

Guidance for registered dental practitioners: Maintaining patient health records

	Why	The Dental Board of Australia (the Board) has developed this fact sheet as part of its role to protect the public. The Board expects all registered dental practitioners to maintain adequate health records to contribute to the safety and continuity of their dental care.
	How	You need to follow regulatory and legal requirements and maintain your knowledge and skills on maintaining patient health records.
	What	You must be familiar with and comply with: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• your professional obligations, as outlined in the Board's registration standards, codes and guidelines• national, state or territory laws relating to health records, including privacy laws.
	Who	<p>The Board and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) work together to regulate dental practitioners.</p> <p>Professional associations, professional indemnity insurers, government health departments and statutory entities can provide guidance and advice on health record management, including what should be recorded in a health record, how to achieve good record keeping and practical examples of the importance of accurate records.</p>

Why the Board developed this guidance

Maintaining patient health records is essential to safe practice, patient safety and continuity of care

As part of its role to protect the public and regulate all registered dental practitioners, the Board publishes guidance, including FAQs and fact sheets such as this. This guidance explains your professional obligations for maintaining adequate patient health records and provides information about useful resources.

Patient health records are legal documents. Maintaining clear and accurate health records is essential for the continuing good care of patients.

How to comply

Follow regulatory and legal requirements, maintain your knowledge and skills

The Board expects you to practise in line with the Board's regulatory standards, codes and guidelines by:

- adhering to the Board's [Code of conduct](#), and
- completing ongoing [continuing professional development](#) (CPD) that contributes to the development, maintenance and enhancement of knowledge, skills and performance.

You must also be aware of and comply with state, territory and/or national laws, including privacy requirements, relating to health record management.

What obligations do you have?

Code of conduct and other professional obligations

The Board's codes, registration standards and guidelines set out your professional obligations to practise safely.

The [Code of conduct](#) outlines the Board's expectations for professional conduct. You should be familiar with the code and apply it to your practice.

Several sections of the code relate to maintaining adequate patient health records. For example, you must:

- be aware of your legal obligations and act in accordance with the law
- maintain adequate records
- keep accurate, up-to-date, factual, objective and legible records that report relevant details of clinical history, clinical findings, investigations, information given to patients, medication and other management in a way that can be understood by other health practitioners
- ensure that records are held securely and are not subject to unauthorised access. This includes protecting the privacy and integrity of electronic records
- ensure that records show respect for patients and do not include demeaning or derogatory remarks
- ensure that records are sufficient to facilitate continuity of care
- make records at the time of events or as soon as possible afterwards
- recognise the right of patients to access information contained in their health records and facilitate that access
- promptly facilitate the transfer or management (including disposal) of health information in accordance with legislation on privacy and health records when requested by patients, or when closing or relocating a practice, and
- be aware of the requirements of the privacy and/or health records legislation that operate in the relevant states or territories, and apply them to information held in all formats, including electronic information.

The Board's codes, registration standards and guidelines set out professional practice requirements:

Code of conduct	Sets the standard of professional conduct expected from registered practitioners. Relevant sections of the Code include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• section 1 - Put patients first – Safe, effective and collaborative practice• section 3 - Respectful and culturally safe practice for all• section 4 - Working with patients• section 8.3 - Health records
Continuing professional development registration standard	Requires practitioners to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• complete a minimum of 60 hours of CPD activities over a three-year cycle• 48 of the 60 hours must be clinically or scientifically based activities• 12 of the 60 hours can be non-scientific activities. CPD courses on record-keeping are readily available for dental practitioners.
Registration standard: professional indemnity insurance arrangements	Requires practitioners to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• have adequate professional indemnity insurance (PII) arrangements for all aspects and locations of practice. PII providers may provide guidance on maintaining adequate health records.

Self-reflective tool

The Board has developed a [self-reflective tool](#) to help you reflect on your record-keeping practice and identify areas for development or improvement.

The self-reflective tool is a series of questions and statements about maintaining health records for you to consider and respond to. After using the tool, you can identify and address any gaps in your knowledge, skills, systems and protocols in relation to record keeping.

National, state and territory laws

National, state and territory laws exist alongside your professional obligations. The laws and organisations responsible for their enforcement will vary by state or territory.

In relation to health records, some of the relevant obligations could include:

- privacy laws - these protect the handling of personal information
- rights for patients to access their health records - these deal with health records and may give patients a right to access their health information.

This is not an exhaustive list. Other requirements may apply and change from time to time. Your responsibility as a registered practitioner is to be aware of what laws currently apply in your jurisdiction and comply with them.

Who is involved?

The Board works with Ahpra and develops standards for practitioners

The Board works with Ahpra and the other National Boards to implement the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (the National Law).

The core role of the Board and Ahpra is to protect the public by regulating registered dental practitioners in Australia.

The Board:

- registers dental practitioners and students
- sets professional standards
- manages complaints about practitioners' health, conduct or performance, including about maintaining adequate health records, and
- publishes guidance material to help practitioners meet registration requirements and professional obligations.

The Board's guidance may relate to a specific topic and refer to laws or other regulators where relevant. The Board does not issue clinical practice guidelines about managing specific conditions, so that practitioners can meet their patients' needs in a range of settings.

Other organisations

Resources may be available to dental practitioners through professional associations, professional indemnity insurers, government health departments and statutory entities. These may give more detailed guidance and advice on maintaining adequate health records.

You should use professional judgment when selecting resources to guide your practice.

Some of the available resources include:

State, territory and federal legislation

The [Office of the Australian Information Commissioner](#) provides [information](#) on privacy laws that might apply in your state or territory.

Professional associations

Professional associations can help you access CPD about maintaining health records.

- [Australian Dental Association](#)
- [Australian Dental and Oral Health Therapists' Association](#)
- [Australian Dental Prosthetists' Association](#)
- [Dental Hygienists Association of Australia](#)

This fact sheet will be reviewed as needed, but generally every three years.