



## **Stronger Together: Dental Assistants Recognition Week 2026**

The Ontario Dental Assistants Association (ODAA) encourages all Ontarians to recognize and appreciate the vital contributions of Certified Dental Assistants, valued members of the oral health team, during Dental Assistants Recognition Week (DARW) from March 1—7, 2026. Organized annually by the American Dental Assistants Association, DARW is celebrated across Canada and the United States.

The ODAA's theme for 2026, Stronger Together, emphasizes Certified Dental Assistants role as essential team members whose collaboration and mutual respect strengthen the entire interprofessional health care team and improve patient care. With a defined scope of practice, Dental Assistants provide essential skills and support not only to the dental team but, most importantly, to the patients they serve. Dental Assistants facilitate the work of dentists and hygienists, relying on their broad dental education, up-to-date knowledge of oral health trends through continuing education, and unique skills acquired through collaboration and experience.

As members of the Interprofessional team, Dental Assistants collaborate closely with other oral health professionals in developing individualized treatment plans for patients or clients. By leveraging each team member's expertise, a dental practice can adopt best practices in oral health care, resulting in optimal patient outcomes. ODAA Chief Executive Officer, Tara Fitzpatrick, BA, CDA II, CDR, has seen firsthand the importance of utilizing the skills of all members of the oral health team. "Certified Dental Assistants are irreplaceable when it comes to the delivery of quality dental care. They take dental X-rays, complete fluoride treatments, and even file your insurance claims," Fitzpatrick says, speaking from her over 25 years of experience as a Certified Dental Assistant. "Unfortunately, the shortage of these professionals already means that two-thirds of the dental offices in Ontario report needing to hire at least one new Dental Assistant."

The Stronger Together theme also underscores the importance of working collaboratively to identify opportunities to promote the profession. ODAA President, Cheryl Russell-Julien, CDA II, credits the Association with showing her the importance of being part of a strong professional community. "When I joined the Association in 1980, it became clear that being part of a dynamic group of dedicated professionals was something truly special," Russell-Julien recalls. "Being a Certified Dental Assistant has taught me resilience, the importance of lifelong learning, empathy, and just how powerful we can be in making a difference not only in our patients' lives but in the future of our profession. And as members of the Association, we are a unified voice, stronger together, advocating to move our profession forward."

**About the ODAA:** The Ontario Dental Assistants Association is a non-profit organization that recognizes and advances the professional standing of Certified Dental Assistants, Certified Dental Receptionists, and Certified Dental Treatment Coordinators. We support our members as essential and valued professionals integral to the oral health care team, fostering respect and pride through advocacy, leadership, quality continuing education, and recognized credentials. As the certifying body and membership association for Ontario Dental Assistants, more than 6,000 Certified Dental Assistants, Dental Receptionists, Treatment Coordinators, students, and other dental professionals belong to the ODAA.

To connect with the ODAA, contact Laura Thorne, Communications & Advocacy Manager, at [lthorne@odaa.org](mailto:lthorne@odaa.org). Media is also encouraged to contact local dental offices to highlight Certified Dental Assistants in their region.

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