

Alberta's health colleges are created by the Health Professions Act (HPA), which gives colleges the mandate to protect and serve the public interest. This responsibility is woven into everything that health colleges in Alberta do. In addition to engaging with regulated members, ACSLPA and other health colleges remain connected to the public they serve. While many of our Insights articles are developed with an audience of regulated members in mind there is also plenty of meaningful engagement that happens between colleges and the public; this article intends to speak to this relationship.

There are three main ways in which the public and health colleges interact in Alberta. This article will speak to the specifics of these interactions at ACSLPA.

1. Members of the public make up half of our governing Council.

In our Insights article on *Regulatory Colleges and Self-Governing Professions*, we discussed that speech language pathology and audiology are professions which are regulated in a shared governance model—where aspects of self-regulation and oversight from the public are balanced. The Registrar/CEO reports directly to ACSLPA's Council, who is responsible for college oversight.

Public Member is the term used to refer to the 6 individuals appointed to Council by the government to ensure that regulation continues to prioritize the safety and best interests of the public. While the method by which the government carries out these appointments changes over time, interested members of the public can typically find information about how to apply for Council positions on the Government of Alberta website.

2. ACSLPA maintains a Public Register of all our registered members.

When looking for goods and services the most common answer these days is to search Google for information about local availability. However, when it comes to looking for health care practitioners, health care colleges maintain public registers which list all the active regulated professionals in the province. ACSLPA's public register can be accessed on our website. It can also be used to check any conditions the member might have on their practice permit. All health colleges in Alberta must maintain a public register of their members. This register empowers the public to make informed choices about their health care practitioners.

3. Members of the public can voice concerns and file complaints regarding regulated health professionals.

Health colleges are required to provide and enforce standards of practice and a code of ethics. The HPA defines the parameters of this enforcement and grants quasi-judicial status to health colleges. Being given the legal authority to enforce professional conduct means that there are consequences if a regulated health professional acts in an unprofessional way.

Quasi-Judicial: a non-judicial body that can interpret law, hold tribunals and hearings to resolve situations, and may impose legal penalties.

If a member of the public is concerned about the professional care they have received they can contact the College or check our website for information about professional conduct and how to file complaints. Every health college must have a Complaints Director and a Hearings Director by law. These two positions allow for the complaints to be investigated and proceed to Hearing, if necessary.

While each college works to aid their members in maintaining high standards of conduct, if there is an issue, the complaints process allows for investigation and any next steps required. The results of this enforcement aim to reduce future occurrences of unprofessional practice and allow the clients and practitioners to reach a resolution.

If you found this article interesting, the rest of our Insights publications can be accessed on our website, acslpa.ca. Don't forget to keep an eye out for future articles in our "Regulators and the Public" series which are intended to educate Albertans about the role of regulators in their health care. If you have any questions about this article, please email feedback@acslpa.ca. ■