

Fact sheet

September 2020

Maintaining your patient health records

The Dental Board of Australia (the Board) expects all registered dental practitioners to maintain health records that serve the best interests of patients or clients and that contribute to the safety and continuity of their dental care.

What you need to know

The Board expects you to:

- Practise in accordance with the Board's regulatory standards, codes and guidelines by:
 - adhering to the obligations set out in the [Code of conduct](#) including about confidentiality, privacy and informed consent
 - completing ongoing [continuing professional development](#) (CPD) that contributes to the development, maintenance and enhancement of knowledge, skills and performance. CPD courses on record keeping are readily available for dental practitioners and can cover topics such as privacy and consent, legislative requirements, access and retention, and
 - ensuring you have appropriate [professional indemnity insurance](#) (PII) arrangements in place for all aspects of your practice. PII providers can provide guidance on maintaining adequate health records.
- Be aware and comply with:
 - state and territory legislative requirements including (but not limited to) authorities that regulate health records or any other relevant legislation and/or regulatory requirements, and
 - privacy legislation and/or any other relevant privacy requirements related to health-record management.
- Understand the principles of maintaining health records by being aware of:
 - what constitutes a health record
 - your obligations and responsibilities when making a health record, and
 - what information should be recorded in a patient or client's health record.

Resources to help you

Code of conduct

The [Code of conduct](#) is a crucial part of the Board's regulatory framework for setting minimum standards and regulatory guidance¹ for the profession to protect the public and support the objectives of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme.

The *Code of conduct* outlines the Board's expectations for dental practitioners' professional conduct, including the importance of maintaining a high level of professional competence to provide the best dental care to patients or clients.

It also describes the Board's expectations of what constitutes good practice when maintaining health records.

¹ The Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory, allows for National Boards to set standards, codes and guidelines for the regulated professions.

Section 8.4 – Health records

Section 8.4 of the *Code of conduct* specifically refers to health records and provides you with guidance on the Board's expectations on how to manage them. It states:

Maintaining clear and accurate health records is essential for the continuing good care of patients or clients. Practitioners should be aware that some National Boards have specific guidelines in relation to records. Good practice involves:

- a. *keeping accurate, up-to-date, factual, objective and legible records that report relevant details of clinical history, clinical findings, investigations, information given to patients or clients, medication and other management in a form that can be understood by other health practitioners*
- b. *ensuring that records are held securely and are not subject to unauthorised access, regardless of whether they are held electronically and/or in hard copy*
- c. *ensuring that records show respect for patients or clients and do not include demeaning or derogatory remarks*
- d. *ensuring that records are sufficient to facilitate continuity of care*
- e. *making records at the time of events or as soon as possible afterwards*
- f. *recognising the right of patients or clients to access information contained in their health records and facilitating that access, and*
- g. *promptly facilitating the transfer of health information when requested by patients or clients.*

Other relevant sections of the code

The Board's expectations about health records are also detailed throughout the *Code of conduct*, including:

- **Section 2 – Providing good care**
 - Introduction (section 2.1)
 - Good care (section 2.2)
- **Section 3 – Working with patients or clients**
 - Effective communication (section 3.3)
 - Confidentiality and privacy (section 3.4)
 - Informed consent (section 3.5)
 - Ending a professional relationship (section 3.13)
 - Understanding boundaries (section 3.14)
 - Closing or relocating a practice (section 3.16)

You have a professional responsibility to be familiar with the *Code of conduct* and apply it to your practice.

Other resources

The Board has developed a [self-reflective tool](#) which is designed to help you meet the obligations in the *Code of conduct* about health records.

There are a range of resources available to dental practitioners through professional associations, insurers and government health departments, designed to give more detailed guidance and advice on health record management. These resources can provide dental practitioners advice on what should be recorded in a health record, how to achieve good record keeping and practical examples of the importance of accurate record keeping.

You should seek advice from your professional association, insurer or your employer if you are still not sure how to comply with the *Code of conduct* and the accepted professional standards about record keeping.

Review

This fact sheet will be reviewed as required. This will generally be every three years.