

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

This Findings Brief highlights current workforce needs reported to the state's Health Workforce Sentinel Network by Washington's dentist offices/dental clinics during April/May 2024, as well as trends over time. Between 2016 and 2024, over the course of 16 reporting periods, dentist offices/dental clinics in Washington provided key, on-the-ground information to the Washington State Health Workforce Sentinel Network. More findings from 2024 and earlier, as well as for other health care facilities, may be viewed at <https://www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings>

Top occupations with exceptionally long vacancies*							
Rank	Spring 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Fall 2023	Spring 2024
1	Dental assistant	Dental assistant	Dental hygienist	Dental hygienist	Dental hygienist	Dental assistant	Dental hygienist
	Dental hygienist						
2	Dentist	Dental hygienist	Dental assistant	Dental assistant	Dental assistant	Dental hygienist	Dental assistant
3	Office personnel	Dentist	Office personnel	Office personnel	Office personnel	Dentist	Dentist
	Medicaid navigator						
4	No additional occupations reported	Office personnel	Dentist	Dentist	Dentist	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Office personnel

← Most cited

*Findings prior to Spring 2021 not shown due to space constraints. Occupations cited by the same number of responses share the same rank number.

Reasons for exceptionally long vacancies and retention/turnover problems

Themes included availability and quality of dental assisting training programs, constraints to increasing dental hygienist supply, and impacts of limited supply and workplace stress on retention.

- [Dental assistant] WA state shortage. Those that come out of [a local] training programs are poorly trained.
- [Dental assistant] There is a huge lack of schooling options that [have] any value .
- [Dental assistant] Insufficient workforce. Educate high school students of attractiveness of dental assisting as career.
- [Dental hygienist] There is a shortage of dental hygienists in WA. Many of them retired or left the industry after COVID. Hygiene class sizes are small and the average hygienist only works in the field for 6-7 years.
- [Dental hygienist] Not enough hygienists in the labor force for the demand from dental offices and dental patients.
- [Dental hygienist] Insufficient training pipeline in WA state. excessive requirements for out of state practitioners to obtain dental hygiene license in WA compared to other states.
- [Dental hygienist] Qualified, experienced candidates are way too expensive or cannot find quality, experienced candidates.
- [Dental hygienist] Insufficient workforce. potential employees are aware of shortage of providers. I had a hygienist who was very well treated and paid in my office move to another office across town to shorten his commute.
- [Dentist] Severe burn out from staffing shortages and patient demand.
- [Dentist] Limited candidate pool, compensation challenges, community fit for employees and families.

Dentist Offices/Dental Clinics (Spring 2024)

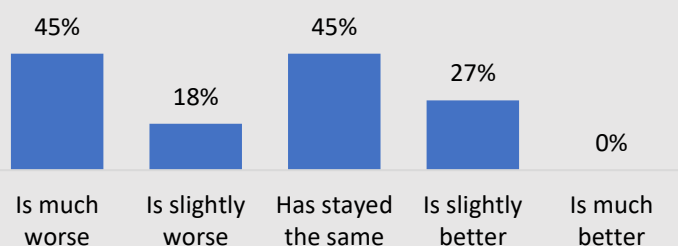
Highlights of current workforce needs reported to the state’s Health Workforce Sentinel Network by Washington’s dentist offices/dental clinics during April/May 2024 (continued).

Changes in priorities regarding orientation/onboarding for new employees and training for existing/incumbent workers reported by dentist offices/dental clinics

- *[Dental assistant] A lot more training needed post graduation.*
- *[Dental assistant and dental hygienist] Mandated medical emergencies training and BP taken at every appointment.*
- *[Dental hygienist] [We are] trying to enhance structure and consistency to support retention efforts. Trying to be flexible and onboard quickly.*
- *[Dental hygienist] We've had to ask our hygienists to be more efficient with their time... in order to attempt to get the hygienists' production to offset the large increases in their hourly wages due to inflation...*

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples

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



Comment examples

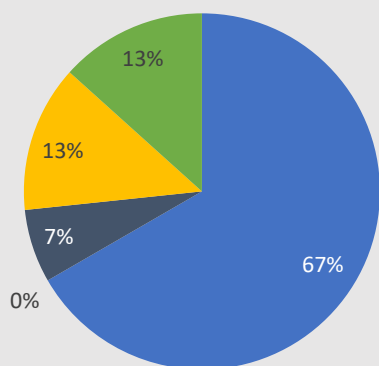
- *[Is much worse] There just are not the trained staff available.*
- *[Is slightly worse] Fewer applicants.*
- *[Has stayed the same] In the past 6 months the hiring situation seems to have stabilized. Our main problem now is that team member wages have drastically increased while patient revenue has remained stagnant. It's resulted in a significant decrease in profit margin for the business and we are faced with possibly reducing the team size in effort to control overhead.*
- *[Is slightly better] New experienced dental office/clinic manager.*

Describe any new retention strategies your organization has implemented in the past year and their impact on staff retention.

- *We strive to have a great culture in our workplace and have for several years now. It's often quoted by team members as to why they stay with our practice so long. Our wages are competitive - we are not paying top dollar for skilled team members.*
- *Improved training for success, career pathway building upon growing careers.*
- *I have been making presentations to the high schools in the local counties on dental workforce opportunities and career laddering opportunities within the dental field. I speak to the senior classes.*
- *Are still in progress and include compensation adjustments and work life balance adjustments.*
- *Continuing education and trainings, increased wages.*

How would you describe your facility's use of contract/travel workers now compared with your use a year ago?

- We did not use contract/travel workers a year ago and still do not now
- We did use contract/travel workers a year ago but do not now
- We've decreased the number of contract/travel workers
- We use about the same number of contract/travel workers
- We've increased the number of contract/travel workers



Has your facility adopted, or is it considering adopting, forms of artificial intelligence (AI) to help improve administrative workflows?

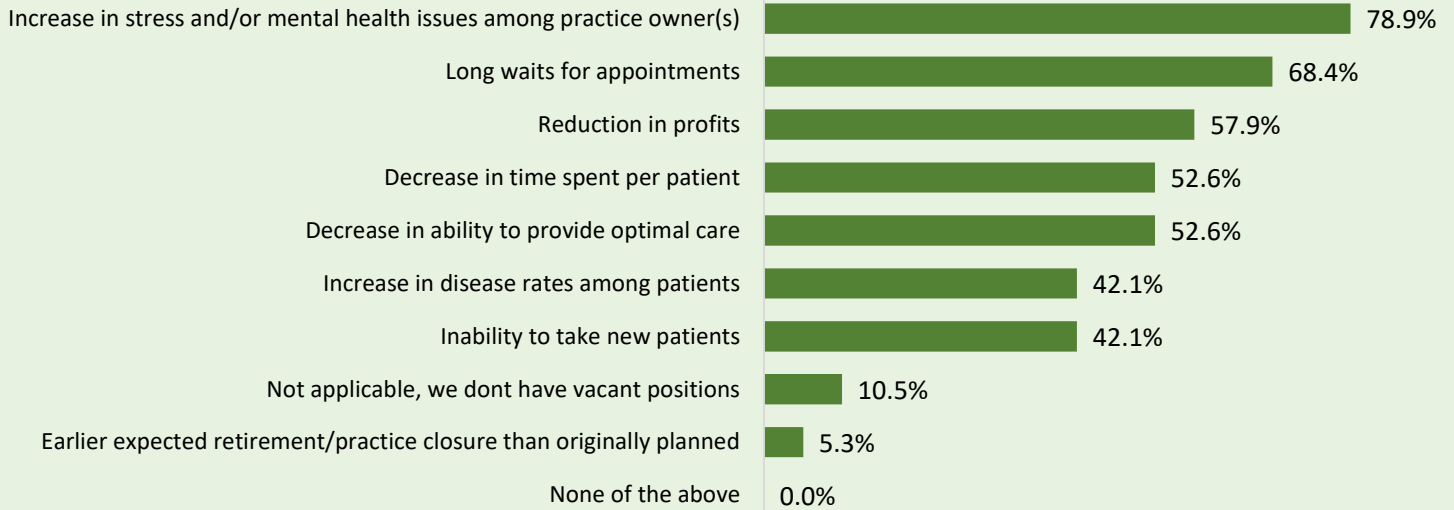
33% of respondents indicated they adopted AI to help improve administrative workflows. Below are examples of those that responded "yes:"

- AI software submitting insurance claims and posting insurance payments via machine readable EOBs. AI software is also being used to screen dental x-rays to help detect pathology. AI software is being used to design night guards.
- We have not developed any AI platforms, and don't know if there are any specific software, systems or SOPs for the dental clinic. But we'd like to develop a Tele-Dentistry platform to be used for all the medical clinics and (2) hospitals for emergent dental care during clinic, after hours and weekends.

Dentist Offices/Dental Clinics (Spring 2024)

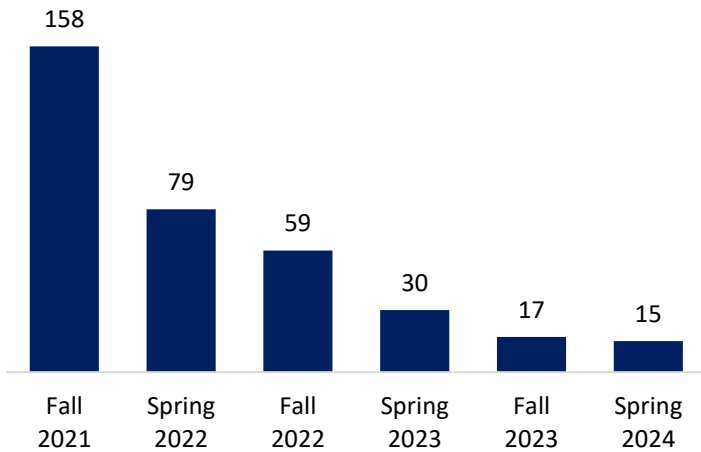
Vacancies and Effects on Patient Care and Dental Practices

If your dental clinical practice currently has vacancies for dental hygienists, dental assistants, and/or EFDAs, in what ways, if any, is it affecting patient care and/or your practice and dental team?*

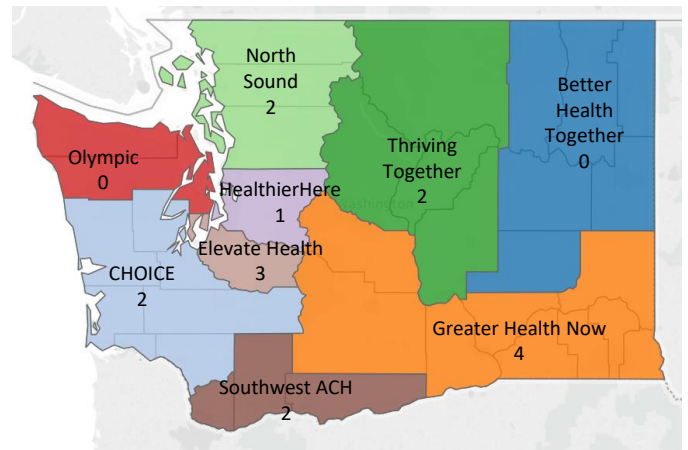


*More than one response could be selected

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



Number of Dentist Offices/Dental Clinics by Accountable Community of Health (ACH) (Spring 2024)



Note: Each facility may serve clients/patients in more than one county, which is why map totals may exceed total unique responses.

About the Washington Health Workforce Sentinel Network

The Sentinel Network links the healthcare sector with policymakers, workforce planners and educators to identify and respond to changing demand for healthcare workers. The Sentinel Network is an initiative of Washington’s Health Workforce Council, conducted collaboratively by Washington’s Workforce Board and the University of Washington 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 organization’s workforce needs to inform policy and planning responses.
- 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.

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