

## Introduction

A regulatory body's paramount objective is to serve and protect the public interest. Dietetic regulatory bodies support registered dietitians to deliver high quality, client-centered services within the current practice environment. The regulation of health professionals in Canada is authorized in provincial law and therefore professional requirements differ slightly from province to province.

The College of Dietitians of Alberta (CDA) regulates the practice of Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists in Alberta as delegated by the Government of Alberta to the College under the *Health Professions Act*. The protected titles in Alberta are: Registered Dietitian, Registered Nutritionist, Dietitian, Nutritionist, and RD.

## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide a position to Registered Dietitians in Alberta with respect to electronic dietetic practice outside of the province where the dietitian is registered. Electronic practice will continue to evolve and regulatory bodies have a responsibility to ensure that dietitians provide safe and competent nutrition care to clients, regardless of where they practice and the means of communication.

## Definition

Electronic practice is defined as the provision of dietetic service (e.g. counseling, providing information and advice) via internet, email, telephone, videoconference or other electronic means to the public and to individual clients/patients. Electronic dietetic practice refers to communication with clients or patients using aforementioned media across provincial, territorial or national borders.

For the purpose of this position, electronic dietetic practice does not refer to communication and consultation between dietitians or other health professionals across borders.

## Benefits and Limitations of Electronic Practice

Benefits:

- Services can be provided in a more timely manner
- Services can be delivered at a lower cost to the client
- Improved access to services (not limited by geographic location)

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- Professionals can improve the quality of the services they deliver (e.g. less time spent on travel therefore more time to participate in continuing education or research)
- More efficient use of time for dietitian (e.g. less time to travel) <sup>2,3,4</sup>
- Improved access to follow up care; continuity of care

### Limitations:

- Effectiveness of communication i.e. Lack of face-to-face contact between practitioner and client may reduce or be perceived as reducing quality of care
- Limited availability of assessment information
- Potential for breach of confidentiality and communication failure
- Potential for unauthorized practice
- Potential for providers to practice outside of their scope of practice
- Potential for telepractice to be favored for cost savings when direct contact may be more appropriate <sup>2,3,5</sup>
- Limited ability of regulators to effectively enforce professional standards and obligations due to difficulty of a regulatory body conducting investigations in other jurisdictions.

### Lawful Practice and Legal Jurisdiction

Laws vary from province to province with regard to electronic practice across provincial borders. Each jurisdiction has the discretion to require dietitians to register in the province where the client resides. Provincial regulatory bodies should advise dietitians to comply with registration requirements and adhere to the scope of practice in the province(s) where the client resides.

### Registration Requirements

Dietitians practicing electronically across provincial borders must know every province's position with respect to whether registration is required in the province where the client resides. Dietitians must respect privacy legislation in both jurisdictions. Therefore, dietitians providing electronic service to clients outside of Alberta are required to contact the regulatory body in the jurisdiction the client resides to determine whether registration in that province is required.

When a dietitian engages in electronic dietetic practice with a client outside of the province where they are registered (Alberta), it is generally accepted that the dietitian is held accountable to the college where they are registered (CDA).

### Lawful Scope of Practice

In electronic practice, the dietitian must be aware of and comply with restricted activities (e.g. controlled practice activities, controlled acts, and scope of practice) and authorization practices in the province where the client resides, as well as the province where the dietitian resides.

- a. If a province has a restricted activity, the dietitian must be registered in that province in order to perform the restricted activity.
- b. Dietitians must only practice within the scope of practice for the province in which they are registered AND the scope of practice for the province in which the client resides.

### Principles of Client-Focused Electronic Practice

#### Accountability

The public benefits from increased access to dietetic expertise through electronic dietetic practice. However, as public safety is the regulatory mandate, the public needs to know that their dietitian is registered and accountable through a provincial dietetic regulatory body. Registration with a regulatory body ensures that dietitians have met specified qualifications to practice dietetics, that they practice in keeping with established professional standards, and that clients have a way to raise a concern and lodge a complaint. With few exceptions<sup>i</sup>, current dietetic legislation and policy in Canadian jurisdictions do not address electronic dietetic practice, however it is generally accepted that a regulatory body has jurisdiction over the conduct of dietitians registered with them wherever the conduct occurs.

#### Transparency

Dietitians providing or offering to provide services via electronic means across borders should inform clients of the jurisdiction where they are registered and limitations of e-practice. For example, the client needs to understand that complaints about the dietitian's conduct would have to be made to the regulatory body in the jurisdiction where the dietitian is registered, and not necessarily the jurisdiction in which the client resides.

Dietitians should use the title *Registered Dietitian* or *Dietitian* to provide clarity to the public. Designations differ amongst provinces and the title *Dietitian* is consistent in all provinces and the use of other titles (e.g. nutritionist, nutrition consultant) may confuse their professional status.

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Dietitians should provide electronic information, including email and website addresses, blogs or any other interactive electronic address to the regulatory body where the dietitian is registered.

### Duty to Clients

Communication with a client through electronic dietetic practice constitutes a dietitian-client relationship in the same way that any in-person interaction would constitute a dietitian-client relationship. The dietitian has a duty to provide care to clients in a manner consistent with care provided in person and to adapt the duty to the medium. For example, with regards to confidentiality, the dietitian would identify those who are able to observe the interaction (others in a room during a telephone call). The same professional obligations that exist for consent, confidentiality, and security of information in face-to-face dietetic services also exists for electronic dietetic services.

- a) As part of obtaining informed consent when providing electronic dietetic service, the dietitian should clearly disclose limitations and risks of electronic dietetic practice (including risks associated with confidentiality), their name, registration status, jurisdiction(s) in which registration/license is held and contact information for their registering/licensing jurisdiction.
- b) Competent services – Dietitians should be competent in the use of the technology used in their practice and address the limitations of technology in terms of care provided to their clients and security of client information.
- c) Collaboration – Dietitians will refer clients to other health care professionals when a client's needs exceed the dietitian's professional abilities.
- d) Professional Practice - Dietetic assessment, intervention and recommendations must be evidence-based or in accordance with best practice, and in accordance with the ethical and practice standards of the province where the dietitian is registered. Record keeping also needs to be in accordance with the ethical and practice standards of the province where the dietitian is registered. If the standards of practice of the profession cannot be met by services provided electronically, the dietitian must refer the client elsewhere. Dietitians must not attempt to exempt the services provided electronically from compliance with standards of practice and ethical behavior by obtaining releases or disclaimers from the client.

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- e) Many provincial dietetic regulatory bodies require dietitians to carry professional liability insurance. It is advisable to carry professional liability insurance if engaging in electronic practice and to ensure that coverage includes such services.

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Contact Information for Canadian Dietetic Regulatory Bodies	
<p><b>British Columbia</b> College of Health and Care Professionals of British Columbia (CHCPBC) 900 – 200 Granville St. Vancouver, BC V6C 1S4</p> <p>Phone: (604) 742-6715; Toll free: 1-877-742-6715 Email: <a href="mailto:info@chcpbc.org">info@chcpbc.org</a></p>	<p><b>Ontario</b> College of Dietitians of Ontario (CDO) 175 Bloor Street East North Tower, Suite 601 Toronto, ON M4W 3R8</p> <p>Phone: (416) 598-1725; Toll free: 1-800-668-4990 Email: <a href="mailto:information@collegeofdietitians.org">information@collegeofdietitians.org</a></p>
<p><b>Alberta</b> College of Dietitians of Alberta (CDA) Suite 1320 — 10123 99 Street Edmonton AB T5J 3H1</p> <p>Phone: (780) 448-0059; Toll free: 1-866-493-4348 Email: <a href="mailto:office@collegeofdietitians.ab.ca">office@collegeofdietitians.ab.ca</a></p>	<p><b>Nova Scotia</b> Nova Scotia College of Dietitians and Nutritionists (NSCDN) 380 Bedford Highway, Suite 301 Halifax, NS B3M 2L4</p> <p>Phone: (902) 223-5718 Email: <a href="mailto:registration@nscdn.ca">registration@nscdn.ca</a></p>
<p><b>Saskatchewan</b> Saskatchewan College of Dietitians (SCD) Box 277 Rosetown SK S0L 2V0</p> <p>Phone: (306) 359-3040 Email: <a href="mailto:registrar@saskdietitians.org">registrar@saskdietitians.org</a></p>	<p><b>Manitoba</b> College of Dietitians of Manitoba (CDM) 208-584 Pembina Highway Winnipeg, MB R3M 3X7</p> <p>Phone: (204) 694-0532 Email: <a href="mailto:office@collegeofdietitiansmb.ca">office@collegeofdietitiansmb.ca</a></p>
<p><b>New Brunswick</b> New Brunswick Association of Dietitians (NBAD/ADNB) PO Box 7344 RPO Jean-Coutu Riverview, NB E1B 4T9</p> <p>Phone: (506) 386-5903 Email: <a href="mailto:registrar@adnb-nbad.com">registrar@adnb-nbad.com</a></p>	<p><b>Newfoundland and Labrador</b> Newfoundland and Labrador College of Dietitians (NLCD) P.O. Box 1756 Postal Station C St. John's NL A1C 5P5</p> <p>Phone: (709) 753-4040; Toll free : 1-877-753-4040 Email: <a href="mailto:registrar@nlcd.ca">registrar@nlcd.ca</a></p>
<p><b>Quebec</b> Ordre des diététistes-nutritionnistes du Québec (ODNQ) 550 Sherbrooke Street West West Tower, office 1855 Montreal, QC H3A 1B9</p> <p>Phone: (514) 393-3733; Toll free: 1-888-393-8528 Email: <a href="mailto:info@odnq.org">info@odnq.org</a></p>	<p><b>Prince Edward Island</b> College of Dietitians of Prince Edward Island (CDPEI) PO Box 362 CTL Charlottetown, PE C1A 7K7</p> <p>Phone: (902) 436-2438 Email: <a href="mailto:registrar@peidietitians.ca">registrar@peidietitians.ca</a></p>

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<sup>i</sup> CDO policy and NS legislation (net yet in effect)