



Virtual Dietetic Practice

Guidelines for Registered Dietitians in Newfoundland & Labrador

This guideline refers to virtual dietetic practice for Dietitians within the province and provides guidance for virtual dietetic practice outside of the province.

The Newfoundland and Labrador College of Dietitians (NLCD) paramount objective is to serve and protect the public interest. Dietetic regulatory bodies support dietitians to deliver high quality, client-centred services within the current practice environment.

Definitions

A *Client* is someone that a dietitian has established a professional relationship with the intent to practice dietetics and deliver dietetic services.

In person service are those dietetic services provided by a dietitian in direct face to face contact with a person.

Virtual dietetic practice is defined as the provision of dietetic services (e.g. counseling, consultation, monitoring, teaching, etc.) which involves any type of intervention with a client who is remotely located from the dietitian providing the service. It can include telephone, videoconferencing, email, apps, web-based communication and wearable technology. Virtual dietetic practice can occur within a jurisdiction and across borders within Canada.

Cross border refers to dietetic services performed across a Canadian provincial border where the dietitian providing the service is registered with the regulatory body in one province and is providing care to a client residing in another province.

Lawful Practice and Legal Jurisdiction

The regulation of health professionals in Canada is authorized by provincial law and therefore professional requirements can differ from province to province. No provincial regulatory body in Canada prohibits virtual dietetic practice. However, each regulatory body can identify requirements and standards specific to virtual dietetic practice.

NLCD does permit dietitians to engage in virtual dietetic practice within Newfoundland & Labrador. However, if you decide to engage in virtual dietetic practice outside your home province you must contact the Registrar of the dietetic regulatory body in the Province in which you wish to deliver the services. You must be aware of their provincial legislation, standard of practice, code of ethics and the laws and regulations governing Information Communication Technology (ICT). Some provinces have controlled acts and restricted activities

the registered dietitian must be aware of. It is the dietitian's responsibility to check each province's registration requirements for cross border virtual dietetic practice.

Table 1 has been attached for information purposes only and only applies to dietitians who are **currently fully licensed and in good standing with a Canadian dietetic regulatory body**. Table 1 is accurate as of the date of printing, and is subject to change. **As the information may change, dietitians are advised to confirm registration requirements in the jurisdiction where the client resides.**

Professional Liability Insurance

Many provincial dietetic regulatory bodies require dietitians to carry professional liability insurance. Dietitians should ensure their coverage includes virtual dietetic practice within the province as well as across the country.

Considerations when practicing Virtual Dietetic Practice

- Limited availability of assessment information
- Potential for breach of confidentiality and communication failure
- Potential for unauthorized practice
- Potential for providers to practice outside of their scope of practice
- Potential for virtual practice to be favored for cost savings when direct contact may be more appropriate
- Limited ability of regulators to effectively enforce professional standards and obligations should the regulatory body be required to conduct investigations in other jurisdictions.

Relevance

Dietitians are required to act in the client's best interest at all times. In the context of virtual dietetic practice, dietitians must constantly assess the appropriateness of virtual dietetic services. The following criteria should be considered by the dietitian:

- Services need to be applicable and feasible through virtual means and designed to meet the client's need.
- Services need to add value and be client-centered.
- The risks need to be analyzed and they must not outweigh the benefits.
- The technology must be easily accessible for both users.
- The technology must perform and support all type of services offered.
- Both the dietitian and the client must have the proper level of knowledge and competency related to the use of technology.
- Data obtained through virtual practice must be reliable and accurate in order for the dietitian to set the appropriate plan and follow-up.
- Clients and families are encouraged to be actively engaged during the delivery of services.

Accountability

The public benefits from increased access to dietetic expertise through virtual dietetic practice. However, as public safety is the regulatory mandate, the public needs to know that their dietitian is registered and accountable through a provincial dietetic regulatory body.

Registration with a regulatory body ensures that dietitians have met specified qualifications to practice dietetics, with established professional standards and clients have a way to raise a concern and lodge a complaint. With few exceptionsⁱ, current dietetic legislation and policy in Canadian jurisdictions do not address virtual dietetic practice, however it is generally accepted that a regulatory body still has jurisdiction over the conduct of registered dietitians.

Transparency

Dietitians providing services through virtual means across borders should inform clients in the jurisdiction where they are registered of potential limitations of virtual practice. Clients should be provided with the dietitian's contact and registration information so they know how to reach them and the College. As well, clients need to understand that complaints about the dietitian's conduct would have to be made to the regulatory body in the jurisdiction where the dietitian is registered. Dietitians should use the title *dietitian* to provide clarity to the public, since designations differ from province to province. The title *dietitian* is consistent in all provinces and the use of other titles (e.g. nutritionist, nutrition consultant) may confuse their professional status.

Insurance providers may have different policies/criteria for reimbursement if the service is provided through virtual practice or by an out of province Dietitian. Dietitians should encourage clients to confirm their insurance coverage prior to delivering the services.

Duty to Clients

Dietetic intervention with a client through virtual practice constitutes a dietitian-client relationship in the same way that any in-person interaction would constitute a dietitian-client relationship. The dietitian has a duty to provide care to clients in a manner consistent with care provided in person and to adapt the duty to the medium. The same professional obligations that exist in face-to-face dietetic services also exist for virtual dietetic practice.

- a) **Consent** – As part of obtaining informed consent when providing virtual dietetic service, the dietitian should clearly disclose limitations and risks of virtual dietetic practice, their name, registration status, jurisdiction(s) in which registration/license is held and contact information for their registering/licensing jurisdiction.
- b) **Competent Services** – Using technologies to support practice is part of the entry-to-practice competencies for dietitians. Current research, evidence-informed guidelines, and best practice in virtual dietetic practice should be used to improve the quality of services. Dietitians should include virtual dietetic practice in their continuing education and address any limitations that could affect the quality of care or the compliance with provincial legislation. Education and training should also be available to the clients on the safe use of equipment and devices used in service delivery.
- c) **Collaboration** – Dietitians will refer clients to other health care professionals when required. Where appropriate, Dietitians will form and maintain partnerships with other service providers, programs and organizations to meet the client needs. If communication or an exchange of data is required with

another health professional, dietitians need to obtain consent from the patient, as required when providing in person services.

- d) **Professional Practice** – Dietetic assessment, intervention and recommendations must be evidence-based or in accordance with best practice, and in accordance with the ethical and practice standards of the province where the dietitian is registered. Record keeping is accurate, up-to-date and secure. Dietitians must practice in accordance with the ethical and practice standards of the province where the dietitian is registered. If any standard of practice of the profession cannot be met virtually, the dietitian must refer the client elsewhere. Dietitians must not attempt to exempt the services provided virtually from compliance with standards of practice and ethical behavior by obtaining releases or disclaimers from the client.
- e) **Confidentiality** – Dietitians must ensure confidentiality around data collection, documentation and storage, as well as consultation. For example, the dietitian should identify those who are able to observe the interaction during the services (others in a room during a telephone call or videoconferencing). Any risk of breach with the use of technology should be assessed and managed. Virtual dietetic practice equipment and devices, access and storage needs to be secured adequately.
- f) **Safety**

Technology & Security – Appropriate and reliable equipment, device and information systems should always be used. Dietitians should ensure a plan is in place to address any technical problems should they arise, for the services they offer. For example, this could include, what to do if there is a power outage during the consultation, or if there is a connectivity or software problems.

Clinical Issue - Dietitians should also keep in mind that clinical problems may occur as a result of their intervention and should plan for alternative health resources to support their client. For example, what to do if a client has a hypoglycemia during the session, or if the person mentions suicidal thoughts.

Table 1. Requirements for Virtual Dietetic Practice by the Canadian Dietetic Regulatory Bodies.

Regulatory Body	Required to register in client's province for cross border virtual practice? (Yes or No)	Other Regulatory Requirements
College of Dietitians of British Columbia (CDBC)	Yes	A dietitian registered in another province who provides virtual dietetic services to BC residents must be registered in BC.
College of Dietitians of Alberta (CDA)	Yes	A dietitian registered in another province who provides virtual dietetic services to AB residents must be registered in AB.
Saskatchewan Dietitians Association (SDA)	No	A dietitian registered in another province who provides virtual dietetic services to SK residents must: a. disclose where they are registered to the SK client, b. inform the SDA they are providing virtual dietetic services in SK, and c. become familiar with SK laws, regulations, standards and code of ethics.
College of Dietitians of Manitoba (CDM)	No	A dietitian registered in another province who provides virtual dietetic services to MB residents must: a. have successfully completed the CDRE, b. contact CDM prior to providing services and c. disclose where they are registered to the MB client.
College of Dietitians of Ontario (CDO)	Yes	A dietitian registered in another province who provides virtual dietetic services to ON residents must be registered in ON.
Ordre professionnel des diététistes du Québec (OPDQ)	No	If a dietitian is physically located outside of Québec and providing virtual dietetic services to QC residents, the OPDQ advises the dietitian: a. disclose to their client they are not registered as a dietitian in QC, and b. become familiar with QC laws, regulations, standards and guidelines.
New Brunswick Association of Dietitians (NBAD) / Association des diététistes du Nouveau-Brunswick (ADNB)	No	A dietitian registered in another province who provides virtual dietetic services to NB residents must: a. disclose where they are registered to the NB client, b. inform NBAD prior to providing virtual dietetic services in NB, and c. adhere to NBAD laws, regulations, standards and code of ethics.
Nova Scotia Dietetic Association (NSDA)	No	If a dietitian is physically located outside of Nova Scotia and providing virtual dietetic services to Nova Scotia residents, the NSDA advises the dietitian: a. disclose to their client they are not registered as a dietitian in Nova Scotia, and b. become familiar with Nova Scotia laws, regulations, standards and guidelines.
College of Dietitians of Prince Edward Island (CDPEI)	Yes	A dietitian registered in another province who provides virtual dietetic services to PEI residents must be registered in PEI.
Newfoundland and Labrador College of Dietitians (NLCD)	No	If a dietitian is physically located outside of NL and providing virtual dietetic services to NL residents, the NLCD advises the dietitian: a. disclose to their client they are not registered as a dietitian in NL, and b. become familiar with NL laws, regulations, standards and guidelines.

NS legislation (not yet in effect)

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