

California Dental Licensure Checklist

For out-of-state and internationally trained dentists. Every requirement carries its statute or Board citation.
Last verified 2026-07-28. Full sourced version: dentovio.com/california/dental-license-pathways

Quick decision guide

- Experienced U.S.-licensed dentist (5 years of practice immediately preceding)? -> Licensure by Credential (BPC S1635.5): no clinical exam, no Law & Ethics exam.
- Completed a 1-year CODA GPR/AEGD certified within 2 years? -> Licensure by Residency (BPC S1634.1): clinical exam waived, Law & Ethics exam required.
- CODA graduate without either record? -> Licensure by ADEX Examination + Law & Ethics exam.
- Non-CODA foreign degree? -> 2-academic-year advanced-standing DDS/DMD first (UCSF, UCLA, USC, Pacific, Loma Linda, WesternU), then choose ADEX or residency.

The four pathways at a glance

Who it fits:

Credential: Experienced U.S.-licensed dentists
ADEX: New CODA grads; out-of-state dentists without the credential record
Residency: Dentists with a 1-year CODA GPR/AEGD
International: Non-CODA foreign graduates

Clinical exam:

Credential: None
ADEX: ADEX (5-year score validity)
Residency: None (waived)
International: Follows the chosen pathway after the degree step

California Law & Ethics exam:

Credential: Not required (BPC S1635.5 licenses "without examination")
ADEX: Required (\$125 + \$27.23 PSI)
Residency: Required (\$125 + \$27.23 PSI)
International: Required with the eventual pathway

INBDE:

Credential: Not required
ADEX: Required
Residency: Required
International: Required (also for program admission)

Core experience test:

Credential: 5 years of practice immediately preceding (BPC S1635.5(a)(3))
ADEX: --
Residency: CODA GPR/AEGD $\geq$ 1 year, certified within 2 years
International: 2-academic-year advanced-standing DDS/DMD first

Application fee:

Credential: \$525
ADEX: \$400
Residency: \$800
International: Pathway fee after the degree step

Realistic timeline:

Credential: 3-5 months
ADEX: 2-4 months post-ADEX
Residency: 2-4 months post-certification
International: 3-5+ years

Licensure by Credential (BPC S1635.5)

Experienced dentists holding an active, unrestricted U.S. license -- the only pathway with no clinical exam and no California Law & Ethics exam.

Application fee: \$525 (non-refundable). Realistic timeline: 3-5 months end to end. Exams: none.

Checklist

- ☐ **Active, unrestricted U.S. license (BPC S1635.5(a)(2); DBC LBC instructions)**
License from another U.S. state, district, or territory, not subject to current or pending disciplinary action (revocation, suspension, or probation). Every state where you hold or held a license must send an Out of State Certification Form -- accepted only when emailed directly by the licensing agency or delivered in a sealed, unopened envelope. A foreign-trained dentist who holds a qualifying U.S. license can use this pathway; the degree's origin is not disqualifying here.
- ☐ **Five years of practice immediately preceding the application (BPC S1635.5(a)(3))**
Active clinical practice, OR full-time non-clinical practice requiring an active dental license in a federal, state, or local public-health program, for at least five years immediately preceding the application; OR full-time faculty in an accredited dental-education program plus at least 5,000 hours of clinical practice within the past five years. SB 1453 rewrote this test effective 2025 -- older guides still describe the repealed "5,000 hours in five of seven years" standard.
- ☐ **Residency credit option (BPC S1635.5(a)(3)(A))**
A CODA-accredited residency (GPR, AEGD, or a recognized specialty program) credits 1,000 hours per year, up to 2,000 hours, toward clinical practice.
- ☐ **Alternative service contracts if practice history falls short (BPC S1635.5(a)(3)(B)-(C), S1635.5(e))**
Commit to 32+ hours/week for two years in a qualifying primary-care clinic (pending clinical practice contract), or 40+ hours/week for two years teaching or practicing in a Board-approved accredited dental-education program. Qualifiers under these routes can receive a two-year temporary restricted license valid only at those facilities.
- ☐ **Clean exam record for five years (BPC S1635.5(a)(6); DBC LBC instructions)**
No failed state, regional, or national dental licensure exam within five years before applying; a later pass of the same exam cures a prior failure. The Certification of Non-Failure of Licensure form is mandatory even if you never took a clinical exam.
- ☐ **Discipline history + NPDB/DEA release (BPC S1635.5(a)(4)-(5))**
No disciplinary action in any licensing state (the Board reviews any history case by case), plus a signed release for National Practitioner Data Bank disclosure and DEA registration verification.
- ☐ **50 CE units within two years of applying (BPC S1635.5(a)(8); S1645(b); DBC LBC instructions)**
Must include the Board's mandatory coursework: BLS (max 4 units -- live, in-person skills session required; online-only BLS is rejected), California Infection Control (2 units, Board-registered provider), California Dental Practice Act (2 units, Board-registered provider), and Schedule II opioid-prescribing responsibilities (2 units). Practice-management courses are rejected.
- ☐ **Application (form LBC1), photo, fingerprints (BPC S1635.5(a)(1); DBC LBC instructions)**
BreEZe or paper LBC1 application with the \$525 fee, a passport-style color photo, and classifiable fingerprints -- Live Scan in California, or FBI FD-258 hard cards with a \$49 processing fee from out of state. Do not fingerprint (or mail cards) before the paid application is on file; the Board cannot process early prints.

Watch-outs

- Practice-hours documentation (forms LBC3(a)/(b)/(c); solo owners file both LBC3(a) and LBC3(c)) is where applications stall most.
- The five-year practice window has no published tolling -- Board materials show no COVID, parental-leave, or hardship flexibility. If the record falls short, the routes are the S1635.5(a)(3)(B)-(C) service contracts, ADEX, or residency.
- There is no practicing while you wait: the standard credential route has no temporary license, and clinical work before your California license number issues is unlicensed practice. (The narrow S1635.5(e) temporary restricted license exists only for clinic-contract and teaching qualifiers.)

- License verifications routed through third-party clearinghouses are rejected -- they must come directly from the licensing agency.

Licensure by ADEX Examination

New CODA-school graduates and out-of-state dentists who do not qualify for the credential pathway.

Application fee: \$400 (non-refundable, 16 CCR S1021(a)). Realistic timeline: 2-4 months after ADEX results, longer around the June-August graduation peak. Exams: INBDE, ADEX clinical examination, California Law & Ethics exam.

Checklist

- [] **Qualifying degree (BPC S1632; DBC ADEX application instructions)**
DDS/DMD from a CODA-accredited or Board-approved dental school, proven by a Dean-signed certification with the university seal sent directly to the Board.
- [] **INBDE passage (DBC ADEX application instructions; jcn.de.ada.org)**
Proof of passing the JCNDE's National Board examination (INBDE; older NBDE Part I/II results also qualify), reported to the Board.
- [] **ADEX examination sections, passed within five years (BPC S1632(c); ABDE 2026 candidate manual)**
Diagnostic skills (DSE OSCE -- sunsets August 1, 2026, when the ADA's DLOSCE replaces it in the series), prosthodontic (manikin), endodontic (manikin), restorative (patient or CompeDont manikin), and periodontal scaling -- the clinical periodontal section becomes a required series component on August 1, 2026. Manikin-based exams have been accepted since the Board's May 28, 2020 decision. All sections must be passed within the five years preceding the application (BPC S1632(c)), and the ABDE requires the full series within 18 months of the first attempt.
- [] **California Law & Ethics exam (DBC L&E examination page; 16 CCR S1021)**
Separate \$125 application plus \$27.23 PSI seat fee; can be taken up to one year before graduation and runs in parallel with the main application. In-person only at PSI centers -- 20 California cities plus 22 out-of-state cities.
- [] **Fingerprints and BLS (DBC application instructions)**
Live Scan (in California) or FBI hard cards (out of state, \$49 processing fee). You may sit the L&E exam pending fingerprint clearance, but no license issues until clearance arrives.

Watch-outs

- Retake math: after three failed attempts at the S1632 exam, BPC S1633 requires 50 hours of remediation education per failed subject (at a CODA-approved school, within one year of the third failure) before further re-examination. A score of 85%+ in a subject exempts you from re-testing that subject for two years.
- The 2026 series transition is dated: DSE OSCE registration ends June 2026, the DLOSCE replaces it and the clinical periodontal section becomes required on August 1, 2026 -- budget for the current bundle price (\$2,795-\$2,995) and check the ABDE manual before scheduling.
- Legacy WREB scores (exam retired December 31, 2022) stay usable only within the five-year score-validity window -- the last WREB cohorts support applications only into late 2027.
- Licensure by Portfolio no longer exists -- SB 1453 repealed it effective January 1, 2025. Older checklists still list it.

Licensure by Residency (BPC S1634.1)

Dentists who completed a CODA-accredited GPR or AEGD of at least one year -- the clinical exam is waived, the Law & Ethics exam is not.

Application fee: \$800 (non-refundable). Realistic timeline: 2-4 months once the residency certification is in hand. Exams: INBDE, California Law & Ethics exam.

Checklist

- ☐ Qualifying degree (BPC S1634.1(b))

Graduation from a dental school accredited by CODA or by a Board-approved national accrediting body. A non-CODA foreign degree alone does not qualify -- internationally trained dentists reach this pathway through an advanced-standing DDS/DMD, or under a legacy Board-approved foreign school until its sunset date.

- ☐ Clinically based GPR or AEGD, minimum one year (BPC S1634.1(c))

A clinically based advanced education program in general dentistry (AEGD) or general practice residency (GPR), at minimum one year in duration, accredited by CODA or a Board-approved national accrediting body. The program may be in any U.S. state -- California is not required. Specialty residencies (ortho, perio, OMFS, pedo, endo) do not qualify under this section.

- ☐ Certification and completion within two years (BPC S1634.1(c); DBC licensure-by-residency instructions)

The Board-approved Certification of Clinical Residency Completion is executed after you finish the program (you can start the application, fee, and fingerprinting during residency), and both the certification and program completion must fall within the two years before the application date.

- ☐ INBDE + Law & Ethics exam (BPC S1634.1(d)-(e))

National Board passage (BPC S1634.1(d)) and the California Law & Ethics examination (BPC S1634.1(e)) are both statutory requirements -- the L&E application is a separate \$125 filing. Only the clinical exam is waived.

- ☐ Clean exam record for five years (BPC S1634.1(f))

The non-failure rule applies here too: no failed state, regional, or national dental licensure exam within five years before applying, with a later pass curing a prior failure. A residency does not erase a recent ADEX failure.

Watch-outs

- The residency paradox: some federal/VA residencies require an active dental license going in -- those programs cannot supply your first license.
- The two-year certification window is unforgiving: finish a residency, wait three years, and this pathway closes.
- Specialty residencies do not qualify -- BPC S1634.1(c) names clinically based AEGD/GPR programs only. (A CODA specialty residency does still credit up to 2,000 hours toward the credential pathway under S1635.5(a)(3)(A).)
- Fingerprint sequencing: Live Scan results that arrive before your paid application is on file are rejected -- wait for the Board's emailed Live Scan request after the fee posts.

International route (non-CODA degree)

Dentists whose original degree is from a school that is neither CODA-accredited nor Board-approved -- the pathway decision comes after an education step.

Application fee: Pathway fee applies after the education step. Realistic timeline: 3-5+ years including the advanced-standing program. Exams: INBDE, Then the pathway you qualify for (ADEX or residency) + California Law & Ethics exam.

Checklist

- [] **Credential evaluation (DBC foreign-graduate guidance; ECE)**
Course-by-course evaluation of the foreign degree. The Dental Board recognizes ECE; some programs also accept WES, but an ECE report is the safe default (~\$199, 3-4 weeks once your file is complete -- sourcing sealed foreign transcripts and translations is the real delay, often months).
- [] **INBDE (IDP program admission requirements; DBC application instructions)**
Required both for advanced-standing program admission and for eventual licensure.
- [] **Advanced-standing DDS/DMD (international dentist program) (ADEA CAAPID program pages; school bulletins (2026-27))**
A two-academic-year (24-36 month) CODA-accredited international dentist program. Six California schools run IDPs -- UCSF, UCLA, USC, University of the Pacific, Loma Linda, and Western University of Health Sciences -- with published 2026-27 tuition roughly \$115K-\$134K per year (total cost with living expenses commonly \$250K-\$400K). Applications run through ADEA CAAPID (\$264 first program, \$115 each additional), with per-school supplemental applications and deadlines from early June to late July for 2027 starts.
- [] **Then choose a licensure pathway (BPC S1632; BPC S1634.1)**
With the advanced-standing degree, the ADEX and residency pathways open on the same terms as for U.S. graduates. The Law & Ethics exam can be taken up to one year before program graduation -- most IDP candidates test in their final year.

Watch-outs

- A GPR/AEGD does not bypass the advanced-standing program -- the residency pathway itself requires a CODA/Board-approved degree first.
- The last legacy Board-approved foreign school has sunset: De La Salle Bajo's (Mexico) approval expired in May 2026 -- the Board's own pages cite both May 16 and May 31, 2026 as the cutoff for eligible graduates. Since January 1, 2020 no new non-CODA foreign schools have been approved, and approval now requires CODA accreditation.
- AB 1952 (Berman, 2026) would open a separate route for internationally trained dentists to license as dental hygienists (RDH) under the Dental Hygiene Board -- but it is a pending bill held in Appropriations as of May 2026, not law. Guides describing it as a live route are ahead of the Legislature.
- L&E score validity is two years -- visa and OPT timing rewards testing late in the program, not early.

Document folder

Education

- ☐ Dean-certified proof of DDS/DMD (Certification of Dean form or sealed Dean's letter, sent directly to the Board)
- ☐ Foreign applicants: course-by-course credential evaluation (ECE/WES) and advanced-standing program documentation
- ☐ Residency pathway: Certification of Clinical Residency Completion signed by the program director, with educational seal

Examinations

- ☐ INBDE (or legacy NBDE I/II) results reported through JCNDE
- ☐ ADEX section results (valid five years) or legacy WREB scores within their validity window
- ☐ Law & Ethics exam: separate application, \$125 + \$27.23 PSI -- file it in parallel, then self-notify the Board after passing

Licensure history (credential pathway)

- ☐ Out of State Certification Form from EVERY state where you hold or held a license -- sent directly by the licensing agency
- ☐ Certification of Non-Failure of Licensure form (mandatory even if you never sat a clinical exam)
- ☐ Practice verification: LBC3(a) clinical practice, LBC3(b) faculty employment, LBC3(c) solo practice (solo owners file both (a) and (c))

Identity & background

- ☐ Passport-style color photo on a plain background
- ☐ Fingerprints: Live Scan in California; Board-provided hard cards + \$49 fee from out of state
- ☐ Signed NPDB disclosure release and DEA registration verification (credential pathway)

Continuing education (credential pathway)

- ☐ 50 CE units completed within two years of the application
- ☐ Inside the 50: BLS with live in-person skills session (max 4 units), California Infection Control (2 units, Board-registered provider), California Dental Practice Act (2 units, Board-registered provider), Schedule II opioid prescribing (2 units)

Common mistakes to avoid

- Planning around the repealed portfolio pathway or a five-year-old checklist

Fix: SB 1453 repealed Licensure by Portfolio effective January 1, 2025, and rewrote the credential pathway's experience test the same day. Work only from the Board's current application packages.

- Assuming an out-of-state or foreign license transfers

Fix: California has no reciprocity. An out-of-state license opens the credential pathway only if you meet every S1635.5 element; a foreign license alone opens nothing without the education step.

- Practicing while the application is pending

Fix: No general temporary license exists. Clinical work before your California license number issues is unlicensed practice -- it can end the application and worse.

- Fingerprinting before the Board asks for it

Fix: Live Scan results that arrive before your paid application is on file are rejected and discarded. Submit the application and fee first, then use the Live Scan request form (with its ORI code) the Board emails you.

- Letting a deficiency sit

Fix: Under 16 CCR S1004, an application not completed within the Board's abandonment window is legally abandoned -- you restart from zero, potentially with fresh fingerprints. Cured documents also rejoin the bottom of the processing queue, so respond fast and completely the first time.

- Online-only BLS certification

Fix: The Board rejects it. Your BLS course needs a live, in-person skills session, a skills test, and a written exam.

- License verifications routed through a clearinghouse

Fix: Electronic verifications count only when emailed directly from the licensing agency to the Board. Order them early -- they gate file completion.

- Skipping the Certification of Non-Failure form because you never took a clinical exam

Fix: It is mandatory for credential applicants regardless of exam history.

- Missing a deficiency email

Fix: Effective April 1, 2026 the Dental Licensing Unit corresponds by email only -- no hard-copy letters. Whitelist dbc.ca.gov addresses and check spam weekly; a missed deficiency email stalls files indefinitely.

- Taking the Law & Ethics exam too early -- or buying the wrong exam's prep

Fix: A passing L&E score is valid two years; IDP candidates especially should test late. And California runs three different dental "law and ethics" exams (dentist, RDH, RDA) -- dentist candidates need the DBC dentist exam, not RDH or RDA materials.

- Fee math without the add-ons

Fix: Budget the 2.3% BreEZe card surcharge, the prorated up-to-\$650 issuance fee, and \$27.23 per L&E sitting on top of headline application fees.

- Counting on a federal/VA residency for a first license

Fix: Some of those programs require an active license going in -- confirm before matching if the residency pathway is your licensure plan.

Dentovio is an independent publisher -- not the Dental Board of California or any government service. Educational reference only, not legal advice. Laws change: confirm every requirement with the Dental Board of California (dbc.ca.gov) before acting.

Sourced, linked version of this checklist: dentovio.com/california/dental-license-pathways