



Spotlight on Independent Dental Hygiene Practice

Dental hygienists are primary oral health care professionals who don't just work in traditional dental offices. Many own their own dental hygiene clinics; others work in long-term care facilities, homes, schools, and on the road, offering mobile services, improving access to oral health care in communities across Canada.

Dental hygienists who practise independently provide oral health care without needing direction from a dentist.

In all provinces, legislation allows dental hygienists to own and operate their own businesses. They may offer space to other dental hygienists, dentists, denturists, speech-language pathologists, physiotherapists or professionals. Others may contract their services to public health programs, community clinics or long-term care facilities. By offering their services in various settings, dental hygienists can better meet the oral health needs of every person living in Canada.

Just like their dental hygiene counterparts in traditional dental offices, **dental hygienists practising independently collaborate with other health professionals to provide individualized, systematic oral health care to support their patients' overall health.** At every appointment, they will:

- collect a comprehensive health history
- assess the head, neck, and jaw joints, as well as the mouth, teeth, and gums
- perform an oral cancer screening
- assess the person's risk for oral diseases and identify any areas of concern
- develop a comprehensive care plan
- treat gum disease by removing dental biofilm and calculus from the teeth
- provide instructions on at-home oral self-care techniques to address gum and other oral diseases

Depending on the patient's individual needs and risk for dental caries, dental hygienists may place dental sealants or apply fluoride or other products to prevent or arrest tooth decay or address tooth sensitivity. They may also place temporary fillings if a permanent solution is not immediately available.

If a dental hygienist practising independently identifies a health or dental concern, they will refer the patient to the appropriate health care professional, such as a dentist, denturist, dental specialist, speech therapist, nutritionist or physician for further care.

But that's not all. Ask your dental hygienist about other services they can provide to prevent oral disease, maintain or improve your oral and overall health.





Independent Dental Hygiene Practices in Your Community

Dental hygiene practice owners may operate storefront or home-based clinics. An increasing number are opening mobile practices, some using vans retrofitted with a dental hygiene operatory. These innovative business models make it possible for children and their parents, seniors, residents in long-term care and group homes, and Indigenous communities to access the oral care they need more easily.

Long-Term Care

Meeting the oral health needs of residents in long-term care (LTC) can be challenging because of the residents' lack of mobility or decision-making capacity or insufficient staffing or staff knowledge of oral care. Having an organized oral care program in LTC homes is imperative. In fact, many dental hygienists are joining care teams and providing dental hygiene services to LTC residents using the fully equipped dental operatories within the facility or by bringing in their own mobile chair, equipment, and supplies.

Remote Communities

Dental hygienists working independently often travel to northern, rural, and Indigenous communities to deliver much-needed preventive and therapeutic care to those with limited or no local access to oral health care services.

Access to Care

Dental hygienists working independently know that professional oral care can be costly for low-income families. Focusing on prevention, they may offer advice or services that will help prevent disease before it occurs.

In addition, many offer at-home dental hygiene care, making preventive services more accessible to clients with limited mobility or transportation challenges. Offering services in the comfort of a person's home may also help reduce anxiety among those who have phobias stemming from past dental experiences. These clients may be more likely to attend regular dental hygiene appointments when they take place at home.

While all dental hygienists in Canada provide oral health care services across all life stages, dental hygienists practising independently are instrumental in improving access to care for underserved populations.