be issued a licence from the Denturist Licensing Board of Nova Scotia (DLBNS).
3. **Protected Titles/Designations:** Those who hold a practising licence from the DLBNS are entitled to call themselves a "Denturist".
4. **Denturist Qualifying Examination:** Denturists must also pass the Qualifying Examination to demonstrate their competence in denturism.
5. **Continuing Education:** Denturists are required to engage in the [Continuing Education Program](#) and complete ongoing professional development and continuing education to maintain their licensure. Denturists are expected to engage in activities that address and promote continuing competence, inter-professional collaboration, changes in practice environments, standards of practice, and the latest advancements in the field.
6. **Practice Hours:** Denturists are required to complete 640 practice hours within the three-year period immediately preceding an application, including renewals.

Dental Technology Profession

Brief History

The first Act governing the practice of Dental Technology in Nova Scotia was enacted in 1965. Dental Technicians are currently regulated by the [Dental Technician's Act](#).

Scope of Practice

Dental technicians design, fabricate, repair, reproduce or modify fixed and removable dental prosthetics to be used in, upon, or in connection with any human tooth, jaw, or associated structure or tissue. They receive a prescription from a dentist from which they make these prosthetics or appliances. Dental Technicians are not permitted to do any intraoral work but do occasionally see individuals at their laboratories for shade-taking and matching appointments.

Within dental technology, technicians may work in one or more of the following disciplines:

1. **Crown and bridge:** these technicians often work with wax to mock up and idealize an intraoral situation. They would then use metal or other materials to fabricate and finish crowns, bridge frameworks, inlays or onlays, post and core, and other fixed restorations.
2. **Ceramics:** technicians who are ceramists use porcelain-like materials layered onto a substrate to make a variety of fixed prostheses that mimic natural teeth in colour, shape and texture such as crowns, bridges, and veneers.
3. **Removable Partial Dentures:** RPD technicians design and fabricate partial dentures that combines a rigid framework with artificial teeth for individuals who are missing some, but not all natural teeth.
4. **Complete Dentures:** complete denture technicians design and fabricate removable prosthetics, typically in a type of acrylic, for individuals who are missing all of their teeth on one or more arches.
5. **Orthodontics:** technicians who practice orthodontics fabricate a multitude of fixed and removable appliances meant to treat irregularities of the teeth or jaw. They often use a variety of materials and techniques to make things such as retainers, space maintainers, biteplanes, and palatal expanders.

Additionally, many technicians in both fixed and removable disciplines work to restore dental implants and are employing CAD/CAM technology more and more.

Licensure requirements

1. **Education:** Completion of a recognized dental technology program (or a substantially equivalent program for internationally educated dental technicians).
 - a) There are 5 colleges across Canada that offer dental technology as a 2- or 3-year program.
 - b) There is currently no program for dental technology in NS.
 - c) The NSDTA is working toward implementing a Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition program for those with practical experiential knowledge or gaps in formal education.
2. **Licensure:** To own or operate a laboratory in Nova Scotia, Registered Dental Technicians (RDT) must be issued a certificate from the NSDTA and must be a current member. Individuals with no certificate may work as dental technicians under the supervision of an RDT.
3. **Protected Titles/Designations:** In Nova Scotia, anyone can practice and call themselves a dental technician, however only those who hold a certificate and are current NSDTA members can call themselves a Registered Dental Technician or use the initials "RDT" after their name as a professional designation.
4. **Qualifying Examination:** In NS (as well as NB, QC, ON, SK, AB, and BC) anyone wishing to become an RDT must participate in the credentialing and competency assessments provided by the [Canadian Alliance of Dental Technology Regulators](#), which includes knowledge-based and practice-based examinations.