



Starting a Dental Practice Checklist

This list offers general information and does not take the place of legal advice. This list is not exhaustive, and each item may not be applicable to every situation. This list contains links to many websites and you may find it helpful to review the list on a computer with internet access. Resources can be found on cda.org/practicesupport.

Financial and Legal

- Put together your business plan, which is a tool to help you systematically research and plan your practice. Use the [Business Plan Template](https://cda.org/practicesupport) on cda.org/practicesupport. The process can help you determine whether you start a new practice or purchase an existing practice.
- Get prequalified for a loan.
- Identify the practice you want to purchase and, with an attorney's assistance, make an offer.
- Review, with an attorney's assistance, and execute the offer/letter of intent/deposit agreement.
- Work with an accountant or an experienced consultant on valuing the practice and performing due diligence.
- Submit loan paperwork.
- Choose the financial institution for your practice account.
- Establish legal structure for a dental corporation (C-corp, S-corp) or partnership, if applicable. Limited liability corporations and limited liability partnerships for dentists are not allowed in California. Read "[Incorporate or Not What Is Right for You](https://cda.org/practicesupport)" on cda.org/practicesupport. The legal name for a dental corporation name must utilize the name or names of current or past owner(s).
- Submit financial documents required by landlord to obtain a new lease or lease assignment of the existing lease and obtain landlord's consent for a new lease or lease assignment.
- Have attorney review documents related to practice purchase, buy-in, lease agreement or practice construction, if applicable.
- Hire accountant as advisor for tax planning and business systems assessment and to complete tax filings.
- Determine if you will use your Social Security number or your Employer Identification Number as your Taxpayer Identification Number on IRS forms.
 - Go to this IRS website, irs.gov/Individuals/International-Taxpayers/Taxpayer-Identification-Numbers-TIN for more information.
 - If using an Employer Identification Number as your Taxpayer Identification Number, register the Tax Payer Identification number with NPPES <https://nppes.cms.hhs.gov/#/> for a Type-2 business NPI that will be required to submit on claim forms and through dental plan contracting.
 - Obtain an Employer Identification Number from the IRS at irs.gov/Businesses/Small-Businesses-&Self-Employed/Employer-ID-Numbers-EINs
- Know how to create and to interpret a cash flow statement. Establish accounts payable and receivables systems.
- Establish fees. Individual fee schedules are not available and federal law limits the extent by which you can discuss fees with colleagues. Refer to "[Establishing Fees](https://cda.org/practicesupport)" on cda.org/practicesupport.

- Develop a patient financial policy. Read “[Patient Financial Protocols](https://www.cda.org/practicesupport/patient-financial-protocols)” on [cda.org/practicesupport](https://www.cda.org/practicesupport).
- Consider the use of patient financing programs. If offering patients the option of using a commercial financing program, be sure to read “[California Requirements for Dental Practices Offering Commercial Credit to Patients](https://www.cda.org/practicesupport/california-requirements-for-dental-practices-offering-commercial-credit-to-patients)” on [cda.org/practicesupport](https://www.cda.org/practicesupport).
- Select a company to process credit card payments. Comply with the security standards of the practice’s credit card processor. Read “[Credit Card Security Standards](https://www.cda.org/practicesupport/credit-card-security-standards)” on [cda.org/practicesupport](https://www.cda.org/practicesupport).
- Take steps to prevent fraud and embezzlement. Read “[Eliminate Opportunity for Embezzlement](https://www.cda.org/practicesupport/eliminate-opportunity-for-embezzlement)” on [cda.org/practicesupport](https://www.cda.org/practicesupport).
- Look at the resources on [cda.org/practicesupport](https://www.cda.org/practicesupport) and identify the ones you may refer to frequently.
- For example, “[Legal Reference for California Dentists](https://www.cda.org/practicesupport/legal-reference-for-california-dentists).”

Licenses, Permits and Required Documents

- Check for required local city and county permits, licenses, taxes and fees.
 - Check the websites of both the city and county — information on locally required permits, licenses, taxes and fees can be found on the websites. You can also check CalGold, [calgold.ca.gov](https://www.calgold.ca.gov), a state website with permit information for all types of businesses. Some local agencies collect business property tax and/or professional license tax.
 - If you are building new or remodeling space, ensure your contractors obtain the necessary permits. Consider utilizing a Certified Access Specialist (CASp) to ensure compliance with state and federal disability access laws.
 - More information on CASps is available from your local building department. Check with the city or county to determine whether dental office is a permitted use at the location and if the location has the required number of parking spaces pursuant to the zoning code for the area.
- Notify Dental Board of practice address within 30 days of starting practice or changing address.
 - Forms are available on the Dental Board website, [dbc.ca.gov/formspubs/index.shtml#forms](https://www.dbc.ca.gov/formspubs/index.shtml#forms).
- If you have a proprietary interest of any nature or any right to participate in the management or control of more than one place of practice, apply for additional office permit. Post required notice.
 - Permit application is on the Dental Board website, [dbc.ca.gov/licensees/dds/permits_ao.shtml](https://www.dbc.ca.gov/licensees/dds/permits_ao.shtml).
 - If you intend to use a business name that is different from your own name, apply for fictitious business name permit with the Dental Board. After getting the board’s approval, file fictitious business name statement with the county clerk.
 - Read “[Fictitious Business Name](https://www.cda.org/practicesupport/fictitious-business-name)” on [cda.org/practicesupport](https://www.cda.org/practicesupport).
- If applicable, obtain oral conscious sedation permit, conscious sedation permit or general anesthesia permit from the Dental Board. Information is available on the Dental Board website, [dbc.ca.gov/licensees/dds/permits_index.shtml](https://www.dbc.ca.gov/licensees/dds/permits_index.shtml).
- If applicable, obtain oral and maxillofacial surgery permit from the Dental Board. Information is available on the Dental Board website, [dbc.ca.gov/licensees/dds/permits_index.shtml](https://www.dbc.ca.gov/licensees/dds/permits_index.shtml).
- If applicable, obtain cosmetic facial surgery permit from the Dental Board. Information is available on the Dental Board website, [dbc.ca.gov/licensees/dds/permits_index.shtml](https://www.dbc.ca.gov/licensees/dds/permits_index.shtml).

- If applicable, obtain mobile dental unit permit from the Dental Board. Information is available on the Dental Board website, dbc.ca.gov/licensees/dds/permits_index.shtml.
- If applicable, obtain portable dental unit permit from the Dental Board. Information is available on the Dental Board website, dbc.ca.gov/licensees/dds/permits_index.shtml.
- Comply with the requirement to notify patients of clinical staff names, licenses and academic degrees by following these three actions:
 1. Clinical staff wear name tag **or** have license or certificate posted.
 2. Prominently post the name, license type and highest level of academic degree of each licensed individual or provide the information in writing in 24-pt type to the patient at the initial visit.
 3. Prominently display the name, license type and highest level of academic degree of each licensed individual on the practice website.
 - Refer to “[Guide to Dental Practice Act Compliance](#)” on cda.org/practicesupport.
- Develop and implement an [Exposure Control Plan](#) if employees are hired. Train employees on the contents of the plan.
 - See *CDA Regulatory Compliance Manual* for the sample plan.
- Develop and implement an [Injury and Illness Prevention Plan](#) if employees are hired. Train employees on the contents of the plan.
 - See *CDA Regulatory Compliance Manual* for the sample plan.
- Develop and implement a [Hazard Communication Plan](#) if employees are hired. Train employees on contents of the plan. Refer to “[Hazard Communication in the Dental Practice - Training for New Employees \(PowerPoint\)](#)” on cda.org/practicesupport.
 - See *CDA Regulatory Compliance Manual* for the sample plan.
- Obtain DEA registration number only if prescribing, dispensing or administering controlled substances. All prescribers with DEA numbers are required to register to access the state CURES prescription drug monitoring program.
 - Register online with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Diversion Control Program, deadiversion.usdoj.gov.
 - Register for CURES at oag.ca.gov/cures-pdmp.
 - Read “[Controlled Substances Prescribing and Dispensing](#)” on cda.org/practicesupport.
- Purchase secured prescription forms if prescribing controlled substances or if writing prescriptions for Denti-Cal patients. A list of state-approved vendors can be found on the Department of Justice Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement website, oag.ca.gov/security-printers/approved-list.
- Register as a medical waste generator with the state [Department of Public Health](#) or local enforcement agency.
- Obtain air compressor/tank permit. Read, “[Air Compressor/Tank Permits](#)” on cda.org/practicesupport.
- Obtain a National Provider Identification (NPI) number. An individual provider may have an NPI number separate from a group practice or corporation if he or she is employed by or owns a practice. Type 1 numbers are for individuals. Type 2 numbers are for organizations. Address and name changes must be reported within 30 days.

- Refer to information posted at U.S. Department of Health and Human Services at nppes.cms.hhs.gov/NPPES/StaticForward.do?forward=static.npistart.
- Obtain required posters for posting at the practice.
 - One free set of required posters is available from CDA by visiting www.cda.org/posterset; extra poster sets are available for purchase from the [CDA Practice Support Store](#). A list of [required posters](#) is available on cda.org/practicesupport.
 - Post Prop 65 signs if applicable. An informed consent form may be used in lieu of a posted notice. Read "[Proposition 65 FAQ](#)" on cda.org/practicesupport.
- Post Notice of Licensure by the Dental Board. Refer to the Dental Board website dbc.ca.gov/licensees/notice.shtml.
- Obtain and post a copy of radiation regulations, also referred to as "Title 17 regulations." Create a written radiation safety program. Monitor radiation exposure of employees unless exemption applies at the practice. Post radiation warning signs where equipment is used.
- Download a copy of CDA's "[Radiation Safety In Dental Practice](#)" from cda.org/practicesupport.
 - Review and share contents with staff. Complete the template for a radiation safety program that is included in the document.
- Register X-ray equipment with the state Department of Public Health Radiologic Health Branch, cdph.ca.gov/certlic/Pages/RHB-RadiationMachineRegistration.aspx.
 - If you own handheld units, also download, print and keep this exemption letter, cdph.ca.gov/certlic/radquip/Documents/Exemption-hand-held.PDF, on file.
- For Los Angeles and San Diego counties — if building out or adding new X-ray equipment, apply for a plan check.
 - publichealth.lacounty.gov/eh/ep/rad_health/index.htm
 - sdcounty.ca.gov/deh/hazmat/radhealth.html
- Obtain sellers permit from the state Board of Equalization if applicable. Refer to article "[Sales and Use Tax](#)" on cda.org/practicesupport.
- Once your practice generates \$100,000 in a year, register as a Qualified Purchaser with the state Board of Equalization for reporting use tax. Refer to article "[Sales and Use Tax](#)" on cda.org/practicesupport.
- Obtain a performance license if you play music, movies or shows in your practice. Refer to article "[Movie and Music Licenses Q&A](#)" on cda.org/practicesupport.

Insurance

- Obtain professional liability/malpractice.
- Obtain building and business property coverage.
 - Covers damage to your building and property inside your office. Policies should conform to insurance requirements of the lender and the lease.
- Consider business overhead coverage.

- Helps pay business overhead if you're disabled. Policy should conform to insurance requirements of the lender and the lease.
- Obtain business liability coverage.
 - If a nondental injury occurs to a patient or visitor to your office. Policy should conform to insurance requirements of the lender and the lease.
- Obtain workers' compensation coverage.
 - Mandatory if you have employees.
- Consider employment practices coverage.
 - If an employee sues you.
- Consider group health insurance, if applicable.
- Consider life insurance.
- Could be a lender requirement.

Professional liability and workers' compensation coverage are offered by a CDA subsidiary, [The Dentists Insurance Company \(TDIC\)](#). Other insurance coverage is offered by another CDA subsidiary, [TDIC Insurance Solutions](#). Links to either company are found on [cda.org](#) home page.

Employees

See also [New Employee Checklist](#) on [cda.org/practicesupport](#).

- Obtain an Employer Identification Number from the IRS, [irs.gov/Businesses/Small-Businesses-&Self-Employed/Employer-ID-Numbers-EINs](#).
- Determine job descriptions, salaries and benefits. See sample job descriptions on [Job Description: A Valuable tool](#) on [cda.org/practicesupport](#).
- Develop office employee manual. A number of laws require written policies. Use this [Sample Employee Manual](#) if you are purchasing a practice and plan to retain the employees, be sure to review the practice's employment policies with employees. It is recommended that employees be provided time during the workday to review and sign the acknowledgements. Should you revise any policy, apprise employees of the changes and obtain employees' acknowledgement of these changes using the Practice Policy Revision Employee Acknowledgment Template. Retain all acknowledgements in employee records.
- Register as an employer with the state Employment Development Department (EDD) and review [California Employers Guide \(DE44\)](#) for information on employee taxes and withholdings.
 - Complete Registration Form for Commercial Employers (DE 1) no later than 15 days after the first \$100 in wages is paid. California Employers Guide can be found online at [edd.ca.gov/pdf_pub_ctr/de44.pdf](#). You can also go to the EDD website, [edd.ca.gov/Payroll_Taxes](#), to learn how to submit payroll taxes.
 - Request in the purchase agreement that the seller of the practice obtain a Certificate of Release of Buyer (form DE2220) from the EDD releasing you from any liability for the period of employees' employment with the seller.

- If you purchase a practice and plan to employ current employees, you must report them to the EDD as new employees. You may request that EDD transfer the previous owner's business reserve account to you. You may also be responsible for payroll taxes incurred during the original owner's ownership, unless a Certificate of Release of Buyer is submitted. See this EDD website for more information, edd.ca.gov/payroll_taxes/Changes_to_Your_Business.htm#PurchasingBusinesswithEmployees.
 - A practice buyer is not obligated to continue the employment of any individual in the practice he or she is purchasing.
- Advertise available jobs or work with placement agency. See [Sample Job Advertisement](#) text on cda.org/practicesupport.
- Set up employee records with separate files for confidential employee records and a general/main employee file. If you purchase a practice and will employ current employees, update individual employee records to document new employer information. Use the New Employee Checklist and Records and Document Retention Guidelines on cda.org/practicesupport as guidance.
- As a best practice, contract with payroll service, if desired. Confirm accuracy of wages and established benefit limits (i.e. paid sick leave accrual caps) with the service. Audit regularly.
- Have required brochures on sexual harassment, disability insurance, paid family leave and workers' comp available to give to newly hired employees. See "[Required Postings in a Dental Office](#)" on cda.org/practicesupport to find online links to the required brochures.
- Establish alternative workweek, if applicable.
 - Information on holding an alternative workweek election can be found in [Industrial Welfare Commission Order #4](#), one of the required posters. See [Alternative Workweek information](#) on cda.org/practicesupport to guide you through the process and a sample letter to send to the state.
- Find staff training resources on cda.org/practicesupport.
 - There are PowerPoint presentations on patient records, handling claims disputes, customer service and more.

Clinical and Practice Operations Needs

- Identify and purchase dental equipment and supplies. Consult with dental suppliers and architects/office designers. Visit the exhibit halls at CDA Presents.
- Identify and purchase office furniture, supplies and storage units. Consult with dental suppliers and architects/office designers as needed.
- Identify and purchase computer system, practice management software and peripherals such as a digital signature capture device. Consider integration of image management software. Implement data security and backup systems as required by HIPAA Security Rule. Consider reading "[The Dental Software Revolution - Product Evaluation and Selection](#)" and "[Five Frequent Mistakes When Signing Dental Software](#)" on cda.org/practicesupport.
- Identify and purchase phone system.
- Consider an intraoffice communication system.
- Develop a system for checking inventory and ordering supplies.
- Identify dental laboratories to use.
- Purchase and install an amalgam separator, if applicable. Read "[Amalgam Separator Requirement Q&A.](#)"

- Order prescription pads. Read "[Medication Prescribing and Dispensing Q&A](#)" on [cda.org/practicesupport](#).
- If a general dentist, identify specialists for referral.
- Consider participating in a mutual aid group. Read "[Practice Interruption and Mutual Aid Group Guidelines](#)" on [cda.org/practicesupport](#). Check with the local dental society.
- Find service providers for dental waste recyclers, medical waste disposal, dosimeters, chemical air monitors and speech interpreters on [cda.org/practicesupport](#).

Patient Records, Communication and Marketing

- If a practice was purchased, obtain patient authorization before using the patient record. Authorization is implied when a patient makes an appointment to be seen by the practice. Consider sending to patients an announcement of the practice purchase.
- Develop or acquire new patient forms, informed consent forms, form letters and scripts for communicating with patients and others. Many of these are available as practice management resources on [cda.org/practicesupport](#).
 - For example, see "[The New Patient Process: Making the Best First Impression with Your New Patients](#)" and "[New Patient Forms \(zip file\)](#)" on [cda.org/practicesupport](#).
- Gain a general understanding of state and federal privacy laws. State privacy laws apply to all health care providers, even those who are not HIPAA-covered entities.
 - Refer to the articles, Q-and-As and checklist on HIPAA and privacy posted on [cda.org/practicesupport](#).
- Conduct a risk assessment on how patient information is used, managed, stored and transmitted in the practice, and then consider ways that information may be accessed by unauthorized individuals or unintentionally released. Identify risks then implement a risk management plan.
 - Refer to [The ADA Practical Guide to HIPAA Compliance: Privacy and Security \(2013\)](#), which has sample forms, sample policies and checklists of action to consider and take. Also refer to "[HIPAA and California Health Information Privacy and Protection Laws Q&A](#)," available on [cda.org/practicesupport](#).
- Develop written policies to address how the dental practice will prevent the unauthorized and unintentional release of protected health information in all forms of communication – oral, written and electronic. Include policies on patient access to records, use and disclosure of patient information to third parties and steps to take after a data breach.
 - Refer to [The ADA Practical Guide to HIPAA Compliance: Privacy and Security \(2013\)](#), which has sample forms, sample policies and checklists of action to consider and take. Review "[Data Breach Notification Requirements Checklist](#)" and "[Patient Records: Requirements and Best Practices](#)" and "[HIPAA and California Medical Information Act Implementation Checklist](#)" on [cda.org/practicesupport](#).
- Develop a notice of your practice's privacy policies and procedures ("Notice of Privacy Practices"). Obtain patient acknowledgement of receipt of notice.
 - Refer to "[Sample Notice of Privacy Practices](#)" on [cda.org/practicesupport](#).
- Enter into a business associate agreement with any entity that the dental practice allows to have access to patient information for nonclinical purposes. Agreement is to ensure privacy and security of the information.
 - A sample "[HIPAA Business Associate Agreement](#)" is available on [cda.org/practicesupport](#).

- Take steps to protect against interception of electronic transmission of patient information. Use passwords or other means to ensure only authorized individuals access electronically stored patient information. Take steps to ensure patient information is accessible if main computer network is disabled.
 - Read “[HIPAA Security Rule: A Summary](#).” Refer to *The ADA Practical Guide to HIPAA Compliance: Privacy and Security (2013)*, which has sample forms, sample policies and checklists of action to consider and take.
- Train employees on the dental practice’s privacy policies and procedures.
 - Use “[Information Privacy and Security](#)” a PowerPoint presentation you can download from cda.org/practicesupport as a framework for staff training.
- Obtain patient consent to call or text them using cellphone number per Federal Communication Commission regulation. Obtain patient consent to contact them via email.
- Obtain Dental Materials Fact Sheet from the Dental Board at dbc.ca.gov/formspubs/index.shtml#pubs and implement process to distribute to patients and obtain patients’ acknowledgement of receipt.
- Identify language and sign language interpreters. Comply with notification requirements of ACA 1557, if applicable. Read “[Americans with Disabilities Act and Disability Rights Laws](#)” and “[Nondiscrimination Requirements Under the Affordable Care Act Section 1557](#).”
- Determine/develop patient record management system. Read the article “[Patient Records – Requirements and Best Practices](#)” on cda.org/practicesupport.
- Develop scheduling policies and procedures. Read “[Designing Your Practice’s Schedule](#)” and related resources available on cda.org/practicesupport.
- Follow through on the marketing plan that was developed as part of your business plan. Review “[Dental Practice Marketing and Advertising 101](#)” and related checklists on cda.org/practicesupport.

Dental Benefits Plans

- Consider how your practice will work with dental benefit plans. Read these articles and others available on cda.org/practicesupport.
 - “[Choosing a Dental Practice Model](#)”
 - “[Evaluating Dental Benefit Plans Checklist](#)”
 - “[Dental Contracts 101](#)”
- Comprehend your rights as they relate to dental benefit plans. Start by reading “[Prompt Payment of Claims Required by Law](#)” on cda.org/practicesupport.
- Identify dental benefit plans in your area by contacting employers near your dental office or in your community. You can also refer to “[California Department of Managed Health Care Licensed Dental Plans](#)” to view various lists of plans. Visit each plan’s website to find out how you can enroll as a provider.
- The ADA CDT Dental Procedure Codes book contains billing codes. A companion book provides guidance for different coding scenarios. Order by calling 800.947.4746 or visit ebusiness.ada.org.
 - Read more about the CDT and companion book on ada.org.
- Use the “[Dental Benefit Plan Handbook](#)” on cda.org/practicesupport to train staff and/or educate yourself on the ins and outs of working with third-party payers. Sample forms and letters are included in the handbook.

- Use the “[Evaluating Dental Benefit Plans Checklist](#)” on [cda.org/practicesupport](#) and calculator to determine the financial impact of participating in or dropping a plan.
- Review [Medicare Provider Options](#) on [cda.org/practicesupport](#) for Medicare enrollment and determine if you want to opt in, opt out or become an ordering and referring provider.
- Review all dental benefits plans’ agreements prior to execution of any agreement.

Waste Management and Infection Control

- Register as medical waste generator.
 - Registration application is on the California Department of Public Health website, [cdph.ca.gov/certlic/medicalwaste/Pages/Generators.aspx](#). Be sure to mail the application to the appropriate enforcement agency.
- Arrange for medical waste disposal, pickup or mail-back service.
 - Refer to “[Dental Waste Management Options](#)” and “[Medical Waste Disposal Options](#)” on [cda.org/practicesupport](#).
- Obtain California EPA identification number, if applicable. It is required if you dispose of hazardous waste through a local household hazardous waste program.
 - Read “[Hazardous Waste ID Numbers](#)” available at the Department of Toxic Substances Control website, [dtsc.ca.gov/IDManifest/index.cfm](#).
- Purchase and install an amalgam separator, if applicable. Complete documentation required by local sanitation agency. Read “[Amalgam Separator Requirement Q&A](#)” and “[Regulated Wastes and Wastewater Frequently Asked Questions](#)” on [cda.org/practicesupport](#).
- Arrange for hazardous/universal waste pickup or mail-back service. Look into the possibilities of using your local household hazardous waste program. Read “[Dental Waste Management Options](#)” on [cda.org/practicesupport](#) to learn what is considered hazardous or universal waste.
- Arrange for weekly spore check/biological monitoring as required by the Dental Board.
- Prepare written protocols for instrument processing, operatory cleanliness and injury management as required by the Dental Board’s infection control regulation.
 - Use the “[Sample Instrument Processing \(Sterilization\) Protocol](#),” “[Housekeeping Schedule](#)” and “[Employee Injury Protocol](#)” on [cda.org/practicesupport](#).

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