



Dietitians of Canada
Les diététistes du Canada

**Professional
Standards
For Dietitians
In Canada**

**Normes
professionnelles
des diététistes
au Canada**

**Professional Standards
For Dietitians
In Canada**

Developed by:

**Dietitians of Canada
College of Dietitians of Ontario**

in collaboration and with financial support from:

**British Columbia Dietitians' and Nutritionists' Association
Alberta Registered Dietitians' Association
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Manitoba Association of Registered Dietitians
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New Brunswick Association of Dietitians
Nova Scotia Dietetic Association
Prince Edward Island Dietetic Association
Newfoundland Dietetic Association**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
WHAT ARE STANDARDS?	1
WHY DO WE NEED STANDARDS?	2
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR DIETITIANS	2
WHAT PRINCIPLES UNDERLIE THE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS?	3
HOW ARE THE SIX PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS PRESENTED?	4
STANDARD 1: PROVISION OF SERVICE TO A CLIENT	6
STANDARD 2: UNIQUE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE.....	7
STANDARD 3: COMPETENT APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE	8
STANDARD 4: CONTINUED COMPETENCE.....	9
STANDARD 5: ETHICS	10
STANDARD 6: PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY & ACCOUNTABILITY	11
APPENDIX A.....	12
GLOSSARY.....	13
REFERENCE LIST.....	16

CERTAIN WORDS OR PHRASES THAT APPEAR IN THIS DOCUMENT ARE DEFINED IN THE GLOSSARY. FOR EASE OF READING, WHEN THESE WORDS OR PHRASES APPEAR FOR THE FIRST TIME, THEY ARE ITALICIZED.

INTRODUCTION

The dietetics profession has a long history of commitment to quality services. The *public* has come to trust and value our expertise in the area of dietetics. This expertise is described in the “National Scope of Practice Statement” which was developed by the *Affiliation Agreement Management Team (AAMT)* in 1992 (Appendix A). Although the specific wording in each province may vary, the meaning and intent of the national statement is reflected in each provincial scope of practice statement. Scope of practice statements define the boundaries of practice with respect to those of other professionals.

National Scope of Practice Statement

The practice of dietetics and nutrition means the translation and application of the scientific knowledge of foods and human nutrition towards the attainment, maintenance, and promotion of the health of individuals, groups, and the community (AAMT, 1992).

Protecting public trust and ensuring the quality of dietetic services is the responsibility of all dietitians¹. Because it is a privilege, and not a right to practice as a dietitian we are accountable to the public and to each other. This means that we must:

- practice within professional, legal, and ethical *standards*; and
- monitor practice according to those standards.

WHAT ARE STANDARDS?

Standards originate from many sources, and are based on the values, priorities, and practice of the profession. Standards describe minimal levels of performance against which actual performance can be compared. They are intended to guide the daily practice of each and every professional. It is recognized that individual dietitians will strive to exceed the requirements of these standards. However, the standards state minimal levels below which performance is unacceptable.

In this document, *Standards of Practice* is used as an umbrella term for a group of documents that include, among others: *professional standards, ethical guidelines, entry-level competencies, provincial regulations, standards of care and practice guidelines*. Together these documents outline the requirements for safe dietetic practice and describe the responsibilities of each dietitian. For example, “The Code of Ethics for the Dietetic Profession in Canada” (1996) guides ethical decision-making by outlining fundamental aspects of the professional relationship.

¹ The word dietitian is used because it is the most common title protected by provincial legislation. However, some provinces also protect the word “nutritionist,” and professional and job titles often use the terms interchangeably.

WHY DO WE NEED STANDARDS?

There are many reasons why dietitians need standards. As mentioned earlier, standards represent a minimal level of performance that a profession uses to evaluate the activities of its members.

Standards are also developed to:

- ensure the public of safe and ethical dietetic practice;
- act as a guide to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to practice safely;
- help dietitians and others evaluate practice;
- help dietitians improve their practice;
- promote the role and accountability of dietitians to the public, other professionals, and themselves;
- provide guidance to educators in developing educational programmes for dietitians;
- act as a legal reference to describe reasonable and prudent practice in employment situations, inquests, negligence cases, and complaints to the professional body.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR DIETITIANS

This document of “Professional Standards for Dietitians in Canada” is intended to replace the “1989 Standards of Practice Manual”. The 1989 standards were based on areas of professional responsibility, while the 1996 Professional Standards are based on broad professional characteristics.

Professional standards which are based on broad professional characteristics describe the acceptable behaviour of the professional. From reviews of the literature², six common professional characteristics around which standards can be developed emerged. These characteristics are:

1. professionals provide a service to the public
2. professionals base their practice on a unique body of knowledge
3. professionals competently apply knowledge
4. professionals maintain competence in their area of practice
5. professionals adhere to a code of ethics
6. professionals are responsible and accountable to the public for their own actions.

² In developing the 1996 Professional Standards, several publications, including those from numerous professional associations and regulatory bodies, were reviewed. The key documents have been included in a Reference List contained within this document.

This model was chosen for several reasons. First, it is applicable to all dietitians regardless of their area, setting, or focus of practice. Second, the wide applicability of standards based on broad professional expectations does not limit the practice of the profession or affect the protection of the public. And finally, these broad standard statements can be used as a framework for the development of standards at a more specific or local level.

The six Professional Standards in this document originated through the work of a national steering committee comprised of dietitians representing each professional association/regulatory body in Canada, and a member of the public. Further input was obtained through focus groups that included dietitians from a variety of practice settings and members of the public in each province. This collaborative project was undertaken to establish common professional standards which will enhance portability and harmonization for dietitians across the country.

The six Professional Standards in this document will evolve over time because dietetics is based on an ever-changing body of knowledge. As practice continues to develop in response to the changes in this body of knowledge, the six standards will be modified to reflect these changes.

WHAT PRINCIPLES UNDERLIE THE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS?

These six Professional Standards are based on several guiding principles adapted from the assumptions appearing in the “Competencies for Entry-Level Dietitians” (1996). These guiding principles relate to views about dietitians, the client, health, and the environment.

Dietitians

- Dietitians are essential members of the health system and assume a variety of roles³, in different areas of practice such as clinical, education, health promotion, food service management and industry, research, administration, and consulting.
- Dietitians practice independently, interdependently and collaboratively.
- Dietitians practice within legislated professional regulations.
- Dietitians are committed to *life-long learning* to upgrade their knowledge and skills in order to keep their practice current.
- Dietitians are committed to quality outcomes, and they intervene so as to contribute to the best possible outcomes for their *clients*.

³ For example: 1) a clinical dietitian may provide direct service for an individual client during one part of the day and be involved in carrying out surveys, or gathering information (an aspect of research), during the rest of the day; 2) a dietitian working in the community may spend some of her time educating other health care providers about nutrition issues, and also assume a management role in her organization; and 3) a dietitian working in industry may spend some of her time educating employees and consumers about food products, and may assume a research role when conducting a consumer survey.

The Client

- The client may be an individual, family and/or substitute decision-maker, group, agency, employer, employee, organization or community, and is unique and diverse in needs.
- The client is the central focus of the *professional service* that dietitians provide.
- The client collaborates and is a partner in the decision-making process in which to achieve nutritional goals and objectives. This means that the client's own experiences and knowledge are central, and carry authority within the client-professional partnership. This assumption forms the basis of a *client-centred approach* wherein mutual respect, trust, and shared objectives are fundamental.

Health

- Health is a basic resource for everyday living. It is the extent to which one can realize aspirations, satisfy needs, and change or cope with the environment.
- Health is influenced by biology, individual beliefs and culture, lifestyle, the health care system, and social, economic, and physical environments.
- Health is impacted by nutrition and food choices.
- Health exists on a continuum from wellness to illness.

The Environment

- The environment in which dietitians practice includes a variety of practice settings and relationships. It encompasses physical, psycho-social, political, regulatory, economic and cultural factors.
- The environment is ever changing and dynamic.

HOW ARE THE SIX PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS PRESENTED?

The six Professional Standards are based on the six characteristics of a professional described earlier. The standard statements are then followed by *indicators* which illustrate how each can be applied. The indicators are not exhaustive, nor are they listed in order of importance. They should be considered as guides to help determine if the standard is being achieved.

Professional practice is based on the belief that the actions of a professional have an effect on clients. This means that the six standard statements can be tied, either directly or indirectly, to *client outcomes*. A short discussion of outcomes follows each standard and its indicators. Although much work has been done over the past few years in linking standards of care and practice guidelines to specific outcomes, little has been done in the area of professional standards and outcomes. As a result, this document does not provide definitive outcomes that can be linked to each of the standard statements. It is anticipated that research in this area will continue, and that as the six Professional Standards evolve over time, specific client outcomes will be defined for each standard statement.

Because the six Professional Standards are based on broad professional expectations, they are applicable to all dietitians regardless of their area of responsibility or focus of practice. As always, it is important to remember that each dietitian is individually responsible for **her/his own actions** even when acting collaboratively or in conjunction with others.

STANDARD 1: PROVISION OF SERVICE TO A CLIENT

The dietitian uses a client-centered approach to provide and facilitate an effective dietetic service.

Indicators

To apply Standard 1 each dietitian

- 1.1 collaborates with the client and/or *appropriate others*
- 1.2 *manages* available resources effectively and efficiently in meeting the needs of the client
- 1.3 applies a *research-based* approach in providing a dietetic service
- 1.4 uses *critical thinking* to analyze, synthesize, and apply information to improve the quality and effectiveness of service
- 1.5 creates a client-centred environment conducive to achieving client outcomes.

One desired outcome of this standard is the establishment of a partnership between a client and a dietitian. Here it is important to assess not only the level of participation by the client, but the manner in which the dietitian supports or encourages this participation.

A second outcome is the provision of an effective dietetic service. Since effectiveness may have a subjective and an objective component, the dietitian may review the results of surveys, questionnaires, etc. to determine client satisfaction and the achievement of agreed upon goals and objectives.

STANDARD 2: UNIQUE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

The dietitian has an in-depth scientific knowledge of food and human nutrition, and integrates this knowledge with that from other disciplines including health and social sciences, education, communication and management.

Indicators

To apply Standard 2 each dietitian

- 2.1 has the knowledge relevant to her/his area of practice⁴
- 2.2 knows how and where to locate needed information
- 2.3 shares knowledge and information with appropriate others
- 2.4 is informed about the unique body of knowledge possessed by dietitians in a variety of roles, and the contribution of dietitians as related to other service providers
- 2.5 seeks to strengthen innovation and excellence in practice by supporting the development and use of new knowledge in dietetics
- 2.6 creates an environment that assists individuals to acquire new knowledge and skills.

By a dietitian adhering to this standard, a client can be assured of service that is based on knowledge and understanding grounded in theory and research. As a result, the client can access an expert in food and human nutrition who bases her/his thinking on up-to-date professional knowledge.

⁴ As noted earlier in this document, area of practice refers to clinical, education, health promotion, food service management and industry, research, administration, and consulting.

STANDARD 3: COMPETENT APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

The dietitian competently applies the unique body of knowledge of food and human nutrition, and competently integrates this knowledge with that from other disciplines including health and social sciences, education, communication and management.

Indicators

To apply Standard 3 each dietitian

- 3.1 uses the skills necessary to apply the knowledge relevant to her/his area of practice
- 3.2 collaborates with clients and/or appropriate others
- 3.3 identifies food and nutrition issues through the assessment of data, documentation from the literature and critical analysis of information
- 3.4 formulates goals and objectives, and develops an action plan designed to meet these goals and objectives
- 3.5 implements, monitors, and modifies the action plan
- 3.6 evaluates the action plan through critical appraisal of the process and outcomes
- 3.7 establishes and maintains appropriate information and communication systems
- 3.8 applies knowledge gained from experience, clinical judgements, and research findings to professional practice.

It is expected that the dietitian can use her/his knowledge to the benefit of the client. In assessing client outcomes that can be derived from the application of this standard, it is important to look at the appropriateness of the service, the client's understanding of the action or service plan, and the client's agreement to the action or service plan.

STANDARD 4: CONTINUED COMPETENCE

The dietitian is responsible for life-long learning to ensure *competence* in her/his area of practice.

Indicators

To apply Standard 4 each dietitian

- 4.1 uses an organized and focused approach in: assessing her/his level of competence, determining her/his strengths and competence gaps/ learning needs, and developing a plan to meet those needs
- 4.2 strives for excellence in the profession by participating in, supporting and promoting the use of self-assessment methods and feedback from appropriate others to review and implement changes to practice
- 4.3 invests the time, effort, and other resources needed to maintain and/or improve the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and judgements required for her/his practice.

Since dietetics is based on an ever-changing body of knowledge, continuing competence ensures that client service is based on current knowledge and skills. Through self-assessment and other methods, the dietitian makes changes to her/his practice which result in service that is appropriate, effective and based on current thinking in dietetics.

STANDARD 5: ETHICS

The dietitian practices in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the profession.

Indicators

To apply Standard 5 each dietitian

- 5.1 demonstrates, through example and behaviour, adherence to the code of ethics for the dietetic profession
- 5.2 practices within her/his level of competence
- 5.3 recognizes her/his knowledge or skill limitations, and when necessary seeks the help, guidance, and expertise of others
- 5.4 reports unsafe practice or professional misconduct to the appropriate person or agency
- 5.5 protects a client's right to autonomy, respect, confidentiality, dignity, and access to information
- 5.6 promotes and supports ethical behaviour in practice and in research
- 5.7 uses discussions with colleagues as a means to resolve or interpret ethical issues and conflicts in practice.

In determining client outcomes related to this standard the dietitian must assure her/himself that her/his practice is in accordance with current ethical guidelines such as protecting the client's rights to autonomy, respect, confidentiality, dignity, and access to information. Information as to the client's perception of the ethical nature of the service can also be obtained through discussions, focus groups, surveys, and questionnaires.

STANDARD 6: PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY & ACCOUNTABILITY

The dietitian is accountable to the public and is responsible for ensuring that her/his practice meets legislative requirements, and Standards of Practice for the profession.

Indicators

To apply Standard 6 each dietitian

- 6.1 assumes responsibility and accountability for her/his own professional actions
- 6.2 ensures that her/his practice complies with current legislation, and the Standards of Practice of the profession
- 6.3 follows and continually strives to make changes to pertinent legislation, guidelines, and policies and procedures to ensure consistency with Standards of Practice
- 6.4 *advocates* for improvements in practice
- 6.5 acts to ensure that public safety is maintained.

In meeting this standard the dietitian must assure her/himself that the services she/he provides conform to legislative requirements and standards of practice for the profession. This results in service that is: safe and poses no unnecessary harm or risk to the client, effective, and based on current legislative criteria.

An aspect of public accountability involves the ability of the public to complain about the services rendered by a dietitian. One specific outcome that can be linked to this standard is the availability of a process for resolving complaints about service, and the ease with which a client can access the process.

APPENDIX A

SCOPE OF PRACTICE (AAMT, 1992)

The practice of dietetics and nutrition means the translation and application of the scientific knowledge of foods and human nutrition towards the attainment, maintenance, and promotion of the health of individuals, groups, and the community and may include but is not limited to:

- i) establishing and reviewing the principles of nutrition and nutrition guidelines for healthy and ill people throughout their lives;
- ii) assessing nutritional needs of individuals and developing and implementing care plans based on the assessments;
- iii) managing food service systems to provide nutrition care;
- iv) assessing the overall nutritional needs of a community in order to establish priorities and influence policies which provide the nutritional component of health promotion programs, and planning, coordinating, implementing and evaluating those programs;
- v) collecting, interpreting, and evaluating for consumer protection, information on nutrition that is available to the public;
- vi) consulting with individuals, families, and groups on the principles of food and nutrition, and the practical application of those principles;
- vii) planning, conducting, and evaluating educational programs in nutrition; and
- viii) conducting basic and applied research in food, nutrition and food service systems.

GLOSSARY

Advocates

Advocates means to support, to be in favour of, or to work toward.

Affiliation Agreement Management Team (AAMT)

The Affiliation Agreement was signed in 1987 by the provincial and national dietetic associations. One of the purposes of the Agreement was to facilitate actions by the associations which strengthen and support the profession and the professional. The National Scope of Practice Statement is one example of the work of AAMT.

Appropriate Others

Refers to the client and potential partners in the process. Administration, staff, community representatives, resource people, suppliers, family, interest groups, partners in industry, and those in the health care team may be appropriate others.

Client

An individual, family and/or substitute decision - maker, group, agency, employer, employee, organization, or community who is a potential or actual recipient of the dietitian's expertise. The client is unique and diverse in needs, culture, motivations, resources, religion, and perception of wellness.

Client-centred Approach

The use of collaborative and partnership approaches where the client's own experiences and knowledge are central, and carry authority within the client-professional partnership. In this approach mutual respect, trust and shared objectives are fundamental.

Client Outcomes

Refers to the consequences, to a client, of an action or inaction within the context of a professional service.

Competence

Competence, in professional practice, is more than the accomplishment of discrete and isolated tasks. Rather it involves the interaction and integration of knowledge, critical thinking, judgement, attitudes, skills, values, and beliefs. It also includes the ability to generalize learning and move from one situation to another.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is characterized by reflective thought where information is analyzed, synthesized, and applied to improve the quality and effectiveness of service.

Entry-level Competencies

The 1996 “Competencies for the Entry-level Dietitian” describe the knowledge, skills, abilities, and judgements required of a beginning dietitian. These competencies, which have been accepted by all provincial associations/regulatory bodies, identify key assumptions about the dietitian, the client, the environment, and health.

Ethical Guidelines

Ethical guidelines include, but are not limited to, the code of ethics for the dietetic profession, Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, guidelines for conducting human and animal research, confidentiality policies, pertinent agency policies, and pertinent provincial legislation.

Indicator

An indicator illustrates how a standard can be applied.

Life- Long Learning

Refers to ongoing enhancement of knowledge and skills related to practice.

Manage

Refers to a broad spectrum of activities that include planning, organizing, utilizing resources (human, fiscal, and physical), guiding and directing, and evaluating to ensure that progress toward objectives is being made.

Practice Guidelines

Practice guidelines are clinical tools for improving the quality, consistency, and cost-effectiveness of health care. They describe clinical management strategies aimed at improving the quality of decisions made by the dietitian and the client in order to improve client outcomes. They are based on scientific evidence and expert opinion that focus on client outcomes rather than the process of care.

Professional Practice

Professional practice is practice that is within professional, legal, and ethical standards, and that is monitored according to those standards. Professionalism is inherent within all areas of dietetic practice.

Professional Service

Refers to activities performed within the scope of professional practice.

Professional Standards

Professional standards are based on broad professional characteristics which describe the minimal acceptable behaviour of a professional. Professional standards tend to be generic and can be applied to all professions as well as to all individuals within a profession.

Provincial Regulations

Refers to laws that are passed by the government. The authority for making these regulations comes from a specific act.

Public

Refers to society at large, other health care professionals, government regulators, and any client.

Research-based

Refers to a systematic approach and study of pertinent information in order to establish facts and reach conclusions.

Standards

Standards are minimum levels of performance against which actual performance can be compared. Standards state minimal levels below which performance is unacceptable.

Standards of Care

Standards of care describe the minimal acceptable level of care to be expected. They are usually based on assessment, outcome identification, planning, implementation of action plans, and evaluation.

Standards of Practice

Standards of practice is an umbrella term for a group of documents that include, among others: professional standards, ethical guidelines, entry-level competencies, provincial regulations, standards of care and practice guidelines.

REFERENCE LIST

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⁵ Formerly called The Canadian Dietetic Association.

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COMMENTS

The following *Professional Standards for Dietitians* in Canada have been developed to reflect the present practice realities of dietitians. Because dietetics is an evolving profession, these standards will need to change over time. In order for us to keep these standards current and reflective of your practice, we need your comments.

If you believe that these standards require revision please write, or fax the national office of the Dietitians of Canada, or your provincial association/regulatory body.



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