Introduction

The Yukon government recognizes that families who do not have regular access to a dentist rely on Health and Social Services’ Yukon Children’s Dental Program for children’s dental care. The Department of Community Services wants to change the Dental Professions Act and regulations to allow dental hygienists to provide services for this program.

The Department of Community Services invited dental professionals and public in Yukon to provide their feedback from May 19 to June 26, 2017 on proposed changes to the Dental Professions Act and regulations. The proposed changes would allow dental hygienists to perform dental services within the Yukon Children’s Dental Program. The three consultation questions were:

1. As a dental professional, do you have specific concerns regarding the clarified and expanded scope of practice for dental hygienists proposed by these changes?

2. Do you see any implications for your profession as a result of these changes?

3. As a member of the public, do you think these changes will meet the needs of Yukoners seeking hygienist services as part of the Yukon Children’s Dental Program?

Thirteen responses were received from four dentists and nine dental hygienists which fell into four themes:

1. Yukon Children’s Dental Program and service provisions in other areas.

All respondents recognized the value of the Yukon Children’s Dental Program and supported expanding the scope of practice for dental hygienists to continue the program services historically provided by dental therapists, a profession for which there is no longer Canadian training available. Additionally, nearly half expressed interest in expanding oral health services to other groups, including the elderly living in extended care facilities, into communities without regular access to a dentist and other segments of the population that are underserved.

2. Limitations and considerations for dental hygienists

Most respondents considered the proposed amendments as a positive first step. However, nearly every respondent suggested a more extensive review of the scope of practice for dental hygienists.

The majority of respondents expressed concerns about the limited scope of services that dental hygienists can legally perform. Some respondents suggested that it hinders dental hygienists’ ability to adopt new technologies and techniques within their profession, such as the noninvasive removal of dental caries.

Some respondents cautioned that the amendments need to clarify the difference between procedures and diagnostics to ensure that dental hygienists are not interpreting dental tests and radiographs. Further, dental sealants routinely applied by dental hygienists were noted as a concern, as the procedure posed a contamination risk if done improperly or in the absence of a qualified dental assistant.
3. **Expanding the scope of practice for dental hygienists**

Nearly every respondent suggested that dental hygienists should be allowed to practice the full scope of their training. Specific suggestions included adding desensitizing agents, removing sutures, providing impressions for whitening and sport guards to the existing scope of practice. Other responses recognized advanced dental hygienist procedures, such as administering local anesthetics, performing restorative services and prescribing antibacterial prophylactic solutions and chemotherapeutic agents.

General suggestions were also made for harmonized legislation with other jurisdictions, such as B.C. and Alberta, to reflect similar standards of care or to allow for self-directed clinical practices.

4. **Assuring professional development and continuing education**

Several respondents called for the recognition of advanced professional training and continuing education requirements, or regular professional development, within the licensing criteria.