

About the Study

The Iowa Dental Association (IDA) conducted this survey to learn more about the workforce issues Iowa dentists are facing and what they are doing in their practices to address them. The IDA approached the ADA Health Policy Institute for assistance building the survey instrument and analyzing the results.

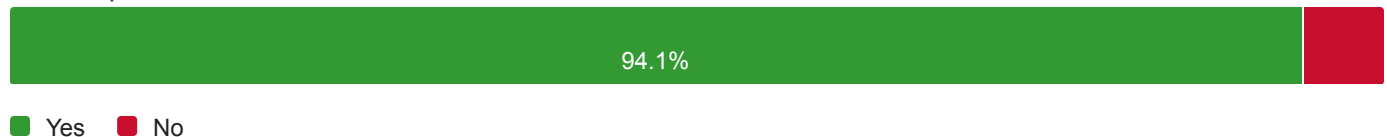
The survey link was sent by IDA staff via email to 65 dentists on the IDA Board of Trustees, Legislative Committee, and PAC Board on Friday, July 17, 2026. A pre-notice about the survey was included in an IDA email newsletter sent July 21. Invitations were emailed directly to 1,626 IDA member dentists on July 23. Reminders were sent on Monday, August 3 and Thursday, August 6. A reminder was also noted in a newsletter sent to the IDA membership on Tuesday, August 4.

Data collection for the survey closed on Sunday, August 9. In total, 201 dentists currently practicing in Iowa completed the survey, for a response rate of 12.4% and a margin of error of +/-6.5% at the 95% confidence level. This report summarizes the results (excluding one duplicate response).

This report was prepared in August 2026 by the ADA Health Policy Institute on behalf of the Iowa Dental Association.

Are you currently treating adult or child patients in a dental practice or clinic?

221 Responses



Do you practice in Iowa?

208 Responses



What type of dentistry do you most often practice?

200 Responses

Field	Choice Count
General Dentistry	84% 167
Pediatric Dentistry	7% 14
Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics	5% 9
Periodontics	2% 4
Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery	2% 3
Endodontics	1% 2
Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology	1% 1
Prosthodontics	0% 0
Orofacial Pain	0% 0
Oral Medicine	0% 0
Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology	0% 0
Dental Public Health	0% 0
Dental Anesthesia	0% 0
Other	0% 0
Total	200

Geographical setting of practice (What is the zip code where you practice?)

200 Responses

Field	Choice Count
Urban	54% 108
Suburban	11% 21
Rural	34% 68
Unknown	2% 3
Total	200

Which of the following best describes your current primary occupation?

200 Responses

Field	Choice Count
Dentist in private practice (e.g., solo, small group, large group, DSO, corporate)	92% 183
Dentist in public health setting (e.g., FQHC, health center, hospital, dental school clinic)	9% 17
Total	200

[Dentist in private practice] Which one of the following best describes you in the primary practice where you work?

183 Responses

Field	Choice Count
Owner dentist (i.e., sole owner, partner, or shareholder)	84% 153
Employee or associate dentist (nonowner)	14% 25
Independent contractor	2% 3
Other, please specify	1% 2
Total	183

Other, please specify

Temp

temporary help

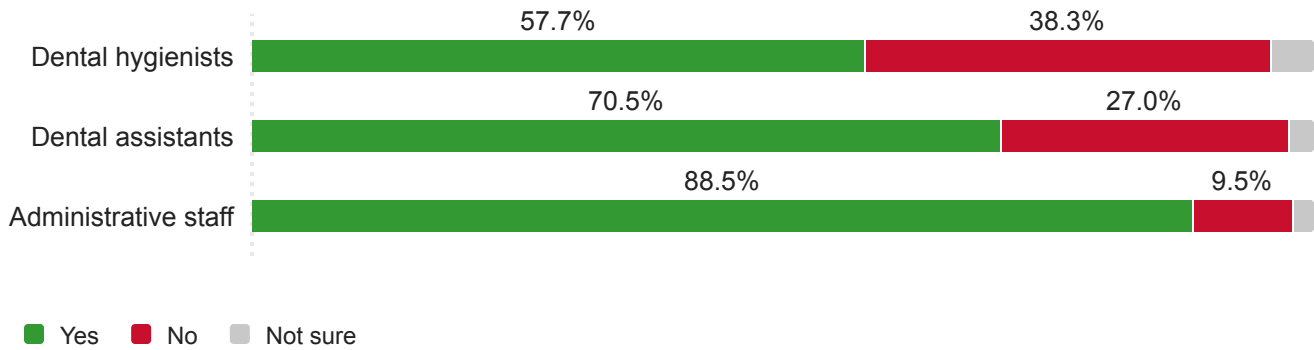
Are you or another dentist in your practice a Medicaid participating provider serving patients covered by traditional Medicaid and/or Hawki?

200 Responses



Does your practice currently have an adequate number of non-dentist staff in the following categories?

200 Responses



How many *open positions* does your practice have right now in each of the following?

Average number of open positions (includes values of 0)

Open positions (FTE)	Mean	Responses
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Dental hygienists	0.5	200
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Open positions (FTE)	Mean	Responses
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Dental assistants	0.6	200
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Open positions (FTE)	Mean	Responses
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Administrative staff	0.2	200
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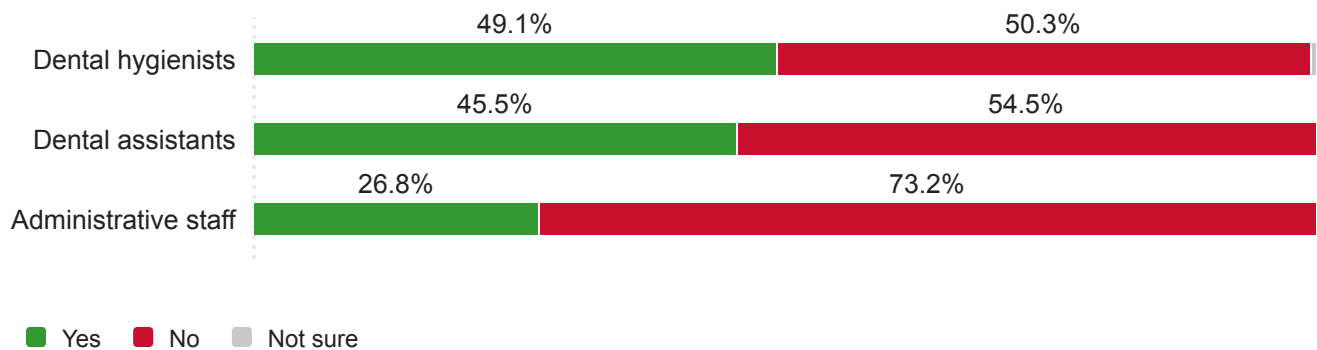
Does your practice currently utilize unregistered dental assistants?

195 Responses



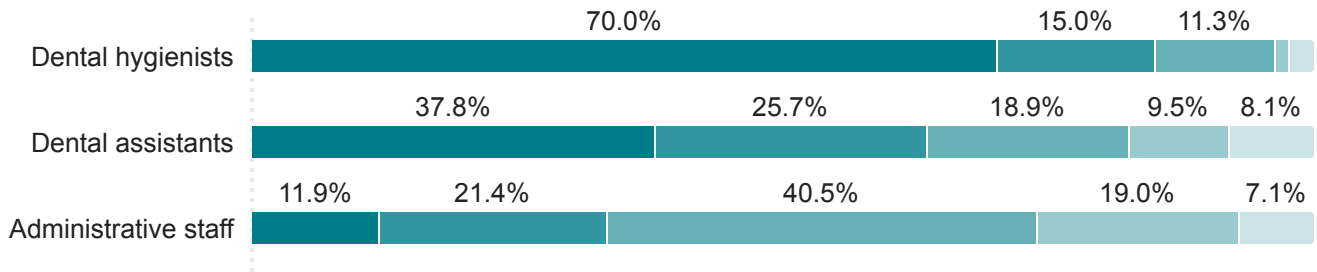
[Owner dentist] Currently, or at any time during the last 3 months, have you recruited for any of the following positions?

166 Responses



[If recruited] How challenging has it been to recruit the position(s) below over the last 3 months?

111 Responses



■ Extremely challenging
 ■ Very challenging
 ■ Moderately challenging
 ■ Slightly challenging
 ■ Not at all challenging

Field	Extremely challenging	Very challenging	Moderately challenging	Slightly challenging	Not at all challenging
Dental hygienists	70.0%	15.0%	11.3%	1.3%	2.5%
Dental assistants	37.8%	25.7%	18.9%	9.5%	8.1%
Administrative staff	11.9%	21.4%	40.5%	19.0%	7.1%

[If very or extremely challenging to recruit dental hygienists] What specifically has been challenging about recruiting dental hygienists?

Summary

67 Responses

Field	Percentage of Responses
NOT ENOUGH HYGIENISTS IN THE APPLICANT POOL	46.3%
CANNOT MEET WAGE/SALARY DEMANDS	32.8%
NO INTEREST IN RURAL/SMALL TOWN PRACTICE	19.4%
NOT RECEIVING APPLICATIONS	19.4%
MISMATCH IN SCHEDULE	6.0%
CANNOT OFFER DESIRED BENEFITS	4.5%
NO SHOW/LATE CANCEL INTERVIEWS	1.5%
MISCELLANEOUS	4.5%

NOTE: See data set for verbatims.

[If very or extremely challenging to recruit dental assistants] What specifically has been challenging about recruiting dental assistants?

Summary

41 Responses

Field	Percentage of Responses
APPLICANTS LACK EXPERIENCE/QUALIFICATIONS	34.1%
NOT ENOUGH IN THE APPLICANT POOL	24.4%
NOT RECEIVING APPLICATIONS	19.5%
CANNOT MEET WAGE DEMANDS	9.8%
NOT INTERESTED IN RURAL/SMALL TOWN PRACTICE	9.8%
MANY DO NOT STAY LONG-TERM / PLANS TO BECOME HYGIENIST	7.3%
CANNOT OFFER DESIRED BENEFITS	2.4%
MISMATCH IN SCHEDULE	2.4%
MISCELLANEOUS	4.9%

NOTE: See data set for verbatims.

[If very or extremely challenging to recruit administrative staff] What specifically has been challenging about recruiting administrative staff?

Verbatims

13 Responses

Applicants typically lack dental backgrounds. Most resumes we see are full of typos.

Finding qualified, able people willing to work. So many people want to work from home or only want to work 20-25 hours a week and get paid full time wages.

Meeting salary needs, flexibility, multitasking role,

No one wants to work in a small town.

Plenty of applicants, but lack of basic knowledge means many do not last long.

Poor applicants with no experience or customer service experience

Retention has been an issue. As we train team members their skills increase and are more valuable to other healthcare-adjacent marketplaces. Stagnant reimbursement rates from dental carriers relative to inflation is an economic fact. I've also had to mentally adjust (and lower) expectations of how we go about customer service and follow through with claims processes.

Same as above, not enough individuals with experience

The lack of computer skills to learn the task, the lack of skills required to interact with people.

They have no dental experience and we don't have time to train them from scratch.

no community college courses that help train staff

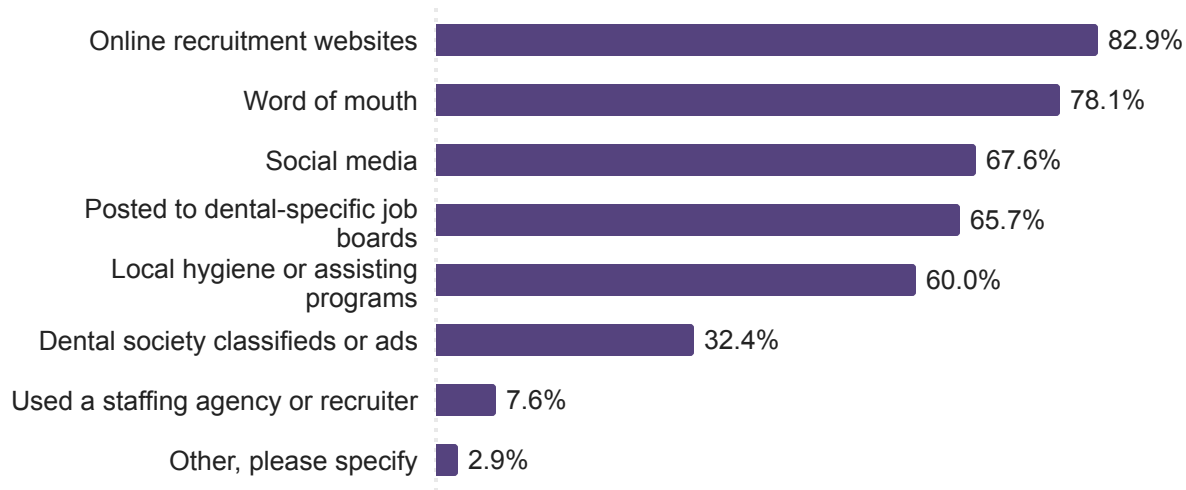
small town, salary, benefits

there is little dental specific training programs available. many admin candidates have not worked in dental and need a lot of training.

[If recruited dental hygienists or assistants] What tools have you used to recruit dental hygienists and/or dental assistants? (Select all that apply.)

% Yes

105 Responses



Other, please specify:

Internal referral/rewards program

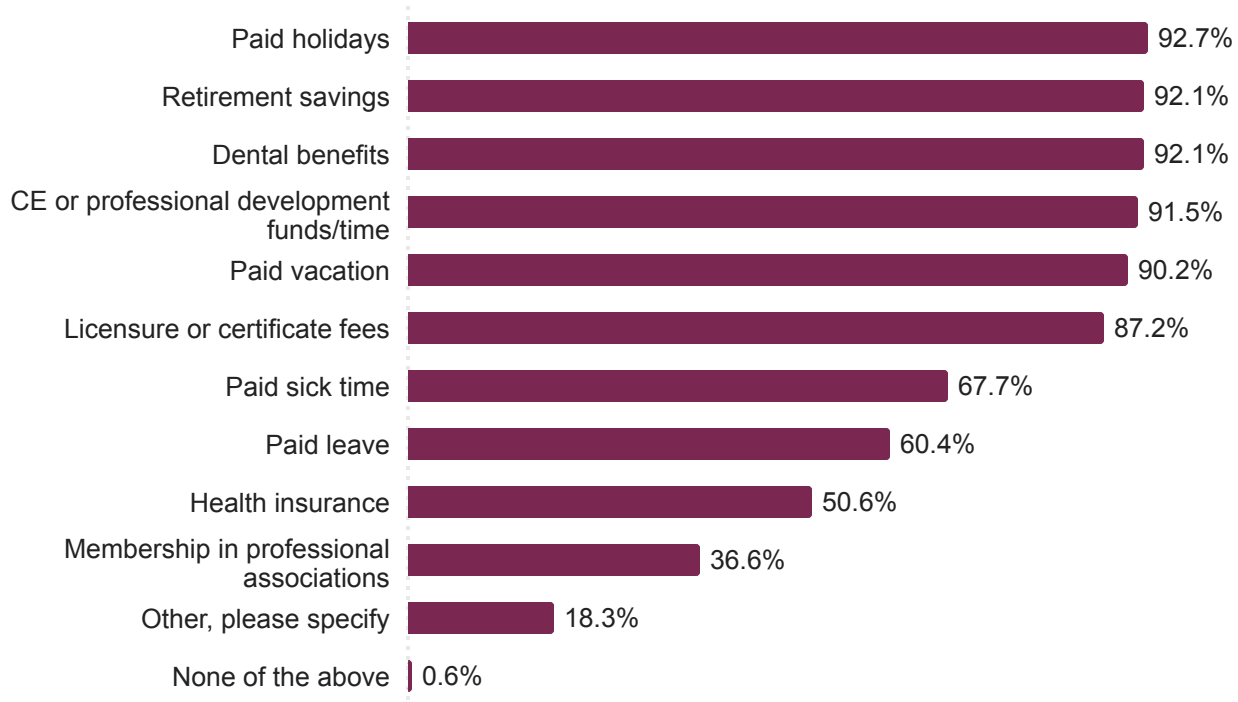
Friends of current employees, basically taking them from other dentists for better pay/environment

Internal within our FQHC

[Owner dentist] Which of the following benefits do you offer to your employees? (Select all that apply.)

% Yes

164 Responses

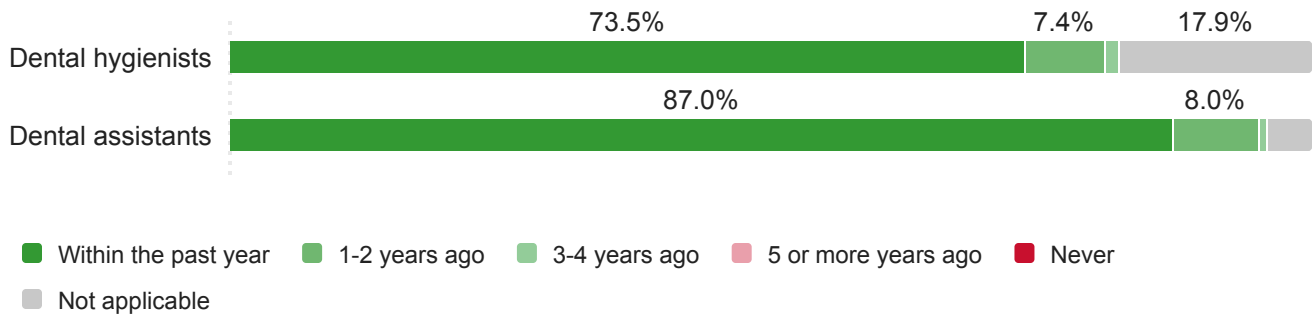


30 Responses

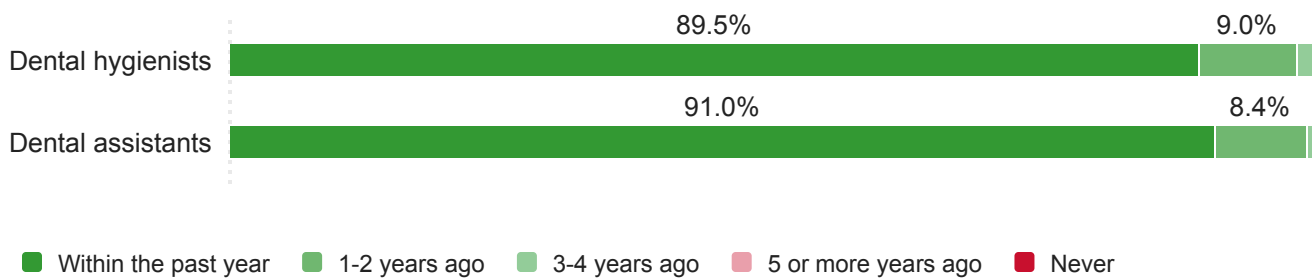
Other, please specify:	Percentage of Choices
UNIFORM ALLOWANCE	32.4%
HEALTH REIMBURSEMENT ARRANGEMENT/ACCOUNT	14.7%
FSA/HSA	14.7%
BONUSES OFFERED	11.8%
DISABILITY	5.9%
GYM MEMBERSHIP	5.9%
DEPENDENT CARE ASSISTANCE PLAN	2.9%
FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE	2.9%
TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT	2.9%
MISCELLANEOUS	5.9%

[Owner dentist] When did you last give dental hygienists and dental assistants on your staff a wage increase?

Including "Not applicable"



Excluding "Not applicable"



[Increased wage within past year, 1-2, 3-4, 5 or more years ago] How much was the wage increase, on average?

