



Spotlight on Independent Dental Hygiene Practice

Dental hygienists are essential health care professionals, but they don't just work in traditional dental offices. You will find them in independently owned dental hygiene clinics, long-term care facilities, homes, schools, and on the road, improving access to oral health care in communities across Canada.

Dental hygienists who practise independently provide oral health care without a dentist present.

In most provinces, legislation allows dental hygienists to own and operate their own businesses and employ or share space with other dental hygienists, dentists, denturists, dental assistants, physiotherapists, and massage therapists. Others may work for public health programs or long-term care facilities. By offering their services in a variety of settings, dental hygienists are better able to 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 work in collaboration with their clients and other health professionals to provide individualized, systematic oral health care.** At every appointment, they will:

- collect a comprehensive health history
- assess your head, neck, and jaw joint
- perform an oral cancer screening
- assess the health of your mouth, oral tissues, teeth, and gums
- identify any areas of concern
- remove dental biofilm and calculus (tartar) from your teeth and provide education on at-home oral care techniques to address gum disease

Depending on your needs, they may also place sealants or apply fluoride or other products to prevent tooth decay, apply a product to treat tooth sensitivity or place temporary fillings.

If a dental hygienist practising independently identifies a health or dental concern, they will refer you 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 maintain or improve your oral and overall health.



According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information's latest data, there are 30,219 dental hygienists working in Canada (excluding PEI and Saskatchewan).¹

1. [Canadian Institute for Health Information. Canada's Health Care Providers, 2015 to 2019. Ottawa: CIHI; 2020.](#)



Independent Dental Hygiene Practices in Your Community

Dental hygiene business owners operate storefront or home-based clinics. An increasing number are opening mobile practices, with some using vans retrofitted with dental hygiene operatories. 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 valuable. More and more dental hygienists are part of care teams and provide dental hygiene services to LTC residents using the fully equipped dental operatories within the facility or by bringing in their own mobile equipment.

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 dental or dental hygiene services.

Accessibility

Dental hygienists working independently know that professional oral care can be costly for low-income families and may offer more affordable options for their clients.

In addition, they can provide dental hygiene care in a client's home, reducing anxiety among those who have phobias stemming from past dental experiences and eliminating travel for people with mobility or transportation challenges. 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 to people at every stage of life, dental hygienists practising independently are instrumental in improving access to care for underserved populations who need it the most.