



Guidelines For Self-Employed Dietitians

Nova Scotia College of Dietitians and Nutritionists

2015 (Updated: November 2023)

The Nova Scotia College of Dietitians and Nutritionists (NSCDN) is the regulatory body for the profession of dietetics in Nova Scotia. In the public interest, the NSCDN regulates dietitians and nutritionists to practice in a safe, ethical and competent manner.

INTRODUCTION

More and more, dietitians are choosing to work in a self-employed capacity. Today, dietitians can be found working in private practice settings, as part of medical or multidisciplinary clinics, private consulting, or in business (e.g., project management). The purpose of this document is to provide members with information, support and guidance so that those wishing to work in a self-employed capacity may practice in a competent, safe and ethical manner.

ACCOUNTABILITIES

- Dietitians working in a self-employed capacity are accountable to ensure that their dietetics and business practices are ethical and consistent with the expectations of the profession and the public;
- dietitians in every practice setting are accountable for their actions (which include inactions) at all times;
- self-employed dietitians practice to the same standard as employed dietitians (e.g., expectations to practice according to the nutrition care process and document as one would as an employee);
- dietitians working in a self-employed capacity should work collaboratively with clients and other care providers to provide comprehensive care and services.

LEGISLATION AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

What are the legislative and regulatory requirements for working in a self-employed capacity?

Despite your area of practice, you must accept the obligation to protect clients, the public, and the profession by upholding the Professional Standards for Dietitians in Canada, Nova Scotia College of Dietitians and Nutritionists (NSCDN) Code of Ethics for Professional Dietitians, provincial and federal legislation, as well as NSCDN policies. Although the NSCDN Code of Ethics applies to all dietitians, if you are working in or wish to begin working in a self-employed capacity, it is crucial that you are familiar with section 7.0 of the Code: The Dietitian as a Business Person.

SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES

Do I need specific skills to work in a self-employed capacity, such as private practice?

Dietitians working in a self-employed capacity may be faced with a broad scope of issues requiring knowledge, skills and experience beyond entry to practice expectations. Solid clinical nutrition experience, strong business aptitude, effective organizational and record keeping skills, and exceptional communication skills are required.

How much experience do I need to start my own private practice?

The knowledge and skills required to work in private practice are often beyond those that can be attained through the completion of an undergraduate degree in nutrition and internship. Although NSCDN does not have specific requirements for entering into private practice, it is advised that members have extensive experience before practicing independently. Ideally, you should have a minimum of 3-5 years of experience working in dietetics.

Are there supports available to me if I work in a self-employed capacity?

One of the drawbacks of working in a self-employed capacity is that it can be very isolating. In the absence of direct supervision, it is important for you to establish a solid support network. It is recommended that, if you have limited experience, you ensure that you have access to either regular supervision or a peer mentor.

BUSINESS PRACTICES

How do I start a business?

When starting a business, there are countless matters to consider. It is your responsibility to be informed about acceptable business practices, including legal and financial requirements. It is recommended that you obtain legal and business advice before starting your business. In addition, there are a number of helpful resources available that provide guidance including the Consulting Dietitians Network of Dietitians of Canada's manual entitled "Dietitians in Private Practice: A Guide for the Consultant" which can be obtained for a small fee by contacting the Network.

Do I need to register my private practice as a business?

To carry on business in Nova Scotia, either on your own or with partners where you wish to (1) to operate without legally incorporating the business; and (2) to use a business name that is different from your personal name(s), you are required to register your business with the Registry of Joint Stock Companies. For more information on registering your business, visit the [Registry of Joint Stock Companies](#).

Are there best practices available for dietitians working in private practice?

Yes. The Consulting Dietitians Network of Dietitians of Canada has created a document that outlines best business practice characteristics for dietitians working in private practice. The resource can be accessed free of charge by contacting the [Consulting Dietitians Network](#).

HIGHLIGHTS

- Have access to a confidential voicemail which clearly states your company information;
- ensure the safety and security of client records in lockable office/drawers when not in use;
- have a procedure in place to back up and secure electronic records to protect against unauthorized use;
- include a statement of privacy in all emails, computer and fax cover sheets;
- have access to a private office for meeting with current and potential clients;
- respond to client inquiries within 72 hours;
- be available to answer client questions prior to an initial appointment;
- offer flexible appointment times to meet client needs;
- obtain consent prior to providing service;
- establish and consistently implement a policy for client payment and missed appointments;
- offer a method to obtain anonymous feedback, and;
- fully disclose industry partnerships.

Outside of the best practice, am I required to have specific policies and procedures in place?

Yes. Policies are important in any business as they help you to remain consistent and protect both you and the clients you serve. When developing policies and procedures, they should be in keeping with both provincial and federal legislation and NSCDN policies.

Specifically, the [Personal Health Information Act \(PHIA\)](#) requires custodians of personal information to:

- Prepare and make readily available a Notice of Purposes outlining the purpose of the; collection, use and disclosure of personal information;
- have a written Retention and Destruction Schedule;
- put into place information practices that;
- meet the requirements of the Act and Regulations;
- are reasonable in the circumstances, and;
- ensure that personal health information in your custody or under your control is protected against theft or loss of information and unauthorized access to, use or disclosure;
- implement, maintain and comply with a Complaint Policy for an individual to make a complaint under the Act;
- prepare and make available a written Privacy Statement about your information practices and;
- a Breach of Privacy form.

For more information on your requirements under PHIA, refer to the document “[Toolkit for Custodians: A Guide to the Personal Health Information Act](#)”.

In addition to PHIA requirements, you should have a:

- Consent to treatment form;
- electronic counseling policy;
- policy that outlines how payment will be received, which includes fees for cancellation.

What do I do if I am contacted by a client whose needs are outside of my personal competence?

As a dietitian, you assume the responsibility and accountability for your personal competence in practice and are required to only practice within your personal level of competence. As you grow your business, it may be tempting to accept every client that seeks your services. As a member of a self-regulated profession, you must uphold your responsibility to provide all services competently to protect the safety of the public. In doing so, you are responsible for evaluating the scope of your knowledge, skills and experience. If you do not have the personal competence to assist a client, you are obligated to be honest with the client and to refer him/her to a dietitian who is qualified in the practice area. Even after many years of working in a self-employed capacity, it is important that you recognize that you may not have established the personal competence to serve every potential client who seeks your services.

RECORD KEEPING

What sort of documentation am I required to keep?

Prior to providing any service, you must obtain documented informed consent. Informed consent means providing the client with information regarding the nature of the treatment or service to be provided along with its expected benefits, possible risks and side effects, alternative courses of action and the likely consequences of no treatment (College of Physicians on Ontario). Consent must relate directly to the intended treatment/service (which includes fees, services and/or billing practices), be based on full disclosure of the likely risks and benefits and be given voluntarily.

Good record keeping allows you to meet professional, legal and ethical obligations. Accurate and complete health records must be created as part of the services you provide. You are expected to document care according to generally accepted professional practice and business standards and in compliance with any provincial and/or federal legislation. Your professional obligations are the same for services delivered in person or via technology. Please refer to [NSCDN Virtual Practice Policy](#), found on the NSCDN website.

FEES AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

How do I establish fees?

Establishing fees can be tricky. Your fees must be fair, reasonable and appropriate for the services rendered. Before establishing fees, you should be aware of standard rates for dietetic services in your area. Unreasonable/inappropriate fees or mismanagement of fees (including failure to claim income) may be considered professional misconduct.

In addition to establishing fair and reasonable fees, your fees should be pre-established and communicated (including accepted methods of payment) prior to provision of any service.

Fee guidelines are available free of charge from the [Consulting Dietitians Network of Dietitians of Canada](#).

I really don't make a lot of money in my business; do I need to claim it?

Absolutely. No matter how much or how little income you make in a self-employed capacity, you are required to claim it.

For more information on claiming self-employed income, refer to the [Canada Revenue Agency's Checklist for Small Businesses](#).