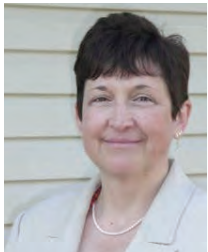


What is the public interest?



Barbara Major-McEwan, RD
President



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The College of Dietitians of Ontario exists to regulate and support all Registered Dietitians in the interest of the public of Ontario.

We are dedicated to the ongoing enhancement of safe, ethical and competent nutrition services provided by Registered Dietitians in their changing practice environments.

The *Regulated Health Professions Act* says that, "In carrying out its objects, the College has a duty to serve and protect the public interest." But, what does "public interest" mean?

As part of governance continuous quality improvement, a governance expert challenged the College to define the very concept of "public interest" that is at the center of our work as a health profession regulatory body. Defining public interest was a more complex undertaking than first perceived.

Public interest tends to be both an intuitive and an abstract concept. There is little in literature offering a definition of public interest which would serve as a guide to Council for the regulation and governance of the dietetics profession. Inspired by the work of Leslie Pal and Judith Maxwell at the Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. *, Council developed a three-point framework (below) to define three distinct areas of public protection for the regulation of the dietetics profession.

Council also developed the *Definition of Public Interest*, presented on the next page, and incorporated it into Council governance policies to guide our decision-making. It expresses the College's governance commitment to public protection outcomes, values and processes. It describes how we work with the public and others to regulate the profession of dietetics in the public interest.



* Leslie A. Pal and Judith Maxwell, *Assessing the Public Interest in the 21st Century: A Framework*. Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc., (CPRN) – January 2004.

The College of Dietitians of Ontario is Committed to Serve and Protect the Public Interest

DEFINITION OF PUBLIC INTEREST

In carrying out its regulatory objects, The College of Dietitians of Ontario commits its resources to serve and protect the public interest. The public interest is defined by the public protection outcomes it strives to achieve, by the College processes and decisions that respect the values generally held by people in Ontario. More specifically,

Public Protection Outcomes mean that the people who receive or benefit from the dietetic services from Registered Dietitians are not harmed or abused physically, emotionally, mentally, financially or sexually. Public protection also means that people are informed of their rights and have the benefit of dietetic services that are based on competent, ethical and safe dietetic practice.

Public Values will be central in all College decisions that are relevant to standards of dietetic practice or to the governance and management of the College. The public values that the College will respect are evident in Canadian and Ontario laws. Public values are also derived from input from members of the public and their representatives.

These values include the following:

- Access to professionals of choice
- Self-determination
- Right to give informed consent for treatment
- Client interest paramount over professional self-interest
- Right to be treated with sensitivity and respect
- Privacy of personal information
- Access to health information
- Free of discrimination (Human Rights Codes)
- Fairness, objectivity, impartiality and transparency of registration and other college decisions
- Reasonable costs to individuals and society
- Integrity
- Collaboration
- Transparency and accountability
- Trust

Public Processes mean processes that are timely, open and transparent and that support participation from the public into key College decisions. Public processes such as public education, consultations, surveys and participation in public forums will be employed to help the College determine the specific opinions and interests of the people affected by College decisions. Decision making processes will bring forward these opinions through public representation on its governing Council and through disciplined consideration of what is in the public interest.