June 18, 2025

Team First: Alberta's Dental Teams United to Improve Access to Oral Health Care

Joint statement from the Dental Hygienists Association of Alberta and the Alberta Dental Association

The Dental Hygienists Association of Alberta (DHAA) and the Alberta Dental Association (ADA) stand together in unwavering support of respectful workplaces for the entire oral health care team. We are proud to represent a growing and resilient community of professionals who make vital contributions to the oral and general health of Albertans every day. Our associations are working closely together to address workforce pressures and challenges, and to strengthen our professions and the oral health care sector.

Shared Solutions and Shared Commitment

The oral health landscape in Alberta is unique. Not all Registered Dental Hygienists (RDHs) work in traditional dental offices, many lead their own practices, while others expand their scope through teaching, mentoring, and public health advocacy.

Alberta leads the country in compensation for RDHs in dental practice settings. Yet the reality is that 79% of Alberta dentists[1] have reported difficulty hiring a hygienist in the past year, with mounting pressures in rural and underserved communities. These challenges are due to the limited availability of RDHs, training capacity within the province, and the need for planning that supports and sustains the entire oral health care team.

No single profession or association can solve workforce challenges alone. A thriving, respectful dental care system depends on the combined effort of hygienists, dentists, assistants, educators, regulators, and policy leaders.

To address these challenges, Alberta's oral health professions are focused on long-term, local solutions that will improve access to care for Albertans. From addressing the shortage of dental hygiene education seats to advocating for expanded services in underserved regions, the DHAA and ADA are working closely with government leaders to address staffing shortages and program design issues and remove barriers for accessing essential oral health care for Albertans.

[1] Source: 2025 ADA Staff and Associate Salary Survey

A Made-in-Alberta Approach to Collaboration

The DHAA and ADA also collaborate on professional development and team-based practice culture improvement initiatives. Each association provides and develops tools to support their members navigate workplace issues and offer practical resources on communication, leadership, and respectful team dynamics.

One powerful example of a made-in-Alberta approach is the **Alberta Dental Team Summit**. Held annually in Banff, this conference brings together the entire oral health team, including dentists, hygienists, assistants, office managers and other oral health professionals as colleagues and collaborators. With sessions on clinical innovation, leadership, patient-centred care, and professional well-being, the Summit creates space for meaningful learning, connection, and rejuvenation in an inclusive team environment.

Where We Go From Here

> *"Creating healthy, respectful workplaces in dentistry isn't the responsibility of one profession, it's a shared commitment across the entire oral health care team. In Alberta, we are setting the tone by working together. When we centre collaboration, communication, and mutual respect, we not only improve working conditions, we improve patient care. This is how we can build sustainable, high performing teams, and it's how we move the profession forward."*
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> *— Laura Wright, President, Dental Hygienists Association of Alberta*

> *"We see every day how powerful strong dental teams are, both for the people who work in our clinics and for the patients we serve. I am proud of how Alberta's dentists and hygienists are showing what's possible when we work together and of how many respectful workplaces are in Alberta. These workplaces are built with intention, leadership, and a shared commitment to each other. We are pleased to continue to work with the Alberta Dental Hygiene Association and add to the many great stories that we have in this province."*
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> *— Dr. Hans Herchen, President, Alberta Dental Association.*

Alberta is a national leader in oral health care, with some of the best-trained dentists, hygienists, and assistants in the country. While there are workforce and policy challenges that must be addressed, meaningful progress depends on continued collaboration, respectful dialogue, and solutions that serve both providers and patients.

That's the approach we're taking in Alberta, and we're proud to lead by example.

DHAA
DENTAL HYGIENISTS ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA

Alberta Dental Association