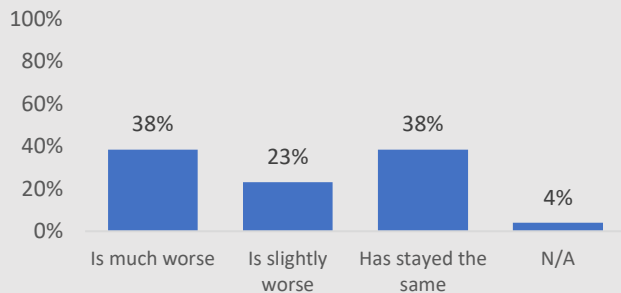


## Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network Findings Brief: Dentist Offices/Dental Clinics

This Findings Brief highlights current workforce needs reported by dental offices and clinics in Washington State during March and April 2023. More findings from 2023 and earlier may be viewed at [wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings](http://wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings). Responses to questions about current overarching workforce issues are summarized below. Earlier overarching and pandemic-related findings may be viewed at [www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/covid-19](http://www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/covid-19).

### Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples

#### In the past six months, how has your organization's ability to staff your facility/facilities changed?



- *[Much worse] [...] The hourly wages of auxiliary providers has outpaced the return from insurance making operations non solvent and unsustainable.*
- *[Slightly worse] Shortage of hygienists, demand for wages that are so high that overhead costs can barely be met.*
- *[Stayed the same] We have had trouble finding any hygienists. We have had trouble finding assistants or front office staff who will show up.*

#### What are your top workforce needs that could be alleviated by new or modified laws, policies, regulations, and/or payment rules?

Suggestions included increasing insurance reimbursements, promotion of workforce training, easing licensing requirements, and increasing license transferability across states.

- *Outreach programs to high school students in diverse neighborhoods highlighting the quality of employment available (6-figure pay 1st year out of training, great hours!) in the dental hygiene workforce*
- *Need to increase reimbursement to provide increased revenue for offices to increase pay. Develop ladder program from RDA to RDH Preventative dental assistant (see ladder concept)*

#### Has your organization made any of the following changes in the past year?

	Yes % (#)	Comments
Hired or assigned workers with higher-level qualifications to fill lower-skilled roles or positions	13% (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Dentist does perio charting (generally done by hygienists).</i></li> <li>• <i>I have had dentists perform the role of hygienist because the level of pay for hygienists has surpassed that of locum tenens dentists.</i></li> </ul>
Hired workers with fewer qualifications than would normally be considered	50% (15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Extend patient care times due to lower skills.</i></li> <li>• <i>Hired a dental assistant with no formal training, have done on the job training.</i></li> </ul>
Implemented new outsourcing/contracting of specific services (or 'service lines')	20% (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Have contacted outsourcing and they have no temp workers.</i></li> <li>• <i>We run temps almost everyday to meet our patient needs. This is unsustainable.</i></li> </ul>

#### In the past year, how has your ability to support clinical training experience/preceptorship/rotation opportunities for students/learners (not newly hired or incumbent employees) at your facility changed? What strategies/policies (e.g., financial incentives, student housing, etc.) have been - or would be - the most helpful for supporting clinical training experiences at your facility?

Themes: Most respondents reported that clinical training opportunities were not applicable to their dental offices and clinics, while others noted that their situation has declined over the past year.

- *[N/A] I haven't considered supporting clinical training for students.*
- *[Much worse] I don't know. I'm a small business owner and I don't have resources to do this.*
- *[Slightly worse] The ability to provide training for offsite rotation preceptors.*

## Dentist Offices/Dental Clinics (Spring 2023)

Between 2016 and 2023, over the course of 14 reporting periods, Dentist Offices, Dental Clinics, and other health care facilities in Washington shared information about their workforce needs to the Washington State Health Workforce Sentinel Network. Below are highlights of trends over time and recent findings. More findings from Dentist Offices and Dental Clinics, along with those from other health care facilities, are at [wa.sentinelnetwork.org](http://wa.sentinelnetwork.org).

Top occupations cited as having exceptionally long vacancies by date of reporting							
Rank	Spring 2020	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023
1	Dental Hygienist	Dental assistant	Dental assistant	Dental assistant	Dental hygienist	Dental hygienist	Dental hygienist
		Dental hygienist	Dental hygienist				
2	Dental assistant	No additional occupations reported	Dentist	Dental hygienist	Dental assistant	Dental assistant	Dental assistant
3	Dentist		Office personnel	Dentist	Office personnel	Office personnel	Office personnel
	Office personnel		Medicaid navigator				
4	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency		No additional occupations reported	No additional occupations reported	Office personnel	Dentist	Dentist

← Most cited

Findings prior to Spring 2020 not shown due to space constraints.

### Reasons for vacancies reported by dental offices/dental clinics

Themes: Dental offices and clinics reported not enough applicants for open positions as the main reason for exceptionally long vacancies, fewer reported issues around salary, wages, and benefits, and other recruitment and retention issues.

- *[Dentist] Shortage of practitioners, especially those skilled in caring for our unique clientele, e.g., primarily Medicaid clients.*
- *[Dental assistant] There is a high demand for the position, and exponential increase in hourly wage requirement, inadequate training, and loss of personnel from the workforce.*
- *[Dental hygienist] Very few candidates are available. In addition, many new grads are liking the temp due to increased hourly wage and flexibility in schedule, they do not have to commit to set days. They are not looking at long term benefits.*

### Reasons for worker retention/turnover problems reported by dental offices/dental clinics

Themes: Dental offices and clinics frequently reported that staff left looking for higher pay and benefits, flexible schedules, lower cost of living, and lower workload.

- *[Office personnel] Retention for front desk. Previous one stated Washington is too expensive and moved to Florida.*
- *[Dental hygienist] Most interviewees were wage and benefit shopping. Using job offers as leverage to increase pay in current job.*
- *[Dental assistant] Many are leaving long term staffed positions for higher paying temporary positions.*

## Dentist Offices/Dental Clinics (Spring 2023)

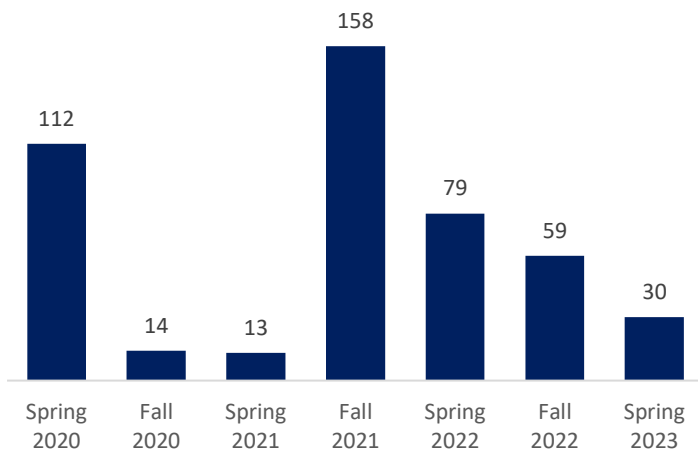
### Changes in Dentist Offices and Dental Clinics' priorities regarding orientation/onboarding for new employees and training for existing/incumbent workers

- [Dental assistant] In office training developed due to poor pool of candidates. Simplified to sterilization technique only.
- [Dental hygienist] Utilized temps for 2 years. The newest hire just made this month. Onboarding is slow and cautious as not to give too many things to learn so as not to overload them with too many responsibilities and have them go back into temping so they don't have "extra" responsibilities.

### New roles for existing employees and new occupations hired by Dentist Offices and Dental Clinics

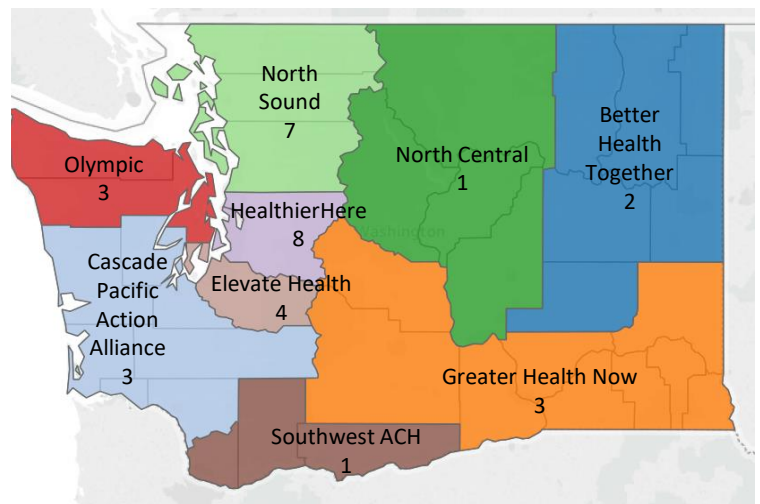
- [Dental hygienist] The hygienist has to take on the role of assistant and sterilization tech because we can't find a sterilization tech.
- [Dental assistant] They are expected to see more patients with fewer breaks or additional help.
- [Office personnel] Cross-trained to work both the front and the back.

**Number of Sentinel Network Responses from Dentist Offices and Dental Clinics in WA by Data Collection Date\***



Findings prior to Spring 2020 not shown due to space constraints.

**Number of Dentist Offices and Dental Clinics Responses by Accountable Community of Health (ACH) (Spring 2023)**



### About the Washington Health Workforce Sentinel Network

The Health Workforce Sentinel Network links the healthcare sector with policymakers, workforce planners and educators to identify and respond to changing demand for healthcare workers, with a focus on identifying newly emerging skills and roles required by employers. The Sentinel Network is an initiative of Washington's Health Workforce Council, conducted collaboratively by Washington's Workforce Board and the University of Washington's Center for Health Workforce Studies. Funding to initiate the Sentinel Network came from the Healthier Washington initiative, with ongoing support from Governor Inslee's office and the Washington State Legislature.

#### Why become a Sentinel? As a Sentinel, you can:

- Communicate your workforce needs and ensure that the state is prepared to respond to the transforming healthcare environment.
- Have access to current and actionable information about emerging healthcare workforce needs.
- Compare your organization's experience and emerging workforce demand trends with similar employer groups.

To view an interactive summary of findings and to provide information from your organization:

[www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org](http://www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org).

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