

Chapter 4

Professional Practice Standards

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Professional Practice Standards Requirements

Professional practice standards play a key role in outlining practice requirements for professionals. The *Health Professions Act (HPA)* requires colleges to establish, maintain and enforce standards of practice for regulated health professions (1). The Government also requires that standards of practice be developed by colleges in consultation with their members, the Minister of Health and other stakeholders. The two documents that outline the professional practice standards for Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists in Alberta are the *Code of Ethics* (please refer to Appendix 2) and the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* (please refer to Appendix 3). Both of these documents must be made available to members of the College of Dietitians of Alberta (the College) and to the public upon request. Together, the Acts, Regulations, bylaws, guidelines, the *Code of Ethics* and the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* provide the legal framework for dietetic practice and for the provision of competent, safe, professional services.

Code of Ethics

The *Code of Ethics* is a set of principles of professional conduct which establishes the ethical expectations that Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are required to adhere to in their professional practice. The document outlines the values, accountabilities and responsibilities by which Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are expected to

conduct their practice. The document also includes an ethical decision framework to assist members in addressing ethical issues.

The *Code of Ethics* should be used by Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists to reflect on practice, by the College to assess the ethical conduct of regulated members and by the public to understand the responsibility and accountability to the profession. As self-regulated, autonomous professionals, each member of the College is accountable for practicing in accordance with the *Code of Ethics*, regardless of role, practice area or practice setting.

KEY PRACTICE POINT

All Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are accountable for practicing in accordance with the *Code of Ethics* regardless of their role, practice area or practice setting.

The *Code of Ethics* was developed by the College in consultation with Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists in Alberta under the authority of the *HPA* and the *Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists Profession Regulation* (1, 2). In meeting its legislated mandate to establish, maintain and enforce standards of practice for regulated health professions, the College recognized the need for a code of ethics applicable to current dietetic practice. The *Code of Ethics* was developed based on a framework created for the provincial dietetic regulatory bodies by Dr. Glenn Griener, Associate Professor of the John Dossetor Health Ethics Centre, University of Alberta. Alberta Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists had the opportunity to review and comment on the draft *Code of Ethics* through workshops and on-line consultations held by the College.

Core Values

The *Code of Ethics* sets out the core values that Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists hold with respect to dietetic practice and fulfilling their obligations to the client, the public and the profession. These core values are as follows:

- Protects the public as the primary professional obligation.
- Respects the autonomy and rights of the individual.
- Acts with integrity in professional services and relationships.
- Maintains competence in dietetic practice.

The *Code of Ethics* supports the College's mission to protect Albertans by regulating the competent practice of Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists.

Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice

The *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* describes the standards and essential competencies that must be met by all Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists practicing in Alberta. The document plays a central role in how members gain admission to and remain registered with the College, thereby gaining the right to practice and use the protected titles of the profession. As self-regulated, autonomous professionals, each member of the College is accountable for practicing in accordance with the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice*, regardless of role, practice area or practice setting.

The *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* was created under the authority of the HPA and the *Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists Profession Regulation* (1, 2). In meeting its legislated mandate to establish, maintain and enforce standards of practice for regulated health professions, the College worked with provincial dietetic regulators and dietitians across Canada to develop the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice*; the document was validated through a national on-line survey completed by dietitians across Canada.

Framework for the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice*

The *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* is based on seven standards of practice, competency statements and related performance indicator statements. The first three standards are applicable to all practicing dietitians. One or more of the remaining four standards are applicable to each dietitian depending on their particular practice. The standards are summarized below.

Standards of practice that apply to and must be maintained by all dietitians:

Standard 1: Professional Practice

Assumes responsibility and accountability in the provision of competent, safe, ethical, professional practice.

Standard 2: Communication

Communicates and interacts effectively with individuals and groups in the provision of professional services.

Standard 3: Competence

Maintains competence in dietetic practice and the provision of professional services.

KEY PRACTICE POINT

All Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are accountable for practicing in accordance with the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* regardless of their role, practice area or practice setting.

Standards of practice that apply to and must be maintained by each dietitian depending on their particular practice area(s):

Standard 4: Client Care

Provides professional services to achieve the nutrition care goals of clients.

Standard 5: Community and Population Health

Provides professional services to promote health and prevent disease in communities and populations.

Standard 6: Management of Organizations

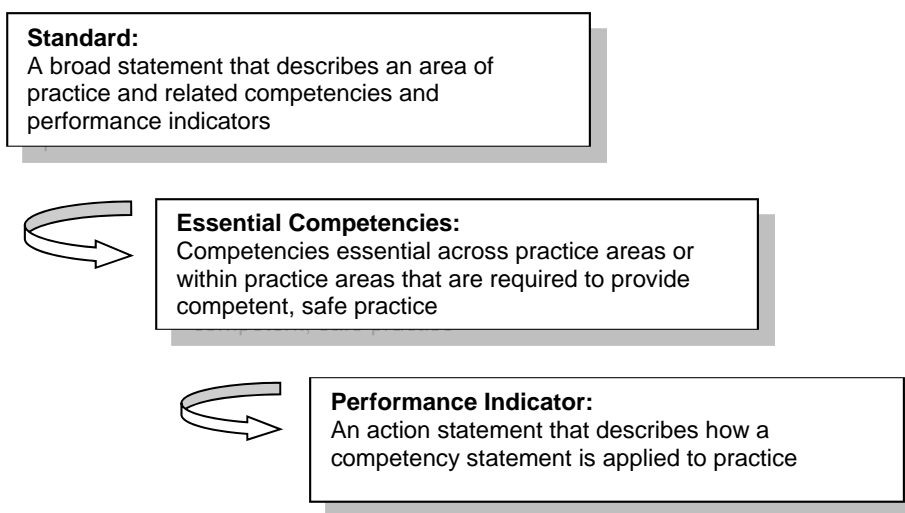
Applies organization management principles in the provision of professional services.

Standard 7: Management of Foodservice Systems

Applies principles of foodservice systems management in the provision of safe, nutritious food.

NOTE: It is recognized that over time, most Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists focus their practice in one particular area such as client care, community nutrition, management, etc. Therefore, one or more of the standard areas from Standards 4 – 7 would apply to a Registered Dietitian or Registered Nutritionist, depending upon their practice. Students preparing for a career in the field of dietetics are required to meet the requirements of all seven standard areas; academic and internship experiences must be designed accordingly.

The framework integrates standards of practice, essential competencies and performance indicators as outlined below.



The *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* supports the College's mission to protect Albertans by regulating the competent practice of Registered Dietitians or Registered Nutritionists. Specific applications of the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* are described below.

Registration & Practice Permits

The *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* is used in the assessment of applicants to the College and is the foundation of the registration examination approved by the College.

Continuing Competence

The *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* is a key document in guiding the practice of Registered Dietitians or Registered Nutritionists and facilitates members in evaluating their practice and identifying competency areas requiring further development within the Continuing Competence Program.

Professional Conduct

Both the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* and the *Code of Ethics* are documents which all Registered Dietitians or Registered Nutritionists must adhere to in their professional practice. Contravention of the provisions contained in either of these documents may constitute “unprofessional conduct” as it is defined in the *HPA*.

Chapter Summary

The *Health Professions Act (HPA)* requires colleges to establish, maintain and enforce standards of practice for regulated health professions. The two documents that outline the professional practice standards for Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists in Alberta are the *Code of Ethics* and the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice*. Together, the Acts, Regulations, bylaws, guidelines, the *Code of Ethics* and the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* provide the legal framework for dietetic practice and for the provision of competent, safe, professional services. The *Code of Ethics* is a set of principles of professional conduct which establishes the ethical expectations that Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are required to adhere to in their professional practice. The *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* describes the standards and essential competencies that must be met by all Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists practicing in Alberta. All Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists must practice in accordance with both the *Code of Ethics* and the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice*. Contravention of the provisions contained in either of these documents may constitute “unprofessional conduct” as it is defined in the *HPA*.

References

1. Province of Alberta. *Health Professions Act*; R.S.A. 2000, c. H-7.
2. Province of Alberta. *Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists Profession Regulation*; 2002.