

DENTURISTS

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Denturists

INTRODUCTION

Denturists/Denturologistes are primary oral healthcare professionals who provide denture care either directly to the public or as part of a dental health team that may include dentists, dental hygienists, dental technicians and oral surgeons. The Denturist Association of Canada [The DAC], 2020a).

HISTORY OF THE PROFESSION

Dentistry has diversified into many branches and specialties since its emergence as a professional field with formal qualifications around 1860. Among these branches is Denturism, which specializes in removable oral prostheses and started to evolve into a profession distinct from dentistry in the early 1900s (The DAC, 2020a). In the early years of Canadian Denturism, Denturists may have been referred to as dental mechanics or denture therapists. The profession itself has also gone by several names throughout its history, including not only Denturism but also denturistry and denturistry. Today, most denture professionals have adopted the name “Denturist” (The DAC, 2020a).

By the 1960s, the profession was made up of self-proclaimed Denturists who maintained that a “specialty trained profession could do better dentures than the dentist/dental laboratory alliance” (Rufenach, 2015). Although this interprofessional struggle was a key feature of Denturism’s historical trajectory in Canada, it eventually resolved into foundational partnerships between dentistry and Denturism and the two professions work closely together today.



The first legislation related to Denturism was introduced in 1961 and allowed dental mechanics to provide complete dentures directly to the public. With the advent of more formalized education and training, Denturists were eventually recognized as being experts in the provision of complete and partial dentures, leading to amendments to the legislation. Depending on the province, the scope of practice of a Denturist may also include the provision of dentures over implants. This expanded scope of practice, along with education enabling them to recognize oral pathologies, has led to a stronger working relationship among the entire oral health team.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Early Denturists learned their skills through on-the-job practice experience; however, there are now six colleges in Canada that provide Denturist training, three of which have been accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Denturism (<https://cadaccreditation.com>). To be accredited, a school undergoes an extensive on-site survey and submits annual reports demonstrating maintenance of the program.

TABLE 1: Schools of Denturism in Canada

| Province | City | School | Accreditation Status |
|------------------|-----------|---|----------------------|
| British Columbia | Surrey | CDI College | Accredited |
| Alberta | Edmonton | Northern Alberta Institute of Technology | Accredited |
| Ontario | Barrie | Georgian College | Not accredited |
| Ontario | Toronto | George Brown College of Applied Arts and Technology | Accredited |
| Ontario | Toronto | Oxford College | Not accredited |
| Quebec | Longueuil | Collège Edouard-Montpetit | Not accredited |

Denturism students' study or a minimum of two years with most programs being a 3 year program length, focusing on the clinical laboratory skills required to make removable oral prostheses (it is relevant to note the word removable is not recognized in the Province of Quebec's legislation). Denturist curricula focus on the theoretical and practical aspects of intra-oral and laboratory procedures. While course content may vary slightly between schools, students of Denturism usually study the following subjects, which are included in the Canadian Denturist Baseline Competency Profile (The DAC, 2020c):

- Clinical prosthetics
- Complete denture prosthodontics
- Dental histology and embryology
- Dental kinesiology
- Dental materials
- Dental psychology and the aging patient
- Dentures over implants
- General anatomy and physiology
- General histology
- Human relations
- Microbiology
- Orofacial anatomy
- Oral pathology and medicine
- Partial dentures
- Pharmacology and emergency care
- Practice management
- Pre-clinical prosthetics
- Preventive dentistry
- Psychology in dentistry
- Public health, legislation and research
- Radiographic interpretation
- Small business management

In recent years, the rising cost of denturist education has garnered national attention (Amery, 2015). Education in Denturism is becoming increasingly expensive, while students remain ineligible for funding opportunities available to other allied oral healthcare students. For example, the military-based Dental Officer Training Program will fully fund a dental student's education in exchange for years of service, but no similar program exists for denturists (National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, 2015).

In 2014, The DAC commissioned a review of the education, competencies and scopes of practice of Denturists. The resulting report, which looked at the curriculum content and competency-based evaluations of Denturist schools, revealed that there is more to Denturism than the fabrication of dentures. The specialized body of knowledge that defines the profession includes a foundational base in the biomedical sciences, including oral anatomy and physiology of the head and neck region, pathophysiology in relation to the signs and symptoms of oral and dental disease, microbiology, and age-related changes in structure and function. Students are also introduced to the art and science of illness prevention and health promotion through course work in asepsis and infection-control strategies, nutrition, pharmacology and other subjects. Aspects of this foundational knowledge base are often highlighted as pre-requisite or co-requisite content for removable prosthodontic theory, laboratory and clinical courses.

The in-depth review of dentistry curricula showed that limited attention is being paid to removable prosthodontics. This finding concurs with previous research indicating that faculties of dentistry seem to have significantly reduced both theoretical and practical curriculum coverage of removable prosthodontics. Available peer-reviewed literature and the comments of some study participants indicate concern about the preparedness of new graduates from dentistry programs to participate in or direct other dental providers working in removable prosthodontics. They also showed a high degree of consensus on the importance of having access to a sufficient pool of Dentists adequately prepared to assume the roles and responsibilities required in removable prosthodontic practice.

Unlike general dentistry, Denturism focuses its training and practice on ensuring students acquire the requisite knowledge, attitudes and skills to provide high-quality removable prosthodontic services to patients who have lost some or all of their teeth (Way, 2015a).

INTERNATIONALLY EDUCATED PRACTITIONERS

The requirements for registration and licensure as internationally educated Denturists vary by province. Below are two examples of how internationally educated Denturists can register in Canada.

Ontario

The College of Denturists of Ontario (CDO) requires that internationally educated professionals hold a Certificate of Registration and meet certain other requirements, including (CDO, 2020a):

1. Submit a diploma in denture therapy or Denturism and official transcripts
2. Submit a Comprehensive Credential Report from a CDO-approved credentialing agency
3. Provide proof of English- or French-language proficiency if the applicant's Denturism program was taught in another language
4. Be a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident, or have authorization under Canada's *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*
5. Pass written and practical qualifying exams set by the CDO

Alberta

To practice in Alberta, Denturists must be registered with the College of Alberta Denturists. It recognizes that Denturism is practised worldwide and professionals are educated in formats and programs that differ from those approved by the College. It has therefore established a process for conducting a fair and transparent assessment of international qualifications. The application process is managed by the Registrar and College staff, while the assessment is carried out by the Registration Committee, made up of regulated members. There are three parts to the process of establishing substantial equivalence: application, assessment and decision, and registration (College of Alberta Denturists, 2020).

SCOPE OF PRACTICE

Denturists are registered oral healthcare professionals who perform a variety of intra-oral procedures and other activities related to the design, construction, repair and alteration of dentures (CDO, 2020b). Depending on the jurisdiction of practice, Denturists may perform some or all of the following duties (Government of Canada, 2020):

- Take impressions of a patient's oral structures, which may include natural teeth and ridge area, giving the shape and size of the patient's jaw
- Design and construct dentures or direct others to aid in the fabrication process
- Insert, fit and modify new dentures
- Repair dentures
- Reline, rebase and adjust dentures
- Fabricate sports mouthguards and anti-snoring prostheses
- Fabricate screw retained and removable prostheses on implants
- Order radiographs
- Fabricate partial dentures
- Perform teeth whitening
- Perform denture cleaning and polishing

PRACTICE SETTING

Denturists in Canada typically operate or work in independent clinics. Patients do not require a referral from another oral health professional to see a Denturist. Denturist clinics often also have in-house laboratories where dentures or other dental prostheses are fabricated. Denturists may also practise in settings such as:

- Community health settings
- Hospitals
- Dental offices
- Teaching institutions
- Research innovation facilities

REGULATION OF THE PROFESSION

The first legislation to recognize the profession of Denturism was the *Dental Mechanics Act* of Alberta (1961). Other provinces followed quickly and, by 1984, most provinces and territories had recognized Denturism as a distinct dental profession. Today, Denturists are recognized as independent practitioners by legislation in every jurisdiction in Canada. Each provincial/territorial regulatory body sets the standards for licensure and standards of practice for Denturists in its jurisdiction.



TABLE 2: Regulatory Bodies for Denturists in Canada

| Province/Territory | Regulatory Authority | Year Regulated |
|---------------------------|---|----------------|
| British Columbia | College of Denturists of British Columbia cd.bc.ca | 1962 |
| Alberta | College of Alberta Denturists abdenturists.ca | 1961 |
| Saskatchewan | Denturist Society of Saskatchewan saskdenturists.com | 1977 |
| Manitoba | Denturist Board of Manitoba denturistmb.org | 1970 |
| Ontario | College of Denturists of Ontario denturists-cdo.com | 1972 |
| Quebec | Ordre des denturologistes du Québec odq.com | 1973 |
| New Brunswick | New Brunswick Denturists Society nbdenturistsociety.ca | 1976 |
| Nova Scotia | Denturists Licensing Board of Nova Scotia nsdenturistsociety.ca | 1973 |
| Newfoundland and Labrador | Newfoundland and Labrador Denturists Board denturistassociationnl.ca | 1984 |
| Prince Edward Island | Denturist Society of Prince Edward Island <i>No website</i> | 2003 |
| Yukon | Yukon Professional Licensing (Dental) community.gov.yk.ca/consumer/index.html | 1984 |
| Northwest Territories | Northwest Territories Professional Licensing (Dental) <i>No website</i> | * |
| Nunavut | Department of Health and Social Services <i>No website</i> | * |

* Denturists in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut are governed by the legislation in their home provinces, but they must be registered with the relevant territorial department of health and social services.

Source: The DAC, 2020a

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

The Denturist Association of Canada

The Denturist Association of Canada (www.denturist.org) is the national voice for Denturists. There are 11 members of The DAC: ten provinces and one territory, representing approximately 2,000 Denturists (see Table 3 for the complete list of member associations). The DAC’s mission is to “pursue the advancement of the profession through education, communication amongst members,

and liaison with external agencies, and to encourage excellence in the provision of denture services to all Canadians” (The DAC, 2020b). That mission statement is accompanied by very specific objectives to ensure The DAC’s voice is heard and its mission realized. The DAC’s objectives are to:

- Promote professional unity and advancement of Denturism on the national level

- Represent the interests of members of the association to all levels of government and the public
- Coordinate information valuable to members
- Advocate for comparable legislation throughout Canada
- Encourage and facilitate standardization of education and examination
- Be proactive in the development of Denturism in Canada and throughout the world
- Promote the standards of professional codes of ethics for Denturists as established, maintained and enforced by Canadian Denturist regulatory authorities
- Carry out any other activities relating to dental healthcare that the Board considers desirable

Provincial/Territorial Denturist Associations

| TABLE 3: Denturist Professional Associations by Province/Territory | | |
|---|--|-------------------------|
| Province/Territory | Professional Association | Year Established |
| British Columbia | Denturist Association of British Columbia denturist.bc.ca | 1951 |
| Alberta | Denturist Association of Alberta denturistassociationofalberta.com | 2005 |
| Saskatchewan | Denturist Society of Saskatchewan saskdenturists.com | 1977 |
| Manitoba | Denturist Association of Manitoba denturistmb.org | 1978 |
| Ontario | Denturist Association of Ontario denturistassociation.ca | 1982 |
| Quebec | Association des denturologistes du Québec adq-qc.com | 1970 |
| New Brunswick | New Brunswick Denturists Society nbdenturistsociety.ca | 1977 |
| Nova Scotia | Denturist Society of Nova Scotia nsdenturistsociety.ca | 1973 |
| Newfoundland and Labrador | Denturist Association of Newfoundland and Labrador denturistassociationnl.ca | 1984 |
| Prince Edward Island | Denturist Society of Prince Edward Island <i>No website</i> | 1985 |
| Yukon | Yukon Denturist Association <i>No website</i> | 1984 |

International Federation of Denturists

The International Federation of Denturists (IFD, <https://international-Denturists.org>) brings together national Denturist organizations to create an international forum for the promotion of the profession (IFD, 2020). The DAC is a member of the IFD, giving Canadian Denturists the opportunity to contribute to an international dialogue on the emergence and establishment of Denturism globally. The objectives of the IFD are to:

- Promote the development of federations or associations of Denturists in every country and political subdivision to represent the views of Denturists to government and governmental authorities and agencies
- Promote the interests and general welfare of Denturists throughout the world
- Create and maintain favourable national and international climates within which Denturists can practice their profession
- Promote research in career training programs for Denturists
- Promote high educational standards and develop a code of ethics for Denturists
- Collect and disseminate statistical and other information
- Conduct general promotional activities, including advertising and publicity on international and national levels
- Disseminate general, economic, social, educational and governmental information
- Secure and present the views of the members to other organizations, governmental agencies, legislatures and the public
- Promote the recognition and acceptance of the services provided by Denturists

DEMOGRAPHICS

According to The DAC, there were 2,408 Denturists registered in Canada in 2020, of which 54% work full time and full year (Government of Canada, 2020). Statistics Canada's most recent demographic data on Denturists is more than 10 years old and comes mainly from Quebec. According to Service Canada data, in 2001, women made up less than 22% of full-time Denturists in Canada (Amery, 2015). This is a significant difference from the gender split in dental hygiene and dental assisting, where more than 90% of practitioners are women.

TABLE 4: Registered Denturists by Province/Territory, 2020

| Province | Registered Denturists |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| British Columbia | 224 |
| Alberta | 314 |
| Saskatchewan | 68 |
| Manitoba | 49 |
| Ontario | 742 |
| Quebec | 920 |
| New Brunswick | 32 |
| Nova Scotia | 33 |
| Newfoundland and Labrador | 21 |
| Prince Edward Island | 2 |
| Yukon | 2 |
| Nunavut | 0 |
| Northwest Territories | 1 |
| TOTAL | 2,408 |

COVERAGE OF SERVICES AND REMUNERATION

Denturist services are covered by a number of third-party payers, including Veterans Affairs Canada, Social Services, Indigenous Services Canada and the Non-Insured Health Benefits program. Denturist services are also recognized by private insurance companies and may be claimed through a patient's insurance plan. According to the most recent Canadian Health Measures Survey (Statistics Canada, 2014):

- 62% of Canadians have private dental insurance
- 78% of respondents from the higher income bracket have private dental insurance
- 50% of respondents from the lower income bracket have no dental insurance
- 53% of adults between the ages of 60 and 79 have no dental insurance

Denturists have their own set of procedure codes with descriptions: The DAC Master List of Procedure Codes, which is updated, revised and maintained by The DAC. It is used by the provincial and territorial associations to create their individual provincial and territorial fee guides, which set the approximate cost for each service. Members use these to submit to insurance companies and third-party payers (Way, 2015b).

The DAC has also developed a network called DACnet™, which uses the Canadian Dental Association's messaging standard and allows Denturists to submit claims electronically to insurance companies and third-party payers (DACnet, 2020).

SALARY

In 2005, the annual employment income for full-time Denturists was \$56,588 (Government of Canada, 2020). In a survey by the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT), graduates of the full-time Denturist Technology Program self-reported a median annual income of \$38,000 (NAIT, 2014). However, the results of this survey do not fully represent the potential income of Denturists. The self-reported figures are most accurate for one particular cohort: newly graduated Denturists, who are likely also

undertaking internship positions as they begin their careers. Approximately 90% of Denturists own their own practices and have the ability to earn well over \$65,000 per year (Statistics Canada, 2014).


KEY ISSUES FOR THE PROFESSION

The rising cost of education, combined with the limited number of spaces available in only six programs across Canada, may be impeding the growth of this profession by pulling prospective students to other oral healthcare professions that offer more financial incentive and future debt relief. For example, although dentistry schools are among the most expensive education programs in the country, the eventual remuneration for Dentists is more in line with the upfront debt load. Additionally, unlike Denturists, Dentists are eligible for funding from nationally recognized scholarship programs and fully funded education pathways from the Canadian Armed Forces.

CONCLUSION

Denturists remain at the forefront of the legislative landscape governing the allied oral dental health professions in Canada. With its unique history, educational pathways, professional challenges and scopes of practice, the continued development and advancement of Denturism contributes to the diversity of allied oral healthcare professionals in Canada.

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ACRONYMS

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| CDO | College of Denturists of Ontario |
| IFD | International Federation of Denturists |
| NAIT | Northern Alberta Institute of Technology |
| The DAC | The Denturist Association of Canada |

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