

Health Professions and Occupations Act Q&A

August 2025

What is the Health Professions and Occupations Act?

- The [Health Professions and Occupations Act](#) (HPOA) will be the governing legislation for the regulation of health professions in BC starting April 1, 2026.
- The HPOA aims to improve public protection and safety in the health system, by doing the following:
 - Increasing information sharing to improve patient safety and public trust, through increased transparency of licensees' past disciplinary actions on the regulatory colleges' public registries, as well as increased communication between employers and the colleges when misconduct has occurred.
 - Establishing the Health Professions and Occupations Regulatory Oversight Office (HPOROO) to ensure regulatory colleges are focused on patient safety and the public interest.
 - Enhancing a commitment to cultural safety and humility, through the requirements for colleges to consult with Indigenous peoples on certain bylaws, and the HPOROO to consult on their own policies and procedures. The HPOA also requires colleges to offer Indigenous support workers for Indigenous peoples going through the discipline process, as well as provides certain protections of cultural practices from being treated as misconduct.
 - Creating an independent disciplinary hearing process that provides support services and support workers for people going through the process.
 - Including all instances of disciplinary actions and summary protection orders against a health professional on the public registry following the disciplinary hearing process.
 - Moving to fully appointed college boards, whose board members are selected based on merit and competency.
- The HPOA addresses discrimination and Indigenous-specific racism in the health care system throughout the legislation, and there are numerous provisions to counteract discrimination or inequity. Indigenous groups were consulted with during the development of the legislation, with a focus on provisions to ensure cultural safety. Some examples of these measures include:
 - Including a set of 'guiding principles' in the HPOA that promote anti-discrimination, anti-racism, awareness of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, that all individuals performing duties under this Act are expected to uphold.
 - Creating a new legal duty for both licensees and certain non-licensees to report it if they believe a licensee has engaged in discrimination.

- Enabling the person making a complaint to request that their identity be protected during the investigation of a regulated health practitioner (known as an identity protection order).
- Enabling trauma-informed practices to inform disciplinary hearing proceedings, such as physical barriers during hearing processes, and written cross-examinations rather than requiring the accused health professional being present.
- Requiring regulatory colleges to provide the option of support workers, nominated by Indigenous governing bodies, to assist Indigenous individuals in navigating the complaints and discipline process in a culturally safe manner.
- Requiring colleges to consult with Indigenous governing bodies on any bylaws which are particularly relevant to Indigenous peoples.

When will the HPOA come into force?

- The HPOA received Royal Assent on November 24, 2022, but is not yet in force as a whole.
- On October 18, 2023, certain sections of the HPOA came into force, to allow for the Health Professions and Occupations Regulatory Oversight Office (HPOROO) to be set up. These sections can be seen here:
 - https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/oic/oic_cur/0579_2023 and
 - https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/oic/oic_cur/0580_2023
- The HPOA will come into force in its entirety on April 1, 2026, by Lieutenant Governor in General (LGIC) regulations, that were approved by Cabinet on July 16, 2025.

The regulations approved on July 16, 2025, include new profession regulations and the Regulated Health Practitioners Regulation, which align with the HPOA and will come into force on April 1, 2026.

Why was the HPOA developed?

- The HPOA was developed due to concerns about the functioning of the regulatory colleges in British Columbia.
- This issue was first identified in a 2003 report by the Ombudsperson which stated that regulatory college boards “do not appear to have fully accepted or understood what it means to act in the public interest”.
 - The report can be read online here: <https://bcombudsperson.ca/assets/media/Special-Report-No-24-Self-Governance-in-the-Health-Professions-The-Ombudsmans-Perspective.pdf>
- On March 8, 2018, the BC Minister of Health appointed Harry Cayton, an expert in health profession regulation, to conduct an inquiry into the College of Dental Surgeons of BC due to concerns from the public and numerous complaints indicating the college was not acting in the best interests of patients.
 - The purpose of the Harry Cayton’s report (referred to as “the Cayton Report”) was to review the *Health Professions Act* (HPA) and suggest possible approaches to modernize BC’s overall health regulatory framework.
 - The report identified several problems with the regulatory framework, including the composition of college boards, a lack of relentless focus on patient safety, and secrecy regarding the complaints system, among other things.

- The report was made public on April 11, 2019 and can be read online here: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/practitioner-pro/professional-regulation/cayton-report-college-of-dental-surgeons-2018.pdf>
- In response to the recommendations outlined in the Cayton Report, the then-Minister of Health, Adrian Dix, established a Steering Committee to create a plan for modernizing the regulatory framework.
- The Steering Committee members included Norm Letnick, then-health critic for the official Opposition, and Sonia Furstenau, then-health critic and house leader for the BC Green Party.
- The Cayton Report, along with feedback from public consultation on the report, led the Steering Committee to develop a consultation paper with proposed changes to health profession regulation in BC.
- The consultation paper was open to public feedback from November 27, 2019, to January 10, 2020.
- Feedback from the consultation informed the Steering Committee's final recommendations in an August 2020 report for improving the model of health profession regulation.
 - The report can be read online here: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/practitioner-pro/professional-regulation/modernizing-health-profession-regulatory-framework-consultation-paper.pdf>
- It is these recommendations which, along with thorough engagement with partners, shaped the foundation of the HPOA and informed the drafting of the new legislation.

What is the Health Professions and Occupations Regulatory Oversight Office?

- The Health Professions and Occupations Regulatory Oversight Office (HPOROO) is a new oversight body established under the HPOA, led by a Superintendent of Health. They will provide responsive oversight of the regulation of health care professions and occupations in BC, to protect the public from harm and discrimination.
- The Superintendent of Health will also be responsible for completing designation assessments for new health professions or occupations that may become regulated in the future. These assessments are initiated on the Superintendent's own volition or by recommendation of the Minister of Health.
- The HPOROO also houses an independent Discipline Tribunal, which will manage serious discipline matters regarding the conduct of health professionals.
- The mandate of the HPOROO is to uphold public safety in the delivery of British Columbia's health care services, as an independent body from government.
- For more information on the HPOROO or the Discipline Tribunal, please visit the HPOROO website here ([Health Professions and Occupations Regulatory Oversight Office](#)).

What are the roles of government, the regulatory colleges, the professional associations, unions, the Health Professions Review Board, and the Health Professions and Occupations Regulatory Oversight Office regarding the HPOA and regulations?

Ministry of Health

- The Ministry of Health is responsible for the maintenance and updating of the regulations, including considering scope expansion requests for regulated professions. The Ministry does not have the authority to initiate or intervene in an investigation or complaint regarding the conduct of practitioners.

Regulatory Colleges

- The role of the regulatory colleges is to oversee the practice of regulated health professions in the public interest. The colleges operate at arm's length from government and establish, monitor, and enforce standards of practice for the professions they govern. They are also responsible for receiving complaints and conducting investigations into licensees' misconduct. Additionally, the colleges are responsible for licensing of health professionals and responding to complaints from the public about the conduct of individual practitioners.

Professional Associations

- The primary purpose of a health profession association is to represent its members and advocate on their behalf. These associations provide ways to help members learn about emerging areas of professional interest or career opportunities and organize networking opportunities and continuing education.

Unions

- The role of unions is to negotiate for their members through collective bargaining, advocate for their members with employers, including addressing workplace grievances, and offer their members training and education opportunities.

Health Professions Review Board

- The Health Professions Review Board is an independent, quasi-judicial administrative tribunal. Its duties include reviewing certain licensing decisions of regulatory colleges, reviewing certain dispositions of complaints made by the inquiry committee of a regulatory college; and developing and publishing guidelines and recommendations for the purpose of assisting regulatory colleges in establishing fair licensing, inquiry and discipline procedures.

Health Professions and Occupations Regulatory Oversight Office

- The purpose of the HPOROO is to increase accountability, transparency, and oversight of regulatory colleges, while promoting best practices and enhancing consistency where appropriate. The HPOROO also houses the Discipline Tribunal, led by the Director of Discipline, which conducts independent hearings and decides disciplinary actions for licensees following an investigation process by a college.

Will the HPOA regulate any new health professions?

- The HPOA coming into force will not automatically result in any new professions being regulated. However, there are five professions that were designated under the HPA, which will become regulated at a future date through regulation under the HPOA.

- In April 2017, four diagnostic and therapeutic (D&T) professions (clinical perfusion, respiratory therapy, radiation therapy and medical laboratory technology) were designated as health professions under the HPA. In July 2024, psychotherapy was also designated as a health profession. However, regulating these professions was put on hold until the HPOA could be implemented.
- There are now regulations for the D&T professions and psychotherapy, which will come into effect on November 29, 2027.
- Psychotherapy will become regulated by the College of Health and Care Professionals of BC, and the D&T professions will become regulated by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC.
- These regulations would come into force on November 29, 2027, giving an extended window of time for the colleges to prepare for and begin regulating these practitioners.
- For future information on the regulation of psychotherapy or the College of Health and Care Professionals of BC, please monitor their website as information becomes available ([College of Health and Care Professionals of BC](#)).
- For future information on the regulation of D&T professions or the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC, please monitor their website as information becomes available ([College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC](#)).
- Once the HPOA is in force, any potential new health professions or occupations recommended to the Minister of Health will go through a designation assessment process conducted by the Superintendent of Health.

How are the profession regulations organized?

- The regulations for each of the health professions are grouped by college rather than having individual regulations for every profession. Under the HPOA, the profession regulations include:
 - Complementary Health Professionals Regulation
 - Health and Care Professionals Regulation
 - Nurses and Midwives Regulation
 - Oral Health Professionals Regulation
 - Pharmacists Regulation
 - Medical, Diagnostic and Therapeutic Professionals Regulation
- Additionally, there is a new regulation, the Regulated Health Practitioners Regulation, which includes Restricted Activities and other information pertinent to interpreting the profession regulations.

Are there changes to scope of practice or restricted activities under the HPOA?

- The HPOA continues British Columbia's shared scope of practice and restricted activities model for regulated health professions. This regulatory model was designed to enable inter-professional practice and team-based care, and to balance public safety and consumer choice. Some aspects of the scope of practice of a regulated health profession may overlap or be shared with those of other regulated health professions.

- For most professions there are few changes to the scope of practice and restricted activities in the HPOA professions regulations; however, we encourage licensees to contact their regulatory college for any additional information on scope of practice and restricted activities.

What are the changes to scope of practice under the HPOA?

- As part of the work to modernize health profession regulation in BC, the HPOA regulations introduce a limited number of scope of practice (SOP) changes for certain professions (i.e., Hearing Instrument Practitioners, Midwives, Naturopathic Physicians, Physical Therapists, Speech-Language Pathologists, and Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners). The changes align with activities that these professions are educated and able to perform.
- These SOP changes will take effect when the HPOA and its regulations come into force on April 1, 2026. For questions or more information on how to interpret these SOP changes, please contact the appropriate regulatory college.

Regulated Health Profession	Scope of Practice change(s) in HPOA profession regulation
Hearing Instrument Practitioners	Raises the patient age requirement to 19 years or older for a hearing instrument practitioner to prescribe, fit, and dispense a wearable hearing instrument (to align with entry-to-practice training). A certified hearing instrument practitioner may prescribe, fit or dispense a wearable hearing instrument for patients aged less than 19 years.
Midwives	Removes the 3-month restriction for the provision of postpartum contraception services
	Includes the application of ultrasound for the purpose of determining fetal position and presentation
	For certified midwives, includes the insertion of "devices" beyond the labia majora for the purposes of inducing labour (e.g., balloon catheters) and administering contraception (i.e., copper IUDs and hormonal IUDs)
Naturopathic Physicians	Removes the ability to administer a substance by using a hyperbaric chamber (in alignment with the regulatory college's position)
Physical Therapists	Includes the following restricted activities that are within entry-to-practice education: • Administer oxygen by inhalation • Diagnose a disease, disorder or condition of the cardiorespiratory or neuromusculoskeletal system that they are capable of treating, managing or preventing by physical and mechanical means • Insert an instrument beyond the nasal passages, beyond the pharynx, or into an artificial opening in the body for the purpose of airway suctioning • Move a joint of the spine beyond limits body can voluntarily achieve using a high velocity, low amplitude thrust

	For certified physical therapists, includes the following restricted activities that require additional education: • Put an instrument, device, hand, or finger beyond the labia majora or beyond the anal verge for the purpose of assessing and treating the pelvic floor • Perform a procedure on tissue below the dermis by inserting solid filament needles for the purpose of reducing inflammation or managing pain • Reduce a dislocation of a joint
Speech-Language Pathologists	Includes the ability to provide broader treatment for feeding and swallowing disorders (compared to previous treatment for vocal tract dysfunction only)
	For certified speech-language pathologists, includes the ability to put an instrument, device, or finger beyond the pharynx to assess and manage swallowing disorders
	For certified speech-language pathologists, includes the ability to put an instrument or device into an artificial opening in the body to assess and manage swallowing disorders
Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners	Removes several limits and conditions on practice, to align with other health professions' regulations (e.g., removes the requirement for consultation or oversight by another type of practitioner)

How are complaints and discipline handled under the HPOA?

- Under the HPOA, regulatory colleges will continue to handle complaints and investigations against health professionals.
- However, the HPOA establishes a new Discipline Tribunal, housed within HPOROO, which will conduct hearings and determine discipline for health professionals who have been investigated by their regulatory college following a complaint.
- The Discipline Tribunal is led by the Director of Discipline (the Director), who will not be involved in hearings but will oversee the Tribunal as a whole.
- Independent discipline panels appointed by the Director will consist of a professional of the same profession subject to discipline, a member of the public, and a specialist in the area of concern (for example in the case of sexual assault, someone who has prior experience in this area).
- The discipline panel will determine the disciplinary action against a professional who has been found to have committed misconduct, but it will be the regulatory college who is responsible for enforcement of disciplinary orders.
- Under the HPOA, any disciplinary order or summary protection orders against a health professional must be published on the public registry.
- Complaints that do not result in disciplinary action are not published or made public. Warnings and advice are not published or made public.

- This will increase transparency and accountability for health professionals and regulatory colleges, as well as increase public protection and will assist the public in making informed decisions about their health care.
- For additional information, please see the [HPOROO website](#).

How will regulatory college boards be appointed?

- Under the HPOA, there is no election process for college boards as they are fully appointed by the Minister of Health on the recommendation of the Superintendent.
- It is a key function of the HPOROO to complete a merit and competency-based board selection process and make recommendations to the Minister of Health for regulatory college board appointments.
- Boards will be made up of 8 to 12 members, half of whom are professionals and half of whom are public board members.

Resources:

[Ministry of Health - Professional Regulation and Oversight Branch](#)

[Health Professions and Occupations Regulatory Oversight Office](#)

[College of Health and Care Professionals of British Columbia](#)

[College of Complementary Health Professionals of British Columbia](#)

[College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia](#)

[College of Pharmacists of British Columbia](#)

[British Columbia College of Nurses and Midwives](#)

[British Columbia College of Oral Health Professionals](#)