

Professional competencies of the newly qualified dental practitioner

Guidance note:

Cultural safety

July 2023

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Introduction

Australian Dental Council (ADC) guidance notes aim to provide helpful information for education providers in specific areas where our standards have recently changed.

This includes the following standards:

- ADC Professional competencies of the newly qualified dental practitioner (the Competencies), effective from 1 July 2023.
- ADC Accreditation standards for dental practitioner programs (the Standards), which became effective from 2021.

Guidance notes are not definitive or binding documents, nor are they intended to be prescriptive.

What is cultural safety?

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy Statement of Intent commits to ensuring a culturally safe health workforce in the National Registration and Scheme (NRAS), with the goal to 'work together to achieve equity in health outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and other Australians to close the gap by 2031'.¹

A nationally consistent definition of cultural safety has been agreed between all parties within the NRAS, which is now reflected in the definition section of the Competencies, as follows:

'Cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities. Culturally safe practice is the ongoing critical reflection of health practitioner knowledge, skills, attitudes, practising behaviours and power differentials in delivering safe, accessible and responsive healthcare free of racism'.²

Greater awareness and preparedness of dental practitioners to care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and to provide culturally safe care will support improved models of care that minimise barriers and reduce health disparities.

Relevant professional competencies

Previous versions of the Competencies did not directly mention the need to ensure practitioners are skilled to assist at-risk groups or populations, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The revised Competencies include a dedicated domain within the Standards for Cultural Safety as it relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to enhance new dental practitioner graduates' readiness to provide culturally safe care. The *Professional competencies of the newly qualified dental practitioner* reinforce the importance of developing the knowledge and skills to deliver culturally safe care and to create a healthcare system that is free of racism.

A specific reference has been included to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples within the broader definition of 'Groups or populations at increased risk of harm or poor oral health', which states that 'all Professional competencies must take into account people, groups and populations at greater risk of harm and/or poor oral health outcomes, that face greater challenges in accessing oral health care, as existing systems, policies and process may not meet their needs'.

The Competencies now include the following:

Domain 1. Social responsibility and professionalism

Newly qualified dental practitioners must be able to:

- acknowledge colonisation and systemic racism, social, cultural, behavioural and economic factors which impact individual and community health
- recognise the importance of self-determined decision-making, partnership and collaboration in healthcare which is driven by the individual, family and community
- provide culturally safe care to diverse groups and populations recognising barriers to accessing care and responding to the distinct needs of those at increased risk or poor oral health

Domain 2. Communication and leadership

Newly qualified dental practitioners must be able to:

- engage respectfully with the person receiving care, their families, carers, and communities in relation to oral health
- engage in interprofessional collaborative practice to provide person-centred care

- identify opportunities for improvement in care delivery and advocate for improved oral health outcomes, including for groups or populations at increased risk of harm or poor oral health

Domain 4. Health promotion

Newly qualified dental practitioners must be able to:

- understand the connection between health promotion and health policy development
- design, implement and evaluate health promotion strategies and programs.

Domain 5. Scientific and clinical knowledge

Newly qualified dental practitioners must be able to:

- apply the social, cultural, biological, biomedical, physical and behavioural sciences in relation to oral health care provision and disease prevention
- apply the theories and principles of population oral health

Domain 6. Person-centred care

Newly qualified dental practitioners must be able to:

- recognise health as it relates to the individual, taking into consideration medical, social and cultural contexts
- determine when and how to refer to the appropriate health and or care professional.

Why is cultural safety important?

The National Oral Health Plan aims to 'improve oral health outcomes and reduce the impact of poor oral health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'.³ Actions identified to achieve this goal include incorporation of cultural competency across training, education and assessment, clinical management protocols and guidelines within dental practitioner programs.³ Dental practitioners must be able to provide culturally safe care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. This includes understanding the definition of cultural safety as determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities and demonstrating the ongoing critical reflection of one's own knowledge, skills, attitudes, practicing behaviours and power differentials in delivering safe, accessible and responsive healthcare free of racism.²

Guidance for education providers

To become and remain accredited with the ADC, programs are required to demonstrate that their 'design, delivery and resourcing enable students to achieve the required Professional competencies' (Accreditation standards; Domain 3). This includes demonstrating that program learning outcomes address and assess all the required Competencies (Accreditation standards; 3.2; 5.2).

To meet the ADC's Standards in this area, education providers should consider how students can be best prepared throughout the curriculum to provide culturally safe care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The experiences students have, how they are delivered and how the relevant Competencies are assessed are likely to vary between programs depending on several factors including the profession and program – for example, whether it is a pre-registration or specialist program.

We do not prescribe exactly how a program should provide opportunities for students to best prepare students to provide culturally safe care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. However, some approaches might include, for example:

- engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health associations for advice and support regarding how to ensure dental practitioner programs attract, support and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and ensure a culturally safe training environment
- establishing partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to develop curricula, including representation on program committees
- inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander views as compulsory course content, and ensuring cultural safety is integrated across the entire curriculum course
- engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to deliver cultural awareness training modules for staff delivering program content⁴
- identifying and, where possible, providing opportunities for culturally safe and responsive clinical placements
- inclusion of assessments to ensure students are developing the skills required to be a culturally safe practitioner.

Education providers are encouraged to consider how they can prepare students for providing culturally safe care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, to ensure barriers to healthcare and health disparities are minimised and to promote a healthcare system free of racism.

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Resources

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