The Changing Dentist Workforce

The Newest Data from HPI

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Today

• Latest data on key dentist workforce characteristics
  • Number of practicing dentists
  • Age, gender, race/ethnicity breakdown
  • Solo vs. group practice and practice ownership

• Big picture takeaways for the future

• Q&A
New on ada.org/hpi

Practice Ownership Among Dentists Continues to Decline

Percentage of dentists in private practice who are owners, by gender:
- Female dentists: 68.1% in 2005 vs. 59.6% in 2021
- Male dentists: 88.5% in 2005 vs. 80.3% in 2021
- All dentists: 73.0% in 2005 vs. 68.7% in 2021

Female dentists have been disproportionately less likely than male dentists to own their practice.

Percentage of dentists in private practice who are owners, by age group:
- 2005: 90.0%
- 2015: 80.0%
- 2021: 70.0%

Dentist Retirements Increase

Average age of active dentists and average dentist retirement age (years), 2009-2021:
- Active dentists: 51.9 years in 2009 vs. 55.3 years in 2021
- Dentist retirement age: 72.6 years in 2009 vs. 75.1 years in 2021

Dentists entering, exiting the workforce per year:
- 2017: 6,176 dentists entered, 5,018 dentists exited
- 2018: 6,335 dentists entered, 5,194 dentists exited
- 2019: 6,333 dentists entered, 5,209 dentists exited
- 2020: 5,991 dentists entered, 5,129 dentists exited
- 2021: 5,645 dentists entered, 5,077 dentists exited

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Solo Practice Continues to Decrease

Percentage of solo practitioners:
- 1999: 55%
- 2020: 44%

Fewer dentists are working as solo practitioners. About 55% of private practice dentists were in solo practice in 1999. That proportion decreased to 44% in 2021.

For more information, visit ADA.org/HPI or contact the Health Policy Institute at hp@ada.org.
The number of dentists per capita is stable.
A higher share of dentists aged 55 and older left the workforce in 2021. This is likely related to the pandemic.
We predict that the number of dentists per capita will remain stable through 2025 and then increase.

Retirement #s are expected to shrink while graduate #s will not, beginning in 2025.
Dentists’ Average Age

The dentist workforce is getting younger, on average.
Dentists entering the workforce have outnumbered those leaving the workforce.
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Dentists per Age, 2012

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We predict gender parity in the dentist workforce by 2040.
From 2001 to 2021, the share of the dentist workforce that is White has decreased, while for Asian and Hispanic or Latino it has increased.
The dentist workforce skews more Asian and White when compared to the U.S. population. In contrast, it skews less Hispanic and Black.
Ownership Status of Private Practice Dentists

Practice ownership rates continue to decline.
Ownership Status of Private Practice Dentists

Female dentists have been consistently less likely than male dentists to own their practice.

Ownership rates for male and female dentists are declining.
Ownership Status of Private Practice Dentists

PERCENTAGE OF DENTISTS IN PRIVATE PRACTICES WHO ARE OWNERS, BY AGE GROUP

In 2021, younger dentists were attaining ownership at a decreased rate compared to 2005.
Solo practice continues to decline. The pandemic has accelerated this trend.
The gender shift in the workforce is likely to significantly accelerate the trend away from solo practice. But both male and female dentists are seeing this trend.
While a decrease in the prevalence of solo practices is seen among all dentists, the trend is pronounced among younger dentists.
Practice Consolidation Accelerates

10.4% of U.S. dentists were affiliated with dental service organizations (DSOs) in 2019. In 2017, it was 8.8%.

BY GENDER
- 13.3% female dentists
- 8.7% male dentists

BY AGE
- 20.4% 21-34
- 13.3% 35-49
- 5.4% 50-64
- 4.0% 65+

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Practice Consolidation Accelerates
Key Takeaways

• Our latest data confirm key trends in the dentist workforce: dentists are getting younger, more likely to be female, more likely to be non-White. Solo practice is disappearing and fewer dentists own their practice. Moreover, due to various factors, these trends are about to accelerate.

• We’re at a point where there is a sharp generational divide in the dentist workforce: We have a large number of young dentists in the workforce and a large number of retirement-age dentists.

• The COVID-19 pandemic appears to have accelerated the practice modality shifts.