National Workforce Shortage Trends and the Future of Staffing

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Panel Q1:

What are the national staffing shortage trends according to the ADA’s Health Policy Institute?
Top Challenges for 2024

Looking ahead to 2024, what are the top 3 challenges facing your practice?*

- 60.2%** Staffing shortages, recruitment, or retention
- 50.3% Low insurance reimbursement, denials
- 21.5% Increasing overhead costs

* Question included in November 2023 wave of HPI’s poll.
** Represents the percentage of responding dentists who cited this particular challenge in their answer.
Staffing Shortages Have Not Eased

While 3/4 of dentists say they have enough office/admin staff, only 2/3 report they have enough hygienists and assistants.
Dental Team Recruitment

Have you recently or are you currently recruiting any of the following positions in your dental practice? (Percentages indicating “yes.”) December 2022 vs. December 2023

More than 1/3 of dentists were actively recruiting dental assistants and dental hygienists in Dec.
Recruitment Challenges Continue

How challenging has it been to recruit the position(s) below? (Percentage indicating “Extremely Challenging” and “Very Challenging”) December 2022 vs. December 2023

Dentists’ perceived difficulty in recruiting dental hygienists and assistants is around the same as it was one year ago.
Dentists are Taking on More Duties

Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, has your practice changed the way the workload is divided among dentists and staff?

If yes, how so?

- Dentist does more hygienist/assistant/admin duties: 49.7%
- Cross-training staff; multi-tasking: 16.2%
- Increased responsibilities; maximizing qualifications for clinical staff: 14.9%
- Increased workload for all staff; Working longer hours: 8.8%
- Reduced hours or days worked scheduling fewer appointments: 4.0%
- Increased appointment length: 3.7%
- Hired additional staff for specific responsibilities: 3.7%
- Added/retained infection control protocols: 3.0%
Staff Hiring Trends in 2023

[Owner dentists] Did you hire new staff for any of the following positions in 2023? (Percentages indicating “yes.”)

- Dental Hygienists: 32.1%
- Dental assistants: 45.3%
- Dentists: 8.5%
- Administrative staff: 32.7%

Nearly half of dentists reported hiring dental assistants in 2023 while nearly one-third reported hiring hygienists and administrative staff.
## Recruitment Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>If hired DH or DA</th>
<th>If hired DH or DA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dental society classified ads</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Online recruitment websites</strong></td>
<td><strong>77.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>51.8%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental-specific job matching site</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local hygiene or assisting programs</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing agency or recruiter</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word of mouth</strong></td>
<td><strong>72.9%</strong></td>
<td><strong>51.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Online recruitment websites and word of mouth are the top ways dentists recruit and hire dental assistants and hygienists.
Changes in Recruitment Practices – 2022 vs. 2023

[If hired DH or DA] For each of the last two years, which of the following benefits were offered to dental hygienist and dental assistant applicants?

- Starting pay rate increased from prior year
- Retirement plan (e.g., 401k)
- Health insurance
- Sign-on bonus
- Paid time off
- Changed hours to meet applicants’ needs
- Other, please specify

In 2023, more dentists changed hours to meet applicants’ needs compared to 2022.
How are Practices Adjusting in 2024?

Looking ahead to 2024, how likely are you to do each of the following for your practice?*

- Make major equipment purchases: 20.5%
- Add staff: 52.0%
- Invest in new software: 14.9%
- Drop out of some insurance networks: 42.5%

* Question included in November 2024 wave of HPI’s poll.

More than half of dentists indicate that they are likely to add staff to their practice in 2024.
Panel Q2:

What are the key factors driving these trends with staffing shortages?
Slower inflows: Program enrollment sees declines

Enrollment in hygiene and assisting programs is down from pre-pandemic levels.
Greater Outflows in the Field

During the COVID-19 pandemic, safety and childcare concerns prompted some dental hygienists to voluntarily leave the profession in 2021.

Fewer than half of dental hygienists who left employment early in the COVID-19 pandemic returned to the workforce in 2021.
Other Key Insights on the Economic Data

• Wages of dental office staff are not keeping up with inflation.

• Dentists are busier than ever and are working longer hours post pandemic.

• Practice expenses are increasing faster than revenues, driving stagnation in dentist average net income.

• Suggests there will be continued ‘margin compression’ in the dental sector.
Wages of dental office staff are not keeping up with inflation.

Nor with wages of other health care workers.

Nor with wages in the economy overall.

Note: Data on ‘Offices of Dentists’ is made up of 37% assistants, 33% front desk staff, 23% hygienists, 7% other staff.
Dentists are Working More than Ever

The percent of dentists indicating “Too busy to treat all people requesting appointments” or “Provided care to all who requested appointments but was overworked” is at an all-time high.
Decline in Average Net Income of Dentists

Average net income of GP dentists declined by 7% in 2022. The long-term trend shows a slight decline.
Practice expenses are rising faster than practice revenues. This is driving the downward trend in GP dentist net incomes.
Panel Q3:

What is the ADA's position, and what is the ADA doing to help close the workforce gap on a national level?
Identifying Strategies for Shoring up the Workforce

HPI engaged with multiple partners to conduct primary research on these issues and identify recruitment and retention strategies.

A comprehensive report was published in 2022 summarizing the findings.
Here’s What the Research Tells Us…

Key Findings:

• About 1/3 of the dental assistant and dental hygienist workforce indicate they expect to retire in 5 years or less.

• Factors associated with retention include work-life balance, positive workplace culture, and ability to help patients.

• Factors associated with attrition include negative workplace culture, insufficient pay, lack of growth opportunity, inadequate benefits, and feeling overworked.
The #1 challenge with recruitment is lack of applicants.

The wage and benefit requirements of the applicants has also been a challenge for dentists.

Dentists also indicated a lack of qualified assistant applicants.
Common Benefits

The majority of dental assistants and dental hygienists indicated that they receive dental benefits, paid holidays, paid vacation, and retirement savings from their employers.
Rare Benefits

Health insurance, paid sick time, paid leave, and CE or professional development funds are rare overall.
Desirable Benefits

Share of dental hygienists and dental assistants not receiving these workplace benefits, and the share not receiving who find the benefit "very desirable."

### Dental Hygienists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Not receiving</th>
<th>Very Desirable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid vacation</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>66.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid holidays</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement savings (e.g., 401K, 403B, SEP IRA)</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental benefits (e.g., free in-house care)</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid sick time</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health insurance</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CE or professional development funds/time</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensure or certificate fees</td>
<td>84.8%</td>
<td>54.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid leave (e.g., FMLA)</td>
<td>86.8%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership in professional association</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Dental Assistants

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<tr>
<td>Paid vacation</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>80.9%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>21.8%</td>
<td>82.0%</td>
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<td>34.5%</td>
<td>73.5%</td>
</tr>
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<td>45.5%</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health insurance</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
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<td>Membership in professional association</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
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Federal Workforce Legislation
Advocated for support of important workforce programs

Last summer, the ADA urged members to ask senators to support important workforce programs, including:

• Reauthorizing Action for Dental Health workforce grants

• Expanding the National Health Service Corps scholarship and loan repayment opportunities

• Extending the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education Program

ADA Action Alert seeks support for dental workforce measures

The ADA encourages members to contact their senators and ask them to support measures to address dental workforce issues. An ADA Action Alert requests that emails to senators seek support for reauthorization of the Action for Dental Health workforce grants to fund programs for dental professionals; the Restoring America’s Health Care Workforce and Readiness Act, which would increase funds for National Health Service Corps’ scholarships and loan repayment programs; the Resident Education Deferred Interest Act, which would address student loan repayment for dental residents; and the ability for dental professionals who have student loans to modify the interest rate to the current applicable rate. Full Story: ADA News (6/9)
ADA Supports the Senate’s Bipartisan Primary Care and Health Workforce Act

- *Increases dental workforce in rural and underserved areas* by supporting grants to states, service programs, community health centers, and education.

ADA Supports the House of Representatives’ **Lower Costs, More Transparency Act**

- *Extends dental workforce programs focused on service, community health centers, and education.*

- Passed the House in December and will head to the Senate for a vote.
ADA Supports the House and Senate’s Action for Dental Health (ADH) Act

• Provides federal grants to states for the dental health needs of underserved populations, including workforce positions.

• The ADH Act passed the House committee and awaits a vote by the full House.

• ADH provided grants of $400,000/year for 4 years to over 35 state oral health programs.

To find out if your state has an ADH grant, please contact your state’s oral health program.

You may also contact Corey McGee from the ADA Government Affairs team for more info: mcgeec@ada.org.
ADA Supports the House and Senate’s Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow’s Workforce Act

• Allows tax-favored 529 plans to be used for dental professional credentials, dental certifications, and licenses for hygienists and dentists.

• 18 cosponsors in the Senate and 115 cosponsors in the House.
ADA Seeks Annual Appropriations for Oral Health Workforce Programs, including:

- **Title VII Oral Health Training**
  - Predoctoral Dental Training Program: Trained 7,132 dental and dental hygiene students
  - Postdoctoral Dental Program: Trained 711 residents and fellows

- **Dental Faculty Loan Repayment**
  - Program provided loan repayment to 100 dental faculty and relieved over $2.1 million in debt

- **State Oral Health Workforce Improvement Grant Program**
  - Trained 124 dental students, 29 dental residents, and 2 dental hygiene students

- **National Health Service Corps**
Scan this QR Code for more Information on ADA-supported workforce funding and how to apply

**Programs include:**

- **Dental Faculty Loan Repayment Program (DFLRP)**
  - Funds increase the number of dental and dental hygiene faculty.

- **Predoctoral Pediatric Training in General Dentistry and Dental Hygiene**
  - Funds go toward pediatric training for dentists and dental hygienists

- **Primary Care Dental Faculty Development Program**
  - Establishes training center for junior primary care dental faculty, Doctors of Dental Surgery (DDS), Doctors of Dental Medicine (DMD) and Dental Hygienists
Improving Licensure Portability

- **The Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact** provides greater licensure portability for dentists and dental hygienists.

- Five states have passed the compact, and twelve states have introduced it so far in 2024. We need seven states to pass the compact and make it active.

- To learn more, visit [www.ddhcompact.org](http://www.ddhcompact.org)
Helping Dental Practices Save Money

• Stopped the Red Flag Rule (2010) from being implemented
  – The Red Flag Rule would require dentists and other health care providers to develop and implement a written identity theft program for their practices.
  – Saving dentists an estimated $500/practice
Helping Dental Practices Save Money

• Prevented elimination of the cash method of accounting
  – Saving thousands of dollars

• Enabled dentists to continue balance billing

• Defeated a Medicare Part B dental benefit legislative proposal

• Stopped the 2.3% tax increase on the sale of medical devices
Helping Dental Practices Save Money

• Secured National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards for practices using nitrous oxide sedation
  – Saving up to $50,000 in costs

• Protected small practices from rushed OSHA rule removal of infection control exemption
Advocacy for Training Programs and Student Loans

- Secured concessions in DEA training mandate
- Prevented steep cuts to oral health training programs
- Achieved a DoE rule to prevent the addition of accrued, unpaid interest to the principal balance of student loans
- Preserved student loan interest deduction, established market-based rates/caps, & introduced income-based repayment
Washington AGD Dental Assistant School

- Opened in Jan. 2022 in collaboration with Dr. Mark Holifield, owner and CEO of Complete Dental Care Educational Center in Jackson, TN
- Offers an affordable 4-week accelerated program designed to train new dental assistants quickly and efficiently.

For more info: waagdddentalassistantschool.org
**Workforce Resources Available From The ADA**
Tools for dentists on recruiting, retaining, and training the dental team

- Promoting dental team careers
- Staff position descriptions
- Dental employment agreements

...and other resources

[ADA.org/dentalstaff](https://ADA.org/dentalstaff)
Panel Q4:

What does the future of staffing look like?
Emerging technology can help mitigate staffing shortages

Technology is shaping the course of the dental staffing world.

• Augmented intelligence and digital imaging are transforming patient care.
  – The ADA developed AI standards in 2023

• Tele-dentistry is revolutionizing remote consultations.
Contact Me!
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