Dental Workforce Shortages: Data to Navigate Today’s Labor Market

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Health Policy Institute

ADA American Dental Association
Why This Matters

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

In any given month, roughly 4 out of 10 dental practices are hiring dental assistants or dental hygienists.
What keeps dental assistants and dental hygienists satisfied in their roles?

What workplace conditions are to blame for dental assistants and dental hygienists leaving their positions?

What levers are available to recruit and retain a high quality dental workforce?

ADA.org/HPI
What the New Report Tells Us

→ Approximately one-third of the dental assistant (33.7%) and dental hygienist (31.4%) workforce indicate they expect to retire in five years or less.

→ The majority of dental assistants and dental hygienists are satisfied in their current job.

→ Roughly half of dental assistants and dental hygienists indicate they have received a raise within the past year. The majority of wage increases are in the 1-3% range.

→ The majority of dental assistants and dental hygienists indicated that they receive dental benefits, paid holidays, paid vacation, and retirement savings from their employers. Health insurance, paid sick time, paid leave, and continuing education or professional development funds are rare overall. These benefits matter for recruitment and retention.

→ 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 majority of currently employed dental assistants and dental hygienists indicate they are satisfied in their role.

Fewer than 1 in 10 indicate a low level of satisfaction.
A lesser share of dental service organization (DSO) employees and part-time employees indicate high job satisfaction.
Most dental assistants and dental hygienists indicate that they received wage increases within the past year or 1-2 years ago. Among those who indicated they have received a raise, it was most commonly an increase in the 1-3% range.
The majority of dental assistants and dental hygienists receive dental benefits, paid holidays, paid vacation, and retirement savings.

Health insurance, paid sick time, paid leave, and continuing education or professional development funds are much less common.
Health insurance, paid sick time, paid leave, and continuing education or professional development funds—while rare overall—are available to the majority of dental hygienists working in public health settings.

These benefits are also more common in DSOs and group practices than in private solo practices.
Missing Benefits are Highly Desirable

Among dental assistants and dental hygienists not receiving these workplace benefits, the majority indicate that almost all of these benefits are “very desirable.”
In general, dentist employers indicated greater generosity in terms of their benefits packages than reported by dental assistant and dental hygienist employees.

Better communication and more transparency surrounding workplace benefits might be helpful.
Dentists who do not offer their employees health insurance were asked why, and the overwhelming majority indicated cost as a reason.

While cost was also the predominant reason among dentists not offering paid leave, nearly 1 in 3 also indicated that they do not offer the benefit because it is not the industry norm and/or not their obligation.
Leaving the Field Voluntarily

The most common reasons dental hygienists opt to leave the field include negative workplace culture, lack of growth opportunity, and inadequate benefits.

The most common reasons among dental assistants were insufficient pay, negative workplace culture, and feeling overworked.
Considerations for Dental Employers

Dental practices need to remain competitive as employers when it comes to employee benefits.

Responsive compensation is a must.

Workplace culture cannot be overlooked.

Consolidated dental practices have an edge when it comes to employee benefits.

Shoring up the workforce pipeline will require long-term changes.
Thank You!

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Dental Assisting National Board
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