

# **Communications Program Review and Development**

## **Final Report**

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## Abstract

From spring through fall of 2025, the CDTA worked with a team of external researchers and consultants to review and improve their approach to communications. The focus of this project was to gain greater engagement from their registrants and better clarity within their information resources in alignment with their 2024-2027 Strategic Plan.

Researchers mapped out the CDTA's current communications voice, channels, techniques, and content; gathered feedback from registrants; and compared existing systems to that of other similar organizations. Findings indicated that while the College has been successful in establishing reliable and consistent communications systems, there were many subtler gaps in terms of the framing and tone of delivery, as well as in the context and focus on information provided. This has contributed to an opportunity to strengthen the relationship with registrants, as there appears to be limited awareness and understanding of the CDTA's role, how it operates, and the ways in which its work supports safety and quality within the profession.

To improve engagement, the team developed a new Communications Plan for the CDTA that includes a roadmap for implementation. Key areas of focus over the next 12 months include:

- Setup of website analytics
- Adoption of new email templates
- Improvements to registrant login area of website
- Updates to website news area, including a blog style newsfeed
- Addition of a FAQ Page to website
- Audience-specific key message mapping



A more detailed look of the roadmap and activities is provided in the Summary section of this report.

# Project Background

The College of Dental Technologists of Alberta (CDTA) exists to regulate the activities of registered dental technology professionals with the goal of ensuring Albertans receive safe, competent, and ethical oral health care.

Central to this goal are the CDTA’s registrants: Alberta’s Dental Technologists and Technicians. Safety and quality systems can only succeed when the people they govern are actively engaged in those systems.

At minimum, registrants need compliance with basic professional standards. But they are also essential to improving those standards, and ensuring they are relevant to the needs of patients as dental technologies continue to evolve.

In recent years, new technologies and changes to provincial legislation have created uncertainty and frustration for many registrants as they navigate how to adapt their practices. As a result, the Council made improved communication and engagement a key strategic priority.

| Strategic intent for the 2024–2027 strategic plan                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strengthen the sustainability and effectiveness of operations and governance | a) Operations <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop and implement a comprehensive succession framework.</li><li>• Develop and implement sustainable business practices, including meaningful performance measures.</li><li>• Maximize use of resources through increased collaboration with regulatory partners.</li></ul> | b) Governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Council members actively improve governance, maintain consistent efforts, evaluate outcomes, and foster long-term sustainability.</li><li>• Develop comprehensive resources for onboarding Council &amp; Committee Members.</li></ul> |
| Improved Communication & Stakeholder Engagement                              | a) Evaluate accessibility and enhance the clarity of information offered by the CDTA to its stakeholders, including regulated members, applicants, the public, and government.                                                                                                                                                       | b) Increase the participation and engagement of regulated members in the work of the College.                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Foster and broaden collaborative relationships with other health regulators  | a) Take a leadership role in health regulator strategic partnerships.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | b) Partner with other oral health regulators to enhance public protection.                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

Over 2025, the CDTA worked with research and design consultants from Onlea to review existing communications at the College and develop a new communications plan that emphasized clarity and collaboration with registrants.



# Communications Review

## System Mapping

Researchers mapped out the CDTA’s existing communication system and reviewed examples of content from the last five years, including emails, website pages, reports, and downloadable resources.

The CDTA has two primary channels: email and the organizational website.

| Email                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Website                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Newsletters</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-urgent</li> <li>Sent quarterly</li> <li>Multiple different topics</li> </ul> <p><b>Announcements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timely/urgent information</li> <li>Sent as needed (no schedule), typically no more than 2-3 in a month</li> <li>Single topic</li> </ul> | <p><b>News / Announcements Page</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Irregularly updated, includes some information also provided by email</li> </ul> <p><b>Communications Page</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides PDF versions of past newsletters</li> </ul> <p><b>Topic Pages</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Combination of main navigation pages and subpages (~23 total)</li> <li>Offers basic text information and some public tools for searching registry and contacting CDTA</li> </ul> <p><b>PDF Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessed from topics pages, no central directory or search tool</li> <li>Typically open in the same browser window</li> </ul> <p><b>Member Account Area</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requires login</li> </ul> |

|  |                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tools for updating registrant info, uploading continuing competence documentation, and downloading practice permits</li></ul> |
|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Communications emails were typically sent via the basic communications tools built into the platform used to manage registrant’s online accounts, CiviCRM.

**Registrant Feedback**

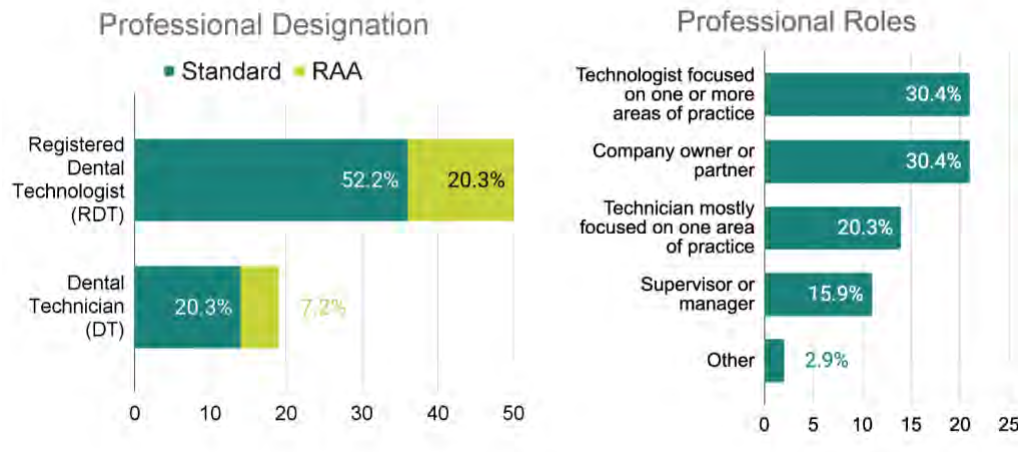
Improving communication starts with understanding who you’re talking to. This project involved several stages of research to get a clear picture of registrants’ perspectives, needs, and challenges with CDTA communications.

Key research areas included:

- How do registrants perceive existing CDTA content? To what extent are they currently engaging?
- How do CDTA comms help registrants meet their regulatory responsibilities? Where do registrants feel they need support?
- What are the main barriers to engagement with CDTA? How are they influencing registrants’ behaviour?

Researchers gathered feedback directly from registrants through a combination of surveys and interviews. The research plan was designed to build a more complete picture of registrants’ backgrounds, goals, and priorities, as well provide space to share their perspectives in a detailed and nuanced way.

Participation was open to all CDTA registrants currently practicing within Alberta. Over 69 registrants completed the initial survey, and seven in the subsequent interviews.



Responses represented a good cross section of the total registrant population in terms of age, gender, professional designation, and role within their organizations.

Registrants we interviewed included:

- Dental Technicians and Registered Dental Technologists.
- Different genders and ethnicities.
- Registrants new to the profession and with decades of experience.
- Lab employees at both small and large organizations, team managers, and business owners.
- Registrants with English as their second language.

## Comparison to Other Similar Organizations

During this process, the researchers compared the CDTA's communications system with those from similar organizations.

The research team selected five provincial regulators of health-related professions in Canada as comparator organizations. Each shared similarities with the CDTA in at least two key areas, including the practices being dental or lab-related, total number of registrants, size of annual fees, or operating budget.

| Organization                                             | Dental or<br>Tech/Lab<br>Profession | Total<br>Registrants<br>+/- 50% | Annual Fee<br>+/- 50% | Operating<br>Budget<br>+/- 50% |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| College of Hearing Aid<br>Practitioners of Alberta       | ✓                                   | ✓                               | ✓                     | ✓                              |
| Alberta College of Combined<br>Lab & X-ray Technologists | ✓                                   | ✓                               | ✓                     | ✓                              |
| College of Dental Hygienists<br>of Manitoba              | ✓                                   | x                               | ✓                     | ✓                              |
| College of Dental<br>Technologists of Ontario            | ✓                                   | ✓                               | x                     | x                              |
| College of Alberta Denturists                            | ✓                                   | ✓                               | x                     | x                              |

Areas of comparison included:

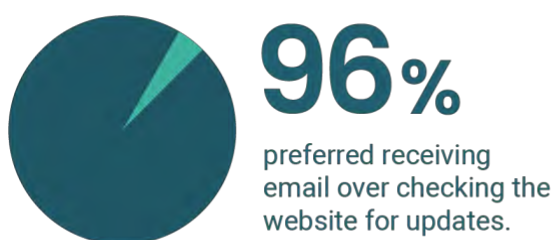
- Voice and tone
- Topics of focus
- Visible channels
- Frequency of updates
- Ease of navigation
- Accessibility of Information
- Content formats used

# Research Findings

## Feedback

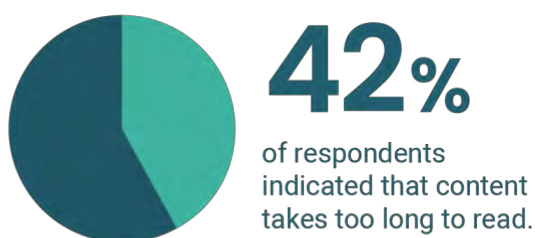
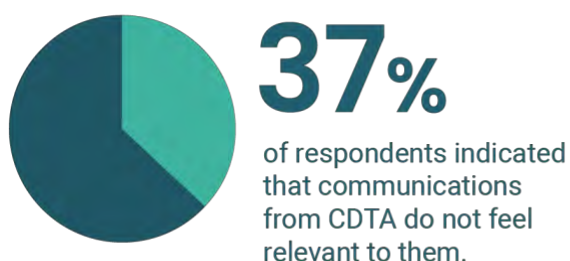
Surveys and interviews indicated that while registrants cared about doing their jobs well, most didn't think about the CDTA in their day-to-day work.

Registrants did want to receive information directly about their regulatory responsibilities, and greatly preferred email over using the website to learn about changes or new information. However, they also rarely engaged with those emails beyond opening them.



96% preferred receiving email over checking the website for updates. <20% of opened emails receive clicks on any of their included links.

Registrants reported that they tended to scan CDTA emails quickly for information that was clearly relevant to their work context and only take action if the next step was clear.



37% of respondents indicated that communications from CDTA do not feel relevant to them. 42% of respondents indicated that content takes too long to read

In general, registrants felt that CDTA emails tended to feel like a sudden dump of information. Communications often lacked clear takeaways and did not feel closely related to their day-to-day work.

**“Sometimes I'll be at work and see an email from them about a new guideline. And I'm like, I don't know if this applies to me...I don't have time to read this. It's not clear in the name of the email, really what it is.”**

Interviewed registrants confirmed that they were aware of calls to participate in CDTA activities such as serving on Council or volunteering, but felt they didn't have the capacity. Some mentioned they were unclear of what would be involved or if they could be helpful.

Registrants reported checking the website infrequently, usually only for tasks like logging their Continuing Competency Program (CCP) credits or downloading their practice permit. Most did not find website resources helpful for answering their questions about regulatory requirements.

**“You have to be a lawyer to understand.”**

Registrants were most focused on topics related to activities required to maintain their practice permit, such as renewing their yearly registration and logging their CCP credits.

## Popularity of suggested content topics

Continuing Competence Program - 64%

Registration / Renewal Info - 46%

Advice to the Profession / Guidelines - 41%

Of suggested content topics, the Continuing Competence Program received the most interest (64%). Other popular topics were Registration/ Renewal Info (46%) and Advice to the Profession/Guidelines (41%).

In regards to the CDTA as a whole, many registrants were unclear on the scope of the organization's activities, or how their work ultimately impacts safety and quality for Albertans dental patients.

Most survey respondents didn't have strong feelings about the tone of CDTA content and 39% even viewed it positively. However, around 17% of the respondents felt uncomfortable with the tone.

## Comparative Analysis

Compared to other similar regulator organizations we reviewed, the CDTA's communications had good foundations, but also lots of opportunity to improve.

Despite experiencing many of the same challenges of a smaller regulator with limited staff and operating budget, the CDTA communications have covered the basics well:

- Website navigation and functions all work.
- Emails and website content are published regularly.
- Information is available on core topics: Fees/Renewals, Continuing Competency Program, Standards and Ethics, and Complaints.
- Voice and tone of content reflects commitment to accuracy and professionalism.

While these basics offer a good foundation for regular updates to members, it was also clear that the CDTA could improve their communications in some key areas:

### **Voice and Tone**

- CDTA's perspective was more strongly represented in content than registrant or patient perspectives, even when the content was intended for their use.
- Language tended to be formal and policy-forward. Precise, but not always clear or concise.
- While professional, the neutral voice and tone of information delivery could also come across as indifferent or uncaring.

### **Content**

- Communications content tended to focus on problems and needs, with relatively little attention on solutions or progress.

### **Accessibility**

- Organization information is inconsistent and doesn't help readers to scan for topics or details that are relevant to their specific content.
- Presentation of communications often not aligned with accessibility best practices with respect to structure, colour contrast, formatting of hyperlinks, and typography.

On the surface, registrants simply appear to be busy with their work and don't feel a need to engage further. However, looking closer revealed a variety of subtler but widespread challenges that made even registrants passionate about quality within their profession reluctant to connect with the CDTA more than the minimum required to maintain their practice.

# New Communication Plan

Reviewing the current stage of CDTA's communications showed a need to focus on the relationship between the College and Alberta's registered dental technology professionals.

The CDTA's new approach to communication has been co-developed between the research team and College staff with the following goals:

- Help registrants complete tasks.
- Balance professionalism with warmth.
- Address registrant questions and concerns.
- Strive for conciseness and readability.
- Surface how CDTA activities connect to safety, quality, and ethics.
- Communicate with registrants as collaborators towards shared goals.

## Approach Validation

As part of plan development, the research team overhauled the CDTA's approach to email communications.

Prototype designs of both announcement and newsletter emails were developed and tested with registrant volunteers. These prototypes incorporated a wide variety of recommendations from the research, including updates to visual design, tone, and structure. They also allowed for testing of improvements to CDTA's communications technology, including new email builder tools that enabled more sophisticated templates and graphic design options.

Registrant feedback on these prototypes was essential to validating both the high-level goals and refining specific tools and approaches for achieving them.

## Email Strategy

CDTA will continue to have two main types of email communications: newsletters and announcements and send them out at a similar frequency. Changes will focus on improving the quality of their contents.

Communications will be sent out using CDTA's updated email tools. Each email type will have templates to help registrants quickly distinguish them and support CDTA staff in organizing information in a clear and friendly way.

**Quarterly newsletters** will be focused on offering concise summaries of news from the previous three months, with links out to any related information or resources about those topics. Instead

of providing detailed information in the body of the newsletter, they will link out to postings or resources on the website. Topic sections to be included with each issue:

- Top Story
- Q&A
- Education
- Featured Resource
- Council Updates

**Announcement** emails will focus on alerting registrants to a specific timely topic or issue as needed. Content will include sections for context like why the information is timely and who is impacted, as well as guidance on how to apply it and links out to related resources.

## Website Strategy

While not the primary channel for timely communications with registrants, CDTA's website serves as an important place to host resources and manage registrant information. College staff plan to improve key elements of these services for better clarity and accessibility.

### News Area

Switch from a hard-coded page to a blog-style feed where current and previous communications can be easily posted and reviewed. The goal will be to help visitors quickly see if anything has been published or updated since they last visited, and review news they might have missed.

### Topic-Specific Pages

Updates to make pages consistent with updated approaches to presentation, structure, and accessibility.

### Member Account Areas

Update language and navigation labels to be more clear and consistent with the rest of the website.

Support registrants with additional context about tools and sections. Provide basic instructions for tools like the CCP credit upload form, as well as links to more detailed information about how the program works.

# Appendix A: Research Results

## Screening Survey

- Total of 74 survey responses from May 11 to May 22, 2025
- 69 included in final analysis, 5 filtered out due to ineligibility and/or lack of survey completion

## Interviews

- 7 semi-structured interviews successfully completed, ~45 minutes each
- 11 potential participants contacted (2 no-shows, 2 did not respond)

## Respondent Demographics and Professional Functions

### Age

Most respondents were over the age of 40 (~58%), with the majority being 50-59 (36.2%).

- 19 to 29: 10.1%
- 30 to 39: 10.1%
- 40 to 49: 20.3%
- 50 to 59: 36.2%
- 60 to 69: 21.7%
- 70 to 79: 3.0%
- 80+: 0.0%

### Gender

The majority of respondents were male (62.3%) while the rest were female. No respondents selected the “Other” category.

- Female: 37.7%
- Male: 62.3%
- Other: 0.0%

### Professional Title

Most respondents were RDTs (52.2%) without RAA, while RDTs with RAA and DTs both made up 20.3% of respondents and DTs with RAA made up the remaining 7.3%. No respondents fell outside of these categories.

- Dental Technician (DT): 20.3% (3)
- Dental Technician with Restricted Activities Authorization (DT)(RAA): 7.3% (1)
- Registered Dental Technologist (RDT): 52.2% (2)
- Registered Dental Technologist with Restricted Activities Authorization (DT)(RAA): 20.3% (1)
- Other (please specify): 0.0%

## Role

Respondent roles were somewhat evenly distributed across the different categories, with technologists and company owner/partner each making up around a third respectively (30.4%), while 20.3% were technicians and 15.9% were supervisors. The “other” category included 2 responses: were “Instructor” and “Client liaison dealing with dentists.”

- Technician mostly focused on one area of practice: 20.3% (2)
- Technologist focused on one or more areas of practice: 30.4% (2)
- Supervisor or manager, overseeing one or more areas of practice: 15.9% (1)
- Company owner or partner: 30.4% (2)
- Other (please specify): 2.9% (0)

## Understanding of CDTA’s Role in Oral Health Profession

Generally, participants understand that the CDTA is a regulator with a limited mandate to protect the public guided by government legislation, not an association, although they expressed some uncertainty around the scope of the CDTA’s role in the profession and the limitations of the college’s mandate.

Participants’ showed awareness of CDTA’s role in the oral health profession across the following areas:

- Making registrants aware of requirements to practice connected to government legislation, ensuring compliance with these requirements
- Setting standards for professionalism in the industry
- Administering CE credit and assessing training for credit eligibility
- Setting and enforcing requirements for entry into the profession
- Handling public complaints, taking disciplinary action against members breaking regulations
- Providing opportunities for registrant involvement in committees and volunteering

Some interviewees expressed uncertainty and concerns around the following areas connected to the CDTA’s mandate, but may fall outside of the scope of a regulator:

- Recommending CE opportunities for registrants
- The real-world impact of regulations on patient safety

- Guidance on pricing the ensure registrants' businesses and employers can remain sustainable

## Current Communications Performance and Engagement Patterns

### Communications Preferences

The vast majority of respondents (95.7%) preferred email over web-based postings (4.3%) for communications from CDTA.

In terms of formats for CDTA professional content, the majority of respondents also preferred email (79.7%), while a smaller proportion preferred downloadable PDFs (26.1%) and web-based videos (21.7%).

## Current Registrant Perception and Experience of CDTA Communications: Key Barriers and Motivators for Engagement

### Overview of Current Registrant Value Perceptions and Goals for Engagement with CDTA Content

- High level summary of what they would like to get out of engaging, what they feel like they are currently getting.
- Summary of any barriers to engagement, which are explored in more detail grouped into several categories below.

Participants described several key goals and future value that they would like to get from engaging with CDTA emails and website content, which are outlined below:

- Completing yearly renewal and getting info about deadlines for renewal.
- Becoming qualified as a DT or RDT & understanding licensing requirements.
- Meeting CE requirements and staying up to date with the latest industry needs in their profession.
  - Current: prove completion of past CE activities.
  - Future aspiration: Understanding what new activities are available, choosing most appropriate activities for their practice.
- Understanding and applying regulations in their profession.
  - Current: getting information on what the regulations are.
  - Future aspirations:
    - Quickly understanding whether they are meeting regulatory requirements in their profession and how to apply them.
    - Staying up to date with the best practices for an oral health professional
- Getting guidance on emerging trends and technologies in their profession.

- Future aspiration: Understand how to remain relevant as the tools and techniques in the industry are changing.