

Code of Ethics - DRAFT

Ethical Expectations

Ethical practice is an integral part of the professional commitment dietitians make to the health and well-being of their clients. The Code of Ethics for Dietitians in Nova Scotia is a statement of values, behaviours, and responsibilities that guide interactions and fair decision-making in any professional situation and work environment.

The Code of Ethics was developed collaboratively and through partner consultation by the College of Dietitians of British Columbia, the Saskatchewan Dietitians Association, the College of Dietitians of Manitoba, the Nova Scotia College of Dietitians and Nutritionists, the New Brunswick Dietitians Association, and the College of Dietitians of Newfoundland and Labrador, to articulate the following five (5) ethical standards.

All dietitians in Nova Scotia have a legal requirement to protect the public under the Dietitians Act. The NSCDN holds dietitians accountable for adhering to the Code of Ethics and upholding the public's trust in the profession. In the event of any concerns or allegations of a breach, the NSCDN will investigate allegations of a breach in conduct.

The Code of Ethics is not a stand-alone document and should be applied with other relevant legislation, regulations, standards, policies, and guidelines. At times, ethical standards may overlap with other regulations, bylaws, and standards as requirements may be both legal and ethical. Definitions are found at the end of this document and may be province-specific. Some definitions may have a narrower interpretation in other regulator policy documents that are specific to the nutrition care relationship between a dietitian and an individual client. The Code of Ethics is a living document that is subject to change from time to time, as dietetic practice and health professional regulation evolve.

Ethical Standards

A dietitian will practice ethically by ensuring that they:

1. Act in the Best Interest of Clients

- a. Maintain objectivity when exercising professional judgement.
- b. Present information in an understandable and sensitive manner.
- c. Obtain informed consent from a client for services, including any changes, refusal and/or withdrawal of services.
 - i. Take all reasonable steps to ensure client consent is not given under conditions of intimidation or undue pressure.
 - ii. If a client lacks decisional ability, obtain consent for planned services from a substitute decision maker.
 - iii. Ensure that the substitute decision maker honours the client's previously expressed wishes, or when unknown, acts in the client's best interest.
- d. Respect the client's right to refuse treatment and/or obtain a second opinion.
- e. Discuss choices with, and support clients to make decisions for services.

- f. Use an evidence-based and evidence-informed approach to meet client needs.
- g. Respect and maintain client privacy and confidentiality.
 - i. Refer to standards of record keeping and privacy guidelines as per the [Standards of Practice](#).
 - ii. Confidential client information should only be disclosed with client consent or when the failure to disclose confidential information would cause significant harm to the client or others.
- h. Advocate for clients, families, and other caregivers when appropriate.
 - i. Do not discriminate against clients or anyone with whom dietitians interact, including, but not limited to, any prohibited grounds in the [Human Rights Act](#).
 - ii. Provide client-centred care that recognizes cultural safety and humility, respects diversity, and is fair and inclusive.
 - iii. Explore solutions and use all reasonable resources to supply quality services which meet the needs of both client and employer.
- i. Supply services until care is no longer needed, the client requests discontinuation, or care is transferred to another dietitian or health professional.

2. Communicate Effectively

- a. Communicate in a respectful, accurate manner, adhering to college requirements including health records, advertising, and media.
- b. Do not make misleading or derogatory statements or claims.
- c. Be sensitive to your position of power as a dietitian in relationships with clients and potential clients.
- d. Do not verbally, physically, emotionally, or sexually harass in any communication.
- e. Manage conflict by applying conflict management strategies.
- f. Present your professional qualifications and credentials accurately.

3. Collaborate Effectively

- a. Collaborate with clients, interprofessional colleagues, workplace leaders, client's family, caregiver, guardian, or substitute decision maker to give quality services.
- b. Recognize and respect other health professionals' scope of practice.
- c. Collaborate with others in the development and revision of policies to support ethical and quality services.
- d. Support learning within the profession when there are opportunities to teach students and mentor colleagues.

4. Practice Safely and Competently

- a. Focus on the client's best interests as your primary professional obligation.
 - i. Provide safe, client-centered services using knowledge, skills, judgment, and professional attitude.
- b. Recognize and practice within the limits of individual competence and dietetic scope of practice.

- i. Act as a credible and reliable source of evidence-based food and nutrition information.
- ii. Refer to other members of the interprofessional team if needed service is beyond the dietitian's skill, knowledge, and dietetic scope of practice.
- c. Reflect on current practice to determine knowledge, skills, and ability development needed to ensure safe, competent, and ethical practice.
- d. Uphold professional boundaries as per the [Standards of Practice](#).
 - i. Do not engage in sexual relationships with any clients.
 - ii. If professional boundaries cannot be kept due to geographical, workforce, and/or resource limitations:
 - 1. Identify, disclose, and mitigate risks of engaging in a professional and personal relationship.
 - 2. Re-establish boundaries as soon as reasonably possible.
 - 3. Where possible, refer client(s) to another dietitian when a relationship exists or could be perceived to exist that would compromise a dietitian's objective decisions and actions towards the client(s).
 - iii. Balance the ability to remain objective with compassion regarding issues of sensitivity and/or personal trauma that arise during treatment.
- e. Be risk aware. Identify any potential type of harm, mitigate the risk of harm, and apply protective factors when practicing dietetics.
- f. Recognize and engage in trauma-informed practice when indicated.
- g. Do not act in a way that negatively affects the reputation of the profession.

5. Be Honest and Responsible

- a. Recognize and resolve ethical situations by applying critical thinking skills in problem solving and decision making.
- b. Avoid conflict of interest. Refer to the [Integrity in Decision-making](#) resource.
 - i. Identify and manage potential situations that may lead to conflict of interest, including financial interest in products and services that are recommended.
 - ii. Refrain from accepting gifts or services, which may influence or give the appearance of influencing professional judgement.
- c. Assume responsibility for services provided by those under your supervision.
- d. Maintain transparent, accurate, and truthful financial records.
 - i. Inform clients of all fees and methods of payment prior to delivering services.
 - ii. Ensure fees are based on fair market price.
 - iii. Allow your name and registration number to be used for billing of dietetic services only you have provided.
- e. Be accountable for your actions when practicing dietetics.
 - i. Disclose and apologize to the client for any mistake made during the client's care, which causes or has potential to cause harm or distress.
 - ii. Propose solutions, alternatives, or referral, as appropriate.
 - iii. Withdraw from practice when circumstances arise that may impair judgment and prevent giving safe and effective care to a client.

- f. Use discretion when refusing to treat a client.
 - i. Do not refuse to treat a client based on discrimination including, but not limited to, reasons in the Nova Scotia Human Rights Code.
- g. Only enter into agreements, assignments, or contracts that allow you to abide by this NSCDN Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.
- h. Give fair and objective performance evaluations, when needed.
- i. Fulfil reporting obligations.
 - i. Bring forward concerns about unsafe practice and unethical conduct by dietitians and other health care professionals to the appropriate supervisor, and/or regulatory body of which that health professional is a registrant. See the [Make a Complaint](#) section of the NSCDN website.
 - ii. Report client incidents as per employer policy.

Definitions

Advertisement: Any publication or communication in any medium with any client, prospective client or the public generally in the nature of an advertisement, promotional activity or material, a listing in a directory, a public appearance or any other means by which professional services or products are promoted or marketed, including contact with a prospective client initiated by or under the discretion of a registrant.

Client: An individual, family, substitute decision-maker, team members, group, population, agency, government, employer, employee, business, organization, or community, who is the direct or indirect recipient of the dietitian's skill and knowledge.

Collaborative Practice: Two or more individuals working cooperatively to achieve the common professional goal of delivery of the highest level of care. Dietitians work in partnership with nutrition, dietetic, interprofessional and/or intersectoral clients and other partners.

Conflict of interest: When a dietitian's personal, business, commercial, political, academic, or financial interests, or the interests of the dietitian's family or friends, interfere with the dietitian's professional responsibilities or a client's best interests.

A conflict of interest may exist whether or not the competing interest actually influences a dietitian. The conflict of interest may affect dietitians in any practice setting. A conflict of interest can be actual, potential, or perceived, and promotes (or is perceived to be promoting) a competing interest; instead, the results of which may or may not lead to negative client outcomes and service delivery.

Cultural Safety: An outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent to health care relationships. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe and supported to access, receive, and make informed decisions about their health care.

Cultural Humility: A process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another's experience.

Equity: refers to a process where every client has a fair opportunity to access dietetic health care and be subject to treatment free from bias and discrimination. A dietitian's understanding of the diversity

among clients within their practice is essential to delivering personalized, client-centered, and data-informed care.

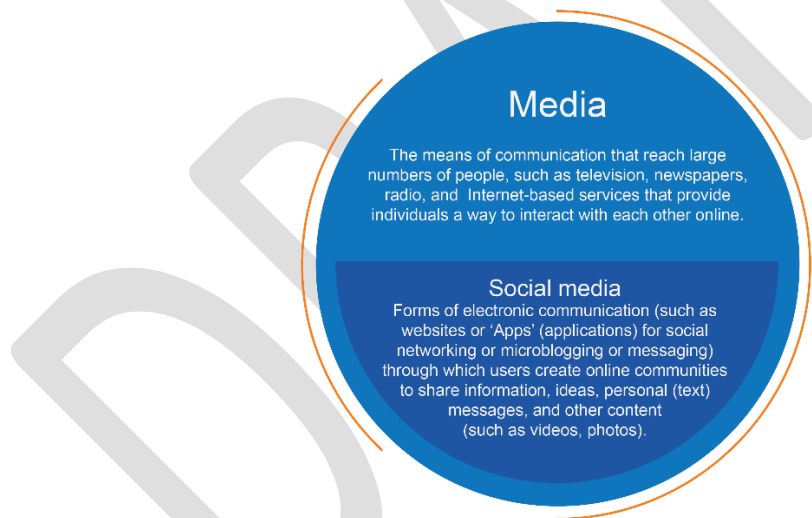
Evidence-based dietetic practice involves evaluating the validity, applicability, and importance of research and subsequently integrating the most reliable and available research evidence with dietetic expertise and client values into the nutrition care process.

Evidence-informed dietetic practice involves balancing the evidence, data, and professional judgment with client interests, preferences, context, risks related to the client's care, needs for best care, and available resources in the decision-making process.

Inclusion: refers to the intentional effort of a dietitian to facilitate a respectful environment where the client can feel safe, heard, and a part of their own healthcare journey and treatment plan.

Risk: In dietetics, a risk can be defined as a situation or action that involves exposure to danger, physical or mental harm (including financial), or loss to a client and/or to the dietitian.

Media: The means of communication that reach large numbers of people (the public), such as television, newspapers, radio, flyers and brochures, and Internet-based services that provide individuals a way to interact with each other online. Media includes social media, which encompasses a wide variety of web-based platforms, applications, and text messages.



Substitute Decision Maker: A person who helps make or makes decisions on behalf of another adult, when the adult is unable to make them. ([BC Ministry of Health](#))

Trauma-informed practice: Strengths-based framework grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma. It emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone, and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. ([BC Ministry of Health](#))

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