



FDI POLICY STATEMENT

Specialization in dentistry

Revised version adopted by the General Assembly: 2025, Shanghai, China
Revised version adopted by the General Assembly: 2012, Vienna, Austria
Original version adopted by the FDI General Assembly: 2007, Ferney-Voltaire, France

CONTEXT

The dental profession is rapidly evolving with the emergence of new technologies, new scientific developments, new therapeutic approaches and a growing demand for specialized dental care. The demand is mainly associated with the increasing prevalence of chronic conditions, discovery of newly diagnosed diseases, an ageing population and the rising importance of preventive care. In this context it is necessary to revise the current understanding of specialization in dentistry in order to guarantee optimized care tailored to meet patients' needs. The formal recognition of dental specialties as a specific qualification of dental health professionals not only helps to structure the dental profession, but also safeguards the quality and safety of care in line with international best practices, scientific and technological advances¹.

SCOPE

This policy statement addresses the definition, regulation, and role of specialization within the dental profession. It focuses on the establishment of criteria for specialties, the training and certification processes for specialists, and how specialization impacts patient care. This does not call into question the quality of care provided by general practitioners.

DEFINITIONS

Dental specialization: the process by which a dentist or member of the dental team undergoes additional education and training in a specific branch or field of dentistry beyond the general dental or oral health curricula.

Dental specialist: a licensed dentist who has met the criteria established by regulatory bodies in their country or region for expertise in a particular area of dental practice^{2,3,4}.

PRINCIPLES

Specialization in dentistry should:

- Ensure the highest standards of care for patients by promoting higher education and specialist training in areas that improve oral health outcomes.
- Support equity in oral healthcare by improving access to specialists for all segments of the population.

- Respect professional ethics by ensuring that only dentists with the requisite additional training are recognized as specialists in their respective fields.

POLICY

FDI recognizes the role of specialization dentistry in improving global oral health and declares:

- The recognition of dental specialties is necessary if we are to meet the specific and complex oral healthcare needs of patients. They must be characterized by a distinct and well-defined field of activity that requires post-graduate training to acquire most up to date, specific, advanced knowledge, skills and competencies that are beyond those of a general dental practitioner⁵.
- Specialization must require additional formal education and clinical training beyond general dentistry with additional competencies that tend to be common to different countries. Dental specialists are expected to deliver a superior level of reflection and practice, corresponding to their field of expertise, by incorporating the latest evidence-based scientific and technological advances. Only practitioners who fulfilled these requirements can be called specialists or an equivalent title⁶.
- Dental specialization must include continuing professional development requirements, to maintain a high and up-to-date level of expertise, knowledge and skill set and shall be mandatory to maintain the specialist title or equivalent.
- Establishment of dental specialties does not limit the right of the general dental practitioner to practice the full range of dental disciplines specific to the profession and their level of expertise.
- General dentists should refer patients to specialists when patient care falls outside the scope of their own practice or requires specific expertise for optimal treatment outcomes, to ensure safe and quality care in line with the most current standards.
- Specialization in dentistry should be second-line, in that a specialist dentist should work collaboratively, in agreement and consultation with general dentists, except where the specialist can act as the primary care provider.
- When establishing and recognizing dental specialties, equitable access to specialist care must be guaranteed for all patients, regardless of their location or socioeconomic situation^{7,8,9}.
- Specialist dentists, dentists and dental teams, must act in the patient's best interests, ensuring that their practice is transparent, ethical and respectful of the confidentiality of health data⁹.
- National Dental Associations (NDAs) and/or relevant health authorities shall be responsible for regulating the accreditation of specialties and ensuring compliance with training standards. The recognition process is best developed through comprehensive collaboration between regulatory, professional and educational bodies. Not all disciplines in dentistry will satisfy the requirements for specialty recognition^{2,6}.
- Specialization in dentistry should encourage cooperation between the various health disciplines to ensure comprehensive patient-centered care. The specialist must work in collaboration with other professionals, particularly in cases where a multidisciplinary approach is required.

KEYWORDS

Dental specialty, evidence-based dentistry, qualification, specialist.

DISCLAIMER

The information in this Policy Statement was based on the best scientific evidence available at the time. It may be interpreted to reflect prevailing cultural sensitivities and socio-economic constraints.

REFERENCES

1. Mark A. Saxen, DDS, PhD; Douglas E. Peterson, DMD, PhD, FDS RCSEd; Michael Mashni, DDS. Point: A 21st-century paradigm for the recognition of dental specialties in the United States. Historical review, lessons learned, looking forward. *Journal of the American Dental Association*. 2019;150(3):193-199.
2. American Dental Association. Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialties and National Certifying Boards for Dental Specialists. Adopted by the 2022 ADA House of Delegates.
3. Canadian Dental Regulatory Authorities Federation. *Process of recognition for a new dental specialty*. Available from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bb4129f8155120d3c911d16/t/6086d900a9b8ab032fe01dba/1739304294453/Process+for+Recognition+of+Dental+Specialty%2C+English%2C+April+2021.pdf> [Accessed 6 October 2025].
4. Council of European Dentist (CED). Statement on Specialist Dentists. Available from: <https://www.cedentists.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CED-DOC-2023-028-FIN-E.pdf> [Accessed 6 October 2025].
5. Caroline Harrington, MS, CHES; Jeffrey Cole, DDS, MBA; Joseph Kelly, DDS – 12, Scope and Specialization in Dental Care. *Delaware Journal of Public Health*. 2022. Accessible from: DOI:[10.32481/djph.2022.12.035](https://doi.org/10.32481/djph.2022.12.035) [Accessed 6 October 2025].
6. Owall B, Welfare R, Garefis et al. Specialisation and specialist education in prosthetic dentistry in Europe. *European Journal of Prosthodontics and Restorative Dentistry*. 2006;14(3):105-10. PMID: 17024982.
7. Wijewardena B, Ranasinghe N, Kruger E, Tennant M. The Distribution of Dental Health Specialist Locations in Sri Lanka. *Community Dent Health*. 2018; 29;35(4):241-246. Accessible from: 10.1922/CDH_4374Wijewardena06. PMID: 30204348. [Accessed 6 October 2025].
8. Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health. Dental specialists in Australia. *Australian Dental Journal*. 2010;55(1):96-100. Accessible from: 10.1111/j.1834-7819.2009.01189.x. [Accessed 6 October 2025].
9. Watt RG, Daly B, Allison P, et al. Ending the neglect of global oral health: time for radical action. *Lancet*. 2019 Jul 20;394(10194):261-272. Accessible from: 10.1016/S0140-6736(19)31133-X. [Accessed 6 October 2025].