



Dental Assisting National Board, Inc.  
*Measuring Dental Assisting Excellence®*

# DANB® Credentialing Services Overview

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## About DANB

### DANB's Mission

The mission of the Dental Assisting National Board, Inc. (DANB) is to promote the public good by providing credentialing services to the dental community. DANB accomplishes and measures the success of this mission through:

- Valid dental assisting exams
- Dental assisting recertification process integrity
- Visible, valuable and accessible DANB exams, certificates and certifications
- Testing services for groups within the oral healthcare community
- Information services for the oral healthcare community related to dental assisting credentialing and recertification
- A properly governed, financially secure, administratively sound organization

Incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1948, DANB is recognized by the American Dental Association (ADA) as the national certification board for dental assistants. This recognition is supported by the American Association of Dental Boards (AADB), the American Dental Education Association (ADEA), the American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology (AAOMR), the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD), the American Dental Assistants Association (ADAA) and the Organization for Safety, Asepsis and Prevention (OSAP).

DANB currently offers five national certification exam programs:

- National Entry Level Dental Assistant (NELDA®)
- Certified Dental Assistant™ (CDA®)
- Certified Orthodontic Assistant (COA®)
- Certified Preventive Functions Dental Assistant (CPFDA®)
- Certified Restorative Functions Dental Assistant (CRFDA®)

DANB tests more than 20,000 dental assistants annually, representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia. DANB exams meet regulatory criteria established in the dental practice acts or administrative rules in 39 states and the District of Columbia. In addition, the Veterans Health Administration recognizes DANB exams as meeting credentialing requirements for expanded functions dental assistants working in healthcare facilities operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The U.S. Air Force Dental Service also requires its dental assisting students to take DANB exams.

### Recognition Within the Dental Community

DANB collaborates with major dental organizations, including the ADA, AADB, ADEA, ADAA, AGD, AAOMR, OSAP, American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) and American Association of Dental Office Managers (AADOM).

DANB receives crucial input from leaders in the dental profession regarding what is important in terms of exam policy and content. The ADA, AADB, ADEA and ADAA each provide a slate of candidates for election to DANB's Board of Directors. The AGD, AAO, AAOMR, AADOM, OSAP and the American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology (ABOMR) each provide a slate of candidates for consideration to serve on DANB's exam committees.

The Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA), an ADA-affiliated agency, requires non-dentist program directors and laboratory, preclinical and clinical faculty in CODA-accredited dental assisting programs to hold a current national DANB certification. CODA encourages CODA-accredited dental assisting programs to use student performance on DANB exams, particularly the CDA exam, as an outcome measure when assessing the program's continued ability to meet CODA accreditation standards.

### NCCA Accreditation

DANB is a member of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence. The Institute's predecessor, the National Commission for Health Certifying Agencies, was formed in 1977 as the result of a federal mandate to form an

organization to develop standards for testing and certification organizations. The National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), the Institute's accrediting body, evaluates certification programs for compliance with the NCCA *Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs*. NCCA's *Standards* exceed the requirements of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

**NCCA has accredited DANB's CDA and COA national certification programs**, including the Radiation Health and Safety (RHS®), Infection Control (ICE®), General Chairside Assisting (GC) and Orthodontic Assisting (OA) component exams. This accreditation means the NCCA has determined that DANB's CDA and COA certification programs meet its high standards, thus helping to assure validity, reliability and objectivity in the testing process. Therefore, those organizations that draw on DANB resources to satisfy statutory requirements or public and professional scrutiny can feel confident that their actions are defensible and credible.

DANB has applied for NCCA accreditation for its CPFDA program and intends to apply for NCCA accreditation for DANB's CRFDA and NELDA certification programs once the necessary candidate volumes for each of these new programs has been reached.

#### ISO Accreditation

DANB's national CDA and COA certification programs are **accredited by the International Accreditation Service (IAS) to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 17024:2012 Standard** for organizations that certify personnel. This accreditation is a global benchmark for organizations that certify individuals and demonstrates that DANB operates these certification programs in a consistent, comparable and reliable manner.

### How DANB Assists State Regulatory Bodies

The first priority of state boards of dentistry is public protection. DANB's mission "to promote the public good by providing credentialing services to the dental community" is aligned with this public protection focus. DANB assists state boards of dentistry by providing a defensible, accessible and easy means of measuring dental assisting competency.

DANB exams are **defensible** because DANB's eligible exam programs are accredited by NCCA, and its exams are developed based on *Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests*, co-published by the American Educational Research Association, the APA and the National Council on Measurement in Education. DANB national exams are developed based on detailed exam blueprints and are supported by regular validity studies.

DANB exams are extremely **accessible** — they are administered on computer year-round at more than 250 locations nationwide, six days a week. DANB complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and makes every reasonable effort to offer the exams in a manner accessible to people with disabilities. If auxiliary aids or alternate arrangements are required, DANB will attempt to make the necessary provisions, unless providing such would fundamentally alter the measurement of knowledge-based competency the exam is intended to test, would result in undue burden, or would provide an unfair advantage to the disabled candidate.

DANB exams make dental assisting competency measurement **easy** for state regulatory boards because DANB can provide the exam development and administrative services needed to implement a dental assisting examination program, partnering with state dental boards in support of their public protection mission.

There are **two primary models by which states can use DANB exams** in implementing competency measurement requirements for dental assistants. In the **first model**, a state board of dentistry is empowered by state law to register, license or otherwise credential dental assistants; DANB's national certification exams, or selected component exams, can fulfill the knowledge-based competency measurement requirement underlying state-specific credentialing. Rather than expending resources to

develop a state-specific exam, a state regulatory agency can accept or require an existing DANB national exam or combination of DANB exams; doing so can eliminate exam development, administration, scoring and reporting costs and reduce lead time to implement a statewide dental assisting credentialing program. The modular format of DANB's certification exams — which consist of individual component exams covering specific functions or areas of knowledge — provides states with the flexibility to test only in the areas that are delegable to dental assistants under state law or rules. In addition to DANB's online credential verification tool, DANB provides periodic reporting of candidate exam results to state regulators free of charge at the interval requested by the state.

In the **second model**, a state dental board is not empowered to register, license or otherwise credential dental assistants; in these cases, regulation of dental assistants often takes the form of establishing parameters for delegation of duties to dental assistants, including outlining allowed and prohibited tasks, education requirements and competency testing requirements. DANB provides state regulators with a suite of independent, psychometrically sound standardized tests that allow for reliable measurement of knowledge-based competence.

When circumstances require it, DANB can develop a state-specific exam that measures competency in the tasks dental assistants may perform in a particular state. A state-specific exam might be requested (1) if a state decides to allow delegation to dental assistants of expanded functions that are not addressed on an existing DANB national exam, (2) if the tasks and duties permitted under state law are too small a subset of the content covered on the CDA exam to justify requiring all three components of the CDA exam (RHS, ICE and GC exams), (3) if the eligibility requirements of the CDA exam are not in line with state law or rule, or (4) if state law has other specific requirements (such as a jurisprudence requirement or the requirement in some states that radiography exams for dental assistants have a hands-on component) that preclude the exclusive use of an existing DANB national knowledge-based competency exam. In these cases, DANB works with the state to develop an exam that satisfies that state's regulatory requirements. It may be the case that an existing DANB national exam will satisfy part of a state's requirements, while a state-specific exam is used as a complement. In addition, a state may accept a DANB national exam as meeting its requirements but may also offer an alternative state-specific exam that is narrower in scope or has different eligibility requirements. To date, all states that work with DANB to develop a state-specific exam also recognize the CDA exam as meeting that state's regulatory requirements.

#### State-to-State Reciprocity: Benefits for the State and for Dental Assistants

Recognizing or requiring a national DANB exam or certification creates the potential for state-to-state reciprocity, which benefits states that recognize the DANB certification and the dental assistant who earns the DANB certification. For example, an assistant who has already passed DANB's CDA exam could be immediately eligible for employment upon moving to a state that recognizes or requires DANB's CDA certification or RHS or ICE component exams. By recognizing a national DANB exam, a state's dental board can increase the pool of dental assistants who are eligible to work in that state. At the same time, the dental assistant benefits from having earned a widely recognized national certification.

## DANB National Exams and Certifications

For many states, the most straightforward means of implementing new competency measurement requirements for dental assistants is to recognize or require DANB national certification or component exams.

As of June 15, 2016, there are more than 37,000 DANB certificants nationwide.

DANB certificants annually renew their DANB certifications by meeting DANB's *Recertification Requirements*, including completing Continuing Dental Education (CDE) credits; maintaining current DANB-accepted, hands-on CPR, BLS or ACLS certification; and paying an annual renewal fee. The objective of DANB's annual renewal requirements is to improve the clinical knowledge of the individual to provide the highest quality of service to the public and the profession. Individuals who do not recertify are no longer allowed to use the certification marks after their name. Please see DANB's *Recertification Requirements* for more information.

To earn DANB certification, a candidate must pass all the necessary component exams within a designated window. The information below outlines the component exams and eligibility requirements for each DANB certification.

#### Radiation Health and Safety (RHS) Exam

DANB's RHS exam, a component of the NELDA and CDA certifications, can be taken as a stand-alone exam. The exam is designed to discern proficiency in radiation health and safety by evaluating a candidate's minimum level of knowledge-based competency. Earning an RHS certificate of knowledge-based competency demonstrates that the individual meets the national standard for knowledge in dental radiography concepts.

Successful performance on DANB's RHS exam is recognized or required in 22 U.S. states and the District of Columbia to meet radiography requirements. More than 114,000 dental assistants have passed the RHS exam, as a stand-alone or as a component exam, in the past 15 years. Beginning in September 2009, the U.S. Air Force Dental Service (AFDS) incorporated the RHS exam into its dental assisting curriculum.

#### Infection Control (ICE) Exam

DANB's ICE exam is a component of the NELDA, CDA, and COA certification programs. It may also be taken as a stand-alone exam. DANB's ICE exam is designed to evaluate a candidate's minimum level of knowledge-based competency and to discern proficiency in infection control, including OSHA requirements, recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Dental Association (ADA) for personnel performing procedures in the dental office. Earning an ICE certificate of knowledge-based competency demonstrates that the individual meets the national standard for knowledge.

Among the 34 states/districts that recognize or require the ICE exam as a component of the CDA exam, Connecticut, Iowa, New Hampshire, New York and North Dakota also recognize or require the ICE exam as a stand-alone exam to meet a portion of their regulatory requirements for dental assistants. There are currently more than 64,000 dental assistants who have passed the ICE exam as a stand-alone exam or as a CDA or COA component exam in the past 15 years. The AFDS began incorporating the ICE exam into its dental assisting curriculum in September 2008.

#### **National Entry Level Dental Assistant (NELDA) certification program**

Launched in April 2015, DANB's new NELDA certification program consists of three component exams:

- Anatomy, Morphology and Physiology (AMP) exam — 105 questions
- Radiation Health and Safety (RHS) exam — 100 questions
- Infection Control (ICE) exam — 100 questions

There are no eligibility requirements to take the AMP, RHS or ICE component exams. However, to earn NELDA certification, a candidate must qualify under one of four pathways. All pathways require holding current DANB-accepted CPR, BLS, or ACLS certification. The NELDA certification may only be held for up to four years. NELDA certificants are encouraged to meet eligibility requirements to take DANB's GC exam and earn CDA certification.

#### **EDUCATION PATHWAYS**

- |                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Pathway I</b>   | Graduation from a dental assisting program located within a post-secondary institution that is accredited by an organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education AND high school graduation or equivalent |
| <b>Pathway II</b>  | Graduation from a U.S. Department of Labor Job Corps dental assisting program                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Pathway III</b> | Successful completion of a dental assisting program located within a high school that is recognized in the U.S. education system                                                                                     |

## WORK EXPERIENCE PATHWAY

- Pathway IV** High school graduation or equivalent AND a minimum of 300 and up to a maximum of 3,000 hours work experience as a dental assistant, accrued over a period of at least two months and no more than three years

### **Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) certification program**

The DANB CDA exam consists of three component exams:

- General Chairside Assisting (GC) exam — 120 questions
- Radiation Health and Safety (RHS) exam — 100 questions
- Infection Control (ICE) exam — 100 questions

A candidate may take the three component exams together or take each exam separately. A candidate must pass all three component exams within a five-year period to earn DANB's CDA certification. There are more than 35,000 DANB CDA certificants nationwide who annually maintain their certification. DANB's CDA exam is recognized or required for dental assistants to meet state regulations or as a prerequisite to performing specified functions in 33 U.S. states and D.C.

A candidate must meet the requirements of one of three eligibility pathways to qualify to sit for the CDA exam or the GC component exam. All pathways require holding current DANB-accepted, hands-on CPR, BLS or ACLS certification.

- Pathway I** CODA-accredited dental assisting or dental hygiene program graduate or current Registered Dental Hygienist (RDH) license
- Pathway II** High school graduate or equivalent AND a minimum of 3,500 hours of dental assisting work experience accumulated over a period of two to four years
- Pathway III** Former CDA or graduate from a D.D.S. or D.M.D. program

DANB established pathway requirements after careful research and statistical analysis. In particular, Pathway II eligibility criteria were based on the results of a three-year study (completed in 1986) that compared the CDA exam performance of on-the-job-trained dental assistants to the performance of CODA-accredited dental assisting program graduates. The study revealed that on-the-job-trained assistants who had at least 3,500 hours of dental assisting work experience passed the CDA exam at a rate statistically equivalent to graduates of CODA-accredited dental assisting programs.

### **Certified Orthodontic Assistant (COA) certification program**

DANB's COA exam includes two component exams:

- Orthodontic Assisting (OA) — 210 questions
- ICE — 100 questions

A candidate may take the component exams together or separately. To earn COA certification, a candidate must pass the OA and ICE exams within a five-year period. DANB's COA exam and/or certification is recognized or required for dental assistants to perform expanded functions in Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Oregon. There are currently more than 1,400 COAs nationwide.

A candidate must meet the requirements of one of four eligibility pathways to qualify to sit for the COA exam or the OA component exam. All pathways require current DANB-accepted, hands-on CPR, BLS or ACLS certification.

- Pathway I** Current or former CDA certificant or current Registered Dental Hygienist AND a minimum of 3,500 hours of work experience as an orthodontic assistant accrued over a period of two to four years

- Pathway II** High school graduation or equivalent AND a minimum of 3,500 hours of work experience as an orthodontic assistant accrued over a period of two to four years
- Pathway III** Current CDA certification AND completion of an orthodontic assisting preparation course at a CODA-accredited dental assisting program
- Pathway IV** Former COA certificant or graduation from D.D.S. or D.M.D. program

**Certified Preventive Functions Dental Assistant (CPFDA) certification program**

Available since April 2011, DANB's CPFDA certification program includes four component exams:

- Coronal Polish (CP) — 100 questions
- Sealants (SE) — 80 questions
- Topical Fluoride (TF) — 80 questions
- Topical Anesthetic (TA) — 80 questions

There are no eligibility requirements to sit for the CP, SE, TA or TF component exams. However, to earn CPFDA certification, a candidate must meet the requirements of one of four eligibility pathways. All pathways require holding current DANB-accepted, hands-on CPR, BLS, or ACLS certification.

- Pathway I** Current CDA certification AND verification of knowledge- or performance-based competency in each of the four CPFDA functions (see below)
- Pathway II** Graduation from a CODA-accredited dental assisting, dental hygiene or dental program AND verification of knowledge- or performance-based competency in each of the four CPFDA functions (see below)
- Pathway III** Former DANB CDA certificant whose certification lapsed no more than two years ago AND a minimum of 3,500 hours of work experience as a dental assistant, accrued during the previous four years, AND verification of knowledge- or performance-based competency in each of the four CPFDA functions (see below)
- Pathway IV** Current Registered Dental Hygienist (RDH) license\* AND a minimum of 3,500 hours of work experience as a dental hygienist, accrued during the previous four years

**Verification of knowledge- or performance-based competency** in each of the four CPFDA functions required for **Pathways I, II and III** must include documentation of the following:

- A. Successful completion of a course on the CPFDA function offered by or within a CODA-accredited dental assisting, dental hygiene or dental program, or
- B. Successful completion of a state dental board-approved course on the CPFDA function, or
- C. Dentist verification of knowledge- or performance-based competency of the CPFDA function

*\* If RDH license is issued in Alabama and the candidate is not a graduate of a CODA-accredited dental hygiene program, candidate must meet the requirements of Pathway I, II or III.*

Currently, DANB's CP exam is required for assistants who wish to perform coronal polishing procedures in Arizona and is recognized as one step in meeting coronal polishing requirements in Ohio and Texas. DANB's CP, SE and TF exams are required in New Mexico for assistants to qualify to perform these functions under the general supervision of a dentist. There are currently more than 260 CPFDA certificants nationwide, working in 43 states.

The dental practice acts in 41 states allow dental assistants to perform — or do not prohibit them from performing — all four of the CPFDA functions. These duties are considered expanded functions in most states. Additionally, dental assistants are allowed to perform coronal polishing procedures in 44 states, apply sealants in 42 states, apply topical anesthetic in 49 states and apply topical fluoride in 48 states.

### **Certified Restorative Functions Dental Assistant (CRFDA) certification program**

Available since May 1, 2013, DANB's CRFDA certification program consists of six component exams, administered in the groupings below; candidates may take each component exam separately, or in the following groupings:

- Group 1 – Impressions (IM); Temporaries (TMP)
- Group 2 – Isolation (IS); Sealants (SE); Restorative Functions (RF)

All of the CRFDA component exams must be passed within three years to earn CRFDA certification. There are no eligibility requirements to take five of the six components of the CRFDA exam. However, a candidate must meet eligibility requirements to take the Restorative Functions (RF) component exam and to earn CRFDA certification.

In addition to current DANB-accepted, hands-on CPR, BLS, or ACLS certification, candidates for CRFDA certification must meet the requirements of one of three eligibility pathways.

- |                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Pathway I</b>   | Current or former CDA certificant whose certification lapsed no more than two years ago                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Pathway II</b>  | Graduation from a CODA-accredited dental assisting or dental hygiene program (no time limit on when they graduated) or current Registered Dental Hygienist (RDH) license. If the RDH license is issued in Alabama and the candidate is not a graduate of a CODA-accredited dental hygiene program, the candidate must meet the requirements of Pathway I |
| <b>Pathway III</b> | Successful completion of an Expanded Functions Dental Auxiliary or restorative course/program offered by an institution with a CODA-accredited dental assisting, dental hygiene or dental school program AND a minimum of 3,500 hours work experience as a dental assistant accrued during the previous two to four years                                |

### **State-Specific Exams Developed and Administered by DANB**

DANB develops and administers state-specific exams or programs that satisfy specific regulatory requirements in Maryland, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Oregon and Washington.

### **How Dental Assistants Might Prepare for DANB Exams**

DANB offers materials that can help exam candidates prepare for DANB national exams.

#### **DANB's Exam Blueprints**

DANB's exam blueprints are outlines of the content that may be covered on DANB's national exams. Using DANB's exam blueprints in conjunction with exam reference materials and other review materials can help candidates prepare for DANB exams. DANB's exam blueprints can be downloaded for free at [www.danb.org](http://www.danb.org).

DANB's national exam blueprints reflect the results of content validation studies that DANB conducts every five to seven years for each national exam. A content validation study includes a job analysis survey of current DANB certificants that defines what tasks a dental assistant performs, how frequently the tasks are performed and how important/critical the competent performance of each task is for the safety and protection of patients and/or operators. These validity studies — and the exam blueprints derived from them — help to build content validity into DANB's exam process.

#### **DANB Exam Reference Materials**

DANB provides lists of suggested reference materials that DANB exam committees use in constructing the exams. These lists do not include all textbooks and materials that are available for the study of dental

assisting; they are simply the resources that the exam committee subject matter experts determined as providing the most up-to-date information needed to meet or surpass a determined level of competency in the practice of dental assisting. The provided lists are to help a candidate prepare to take DANB exams and are not intended to be an endorsement of any of the publications listed. Candidates should prepare for DANB certification and component exams using as many different preparatory sources as needed. The lists of DANB exam reference materials are available on DANB's website at [www.danb.org](http://www.danb.org).

## The DALE Foundation

The Dental Auxiliary Learning and Education Foundation (the DALE Foundation), the official DANB affiliate, offers online review courses and study aids to help dental assistants prepare for DANB exams and earn CDE credits.

Current review course offerings include the DANB RHS Review, DANB ICE Review, DANB GC Review Part I, DANB GC Review Part II and DANB AMP Review, each worth 12 CDE credits upon successful completion, and the Conventional Dental Radiography Review, worth 4 CDE credits.

The DALE Foundation's study aids include an interactive Glossary of Dental Terms — which features online games and boasts nearly 1,900 definitions with audible pronunciations — along with the DANB RHS Practice Test, DANB ICE Practice Test, DANB GC Practice Test, DANB AMP Practice Test, DANB CP Practice Test and DANB OA Practice Test, each of which allows learners to create customized quizzes from 200 practice questions.

The DALE Foundation also offers patient and practice management certificate programs, including HR Fundamentals for the Dental Office, Accounts Receivable for the Dental Office, Financial Reporting for the Dental Office, and Behavioral Guidance and Management for the Pediatric Dental Patient.

The DALE Foundation's other offerings include a short course on dental cements and adhesives and a series of three modules in its Continuing Dental Education Articles (CDEA) series on selected topics in pediatric dentistry.

To learn more, visit [www.dalefoundation.org](http://www.dalefoundation.org).

## Credential Verification and Unauthorized Use of DANB Certification Marks

DANB now offers online credential verification through its website. DANB's new credential verification tool, located at <https://www.danb.org/The-Dental-Community/Credential-Verification.aspx>, allows employers, regulators and members of the public to look up individuals who hold DANB certifications, DANB certificates of knowledge-based competency and DANB-administered state certificates.

If there is evidence suggesting that an individual may have created a fraudulent DANB certificate, DANB conducts an investigation and disciplinary review of the matter in accordance with DANB's established disciplinary policies and procedures. Most often, these cases result in disciplinary action and notification of employers and state regulatory boards.

DANB also takes seriously unauthorized use of its registered certification marks (DANB, DENTAL ASSISTING NATIONAL BOARD, NELDA, CDA, COA, CPFDA, CRFDA, CDPMA and COMSA), its registered service marks (RHS, ICE and MEASURING DENTAL ASSISTING EXCELLENCE), and its trademarks (CERTIFIED DENTAL ASSISTANT and MARK OF DENTAL ASSISTING EXCELLENCE). When DANB receives a report about an individual who is not DANB certified using one of the trademarks associated with DANB certifications and certificates of knowledge-based competency, DANB investigates the report and, if appropriate, sends a "cease and desist" letter to the offending party. If individuals are misidentified as DANB certificants in print publications, DANB notifies the publishers of the errors.

If dental assistants who were formerly certified by DANB are found to be using DANB certification marks after allowing their certifications to lapse, DANB sends a written notice advising that they are not authorized to use these marks unless and until they reinstate their DANB certification.

## For More Information

For additional information about DANB, see DANB's website at [www.danb.org](http://www.danb.org); to ask any questions or request further information on any topic discussed in this overview, please contact:

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