

# 2020 BC Provincial Election Toolkit for Dental Hygienists



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## INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOLKIT

The BC Dental Hygienists Association (BCDHA) has developed this toolkit to help BCDHA members find ways to ask questions and make informed decisions during the 2020 provincial election campaign. Our goal is to encourage candidates to share their individual and party intentions around how they will support improvements in oral health care if they are elected.

BCDHA is a politically non-partisan organization and this information is not intended to influence your vote. Rather we hope you will use this material to ask informed questions, seek clarity on the intentions of candidates, and determine for yourself what you believe the best way forward is for yourself, your profession and British Columbia.

### What is Advocacy?

Advocacy for Health is a combination of individual and social actions designed to gain political commitment, policy support, social acceptance and systems support for a particular health goal or program. Advocacy is one of the three major strategies for health promotion and can take many forms including the use of the mass media and multi-media, direct political lobbying, and community mobilization through, for example, coalitions of interest around defined issues. Health professionals have a major responsibility to act as advocates for health at all levels in society. ([World Health Organization](#))

Some people see advocacy as organizing protests and marches. Others may define advocacy as writing a letter to the editor or talking to your colleague about issues that arise in your practice. Advocacy encompasses all of these approaches and more.

Many of the skills you have developed as a dental hygienist are directly transferable into the political arena. Dental hygienists are highly skilled in interpersonal communication, assessment and planning. The challenge is understanding how to apply these skills in a political context.

## CURRENT ISSUES FACING DENTAL HYGIENE IN B.C.

There are numerous issues currently facing dental hygiene that continue to be at the forefront of BCDHA's advocacy work. While we would love to bring all of these to the attention of candidates during the election campaign, we recognize that the attention span for individual professional issues is quite narrow. For example, while we believe dental hygienists should have prescribing authority and are advocating with government to enhance the scope of practice to include this, we recognize that this is a highly technical and nuanced advocacy piece that most candidates and the public would be unfamiliar with. We can't expect candidates to speak to the nuances of each profession, but rather focus our advocacy work during the election on the big issues that candidates and the public will understand. For the purposes of this Toolkit, we are therefore focusing on three 'big' issues that we believe it is in the best interest of candidates and the public to understand.

### Changes to B.C.'s Regulatory Framework

In response to challenges within the regulatory processes of the College of Dental Surgeons of BC (CDSBC), the BC Government Commissioned regulatory expert Harry Cayton to complete an investigation and file a final report to include recommendations for revitalizing the CDSBC and reforming B.C.'s Health Professions Act. This report, [\*Modernizing the provincial health profession regulatory framework: A paper for consultation \(PDF, 1.0MB\)\*](#) was released on December 21, 2018. The first half focused on CDSBC, while the second half made observations and recommendations around B.C.'s *Health Professions Act*. The most significant change for dental hygiene is the proposed amalgamation of the current four oral health colleges (College of Dental Hygienists of BC, College of Dental Surgeons of BC, College of Denturists of BC and College of Dental Technicians of BC) into one oral health college. To read the original report, the feedback received, and current/updated information, please visit <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/practitioner-professional-resources/professional-regulation>.

BCDHA recognizes that the move to one oral health college is not negotiable and has determined that under the current government, resisting or arguing against this initiative is not practical, nor would it be successful. However, there are many parts of the plan that will continue to be discussed and consulted upon and we believe that all dental hygienists have the right to voice their approval/disapproval/concerns as this process continues. In particular, we recognize that many dental hygienists are concerned that the hard work dental hygienists did to become self-regulating will be undone and dental hygiene will once again be 'under the dentists thumb'. While BCDHA is confident this can be avoided, we need input from dental hygienists around the province regarding their support (or lack of support) for not only the major change to amalgamate, but the additional recommendations made around what the ideal regulatory framework will look like. Notably, BCDHA has flagged to government that the process seems rushed with very little detailed information or logistics being provided. We would like government to slow down and ensure appropriate due diligence is taken as they move forward.

Please note, if the government changes with this election, the current plans and recommendations may be halted entirely. This is something that dental hygienists need to consider as they discuss the future of this initiative and the dental hygiene profession with candidates. BCDHA will continue to assess the situation, and our options for advocacy and influence, regardless of which political party holds power in the B.C. Legislature. As a dental hygienist, we recommend that you carefully read the proposals, reflect on your own feelings, seek clarity from candidates in your area as to how, **or if**, they intend to complete the work around health regulatory reform.

For the most up-to-date recommendations being proposed, visit [\*Recommendations to modernize the provincial health profession regulatory framework \(PDF, 669KB\)\*](#).

## Integration of Dental Hygiene in Primary Health Care

In the [Declaration of Alma-Ata](#), the World Health Organization (WHO) defined primary health care as “essential health care based on practical, scientifically sound, and socially acceptable methods and technology made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community through their full participation and at a cost that the community and country can afford to maintain. It is the first level of contact of individuals, the family, and community with the national health system bringing health care as close as possible to where people live and work, and constitutes the first element of a continuing health care process (HCP).”

Oral health is considered an integral part of general health. In 2009, the [WHO 7<sup>th</sup> global conference advocated the integration of dental care into primary healthcare services](#). The primary oral health care approach empowers health promotion and oral disease prevention and favors health equity. It includes various domains such as risk assessment, oral health evaluation, preventive intervention, communication, and education as well as interprofessional collaborative practice.

Dental hygienists are primary oral health care providers focusing on oral disease prevention and oral health promotion. Oral health has a profound impact on the overall health of Canadians. Periodontal disease, historically considered a localized infection, is now considered a potential risk factor for a number of serious health problems, such as cardiovascular and respiratory disease, diabetes, and pre-term low birth weight babies. The links between oral health and general health underscore the need for a health system that integrates the mouth with the rest of the body.

Under the current B.C. government, a number of primary care networks and community care centres have been established over the past few years. Review the plan for primary care by visiting the General Practice Services Committee (GPSC) website at <https://gpscbc.ca/what-we-do/system-change/primary-care-networks>. One of the major challenges we face in dental hygiene is convincing government and B.C.’s existing medical-based system that there is great value in preventative oral health and that dental hygienists are particularly well placed to integrate into these primary care networks. This will continue to be a key advocacy issue for BCDHA and one we hope dental hygienists will embrace.

## Dental Hygiene in Long Term Care

One of the many unfortunate outcomes of COVID-19 has been the inability for dental hygienists across B.C. to continue to work in long term care (LTC) and assisted living (AL) facilities to provide dental hygiene health care treatment and preventive care for residents. At the beginning of the pandemic dental hygiene was labelled a non-essential service, and it was reasonable and practical for dental hygienists to not enter facilities in order to prevent outbreaks. However, six months in, the lack of professional oral health care for residents is reaching crisis levels. Many have not had any dental hygiene care provided for more than a year putting them at risk for pain and infection. This is becoming an alarming situation and poses a threat to the long-term health and ability to thrive of many LTC and AL residents.

There is currently no province-wide plan that allows dental hygienists to return to work in these facilities. Instead there are ‘patchwork’ and ‘ad hoc’ arrangements in different health authorities across the province. BCDHA is seeking one, consistent provincial plan, and has offered government the opportunity to work with us to set this plan in place. We recognize that the health and well-being of residents is significantly compromised by the lack of access to professional oral health care. We encourage members to seek clarity on government’s plans to support LTC and AL residents in receiving the care they need.

## QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

In this section, we have compiled the list of questions to candidates. You can use these questions at a Town Hall meeting, include them in a letter or bring them to a meeting. Please feel welcome to add your own!

### On regulatory reform?

1. If your government is elected, do you intend to move forward with the proposed amendments to the *Health Professions Act* as per the Cayton Report (formally called [Recommendations to modernize the provincial health profession regulatory framework](#))?
2. What is your plan for ensuring there is appropriate consultation on these recommendations, above and beyond the very limited consultation that has been done so far?
3. How would you reassure dental hygienists that this new Oral Health College will be fair and balanced and not allow one profession, such as the dentists, to take over or be the final decision-makers?
4. Will you be appointing individuals from each oral health profession to the board, or will there be an imbalance allowed (e.g., three dentists, one hygienist, one dental assistant, one dental technician and six public members)?

### On integration of dental hygiene into primary care?

1. Government has a comprehensive plan for primary care that includes all of the standard health professions (doctors, nurses, pharmacists) but overlooks oral health. Preventive oral health and education is one of the staples of dental hygiene and one of the staples of primary care. How would you include dental hygiene in the current primary care plan?
2. Would your government consider allowing dental hygienists to be part of community health centres or the interprofessional primary care networks? What would this look like from your perspective?
3. How would your government include dental hygienists in additional primary care and public health initiatives? For instance, dental hygienists work primarily in the head and neck area of an individual, so why could we not support dental hygienists in doing nasal pharyngeal swabs for COVID-19 or [administer mouth rinse and gargle sample collections](#)?

### Dental Hygiene in Long Term Care

1. How would your government ensure that residents of long-term care facilities have access to dental hygienists and their services?
2. As a result of COVID, many residents of long term care are facing an oral health crisis – dental hygiene has been suspended, nurses and care aides don't have the time or expertise to help. Can you imagine not having your teeth cleaned for a year or having an abscessed tooth due to an un-treated dental cavity or a denture sore that made it painful to speak or eat? How would your government address this, not just during the COVID-19 pandemic, but for future situations that may be similar?

## TOOLS

**Remember: political candidates want to hear from you because *you're* the expert on health care and what is going on in your profession and with the health of British Columbians.**

Your voice is strongest if you connect directly with candidates, and we have some tips to get you started. Remember, your elected provincial officials are in office to represent you. You're entitled to reach out and talk to them about the issues you care about, whether they pertain to your own riding or the province as a whole. Be sure to tune in to meetings where candidates will be present (we anticipate that rallies, community events, debates and town halls will primarily be conducted via online platforms during this COVID-19 period). But don't forget you might also run into a candidate at the local grocery store. Be ready with your questions and comments so you don't miss an opportunity!

Here are a few tips to help you get the most out of your interactions with political candidates:

1. Know your stuff. During a campaign, you never know when you'll run into a candidate – at a neighbourhood event, grocery store or on your very own doorstep. Take some time to prepare two or three priority issues you can speak about with candidates.
2. Be concise and direct. Be ready to get your ideas across in just a few minutes. You'll also have a bigger impact if you can generate a discussion, which you can do by asking open-ended questions that encourage the candidate to tell you more. Ask them open-ended questions like how they and their party integrate dental hygienists into primary care, or whether they intend to support the current plans for health regulatory reform in B.C.
3. Some forms of advocacy focus on being aggressive or confrontational. This rarely works and often means the candidate will be unreceptive to further discussion. Be respectful in your approach and even if you disagree, they will be respectful back.
4. Connect with Colleagues! Advocacy doesn't have to be done alone. Build momentum, exchange ideas and brainstorm fresh solutions with like-minded colleagues. Other dental hygienists are likely to be engaged in the same issues and can offer creative perspectives. Form groups, host meetings and start forums to discuss key issues. There is power in numbers, and your voice can be sustained if you have others to support you.

### Letter-Writing

During an election campaign, it's important to have your voice heard and to inform the political parties of your recommendations and thoughts as a voter and a health professional. Sending a letter to a political party is a popular way to express your thoughts. Much of the same approach applies for writing your candidates as engaging with them directly; however, in this case, you have the added ability to provide more background information on the issue, and to ensure you frame things perfectly. The key, still, is to be clear, concise, and on point.

Send your letter via regular mail or email.

### Letter-writing tips

- Keep a copy of your letter so you can compare it to the response you receive. This will help you evaluate how thoroughly the party considered and responded to your concerns.
- Send copies of your letter to any other individuals or organizations you think may be interested in your cause/concern. This helps create a domino effect of action and advocacy.
- Send a brief note to thank a party or individual if they respond. This demonstrates that you are respectful but, more importantly, engaged with the issue and willing to keep the dialogue going. A follow-up letter is an opportunity to express your ongoing observance of the issue and to remind the party of your request(s) and/or the commitment(s) they have made.
- Be aware of the language you use – letters that are seen as rude or inflammatory are less likely to motivate a thoughtful response from a political party and may, in fact, lead to a more perfunctory or dismissive response.

### Attend Public (and this year, online!) Events

Candidate events are a great way to get candidates on the record about their policy positions. They also provide individuals with the opportunity to meet the candidates and make a connection with them. And, since reporters often attend these events, you may get the chance to talk with the media and provide them with information that they, too, can use while covering election issues. The following tips may help to make the most out of candidates' events:

- Check candidates' websites and/or social media accounts for a calendar of events. If possible, sign up for their email newsletter to receive updates.
- Do background research on the candidates and their policy positions/past actions that affect the issue(s) you are concerned with. By referencing these, you can demonstrate to the candidate your level of awareness, engagement, and concern for an issue.
- Write out your question(s) so that you stay focused and on point.
- Keep your question(s) clear, concise, and specific.
- When speaking, introduce yourself and then ask your question. If the candidate responds but doesn't answer your question, ask a follow-up question. It is okay to tell them that they didn't answer your question and then restate it.
- If an event is in person, and media is in attendance, connect with them to share the concerns or issues you have and why you believe it's important for the media to be aware. The media is keen for interesting, human interest or controversial stories, so they will likely follow up.
- If you suspect the media will attend an on-line meeting or townhall (e.g., if you live in a small town and there is one newspaper), reach out beforehand and share your issue, suggesting that it would be a good opportunity for them to use their media voice to raise a concern or opportunity.

#### EVENT FINDERS:

[Liberal Party of BC](#)

[BC NDP](#)

[Green Party BC](#)

[BC Conservatives](#)



## Set A Meeting with the Campaigns

Contact the campaigns of all candidates in your electoral district. Call the campaign office and ask to speak with the candidate or their campaign manager and tell them you would like to meet with him or her and any other policy-oriented staff. The candidate's goal is to get elected so they need to hear why making dental hygiene a component of their campaign will benefit them; meeting with the campaign directly can be a great opportunity to convince them. It may help to address three main elements:

- The problem(s): for example, you could express your concerns about regulatory changes, identify how you think dental hygienists could contribute to COVID care (e.g., some health authorities do not allow dental hygienists to be contact tracers despite being regulated health care professionals with a strong knowledge and understanding of how to chart, take histories, etc.)
- Draw an explicit connection between the problem and how their involvement could address this problem for your community, district, or region.
- Provide policy solutions - though you don't need to provide technical details, providing a candidate with evidence-based solutions to the issues can help ensure that the candidate not only embraces the problem but does so in the best way possible.

Be sure to acknowledge the candidate's position and/or any previous work they have done on the issue. After the meeting, follow up with an email, letter, or phone call to thank the candidate and any staff that attended for their time, to briefly recap what you talked about reiterate the importance of this issue, and remind the candidate of any commitments they may have made during the meeting.

### Join a Campaign!

If you have a strong sense that one of the candidates in your area represents your beliefs and ideals, campaigns are always looking for volunteers. Not only does this give you insight into what is occurring during the campaign, but it is also an exceptional way to get to know the candidate and provide education and recommendations to them around the issues that matter to you. Today's candidate may be tomorrow's health minister, and you'll have already established your position and knowledge around the future of dental hygiene.

## Use Traditional Media

Traditional media includes television, radio, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and other print or online publications. During the election campaign, the traditional media will be saturated, meaning dental hygiene will be competing for limited time and space. Here are some tips for getting your issues into the traditional media's spotlight:

- Do an online search for media clippings that are similar to what you would be looking to publish, take note of the reporters and news sources that are covering this type of news so you may reach out to them directly (for example, what have other professions said about the proposed regulatory changes?)
- Call your local radio, television stations, and community newspapers and ask for the name and contact information for any reporters covering the election and/or those covering health issues.
- Have background information on dental hygiene and the key issues accessible and be ready to answer any questions (Who, What, When, Where, Why, How).
- Have local examples to illustrate your proposed media piece as much as possible.
- Read, listen, and watch election coverage daily, and follow reporters on Twitter.
- Respond to reporters who have covered stories on topics you are glad to see in the news, use this as an opportunity to introduce yourself and present yourself as a future resource on the topic (if applicable).

- Write letters to the editor or commentaries for local newspapers.
- Raise issues with reporters by calling them directly.
- Build relationships with reporters by supplying them with reliable information and by making the link between the election campaign and the dental hygiene issues that are important in your community.
- Be persistent, if you send an email, follow-up with a phone call. Often emails sent to traditional media outlets get marked as spam or will take too long for a reporter to get to. Follow-up calls result in a much higher chance of your story being picked up.
- Make a point to thank reporters who have covered a story you have pitched.

**IMPORTANT:** When talking to the media, unless otherwise stated, assume that you are on the record. This means that everything you say could appear in print or be broadcast.

## Use Social Media

Politicians are increasingly engaging with their constituents using their social media accounts. Social media provides a new and evolving way of interacting with politicians. With many politicians required to attend to their accounts and respond to tweets and posts within a specific timeframe, this can be an efficient way of reaching out and publicly interacting with candidates. The public nature of these forums allows for short, to the point dialogue that is instantly part of a public record.

### Facebook

Post messages on your Facebook page to promote local debates and candidates' events, inviting your colleagues to attend and ask questions. After events, you can post photos and videos with comments about what's happened or what commitments the candidates may have made. You are welcome to tag events on the BCDHA page as well, if you wish to reach a broader audience of hygienists.

### Twitter

On Twitter, you can engage directly with candidates. Tweet your messages and questions to candidates, using their twitter handle and the hashtags for the initiative. You can also include BCDHA's twitter handle @BCDHA and the CDHA twitter handle @theCDHA. Any response you receive can then be re-tweeted. You can also live-tweet updates from candidates' events.

### Instagram

Post a concise, eye-catching infographic, video, or story speaking about your issues that others can easily share or repost. Tag other accounts, use hashtags, polls or other widgets to engage your audience and raise awareness.

### Blogs

Locate influential bloggers and share your issues and thoughts with them. Influential bloggers are those with enough of an online following that anything they may post about will garner attention. Reach out to bloggers who seem likely to support the media piece you are looking to circulate. Influential bloggers will often be active on social media using this as a platform to interact with their followings and promoting new posts. You may even be able to submit posts, eye-catching infographics, or memes to some blogs.

## Post-Election Engagement

Candidate engagement does not end just because the campaigns are over. If you have engaged during the election campaign, you are now connected to a network of individuals (win or lose) who are engaged in politics and understand your issues. The most important thing you can do to retain momentum is to develop an ongoing relationship with those who are elected or who are involved in politics at your local level.

### Talk to Members of the Press Gallery

The [press gallery](#) has a unique role in government in that they work in the Legislative buildings and have extensive access to government. You often see these individuals reporting from their offices in the Legislature (e.g. Global News, Richard Zussman). They also have opportunity to have casual conversations with candidates and to ask them questions at news conferences and events. Most members of the press gallery will be happy to take a call if it will lead to a good political issue they can follow up on.

### Meet with Your Elected Representative

After the election, call to congratulate your newly-elected official. Set up a meeting with your new or renewed MLA so that, if you were not able to do so during the campaign, you can begin to build a long-standing relationship with your elected representative. (NOTE: MLAs are required to meet with constituents, even if they are the Premier of the province). Get to know their positions on the issues of most concern to you and/or your community. Also use the meeting as an opportunity to educate, letting your MLA know where you stand on the issues and what you would like to see from them. Remember, it doesn't matter whether you voted for your MLA or not; they have been elected to represent you and your interests in the provincial Legislature for the next four years.

Depending on your level of expertise and availability, you might also want to provide yourself to them as a resource for future policy discussions. Elected representatives are rarely experts on all areas of governance. Your MLA may welcome your future willingness to help them critically engage with policy issues where you have experience.

Finally, if you were able to engage with the elected representative during the campaign, remind them of the promises, assurances, or positions they may have made which positively align with your area of concern. Where you have concerns about the foreseeable consequences of a representative or their party's policy positions, find ways to constructively address these. This means providing detailed examples of how their policy will negatively impact the community.

### Write to your Non-Elected Representatives

Just because a candidate does not win election does not mean that they lose their voice. After the election, write them to thank them for their effort and prompt them to continue their meaningful engagement in the issues facing your and their shared community. These individuals may consider running again in the future, so maintaining your relationship with them may prove fruitful in time. Even if they do not plan to run again, though, they are likely to remain involved and invested in the community. Staying engaged with them may provide a voice to the issues and the SDGs of greatest concern to you.

## RESOURCES & TEMPLATES



## Letter Template

Date:

For the attention of:

Candidate's Name

Office Address

Dear Candidate Name:

As we approach the October provincial election, I would like to know the positions of my local candidates on important questions relating to dental hygiene in the province of B.C.

My most pressing concern for my profession is [you should write this in your own words but can pull some of the information from the ['Issues'](#) section]

As a dental hygienist, I am a skilled, knowledgeable, well-educated and regulated health professional. Dental hygienists are primary care providers who understand that good oral health care can prevent bacteria from reaching levels that can lead to oral infections, tooth decay and gum disease. According to the World Health Organization, oral health is a key indicator of overall health, well-being and quality of life. It encompasses a range of diseases and conditions that include dental caries, Periodontal disease, Tooth loss, Oral cancer, Oral manifestations of HIV infection, Oro-dental trauma, Noma and birth defects such as cleft lip and palate. Oral health influences one's mental well-being and whether or not someone can smile confidently or eat without pain. The Global Burden of Disease Study 2017 estimated that oral diseases affect 3.5 billion people worldwide, with untreated dental caries being among the most prevalent noncommunicable diseases.

It is critical that government begin to take into account the significant contributions dental hygiene can make to B.C.'s health care system. Although I work in [a dental office, public health, etc.] dental hygienists work in a variety of settings, including private practice, public health, hospitals, long-term care facilities, educational institutions and research. We are key primary health care providers in First Nation communities, long-term care facilities, with marginalized communities, in public health and in education. We can work independently of or alongside a dentist and we are an important part of the health care team.

I would like to know [insert two to three specific questions]

Thank you for your attention. I would be happy to meet with you to further discuss my concerns and the opportunities my profession could provide to you as you move through this election campaign and beyond.

Sincerely,

## Op-Ed/Letter to the Editor

Op-eds or letters to the editor should:

- Be relevant to recent news.
- Be well written.
- Be clear and concise.
- Convey expertise.
- Provide a different or unexpected perspective.

Tips for placing an op-ed/letter to the editor:

Determine which newspaper you will write to and locate - either online or in the paper itself - the opinion or editorial page. Here, you should be able to find guidelines for submitting an op-ed/guest commentary. Alternatively, some newspapers will provide this information online on their 'contact' page. Be sure to follow these to ensure your submission is accepted. For example, newspapers will likely post a word limit; adhere to this or risk having your piece edited to fit their requirement.

When you submit your op-ed, per the newspaper's instructions, include a 2-3 sentence pitch for why it should be published. Include in this pitch what you are writing about, why this is relevant news to the paper's readers, and why your opinion matters (including your credentials). Below this, paste your finished op-ed and provide your contact information: name, title, address, phone number, and email address.

Where possible, find out who decides which op-eds to publish at the newspaper and call them; ask whether they received your op-ed and when they will decide whether or not it will be published. Give yourself plenty of time to get your piece published, particularly given the time-sensitivity of an election campaign. If you opt to submit your op-ed at another publication, let the newspaper know that you are withdrawing your submission at their paper.

If you are writing a Letter to the Editor, it can be useful to refer to a story that has been written recently. Usually letters need to be received with 24 to 36 hours if they are responding to an article that has been published (by the same paper). However, you can slightly 'cheat' by writing a Letter to the Editor based on a story about the election for instance. Op-eds often take several days to be reviewed. Note: many smaller papers do not accept op-ed submissions and rather rely on their own editorial staff to write them. In those cases, a Letter to the Editor is often your best bet (and can have more words than papers that accept op-eds).

The [Globe and Mail's Public Editor has previously written how they select letters to the editor for publishing](#), providing tips that can be applied regardless of the targeted news source:

- Be short, witty, and relevant to recent news coverage (reference articles where appropriate/possible).
- Try to present a new view or point in the conversation.
- How well your letter is written may impact its selection so do take the time to edit.

Some examples (google the name of the paper and letters to the editor submissions and you should find the info you need):

[Kelowna Daily Courier](#) – Letters to the Editor (max 500 words)

[Prince George Citizen](#) – Letters to the Editor (max 400 words)

[Times Colonist](#) – Letters to the Editor (max 250 words), OpEds (500 – 750 words)

[Vancouver Sun](#) – Letters to the Editor (max 150 words), OpEds (max 600 words)