

FAQ: Standard Occupational Classification

Q: What is the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC)?

A: The SOC is a classification system used by federal statistical agencies to “classify workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating, or disseminating data.” Information such as employment levels and projections, pay and benefits, skills required, and other demographics are widely used by the public, interested stakeholders and public policy-makers. The federal agencies that use SOC system include, but are not limited to, the Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Department of Defense, Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Labor.

Q: What is the difference between the previous SOC definition of a dental hygienist (2010) and the current SOC definition (2018)?

A: The newly revised 2018 SOC from the United States Office of Management and Budget classifies dental hygienists as “Healthcare Diagnosing or Treating Practitioners” -which is the same grouping as dentists - as opposed to the 2010 SOC which classified dental hygienists as “Health Technologists and Technicians.”

The 2010 SOC definition reads as follows:

Clean teeth and examine oral areas, head, and neck for signs of oral disease. May educate patients on oral hygiene, take and develop x rays, or apply fluoride or sealants

The 2018 SOC definition reads as follows:

Administer oral hygiene care to patients. Assess patient oral hygiene problems or needs and maintain medical records. Advise patients on oral health maintenance and disease prevention. May provide advanced care such as providing fluoride treatment or administering topical anesthesia.

Q: What has been ADHA’s involvement in fostering this change?

A: In 2014 and 2016, ADHA provided responses to multiple Federal Register notices to provide comment on proposed changes to the SOC definition.

Further, ADHA met with the Department of Labor to more fully discuss the profession of dental hygiene and the proposed changes to the SOC definition.

Q: How does this impact the dental hygienists’ scope of practice?

A: State scope of practice is not affected directly by the SOC classification.

The revised classification elevates the profession to reflect the dental hygienists’ education and expertise.