



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL
ASSOCIATION

Who's who in dentistry

Overview of the dental sector

Dental services in Australia are delivered through both public and private sectors, with the State and commonwealth governments providing funding for dental care to eligible individuals through the public system and the Child Dental Benefits scheme. The private sector accounts for the provision of the majority of dental services, with many Australians holding private dental insurance to subsidise treatment. Dental services in Australia include preventive care such as regular check-ups and cleanings, restorative care such as fillings and crowns, as well as specialist treatments such as orthodontics and oral surgery. Overall, dentistry plays a crucial role in maintaining the oral health and wellbeing of Australians.

Dentistry is an important aspect of healthcare in Australia, with a significant number of people seeking dental treatment each year.

The dental profession in Australia is regulated through the National Health Practitioner Regulation (National law) overseen and administered by the Dental Board of Australia with the support of the Australian health practitioner regulation agency (AHPRA), which ensures that all dental practitioners meet the required standards of education, training, and professional conduct.

There are five distinct professions recognised under the National Law totalling 23,786 registered practitioners*.

- Dentists
- Dental Prosthetists
- Dental Hygienists
- Dental Therapists, and
- Oral Health Therapists.

These regulated practitioners are supported to deliver oral health care with the assistance of the non-regulated dental workforce which includes, dental assistants, dental technicians and other administrative staff.

This guide serves to identify the various key bodies within the dental and oral health environment. It provides a guide for people wanting to engage with the various parts of the dental sector.

Representative bodies of registered dental practitioners

Australian Dental Association - Dentists

Dentistry is a highly-ethical, well-educated profession, which actively fosters a culture of ongoing learning and development specialising in the treatment of conditions affecting the mouth, teeth, jaws and gums. Dentists diagnose and treat a diverse range of issues affecting a person's oral health, which is critical given the growing understanding that the health of a person's mouth, teeth and gums has a significant influence on their overall wellbeing.

There is an increasing focus on preventive therapies over treatment, and on educating people so they are able to take an active role in the maintenance of their own oral health. A dentist is a role that now encompasses a diverse range of activities, one that is growing year by year as advances in technology and biomedical research emerge.

The Australian Dental Association, as we know it today is the oldest peak body representing the dental sector having been formed in 1909. The ADA has a proud history of producing standards for the entire sector in a wide range of important areas. ADA work on areas like infection control, service itemisation, practice accreditation, radiology, fluoride and therapeutics have been critical for the profession for over a century. The ADA also plays a significant role in supporting the oral health of Australians through oral health promotion, advocacy and a variety of philanthropic work.

Since 1909, the sector has evolved significantly as has the number and scope of representative organisations in the space. While the ADA continues to take a leadership role as the representative of the majority of dentists, who are also the main employers in the sector, we recognise the importance of having a diverse group able to contribute on matters that impact their members.

There are currently 19,912* registered dentists in Australia, 1932 of whom are also registered as specialist dentists in the recognised fields of:

- dento-maxillofacial radiology
- endodontics
- forensic odontology
- oral and maxillofacial surgery
- oral medicine
- oral and maxillofacial pathology
- oral surgery
- orthodontics
- paediatric dentistry
- periodontics
- prosthodontics
- public health dentistry (community dentistry), and
- special needs dentistry.

Only a dentist with recognised qualifications is eligible to apply for a dental specialist title under the National Law.

Acronym	ADA
Represents	Dentists and dental practices.
Qualification to be a member	Dentist
Founded	1909
Location	Offices in Sydney (national and branch), Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane, Darwin and Hobart.
Professional support	CEOs (Federal and each branch except NT and Tas) Approx 100 staff across the federation. 35 in the federal office.
International Affiliation	World Dental Federation (Voting member)

*Dental Board of Australia; June 2023 Registrant Data.

Australian Dental Prosthetists Association

Dental prosthetists are trained in the manufacture of partial and complete dentures, overdentures and mouthguards. A dental prosthetist is also a dental technician. But should not to be confused with a Prosthodontist who is a specialist dentist.

There are approximately 1200 dental prosthetists registered in Australia.

Acronym	ADPA
Represents	Dental Prosthetists
Qualification to be a member	Prosthetist
Location	Office in Sydney
Professional support	Executive Officer

Dental Hygienists Association of Australia

The role of the Dental Hygienist encompass prevention of dental disease and to promote the health of the teeth, gums and hence, overall wellbeing. DHAA membership includes some Dental Therapists and Oral Health Therapists.

There are currently 1400 registered dental hygienists.

Acronym	DHAA
Represents	Dental Hygienists, Dental Therapists and Oral Health Therapists
Qualification to be a member	Dental hygienist, Dental Therapist or Oral Health Therapist.
Location	Office in Melbourne
Professional support	CEO and <5 staff
International Affiliation	International Federation of Dental Hygienists

Australian Dental and Oral Health Therapy Association

Dental Therapists & Oral Health Therapists primarily treat dental diseases in children and adolescents and promote the health of the teeth, gums and hence, overall wellbeing.

Graduates of the Bachelor of Oral health can register in any of the three available registration divisions, Dental Hygienist, Dental Therapist or Oral health therapists. Dental Therapists who have not extended their training through formal programs may only register in the Dental Therapists division and are unable to treat patients over the age of 18.

ADHOTA membership includes some Dental Hygienists.

There are currently 635 registered dental therapists and 2758 oral health therapists.

Acronym	ADOHTA
Represents	Oral health therapists, dental therapists and some dental hygienists
Qualification to be a member	Three year Bachelor of Oral Health degree since mid 2000 but prior to that Diploma of dental therapy
Location	Remote
Professional support	Executive Officer and volunteer board members
International Affiliation	International Federation of Dental Hygienists

Representative bodies of non-registered dental workforce

Dental Assistants Professional Association

Dental Assistants work as part of a wider dental team, primarily with Dentists, but also with Dental Specialists, Oral Health Therapists/Dental Therapists, Dental Hygienists and Dental Prosthetists. While it is possible to work as a dental assistant without formal qualifications, undertaking vocational training in the form of a Certificate III /IV in Dental Assisting increases employment, financial remuneration and career advancement.

The exact number of dental assistants is unknown but estimated to be in the order of 18,000–20,000.

Acronym	DAPA
Represents	Dental Assistants
Qualification to be a member	Experience in dental practice
Founded	Pre 1970
Location	Office in Sydney
Professional support	CEO and <5 staff

Oral Health Professionals Association

This organisation has a low public presence but is believed to represent dental technicians and laboratory staff.

Acronym	OHPA
Represents	Dental Laboratories
Qualification to be a member	Dental Laboratories
Founded	Pre 1970
Location	Office in Sydney
Professional support	Volunteer

Other bodies

Australian Dental Industry Association

The ADIA is the peak organisation representing manufacturers and suppliers of dental products to dental practices.

Acronym	ADIA
Represents	Manufacturers and suppliers of dental equipment and materials
Qualification to be a member	An organisation manufacturing or supplying products to the dental sector
Founded	1925
Location	Office in Sydney
Professional support	CEO and <5 staff
International Affiliation	International Dental Manufacturers

Practitioner regulation

Acronym	Body	Role
DBA	Dental Board of Australia	Registration and Accreditation of Dentists, Hygienists, Oral Health Therapists and Dental Prosthetists (and students)
ADC	Australian Dental Council	Contracted to the DBA to accredit programs leading to registration and to assess overseas trained dentists for registration
AHPRA	Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Authority	Responsible for managing the national registration and accreditation scheme including compliance for some areas such as advertising
DCNSW	Dental Council of NSW	