

# Public Health Nutritionists Must Now be Registered with CDO

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## What action did CDO take?

On November 12, 1999, CDO requested Dr. Colin D’Cunha, Director and Chief Medical Officer of Health, Public Health Branch of the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care that in the next amendment to Ontario Regulation 566: Qualifications of Boards of Health Staff (made under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*), registration with the College of Dietitians of Ontario be included in the qualifications of public health nutritionists.

The request was in keeping with the requirements for other regulated health professionals under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*. It was also in keeping with CDO’s duty to serve and protect the public interest.

## What is the difference between a public health nutritionist and a dietitian?

Public health nutritionists and dietitians are similar in many ways. They have the same requirements for an undergraduate university degree. Public health nutritionists have the additional requirement of a master’s degree with courses or field work in community or public health nutrition (or equivalent) while dietitians are not required to complete postgraduate study.

*The Dietetics Act* defines the scope of practice for dietitians in Ontario as follows: *The practice of dietetics is the assessment of nutrition and nutritional conditions and the treatment and prevention of nutrition related disorders by nutritional means.* The work of public health nutritionists falls into this scope of practice legislated for dietitians.

To use the title ‘dietitian’ in Ontario, the person must be registered with the College of Dietitians of Ontario. Registration requirements include graduation from a university program in foods and nutrition, attainment of competence standards, and successful completion of the Canadian Dietetic Registration Exam. Up until recently, the public health nutritionist was not required to demonstrate competence to practice dietetics by fulfilling requirements for membership in the College of Dietitians of Ontario. Since the title ‘nutritionist’ may be used by people with little or no training in nutrition, it is difficult

for the public to distinguish between qualified and unqualified nutrition practitioners. This is supported by CDO’s 1997 public awareness survey which indicates that a higher proportion of Ontario residents believed that nutritionists in general do not require a university degree.

## What are the benefits of regulating public health nutritionists?

- Membership in the College will provide some recourse for members of the public should the practice of a public health nutritionist cause them any harm.
- The first responsibility of CDO is to the public and as such, is required to receive and act upon complaints from the public about care or services provided by its members.
- As members of the College, public health nutritionists will be required to participate in the quality assurance program administered by the College thereby helping to ensure their ongoing competence to practice dietetics.
- Membership in the College will help to ensure consistent entry-level competence of public health nutritionists to practice dietetics including competence of nutritionists who received their education and practical experience outside Canada or are returning to practice after several years absence.
- Membership with CDO will permit a public health nutritionist to use the designation ‘registered dietitian’ and RD or the French equivalent, ‘diététiste professionnel(le)’ and ‘Dt.P.’ thus clarifying (for the public) their qualifications to practice dietetics and differentiating them from unregulated nutritionists.

## What’s New?

On January 1, 2001 the following part of the Ontario Reg. 630/00 (amending O. Reg. 566: Qualifications of Boards of Health Staff) goes into effect: *“The requirements for employment as a public health nutritionist by a board of health are that the person be registered with the College of Dietitians of Ontario and that the person, ...”*

A 17-page position paper was developed by CDO in 2000 to support this request. The paper is entitled: “Public Health Nutritionists as Regulated Health Professionals”. It is available on CDO’s web site [www.cdo.on.ca](http://www.cdo.on.ca).

CDO would like to thank the following: Helen Brown, Senior Nutrition Consultant, Public Health Branch, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, for her leadership in the inclusion of this amendment to the Qualifications of Boards of Health Staff (O. Reg. 566) and the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) for its support. **D**