AUSTRALIAN
DENTAL COUNCIL

# Professional competencies of the newly qualified dental practitioner

## Resources:
## Social responsibility

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# Contents

What is social responsibility? 3

Relevant professional competencies 3

Domain 1: Social responsibility and professionalism 3

Why is being a socially responsible practitioner important? 4

References 4

Resources 5

# What is social responsibility?

Dental practitioners have a responsibility to the communities they serve to behave in a professional and ethical manner, and it is important that public safety and trust in health professionals is maintained.[1]

The Competencies define the relationship between care at an individual level and the broader societal context to further improve dental practitioners' readiness to enter an increasingly complex health system.

A focus on person-centred care requires a broader understanding of the social determinants of health and how health needs are prioritised by all those involved in the delivery of health care. Prioritising health needs is a shared responsibility and requires input from health practitioners, health service organisations, government, and the broader public, including patients.

Dental practitioners play a role in addressing the inequities of healthcare access as well as the responsible provision of care as it relates to economic and environmental impacts of the health system.

# Relevant professional competencies

Previous versions of the Competencies did not explicitly reference social accountability of dental practitioners.

There has been a change in the name of Domain 1 to 'Social responsibility and professionalism', which recognises the level of control that a newly qualified practitioner can exert, while also considering that professional practice is undertaken within a social context.

The change of title aims to reinforce that for trust in the profession to be maintained, a practitioner must act in a way that meets the expectations not just of the profession, but also of the broader community in which the practitioner works. This Domain name demonstrates the interconnect between responsibility to serve the needs of the broader society and to behave in a way that also meets with the expectations of the professions.

The Competencies now include the following:

## Domain 1: Social responsibility and professionalism

Newly qualified dental practitioners must be able to:

- demonstrate that the interests of the person receiving care are paramount in all decisions and actions
- recognise the importance of self-determined decision-making, partnership and collaboration in healthcare which is driven by the individual, family and community

- recognise the environmental impacts of health care provision and use resources responsibly, making decisions that support environmentally sustainable healthcare

# Why is being a socially responsible practitioner important?

There is an increasing focus on the role healthcare professionals play in addressing the environmental impacts of the health system and the need for dental practitioners to practise in a socially responsible way.

As noted by the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA)'s Climate Change and Health Position Statement, Australia's health sector is directly responsible for 7% of carbon emissions in Australia, providing significant scope for the sector to reduce its carbon footprint.[2]

The health impacts of climate change are increasingly apparent and changes to health practice have a role to play in addressing this challenge in conjunction with improving the sustainability of the healthcare system. Profiling the active decision-making role of dental practitioners on dental equipment and consumables, and the influence of these choices on carbon emissions and impact on the environment, provides a way for the dental professions to assist in addressing this challenge.[3]

The Minamata Convention on Mercury is another example of the potential to minimise the environmental impacts of dental care.[3] The Convention was signed by the Australian Government in October 2013 and seeks to protect human health and the environment from emissions caused by humans and releases of mercury and mercury compounds through a reduction in the use of amalgam.

A broader understanding of the societal impact of health practice is critical to develop socially responsible dental practitioners with the necessary foundation to deliver effective healthcare.

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