



**COLLEGE OF DIETITIANS
OF ALBERTA**

CODE OF ETHICS

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Purpose.....	2
Development of the <i>Code of Ethics</i>	2
Core Values.....	2
Professional Conduct and the <i>Code of Ethics</i>	3
Regulation and the <i>Code of Ethic</i>	3
Regulatory Framework for Dietetic Practice.....	3
Definitions	4
Section 1 The dietitian protects the public as the primary obligation	5
1.1 Primary Obligation.....	5
1.2 Trust in the Profession.....	5
1.3 Shared Responsibility.....	5
1.4 Duty to Report.....	6
1.5 Research	6
Section 2 The dietitian respects the autonomy and rights of the individual	7
2.1 Client-Centered focus.....	7
2.2 Informed Consent.....	8
2.3 Confidentiality.....	8
2.4 Professional Boundaries.....	8
Section 3 The dietitian acts with integrity in professional relationships and when providing professional services.....	9
3.1 Provision of Services.....	9
3.2 Fees.....	9
3.3 Continuity of Services.....	9
3.4 Records	9
3.5 Honesty.....	10
3.6 Fairness	10
3.7 Advertising/Promotion and Endorsement.....	11
3.8 Conflict of Interest	11
3.9 Financial and Business Arrangements.....	11
3.10 Products and Services.....	12
3.11 Practice in Association	12
3.12 Multiple Clients.....	12
Section 4 The dietitian maintains competence in dietetic practice.....	13
4.1 Personal Competence	13
4.2 Restricted Activities	13
4.3 Professional independence	13
4.4 Supervision	14
4.5 Voluntary withdrawal from practice	14
Appendix 1 Ethical Decision Framework	15

CODE OF ETHICS

Introduction

The *Code of Ethics* was developed by the College of Dietitians of Alberta (the College) in consultation with dietitians in Alberta. The document was created under the authority of the *Health Professions Act* (the Act) and the *Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists Profession Regulation* (the Regulation).

The *Code of Ethics* supports the College's mission to protect Albertans by regulating the competent practice of Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists. Together, the Act, Regulations, *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* and the *Code of Ethics* provide the legal framework for dietetic practice and for the provision of competent, safe, ethical and professional services.

Purpose

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

The *Code of Ethics* should be used by dietitians 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.

An ethical decision framework is provided at the end of this document to assist members in addressing ethical issues.

Development of the *Code of Ethics*

The *Health Professions Act* requires colleges to establish, maintain and enforce standards of practice for regulated health professions. To meet this regulated mandate, the College recognized the need for a code of ethics applicable to current dietetic practice.

The *Code of Ethics* was based on a framework developed for the Alliance of Canadian Dietetic Regulatory Bodies by Dr. Glenn Griener, Associate Professor of the John Dossetor Health Ethics Centre, University of Alberta. Alberta dietitians 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 dietitians hold with respect to dietetic practice and fulfilling their obligations to the client, the public and the profession. These core values are listed below.

- **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.**

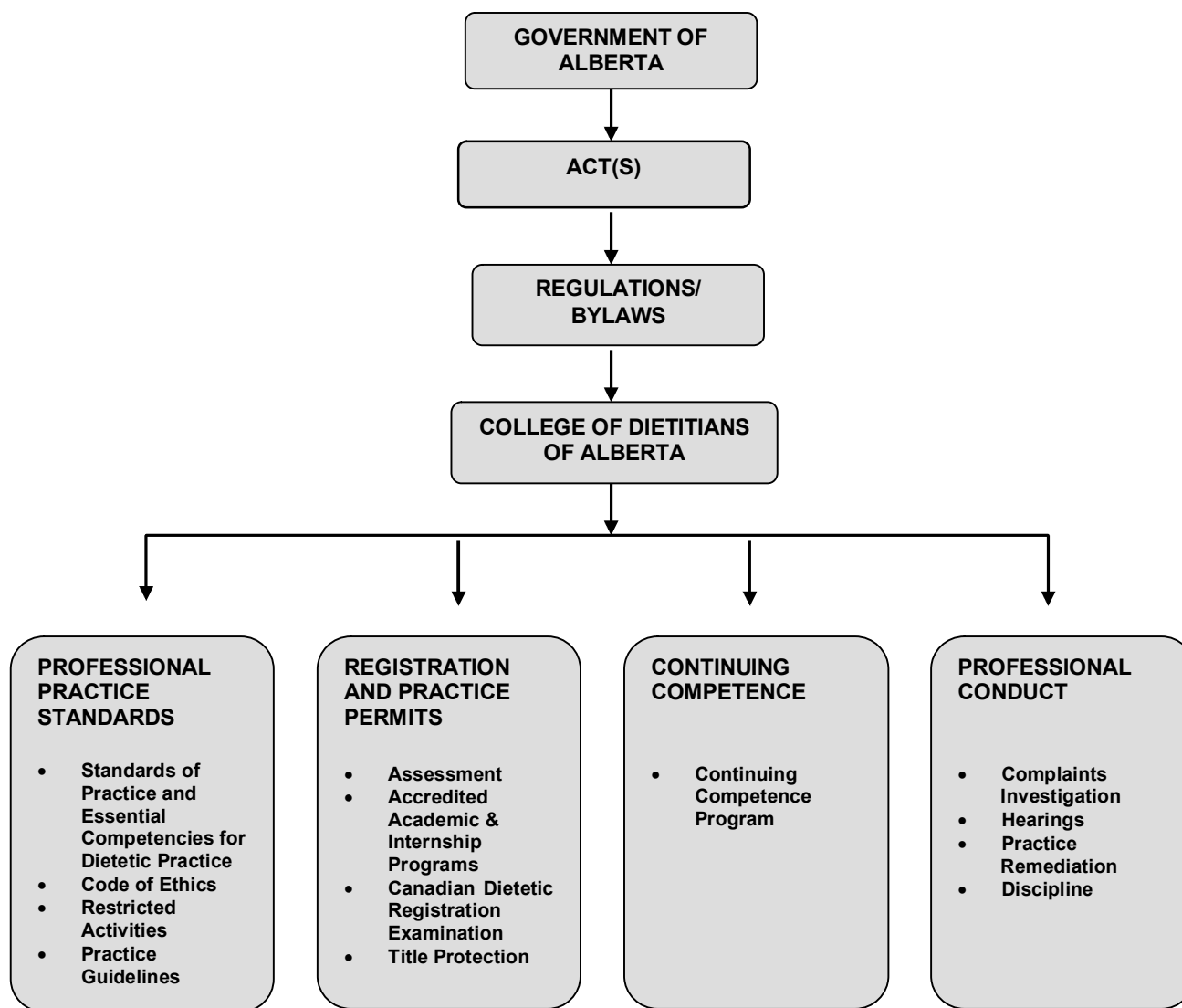
Professional Conduct and the Code of Ethics

The College's *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice* and the *Code of Ethics* are documents which dietitians must adhere to in their professional practice. Breaches of the provisions contained in either of these documents may constitute "unprofessional conduct" as that term is defined in the *Health Professions Act*.

Regulation and the Code of Ethics

Authority to regulate is delegated to the College by the Government of Alberta. Provincial legislation directs the activities of self-regulated health professions including the College of Dietitians of Alberta. The regulatory framework for dietetic practice in Alberta is depicted below.

Regulatory Framework for Dietetic Practice



Definitions

“Client” means an individual, family, substitute decision-maker, group, agency, government, employer, employee, business, organization or community who is the direct or indirect recipient(s) of the dietitian’s expertise.

“Dietitian” means a person who is registered under the Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists Profession Regulation. The term “dietitian” has been used throughout this document and reflects all regulated members of the College.

“Professional Practice Standards” means the set of documents that specify the legal and ethical requirements for professional practice; these documents include the *Standards of Practice and Essential Competencies for Dietetic Practice*, *Code of Ethics*, practice guidelines, Regulations and Bylaws.

“Professional Services” means all actions and activities of a dietitian in the context of their professional practice.

“Products” means any products, items, or materials a dietitian provides in the context of their professional practice. *May include food products, supplements, books, information, materials, handouts.*

CODE OF ETHICS

1.0 The dietitian protects the public as their primary professional obligation.

1.1 Primary Obligation

- (1) The dietitian accepts the obligation as a regulated member of a College under the Health Professions Act to protect and serve the public interest.
- (2) As a regulated member of the College under the Health Professions Act, the dietitian respects the establishment, maintenance and enforcement of standards for registration, competence, standards of practice and a code of ethics for the regulated profession.

1.2 Trust in the Profession

- (1) The dietitian maintains a level of personal and professional conduct that maintains the integrity and dignity of the profession and sustains the public's confidence in the profession.
- (2) The dietitian uses the professional titles and initials protected by the College, when providing professional services to assist the public in identifying them as a regulated health professional.
- (3) The dietitian maintains public trust in the dietetic profession by bringing forward concerns about incompetent, unethical or unsafe practice by dietitians to the College.
- (4) The dietitian upholds their professional responsibility to the public by bringing forward concerns about the incompetent, unethical or unsafe practice by other health professionals to the appropriate regulatory body.
- (5) The dietitian addresses concerns about practice with the health professional first when appropriate in the circumstances and reports the concern to employers and others as appropriate in the circumstances.
- (6) The dietitian does not use professional titles and initials or make references to being a member of the dietetic profession or the College, or having dietetic education and training when:
 - a) representing personal views, views that are unrelated to the practice of the profession, views that would affect public trust in the profession;
 - b) undertaking activities that are unrelated to the practice of the profession;
 - c) acting within a personal rather than professional role.

1.3 Shared Responsibility

- (1) The dietitian assists the profession in improving its standards by identifying issues that are relevant to the provision of competent, safe and ethical dietetic practice.
- (2) The dietitian collaborates with employers, colleagues and others to develop and improve the quality of professional services provided within available resources.
- (3) The dietitian recognizes the expertise of members of the team and collaborates in the planning, coordination and delivery of quality professional services.

- (4) The dietitian guides the professional development of individuals entering dietetic practice by helping them to acquire a full understanding of the responsibilities, ethics and competencies required in professional practice.

1.4 Duty to Report

- (1) The dietitian reports to the College with respect to any actions they are subject to including: any legal actions and any actions taken by professional regulatory bodies or employers with respect to their practice and also reports the outcome of any action taken to the College.
- (2) The dietitian communicates confidential information to prevent harm if the dietitian becomes aware that an individual poses a serious risk of harm to themselves or others. The disclosure of information should be limited to individuals who reasonably need to know and to the extent necessary in the circumstances.
- (3) The dietitian must be familiar with the laws concerning the reporting of abuse of children and vulnerable adults and must comply with those laws.
- (4) The dietitian discloses adverse events and takes all necessary actions according to established guidelines to minimize harm arising from an adverse event and to prevent recurrence.
- (5) The dietitian takes appropriate precautions and follows established guidelines with respect to communicable or infectious diseases including hepatitis, AIDS, blood-borne infections, influenza.
- (6) If the dietitian believes they may have been in contact with an individual who has a communicable or infectious disease or has contracted a communicable or infectious disease that involves a risk to the health or safety of clients or the public, the dietitian discloses the information to the appropriate individuals (may include but is not limited to: the employer, the medical officer of health and the College) and takes all required precautions (may include but is not limited to: protective gear, testing, monitoring, isolation).
- (7) If the dietitian believes that institutional, facility or workplace policies, procedures or practices involve a risk to the health or safety of clients or the public, the dietitian discloses the information to the appropriate individuals (may include but is not limited to: the employer, the medical officer of health and the College) and takes all required precautions.

1.5 Research

- (1) The dietitian who participates in research ensures it conforms to applicable research ethics guidelines.
- (2) The dietitian ensures the risks of the research are justified by the benefits which may be gained, and that the well-being of the individual research subject is never sacrificed for the aims of the research or society.
- (3) The dietitian ensures research participants:
 - a) are informed of and completely understand the nature of their research participation, its anticipated benefits and risks and any forms of care which are withheld as part of the study design;
 - b) understand that they have the right to refuse to participate in or withdraw from a research project at any time and that the refusal or withdrawal will not adversely affect the quality of the professional services provided;

- c) are removed from the research study at any point when the participants are thought to be at risk of harm by continuing to participate.
- (4) The dietitian ensures research results reflect an accurate interpretation or representation of the data and are not falsified in any way.

2.0 The dietitian respects the autonomy and rights of the individual.

2.1 Client-centered focus

- (1) The dietitian provides professional services in response to the needs of the client regardless of ancestry, nationality, ethnic background, religion, age, gender, social and marital status, sexual orientation, political beliefs, or physical or mental disability.
- (2) The dietitian collaborates with the client to provide professional services that reflect the unique needs, goals, values and circumstances of the client.
- (3) The dietitian respects and protects the individual's right to privacy, dignity and physical modesty.
- (4) The dietitian uses a respectful communication style and appropriate forms of address in their interactions with clients.
- (5) The dietitian respects the client's right to autonomy in decision making. Client autonomy includes determining one's own best interests.
- (6) The dietitian provides the client with a complete and objective explanation of the nature and scope of the problem and treatment based on all the facts that have been brought to their attention.
- (7) The dietitian discusses options and interprets controversial information without personal bias, recognizing that legitimate differences of opinion exist.
- (8) The dietitian ensures that the client understands the information provided, that their questions have been answered and they are able to evaluate treatment options.
- (9) The dietitian respects the right of clients to request a second opinion or a referral to another regulated health professional or appropriately qualified individual.
- (10) The dietitian consults with or refers the client to another regulated health professional or appropriately qualified individual when required.
- (11) The dietitian articulates the needs of the client and advocates on the client's behalf when required.
- (12) The dietitian respects the client's right to review and obtain a copy of information in their file or record and responds to a request for correction of information in the client's file or record in accordance with the applicable laws.

2.2 Informed Consent

- (1) The dietitian ensures that informed consent has been obtained for the provision of professional services in accordance with applicable laws and:
 - a) Provides sufficient information to enable clients to make informed decisions about recommended services including information about expected benefits, risks, options, and alternatives;
 - b) Communicates information using appropriate language, terminology and comprehension level to ensure understanding;
 - c) Takes all reasonable steps to ensure that consent is not given under conditions of coercion or undue pressure;
 - d) Provides new information when it could be significant or relevant to the original or ongoing informed consent in a timely manner;
 - e) Respects the right of the client to refuse treatment or withdraw consent for care at anytime.

2.3 Confidentiality

- (1) The dietitian respects the confidentiality of information obtained in providing professional services.
- (2) The dietitian discloses confidential information only when the client consents to disclosure, when disclosure is required or permitted by law, or when disclosure is necessary to protect the client or another individual from harm. See Duty to Report.
- (3) The dietitian avoids indiscreet or public conversations about the client or their treatment.
- (4) The dietitian does not access information in databases or records about individuals who are not clients or information that is not required to provide professional services.
- (5) The dietitian limits access to professional records by others to preserve confidentiality of information.

2.4 Professional Boundaries

- (1) The dietitian must respect boundaries that separate their personal and professional relationships and roles.
- (2) The dietitian is sensitive to their position of relative power or influence in professional relationships and does not use their position to take physical, emotional, sexual or financial advantage of clients.
- (3) The dietitian does not undertake a professional relationship when a current or previous personal, financial, employment or legal relationship with the client would compromise the provision of professional services or the integrity of the dietitian.
- (4) The dietitian does not engage in a sexual relationship with a client when a professional relationship exists.

3.0 The dietitian acts with integrity in professional relationships and when providing professional services.

3.1 Provision of Services

- (1) The dietitian provides professional services, information or advice within a professional role or relationship.
- (2) The dietitian reflects the client's best interests in the provision of professional services.
- (3) The dietitian provides the best standards of professional service possible for clients within the available resources.
- (4) The dietitian provides professional services based on the most complete, accurate, and current client information possible.
- (5) The dietitian provides professional services that are evidence based, based on commonly accepted best practice and that are safe.
- (6) The dietitian responds in a timely manner to requests for professional services, consultations and referrals.

3.2 Fees

- (1) The dietitian provides information about professional services to be provided, fees and fee payment arrangements to the client and ensures the information is understood and agreed to prior to providing professional services.

3.3 Continuity of Services

- (1) The dietitian provides for the continuity of care of clients within the limitations of the health system and available resources.
- (2) The dietitian who is planning to participate in job action/strike must take appropriate steps to protect the health and safety of clients during the job action.
- (3) The dietitian may discontinue services without notice or referral if the dietitian feels personally threatened or at risk of harm by the client.
- (4) The dietitian plans for the transfer of clients when closing practice or upon the death of the dietitian.

3.4 Records

- (1) The dietitian makes and retains complete, accurate records of professional services and signs and dates records that they create.
- (2) The dietitian stores and disposes of paper, electronic and other records in a manner that ensures the security and confidentiality of the records.
- (3) The dietitian plans for the transfer or disposition of records when closing practice or in case of their death.

3.5 Honesty

- (1) The dietitian acts with honesty in their professional relationships and in the provision of professional services.
- (2) The dietitian accurately represents their qualifications, experience and the range of professional services provided.
- (3) The dietitian permits their name to be used for the purpose of verifying that professional services have been rendered only if they provided or supervised the provision of those services.
- (4) The dietitian takes credit for work they have done in connection with scholarly, research or collaborative endeavors and fairly credits contributions made by others.
- (5) The dietitian does not use fraud, deception, omission or misrepresentation in:
 - a) their professional practice
 - b) obtaining registration or a practice permit;
 - c) passing examinations;
 - d) representing professional qualifications, education, expertise or competence;
 - e) providing professional services;
 - f) producing invoices or billings;
 - g) using professional titles, designations;
 - h) advertising / promoting products and services.
- (6) The dietitian does not falsify, alter, make omissions, or incorrect entries into documents, records, or statements.

3.6 Fairness

- (1) The dietitian acts with fairness in their professional relationships and in the provision of professional services.
- (2) The dietitian provides professional services that are fair, non-discriminatory and without bias.
- (3) The dietitian provides objective assessments and evaluations.
- (4) The dietitian provides professional opinions or assessments based on their dietetic knowledge and expertise and on the collection of adequate, current information required to provide the opinion or assessment. The dietitian clearly identifies the limits of the information on which the assessment or opinion is based.

3.7 Advertising / Promotion and Endorsements

- (1) The dietitian does not engage in any form of advertising/promotion or endorsement of products and services that:
 - a) takes advantage of or exploits vulnerable individuals;
 - b) makes statements or claims that are false, misleading, inaccurate or unverifiable;
 - c) creates an unjustified expectation about the results that can be achieved;
 - d) compares the quality of services or fees to those of another individual.
- (2) The dietitian does not allow their name or professional titles and initials to be used in connection with any product or service that:
 - a) provides an endorsement that has not been given;
 - b) has not been evaluated by the dietitian;
 - c) misrepresents the product or service;
 - d) misrepresents the association of the dietitian with the product or service;
 - e) affects the credibility of the dietitian or the profession.
- (3) The dietitian must keep a copy of any advertising/promotion or endorsement for a period of one year following the date in which it last appears. The dietitian must provide a copy to the College on request.

3.8 Conflict of Interest

- (1) The dietitian avoids real or perceived conflict of interest in which their professional integrity, professional independence or the provision of professional services could be influenced or compromised
- (2) When the dietitian identifies a conflict of interest the dietitian must resolve the conflict by fully acknowledging the conflict, ensuring that it is understood and accepted by all parties or discontinue professional services.

3.9 Financial and Business Arrangements

- (1) The dietitian does not accept or offer fees, compensation, gifts or other benefits for making or receiving referrals for professional services.
- (2) The dietitian does not accept contracts, consulting fees, funding including research funding, fees, compensation, gifts or other benefits that compromise professional integrity, professional independence or influence the provision of professional services.

3.10 Products and Services

- (1) The dietitian does not recommend, promote, advertise, distribute, endorse or sell products or services in the provision of professional services where the efficacy or safety of products or services:
 - a) is not supported by evidence based research;
 - b) has not been tested or verified by credible sources.
- (2) The dietitian does not recommend, promote, advertise, distribute, endorse or sell products or services in which the dietitian, or individuals connected to the dietitian, have a financial or other interest unless the dietitian at the same time:
 - a) fully discloses the financial or other interest;
 - b) informs the client they have the option of using alternative products or services;
 - c) assures the client that choosing alternative products or services will not affect the quality of professional services provided by the dietitian.
- (3) The dietitian does not use professional titles and initials or make any reference to being a member of the dietetic profession or the College, or having dietetic education and training with respect to any products or services that do not relate to the provision of dietetic professional services.

3.11 Practice in Association

- (1) The dietitian does not practice in association with other individuals or entities if the association compromises or appears to compromise:
 - a) professional integrity, professional independence or the provision of professional services;
 - b) credibility of the dietitian or the profession.

3.12 Multiple Clients

- (1) The dietitian must identify situations where there is more than one client who directly or indirectly is the recipient of professional services. Multiple clients may include but are not limited to any of the following:
 - a) individuals;
 - b) family members, advocates, substitute decision makers;
 - c) employers (publicly / privately funded health system), businesses, organizations;
 - d) third parties (employee or government assistance programs, insurance providers / payors, government / funding agencies).
- (2) The dietitian will clarify their professional role, responsibility, accountability and confidentiality for services with all clients prior to providing professional services.

- (3) When a conflict of interest exists in the provision of professional service to multiple clients the dietitian must resolve the conflict of interest or must discontinue professional services.

4.0 The dietitian maintains competence in dietetic practice.

4.1 Personal Competence

- (1) The dietitian is knowledgeable of and adheres to all relevant public protection legislation applicable to their dietetic practice (may include but is not limited to: health profession legislation, public health act, protection of persons in care legislation, child welfare legislation, protection of information and privacy legislation.
- (2) The dietitian assumes responsibility and accountability for personal competence in practice.
- (3) The dietitian acquires new skills and knowledge on a continuing basis to ensure safe, competent, and ethical dietetic practice.
- (4) The dietitian practices dietetics based on scientific principles and current evidence-based practice.
- (5) The dietitian practices within the scope of practice, the limits of their qualifications and their own level of competence.
- (6) The dietitian consults or makes referrals as appropriate when a situation is beyond their level of competence.
- (7) The dietitian accepts only those responsibilities which they are competent to perform. If the dietitian is asked to assume responsibilities beyond their present level of competence, the dietitian acquires additional information, knowledge or skills prior to assuming the responsibilities or declines to accept them.

4.2 Restricted Activities

- (1) The dietitian performs restricted activities that are regulated by the College only when authorized to do so by the College.
- (2) The dietitian does not perform any restricted activities that are not regulated by the College unless authorized to do so by another enactment or pursuant to Schedule 7.1 of the *Government Organization Act*.
- (3) The dietitian assumes responsibility for the ongoing competence to perform restricted activities and seeks additional knowledge and skills to maintain current competent practice as required.
- (4) The dietitian does not prescribe or provide a drug on a drug schedule without undertaking a clinical assessment, without medical indication or for other than legitimate therapeutic purposes.
- (5) The dietitian does not prescribe a drug on a drug schedule for their personal use, for use by a person who is not in an established professional relationship.

4.3 Professional Independence

- (1) The dietitian maintains professional independence and judgment and does not allow externally imposed limitations or the influence of others to affect the provision of professional services in accordance with the Professional Practice Standards or in the best interest of the client.

4.4 Supervision

- (1) The dietitian assumes overall responsibility for the professional activities and provision of professional services by individuals under their supervision.
- (2) The dietitian supervises a person appropriate to their level of competence and ensures the person's performance meets generally accepted standards of practice, ethics, competence and safety.
- (3) The dietitian does not assign professional responsibilities to a person who does not have the appropriate credentials or is not appropriately qualified to provide the services.
- (4) The dietitian ensures that a student, trainee, intern or supervisee is appropriately identified as such to the client.

4.5 Voluntary Withdrawal from Practice

- (1) The dietitian voluntarily withdraws from professional practice whenever circumstances exist that might impair their professional judgment, the ability to practice competently and safely or that may cause harm to their clients or the public. The impairment may be related to physical, mental, emotional health, substance abuse or addictions.
- (2) The dietitian notifies the College of the voluntary withdrawal from practice and accepts any conditions on their practice permit appropriate to their situation as determined by the College.
- (3) Before returning to practice the dietitian notifies the College and undertakes an assessment/ evaluation of the ability to practice competently and safely as required by the College. The dietitian accepts any conditions on their practice permit appropriate to their situation as determined by the College.

Appendix 1 ETHICAL DECISION FRAMEWORK

When faced with a situation of ethical conflict or uncertainty dietitians may find the decision-making framework below helpful in determining a course of action. An ethical issue may also become clearer or be resolved by discussing it with colleagues or trusted others.

1. Identify the problem(s).

State the problem as clearly as possible. An ethical issue is not always black or white and may involve competing interests.

2. Identify the relevant issues.

- What are your personal or professional values related to the situation presented?
- Who are the others who are involved in or who may be impacted by the issue? What are their personal/professional values/beliefs/cultural issues?
- Is there a conflict between competing values? Interests? What is at stake?

3. Identify any relevant guidelines that apply.

What documents may provide guidance?

- Legislation
- Professional standards or practice guidelines
- Workplace or business policies/guidelines

4. Identify the sections of the Code of Ethics that apply.

What guidance is provided by the Code of Ethics?

5. Generate options or possible courses of action.

There may be multiple strategies to resolve the issue.

6. Evaluate the options or possible courses of action based on consideration of the issues, consequences, pros/cons.

To help you evaluate the possible courses of action consider:

- ***Does the decision have legal implications?***
Will you be violating any laws, College of Dietitians of Alberta Regulations or the Standards of Practice, workplace policies or guidelines?
- ***Is the decision balanced?***
Is it fair and beneficial to all concerned in the short term as well as the long term? Does it promote a win/win situation/relationship?
- ***How will the decision, if acted upon, make you feel or be perceived?***
Will you feel you made the best decision in the circumstances? How do you think others would view your decision? What if your decision was published in the newspaper?