

AMERICAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION

Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialties and National Certifying Boards for Dental Specialists

Adopted by the 2022 ADA House of Delegates

Introduction

The Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialties and National Certifying Boards for Dental Specialists contain criteria that specialty applicants and the recognized specialty sponsoring organizations and certifying boards must meet in order to become and/or remain recognized by the National Commission on Recognition of Dental Specialties and Certifying Boards (National Commission).

A specialty is a discipline of dentistry that has a separate, distinct and well-defined focus based on unique advanced knowledge, skills and training that has been formally recognized by the National Commission as meeting the "*Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialists*" specified in this document. Dental specialties are recognized to protect the public, nurture the art and science of dentistry, and improve the quality of care in disciplines of dentistry in which advanced knowledge, skills and training are essential to maintain or restore oral health.

Not all disciplines in dentistry will satisfy the requirements for specialty recognition and there should be no expectation that all disciplines in dentistry will meet the Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialties. Disciplines of dentistry that are not currently recognized as a specialty by the National Commission and believe they can meet all of the Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialties, should contact the National Commission for a formal Application for Specialty Recognition. When making decisions related to specialty recognition, the National Commission will only determine compliance with the criteria outlined in the Requirements for Recognition.

If a discipline of dentistry is granted specialty recognition by the National Commission a national board for certifying diplomates in accordance with the "*Requirements for National Certifying Boards for Dental Specialists*" must be established and recognized by the National Commission as the national certifying board for the specialty.

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Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialties

A sponsoring organization seeking specialty recognition in a discipline of dentistry that is not currently recognized as a dental specialty must be able to provide documented evidence that the discipline satisfies all the Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialties specified in this section. Specialty sponsoring organizations recognized by the National Commission must be able to show continued compliance with the Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialties specified in this section.

- (1) In order for a discipline of dentistry to become and/or remain recognized as a dental specialty, it must be represented by a sponsoring organization: (a) whose membership is reflective of the proposed or recognized dental specialty; (b) in which the privileges to hold office and to vote on any issue related to the specialty are reserved for dentists who have either completed an advanced education program that is a minimum of two (2) academic years in length accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation in the proposed or recognized specialty or have sufficient educational and/or practice experience in the specialty as deemed appropriate through written criteria established by the sponsoring organization and its certifying board; and (c) that demonstrates the ability to establish and maintain a certifying board, if the sponsoring organization is not recognized by the National Commission. The recognized specialty sponsoring organization must continue to have a recognized certifying board that continually meets the Requirements for Recognition of National Certifying Boards for Dental Specialists in order to remain recognized.
- (2) A proposed or recognized specialty must be a distinct and well-defined field that requires unique advanced knowledge, skills and training beyond those commonly possessed by dental school graduates as defined by the Commission on Dental Accreditation's Accreditation Standards for Dental Education Programs.
- (3) The scope of practice of a proposed or recognized specialty requires advanced knowledge, skills and training that: (a) in their entirety are separate and distinct from the knowledge, skills and training required to practice in any recognized dental specialty; and (b) cannot be accommodated through minimal modification of any of the recognized dental specialties.
- (4) A proposed or recognized specialty must document scientifically, by valid and reliable statistical evidence/studies, that it: (a) actively contributes to new knowledge in the field; (b) actively contributes to the educational needs of the discipline at the predoctoral, postdoctoral and continuing education levels; (c) actively engages in research that establishes evidence-based validity of therapy used by practitioners in the proposed or recognized specialty; and (d) demonstrates a need for service that is not currently being met by general practitioners or any of the recognized dental specialties.
- (5) A proposed or recognized specialty must have a direct benefit/impact on clinical patient care and meet the needs of its patient population.
- (6) A proposed or recognized specialty must have formal advanced education programs accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation that are a minimum of two (2) academic years in length.

Requirements for Recognition of National Certifying Boards for Dental Specialists

In order to become, and remain, eligible for recognition by the National Commission as a national certifying board for a dental specialty, the specialty must have a recognized sponsoring organization that meets all of the Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialties. A close working relationship must be maintained between the recognized sponsoring organization and the certifying board. A certifying board seeking recognition must be able to provide documented evidence showing that it satisfies all the Requirements for Recognition of National Certifying Boards for Dental Specialists specified in this section.

Certifying boards recognized by the National Commission must be able to show continued compliance with all of the Requirements for Recognition of National Certifying Boards for Dental Specialists as specified in this section.

Organization of Boards:

- (1) An applicant and a recognized certifying board must have no less than five (5) and no more than twelve (12) voting directors/officers designated on a rotation basis in accordance with a method approved by the National Commission. Although the National Commission does not recommend a single method for selecting directors/officers of boards, directors/officers may not serve for more than a total of nine (9) years. All voting directors/officers must be diplomates of that specific certifying board and the certifying board may establish additional criteria/qualifications if they so desire.
- (2) An applicant and a recognized certifying board must have a certification program that is comprehensive in scope and meets the needs of the diplomate practitioners in the recognized specialty and the profession and protects the public. Further, the certifying board must provide evidence of a close working relationship with a recognized specialty sponsoring organization that meets all of the Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialties.
- (3) An applicant and a recognized certifying board must provide evidence of adequate financial viability to conduct its certification program.
- (4) An applicant and a recognized certifying board may outsource administrative duties to suitable external consultants and/or external agencies to assist in daily operations, and/or examination functions. If the certifying board does outsource administrative and/or examination functions, the certifying board must submit documentation describing the process. External and internal consultants who participate in the development and/or administration of certification examinations must be diplomates in the specialty that is being examined.

Operation of Boards:

- (1) An applicant and a recognized certifying board must only certify qualified dentists as diplomates in the specialty area recognized by the National Commission. No more than one (1) certifying board will be recognized by the National Commission for the certification of diplomates in a recognized specialty area of practice.
- (2) An applicant and a recognized certifying board must give at least one (1) examination in each calendar year and must announce examination details at least six (6) months in advance of the examination. In extraordinary circumstances, recognized certifying boards may request a conditional waiver of exception from the National Commission.
- (3) An applicant and a recognized certifying board must maintain a current list of diplomates.
- (4) An applicant and a recognized certifying board must submit to the National Commission data relative to financial viability and operations, written examination procedures, candidate examination guidelines and procedures, certification and recertification examination content, test construction and evaluation, and the reporting of results. Examination procedures and results should follow the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, including validity and reliability evidence. A diplomate in good standing may, upon written request, obtain a copy of the annual examination technical and financial reports of the certifying board. The recognized certifying boards will submit the required documentation on a cycle established by the National Commission.
- (5) An applicant and a recognized certifying board must require diplomates to engage in lifelong learning and shall encourage continuous quality improvement.
- (6) An applicant and a recognized certifying board must provide to the National Commission evidence of examination and certification of a significant number of additional dentists in order to warrant approval of and continued recognition by the National Commission. The recognized certifying boards will submit the required documentation on a cycle established by the National Commission.
- (7) An applicant and a recognized certifying board must bear sole authority and responsibility for conducting the certification programs, the evaluation of the qualifications and competence of those certified as diplomates, and the issuance of certificates.

Certification Requirements:

- (1) An applicant and a recognized certifying board must require, for eligibility for certification as a diplomate, the successful completion of an advanced education program that is two (2) or more academic years in length accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation.

Although full-time, continual attendance in a Commission on Dental Accreditation accredited advanced education program is desirable, the period of advanced education need not be continuous, nor completed within successive calendar years. An advanced educational program equivalent to two (2) or more academic years in length, successfully completed on a part-time basis over an extended period of time as a graduated sequence of educational experience not exceeding four (4) calendar years, may be considered acceptable in satisfying this requirement. Short continuation, refresher courses (educational experience only obtained through continuing education) and teaching experience in a specialty department in a dental education facility will not be accepted in meeting any portion of this requirement.

A certifying board may establish an exception (alternative pathway) to the qualification requirement of completion of an advanced education program that is two (2) or more academic years in length accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation for the unique candidate who can demonstrate comparable educational and/or training requirements to the satisfaction of the certifying board. A certifying board must submit a separate petition to the National Commission for permission to establish and/or revise policy on alternative pathways.

- (2) An applicant and a recognized certifying board must establish minimum requirements for years of practice in the area for which certificates are granted. The years of advanced education in the discipline specific specialty may be accepted toward fulfillment of this requirement.
- (3) An applicant and a recognized certifying board, in cooperation with their recognized specialty sponsoring organization, must prepare and publicize joint recommendations on the Commission on Dental Accreditation educational standards for the advanced education programs for that specialty.

ADOPTED BY THE ADA HOUSE OF DELEGATES (*Trans.* 2001:470; 2004:313; 2009:443; 2013:328; 2018:326; 2022:XXX)