Code of Ethics

The Newfoundland & Labrador College of Dietitians

2024

The Newfoundland & Labrador College of Dietitians (NLCD) is the regulatory body for the profession of dietetics in Newfoundland and Labrador. In the public interest, the NLCD regulates dietitians to practice in a safe, ethical, and competent manner.

Code of Ethics

Ethical Expectations

Ethical practice is an integral part of the professional commitment dietitians make to the health and well-being of their clients. The Code of Ethics for Dietitians in Newfoundland & Labrador is a statement of values, behaviours, and responsibilities that guide interactions and fair decision-making in any professional situation and work environment.

The Code of Ethics was developed collaboratively and through partner consultation by the Newfoundland & Labrador College of Dietitians (NLCD), the Nova Scotia College of Dietitians and Nutritionists, the Saskatchewan College of Dietitians, the College of Dietitians of British Columbia, the College of Dietitians of Manitoba, and the New Brunswick Dietitians Association, to articulate the following five (5) ethical standards.

As registrants of a self-regulated profession, dietitians in Newfoundland and Labrador are bound to the Code of Ethics as part of the regulatory process that services and protects the public. In the event of any concerns or allegations of a breach, the NLCD will investigate allegations of a breach of the code.

The Code of Ethics is not a stand-alone document and should be applied with other relevant legislation, regulations, standards, policies, and guidelines. At times, ethical standards may overlap with NLCD-specific regulations, bylaws, and standards, as requirements may be both legal and ethical. Definitions are found at the end of this document and may be province-specific. Some definitions may have a narrower interpretation in other regulatory policy documents that are specific to the nutrition care relationship between a dietitian and an individual client.

The Code of Ethics is a living document that is subject to change from time to time as dietetic practice and health professional regulations evolve.

Ethical Standards

A dietitian will practice ethically by ensuring that they:

1. Provide Services in the Best Interest of Clients

a. Maintain objectivity when exercising professional judgement.
b. Present information in a way that is easy to understand and is adapted to the client's context.
c. Obtain informed consent from a client for services, including any changes, refusal and/or withdrawal of services.
    i. Take all reasonable steps to ensure client consent is not given under conditions of intimidation or undue pressure.
    ii. If a client lacks capacity, obtain consent for planned services from a substitute decision maker.
    iii. Encourage the substitute decision maker to honour the client's previously expressed wishes, or when unknown, act in the client's best interest.
d. Respect the client's right to refuse treatment and/or obtain a second opinion.
e. Discuss choices with, and support clients to make decisions for services.
f. Use an evidence-based and evidence-informed approach to meet client needs.
g. Respect and maintain client privacy and confidentiality.
    i. Refer to the NLCD Standards of Practice.
    ii. Confidential client information should only be disclosed:
        - with client consent,
        - when the failure to disclose confidential information would cause imminent and significant harm to the health or safety of any person or others,
        - in accordance with the law
h. Advocate for clients, families, and other caregivers when appropriate.
    i. Provide client-centred care that recognizes cultural safety and humility, respects diversity, and is fair and inclusive.
    ii. Explore solutions and use all reasonable resources to supply quality services which meet the needs of both client and employer.
i. Supply services until care is no longer needed, the client requests discontinuation, or care is transferred to another dietitian or health professional.
j. Be sensitive to your position of power as a dietitian.
k. Apply professional judgment to review Artificial Intelligence (AI) output. Ensure data input and information generated is consistent with obligations related to privacy, equity, diversity and inclusion and ensure that the information provided is both accurate and reflects current and up to date dietetic practice.

2. Communicate Effectively

a. Communicate in a civil, respectful, and truthful manner,
b. Adhere to the Dietitians Act, NLCD Standards and policies.
c. Do not make false, fraudulent, misleading, deceptive or derogatory statements or claims.
d. Do not verbally, emotionally, or sexually harass any person in any communication.
e. Manage interpersonal conflict appropriately.

3. Collaborate Effectively

a. Collaborate with clients, interprofessional colleagues, workplace leaders, client's family, caregiver, guardian, or substitute decision maker to provide quality services.
b. Recognize and respect other health professionals' scope of practice.
c. Collaborate with others in the development and revision of policies to support ethical and quality healthcare services, implement and monitor the impact of these initiatives.
d. Support learning within the profession when there are opportunities to teach students and mentor colleagues.

4. Practice Safely and Competently

a. Recognize and practice within the limits of individual scope of practice and the scope of the scope of practice of the profession.
    i. Act as a credible and reliable source of evidence-based food and nutrition information
    ii. Provide safe, client-centered services using knowledge, skills, judgment, and professional attitude.
    iii. Refer to members of the interprofessional team if a needed service is beyond the dietitian's skill, knowledge, and the dietetic scope of practice.
b. Reflect on current practice to determine knowledge, skills, and ability development needed to ensure safe, competent, and ethical practice.
c. Uphold professional boundries
    i. Do not engage in sexual relationships with any clients.
    ii. Where possible, refer client(s) to another dietitians when a relationship exists or could be perceived to exist that would compromise a dietitian's objective decisions and actions toward the client(s).
    iii. If professional boundaries cannot be kept due to geographical, workforce, and/or resource limitations:
        1. Identify, disclose, document and mitigate risks of boundary crossings .
        2. Re-establish boundaries as soon as reasonably possible.
    iv. Balance the ability to remain objective with compassion regarding issues of sensitivity and/or personal trauma that may arise during treatment.

d. Be risk aware. Identify any potential type of harm, mitigate the risk of harm, and apply preventative measures when practicing dietetics.
e. Recognize and engage in trauma-informed practice (Trauma-informed Approaches).

5. Be Honest and Responsible

a. Do not act in a way that negatively affects the reputation of the profession.
b. Recognize and resolve ethical situations by applying critical thinking skills in problem-solving and decision-making.
c. Avoid conflict of interest
    i. Identify and manage potential situations that may lead to conflict of interest, including financial interest in products and services that are recommended.
    ii. Refrain from accepting gifts or services, which may influence or give the appearance of influencing professional judgement.
d. Assume responsibility for services provided by those under your supervision.
e. Maintain transparent, accurate, and truthful financial records.
    i. Inform clients of all fees and methods of payment prior to delivering services.
    ii. Allow your name and registration number to be used for the purpose of verifying professional services rendered only if you provided or supervised the provision of those services.
f. Be accountable for your actions when practicing dietetics.
    i. Disclose to the client for any error which causes or has the potential to cause harm or distress to a client.
    ii. Propose solutions, alternatives, or referral, as appropriate.
    iii. Maintain fitness to practice and withdraw from practice when circumstances arise that may impair reasonable skill or judgment or may endanger the health and safety of clients.
g. Do not discriminate based on a person's age, race, colour, religion, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, origin, family status, marital status, political belief or affiliation, source of income, or other protected within the Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Act
h. Do not enter into agreements, assignments, or contracts that require you to breach the NLCD Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.
i. Give fair and objective performance evaluations, when needed.
j. Fulfil reporting obligations.
    i. Report to the appropriate supervisor or NLCD Registrar if you have reasonable grounds to believe that another registrant:
    (i) has engaged in professional misconduct, incompetence or conduct unbecoming the profession,
    (ii) is incapacitated, or
    (iii) is practising in a manner that otherwise constitutes a danger to the public.

ii. Report to the appropriate supervisor or regulator of another health profession if you have reasonable grounds to believe that a member of that health profession:
    (i) has engaged in professional misconduct, incompetence or conduct unbecoming the profession
    (ii) is incapacitated, or
    (iii) is practising in a manner that otherwise constitutes a danger to the public
iii. Report incidents as per employer policy.

k. Cooperate with the College, the NLCD Registrar, and any committees of the College with respect to any regulatory process or requirements under the Act, Regulations, and bylaws
l. Present your professional qualifications and credentials accurately.
m. Main integrity in all professional interactions.

Definitions

Advertise/Advertising: Any publication or communication in any medium with any client, prospective client or the public generally in the nature of an advertisement, promotional activity or material, a listing in a directory, a public appearance or any other means by which professional services or products are promoted or marketed, including contact with a prospective client initiated by or under the discretion of a registrant.

Artificial Intelligence: An umbrella term that refers to the ability of a machine (e.g., computer) to perform tasks associated with intelligent beings, such as reasoning, language comprehension, and decision making (CPSM, 2024).

Client: An individual, family, substitute decision-maker, team members, group, population, agency, government, employer, employee, business, organization, or community, who is the direct or indirect recipient of the dietitian's skill and knowledge.

Collaborative Practice: Two or more individuals working cooperatively to achieve the common professional goal of delivery of the highest level of care. Dietitians work in partnership with nutrition, dietetic, interprofessional and/or intersectoral clients and other partners.

Conflict of interest: When a dietitian's personal, business, commercial, political, academic, or financial interests, or the interests of the dietitian's family or friends, interfere with the dietitian's professional responsibilities or a client's best interests.

A conflict of interest may exist whether or not the competing interest actually influences a dietitian. The conflict of interest may affect dietitians in any practice setting. A conflict of interest can be actual, potential, or perceived, and promotes (or is perceived to be promoting) a competing interest; instead, the results of which may or may not lead to negative client outcomes and service delivery.

Cultural Safety: An outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent to health care relationships. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe and supported to access, receive, and make informed decisions about their health care.

Cultural Humility: A process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another's experience.

Equity: refers to a process where every client has a fair opportunity to access dietetic health care and be subject to treatment free from bias and discrimination. A dietitian's understanding of the diversity among clients within their practice is essential to delivering personalized, client-centered, and data-informed care.

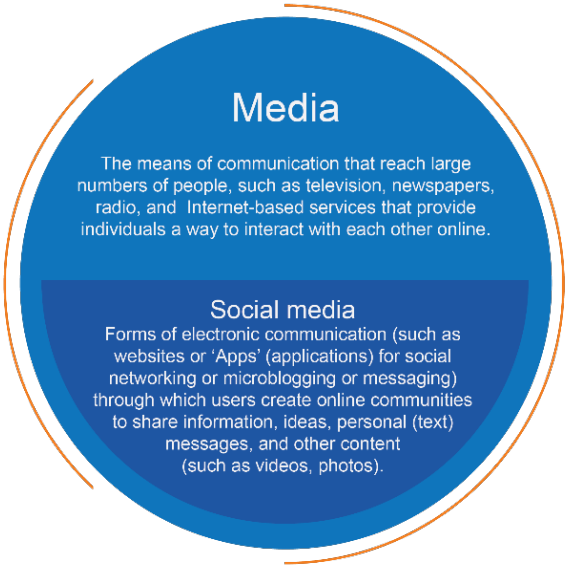
Evidence-based dietetic practice involves evaluating the validity, applicability, and importance of research and subsequently integrating the most reliable and available research evidence with dietetic expertise and client values into the nutrition care process.

Evidence-informed dietetic practice involves balancing the evidence, data, and professional judgment with client interests, preferences, context, risks related to the client's care, needs for best care, and available resources in the decision-making process.

Inclusion: refers to the intentional effort of a dietitian to facilitate a respectful environment where the client can feel safe, heard, and a part of their own healthcare journey and treatment plan.

Risk: In dietetics, a risk can be defined as a situation or action that involves exposure to danger, physical or mental harm (including financial), or loss to a client and/or to the dietitian.

Media: The means of communication that reach large numbers of people (the public), such as television, newspapers, radio, flyers and brochures, and Internet-based services that provide individuals a way to interact with each other online. Media includes social media, which encompasses a wide variety of web-based platforms, applications, and text messages.



Substitute Decision Maker: A person who helps make or makes decisions on behalf of another adult, when the adult is unable to make them.

Trauma-informed practice: a universal and systemic approach to service provision. It is based on an understanding of the prevalence of many forms of violence and trauma among children and adults – developmental, historical, simple/complex, weather-related, war-related, gender-based – and the wide range of adaptations people make to cope. TIP can be implemented in any service setting.

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APPENDIX A-Defining Conduct Deserving of Sanction

In accordance with the *Dietitians Act (2005);* section 8 (g) this document will define "*Conduct deserving of sanction"* which includes *professional misconduct, professional incompetence and conduct unbecoming a registered dietitian.* The following definitions apply to the Newfoundland & Labrador College of Dietitians for the purpose of sections 21-37 of the *Dietitians Act (2005)*.

Definitions:

1. **Professional Misconduct**- means a digression from established or recognized professional standards or rules of practice of the profession
2. **Professional Incompetence**- means or acts or omissions on the part of a member, in her professional duties including the care of a client, that demonstrates a lack of knowledge, skill or judgement or disregard for the welfare of a client or clients of a nature and to an extent as to render her unfit or unsafe to practice dietetics without conditions, limitations or restrictions.
3. **Conduct Unbecoming a registered dietitian**- Engaging in conduct or performing an act that, having regard to all the circumstances, would reasonably be regarded by members as disgraceful, dishonourable or unprofessional.

The following are acts of *professional misconduct* for the purposes of section 21 (c) (i) of the Dietitian Act:

The Practice of the Profession and Care of and the relationship with clients

1. Practicing the profession while the members license of registration has been suspended.
2. Doing anything to a client for a therapeutic, preventative, palliative, diagnostic, cosmetic, research or other health related purpose in a situation in which a consent is required by law but completed without such a consent from client.
3. Abusing a client verbally, physically, emotionally or sexually.
4. Practicing the profession while the member's ability to do so is impaired by any substance.
5. Discontinuing professional services without reasonable cause or without reasonable notice unless:
    a. the client requests the discontinuation
    b. alternative services are arranged
6. Practicing the profession while the member is in a conflict of interest.

7. Giving information about a client to a person other than the client or their authorized representative except with the consent of the client or their authorized representative or as required by law.
8. Breaching an agreement with a client relating to professional services for the client or fees for such services.
9. Failing to report incidents of unsafe practice or unethical conduct of dietitians.
10. Practicing in an area the member knew or ought to have known was beyond their expertise or competence.

Representations about members and their qualifications

11. Inappropriately using a term, title or designation in respect of the members practice

Record Keeping

12. Failing to keep records as required
13. Failing without reasonable cause to provide chart notes relating to an assessment treatment performed by the member, within reasonable time after a client or their authorized representative has requested this information.
14. Signing or issuing, in the members professional capacity, a document that the member knows contains a false or misleading statement.

Business Practices

15. Submitting an account charge for services that the member know is false or misleading.
16. Charging a fee that is excessive in relation to the service charged for
17. Failing to itemize an account for professional services if requested to do so by the client or person or agency who is to pay, in whole or in part, for the services.

Miscellaneous Items

18. Failing to cooperate in a College investigation

The Newfoundland & Labrador College of Dietitians acknowledges the College of Dietitians of Ontario and the New Brunswick Dietetic Association in developing Appendix A- Defining Conduct Deserving of Sanction.