



Workforce Growth Initiatives

AUGUST 2026

Over the past several years, the market need for oral health preventive and therapeutic services has outpaced the growth of the dental hygiene profession. ADHA has initiated and is supporting numerous workforce growth programs to help meet the growing need. This report details the ongoing educational opportunities, collaborative meetings, recruitment initiatives, and research relevant to this important issue for the dental hygiene profession.

Educational Opportunities

ADHA supports career advancement for dental hygienists in clinical practice offering numerous courses to address key topics to enhance skills as well as to assist in managing workplace issues. The following relevant courses are available on ADHA's [CE Smart Platform](#).

Webinars: Live and On-Demand

- A Primer on Legal and Risk Management Concepts
- AAP Classifications: Simplifying for Easy Integration
- AAP: Importance of Soft Tissue Phenotype for Health
- Abuse, Neglect and Trafficking: Professional Responsibility
- ADHA24 Mental Health and Self-Care Workshop Bundle
- ADHA25 Emerging Technologies Workshop Bundle
- ADHA25 Clinical Skills for the Future Workshop Bundle
- Analyzing and Combatting Bias in Dental Hygiene Care
- Antibiotic Stewardship Practices in Dentistry
- Artificial Intelligence and Its Influence on Dental Hygiene
- Autonomy in Action: Voices from the Frontlines
- Biologic Mediators for Hard and Soft Tissue Regeneration
- Bloodborne Pathogen Training
- Breaking Barriers: Expanding Hygiene Beyond Traditional Dentistry
- Can Artificial Intelligence Improve Oral Health Care Delivery?
- Cannabinoids and What the Practicing Hygienists Needs to...
- Certificate in Marketing & Finance for Career Growth
- Choosing the Best Homecare Tool for Cleaning Between Teeth
- Compact Comparisons: Which is Best for Hygienists
- Cone Beam Computed Tomography: What's Your Field of View?
- Conflict: Stop the Blame Game and Bust through to Solutions!
- Critical Connections: Perio Medicine & Systemic Disease
- Cultural Awareness and Belonging in Dental Hygiene
- Delivering Effective Preventive Care Education Chairside
- Demystifying Dental Hygienists' Autonomy
- Dental AI: Are Hygienists Ready? Results of the 2024 Survey
- Dental Hygienist's Role in Minimally Invasive Dentistry
- Dental Implants – Parts, Pieces, Chemistry, & Compatibility
- Driving Change to be Everyday Extraordinary
- Effects of Entry-Tier Oscillating-Rotating Toothbrush
- Effects of Ultrasonic Use on Hearing Loss in Hygienists
- Elevating Care: New Standards in Clinical Dental Hygiene
- Empowering Dental Hygienists to Advocate for your Profession
- Empowering Independence: A Journey to Professional Autonomy
- Empowering the Profession Through Dental Hygiene Education
- Ethics in Dental Hygiene: Applying the ADHA Code in Practice
- Finance for Entrepreneurial Endeavors
- From Provider to Change-Maker: The Autonomy Evolution
- Gatekeeper Suicide Prevention Training
- Get Found, Get Selected, Stay Connected
- Handedness, MSDs, and Quality of Life in Dental Hygienists
- How Money Works: Unlocking the Secrets to Financial Freedom
- Hygiene in the Digital Age: Navigating new Tech & AI
- Hygiene Retention in the Dental Practice
- Hygienists Eliminate Oral Diseases: A Vision for the Future
- Identification and Management of Your Patients with Dry Mouth
- If There's Smoke, There's Fire! Oral Health Concerns & EVALI
- Implementation of the 2017 Classifications by Clinical DHs
- Implicit Bias and Cultural Competency in Dentistry
- Inclusive Dental: Build a Team & Practice for Neurodiversity
- Infection Control Protocols: Protecting Your Patients and Yourself!
- Infection Control Risks: Waterlines & Instrument Processing

- Lead Like a Lion: Build Relationships & Advance Your Career
- Leadership Summit: Advanced Concepts in Leadership Training
- Let's Fight Gingivitis NOW...The Future is in YOUR Hands
- Longitudinal Impact: Motivational Interviewing on Perio
- Medical-Dental Integration: Barriers to Implementing SDF
- Mental Health & Wellness for Dental Hygienists
- Mental Health: A Personal Journey and Call to Action
- Motivational Interviewing for Nutritional Counseling
- Mouthrinse: The Missing Piece of the Preventive Care Puzzle?
- Moving Dentistry Forward with Photobiomodulation
- Nitrous Oxide–Oxygen Minimal Sedation: Comprehensive Review
- Oral Complications of Oncologic Treatments: Hygienist's Role
- Partnering to Prevent Opioid Misuse: Critical Updates
- Precision Oral Cancer Screening: Implementing 2026 Standards
- Prevalence of Workplace Cyberbullying among Hygienists
- Oral Complications of Oncologic Treatments: Hygienist's Role
- Resilience & Emotional Labor in Dental Hygienist Well-Being
- Revolutionize Caries Care Through Hygienist-Driven Protocols
- Revolutionizing Dentistry with Artificial Intelligence
- Revolutionizing Oral Self-Care: The iTOP Approach
- Risks in Patient Care for Hygienists: Tips to Avoid Lawsuits
- Salivary Diagnostics: Dreamin' of Early Detection
- Scaling to New Heights: The Future of Periodontology
- Self-Compassion and Professional Quality of Life in Hygienists
- The ABCs of HbA1c: A review of In-Office Diabetes Testing
- The Dental Hygienist & Oral Cancer Diagnosis: What's My Role
- The Power of Fluoride: From Chemistry to Chairside Care?
- ThinkBelieveDreamDo 2.0: Autonomy
- Use of the HPV Brief Motivational Interviewing Training
- Validity, Reliability & Oral Health Clinical Licensure Exams
- Why Emotional Intelligence is Key to Your Success
- Working Together to Advance the Future of Oral Healthcare



Collaborative Meetings & Webinars

ADHA continues to meet with various dental organizations to discuss solutions to workforce shortage issues including:

- [American Dental Association](#)
- [Academy for General Dentistry](#)
- [American Dental Education Association](#)
- [Dental Assisting National Board](#)

Chairside Recruitment Program Hygienist Inspired

The Hygienist Inspired Chairside Recruitment Program is designed to directly address workforce growth, increase diversity in the profession, and improve access to care to underserved communities. This program has launched in 9 pilot states: Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin, where ambassadors lead state-wide recruiting efforts, conducting chairside recruitment in their operatories and participating in community events to raise awareness about careers in dental hygiene. Hygienist Inspired Allies support the mission of the program by promoting dental hygiene careers, advocating for the profession's impact on oral health, and mentoring future hygienists.

ADHA is grateful to the Delta Dental Foundation of Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana for their support of this program.

ADHA is pleased to announce we have earned first place in the Large Association category of the International Federation of Dental Hygienists (IFDH) Impact Awards for its Hygienist Inspired Ambassador Program.

ADHA plans to expand ambassador representation in high-need regions, deepen partnerships with educators and workforce organizations and continue investing in digital tools that turn awareness into mentorship and enrollment. The Delta Dental Foundation's investment has made this national reach possible.

Learn more at adha.org/hygienistinspired.



Relevant Research

Since the pandemic, ADHA has been tracking research related to workforce shortages in dental hygiene practice and education. The following reports highlight information gleaned from key studies. The reports demonstrate consistency in findings and potential solutions.

Workplace Bullying and Turnover Intention Among Dental Hygienists: Mediation roles of stress and social support.

This study examined the prevalence of workplace bullying among dental hygienists. A cross-sectional study of dental hygienists providing direct patient care was conducted using a composite of validated questionnaires. Findings showed that 56% of respondents reported experiencing workplace bullying. Further, the stress associated with workplace bullying increased the intention to leave a job. The authors concluded that management staff in dental settings must work to prevent and manage workplace bullying to reduce stress and retain dental hygienists.

Source: Wedding K, Boyd LD, Petit, JN, & Vineyard, J. Workplace bullying and turnover intention among dental hygienists: Mediation roles of stress and social support. J Dent Hyg. 99(50):18-28.

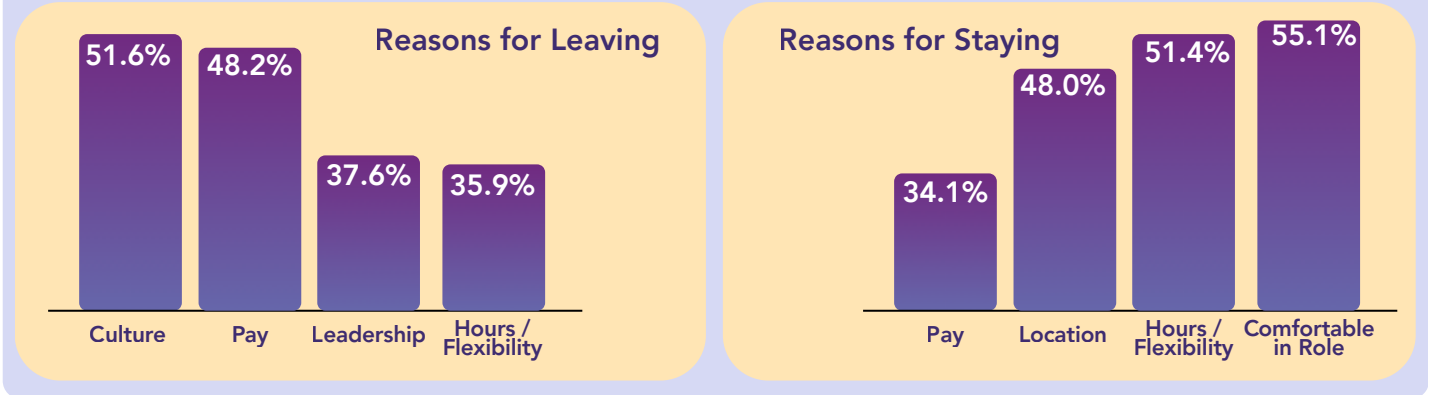
Third Annual State of Work Report

The survey provides comprehensive insights into the demographics, professional experiences, challenges, compensation, and development preferences of dental professionals across the United States in 2026.

Retention Drivers: The Push and Pull Factors

Culture Drives Exit; Comfort Drives Retention

Flexibility acts as a double-edged sword; Leadership’s negative impact is double its positive influence.





Compensation

In the last 24 months, 54% of dental hygienists surveyed indicated they had not received a raise.

70.3% of dental hygienists do not currently receive a bonus of any kind.

Career Length & Intent

On average, dental hygienists have been in the industry for 11-20 years.

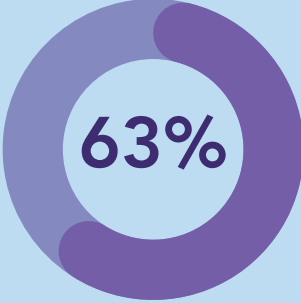
77%: Have never left the field
Anticipating working more than 10 years



Autonomy Impact

Survey results show that dental hygienists assigned a score of 5 on the 0–10 Patient Care Decision Autonomy scale, suggesting a moderate sense of independence in patient care decisions.

Dental hygienists rated expanded autonomy for underserved care at 5 on a 0–5 scale, indicating strong agreement that increased autonomy would improve access to care in underserved populations.



Survey results indicate that almost 63% of dental hygienists believe that enhanced autonomy in clinical decision-making would improve their likelihood of staying in the profession.

Barriers to Care

Scope of practice and supervision requirements were identified as barriers to care.

Barrier	Percentage
Scope of Practice	54.8%
Supervision Requirements	44.5%
Payer Restrictions	40.2%

Stress and Burnout Mitigation

Survey results indicated the following additional resources would meaningfully reduce stress and burnout:

- 61% citing a more flexible schedule
- 60% identifying stronger team support
- 52.2% noting the need for more time per patient.

Source: GoTu. (2026). Registered dental hygienist state of work report 2026. Retrieved from <https://adha-sow.gotu.com/>.

Second Annual State of Work Report

The dental hygiene workforce is shifting, with a stronger focus on financial stability, career flexibility, and managing burnout. Many registered dental hygienists are turning to temporary work as a strategic option while concerns about compensation and work-life balance continue to be top priorities. ADHA is grateful to GoTu for sharing their findings related to state of work for dental hygienists in 2025.

Workforce Demographics & Career Longevity

The registered dental hygienist workforce consists of experienced professionals, with 23% having 20+ years of experience and 79% planning to remain in the field for at least another decade.

Financial Well-Being & Compensation

Despite most registered dental hygienists earning \$41-\$60 per hour, 44% have not received a raise in two years, and 66% do not receive bonuses, contributing to widespread financial dissatisfaction.

Workplace Satisfaction & Burnout Trends

Burnout and career mobility are key concerns for registered dental hygienists, with many seeking higher pay and better benefits, while others turn to temporary work for flexibility and stability.

The Rise of Flexibility: Temporary & Non-Traditional Work

Registered dental hygienists are increasingly turning to temporary work for better pay and flexibility, with 28% identifying as a part-time or full-time temporary registered dental hygienist.



Second Annual State of Work 2025

Future of the Registered Dental Hygienist Profession

Registered dental hygienists are advocating for higher wages, better benefits, and improved workplace culture to enhance career longevity and job satisfaction.

The top 3 reasons registered dental hygienists seek job changes reflect a desire for greater control over their careers, income, and work environment.

1

Higher pay rates

2

Better benefits

3

More Flexibility in scheduling

RDH WORKFORCE BY EXPERIENCE

20+ years	
11-20 years	
6-10 years	
3-5 years	

79% of RDHs anticipate staying in the field for more than 10 years.

Source: GoTu. (2025). Registered dental hygienist state of work report 2025. Retrieved from <https://p.gotu.com/rdh-state-of-work.2025>

Dental Hygiene Program Directors Survey

Program directors across the US were surveyed to examine barriers to increasing class size and diversifying student recruitment. ADHA appreciates this research supported by the Michigan Health Council. Based on the [Dental Hygiene Program Survey Report](#).

Barriers to expanding class size include limited clinic space, hiring additional faculty, and faculty salaries are not on par with non-academic salaries.

Recommendations for Faculty

Provide opportunities for program directors to seek graduate degrees and to work in their administrative capacity as long as they are enrolled in a graduate program; hire more part-time faculty to increase teaching especially on nights and weekends; offer childcare to working faculty; and develop career ladders that could offer advancements beyond clinic work.

Resources to improve recruitment efforts for underrepresented and disadvantaged students include financial assistance and childcare.

Recommendations for Students

CODA update program requirements to expand clinical facilities available for instruction; provide online learning and local practice; offer flexible or part-time hours for instruction including nights, weekends, and part-time to help with childcare and work responsibilities; provide onsite childcare as an affordable option to help more students pursue their career.

Source: Michigan Health Council. (2025). Dental Hygiene Program Survey 2025: Results & Analysis. https://www.mhc.org/files/ugd/24abcc_6a787803e307463fb24c3ce044760f95.pdf

2023-24 CODA Dental Hygiene Report

Each year, the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) provides data reports related to dental hygiene education. This 2023-2024 CODA Dental Hygiene Report provides the most recent data related to dental hygiene education programs, including applications to, enrollment in, and graduates of dental hygiene programs.

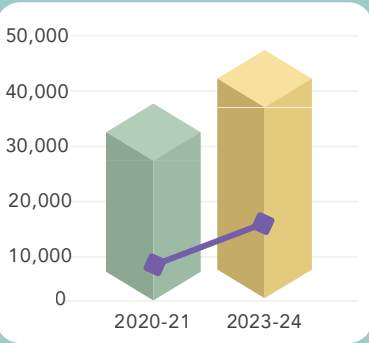


The number of dental hygiene education programs has increased to 346.

First year enrollment in dental hygiene programs has been increasing.

2023-24	8,967
2020-21	7,745
2013-14	8,287

The enrollment in 2023-2024 is up from 2020-2021 and surpassed the 2013-2014 rate.



Applications to dental hygiene programs increased from 34,826 in 2020-21 to 43,390 in 2023-24.

Student acceptance increased from 9,371 in 2020-21 to 10,708 in 2023-24.

Total enrollment has increased to 17,057 in 2023-2024.

Enrollment was 16,079 in 2020-21 and has surpassed rate of 16,162 in 2013-14.



Graduates of dental hygiene programs rose to 7,132 in 2023-24. There were 7,002 graduates in 2020-21.

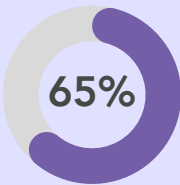
Source: Commission on Dental Accreditation. (2024). 2023-2024 Dental Hygiene Report. American Dental Association. <https://codada.org/find-a-program>

Dental Workforce Shortages Research – 2022

The American Dental Association Health Policy Institute, in partnership with the American Dental Hygienists' Association, American Dental Assistant Association, and the Dental Assisting National Board, conducted a study to assess workforce shortage issues. This national study provides information about job satisfaction, factors associated with retention and attrition, workforce longevity, and benefits.

Based on [Dental Workforce Shortages: Data to Navigate Today's Labor Market](#), here's what the research tells us.

WORKFORCE LONGEVITY



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

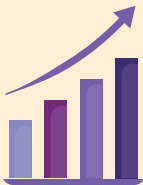
JOB SATISFACTION



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

WAGE INCREASES

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.



FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH RETENTION AND ATTRITION

RETENTION FACTORS

Work-life balance, positive workplace culture, and ability to help patients.

ATTRITION FACTORS

Negative workplace culture, insufficient pay, lack of growth opportunities, inadequate benefits, and feeling overworked.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION BENEFITS

The majority of dental assistants and dental hygienists indicated that they receive benefits, especially those where funds are rare overall. These benefits matter for recruitment and retention.

▶ Dental Benefits	▶ Health Insurance
▶ Paid Holidays	▶ Paid Sick Time
▶ Paid Vacation	▶ Paid Leave
▶ Retirement Savings	▶ Continuing Education

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute. (2022). Dental workforce shortages: Data to navigate today's labor market. In collaboration with American Dental Assistants Association, American Dental Hygienists' Association, Dental Assisting National Board, and IgniteDA. https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/adaorganization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/research/hpi/dental_workforce_shortages_labor_market.pdf