

Washington's Rural Oral Health Workforce

Health Workforce Council Meeting
August 28, 2025

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WASHINGTON
ORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE



centerforhealth
workforce**studies**
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

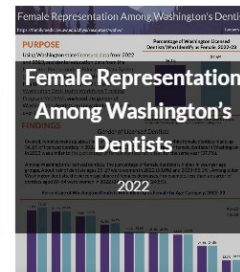
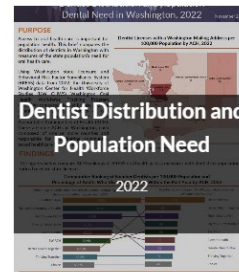
About WOHW



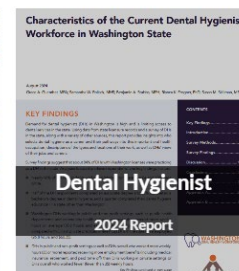
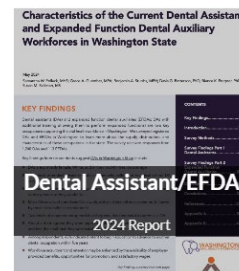
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Data Briefs



Survey Findings



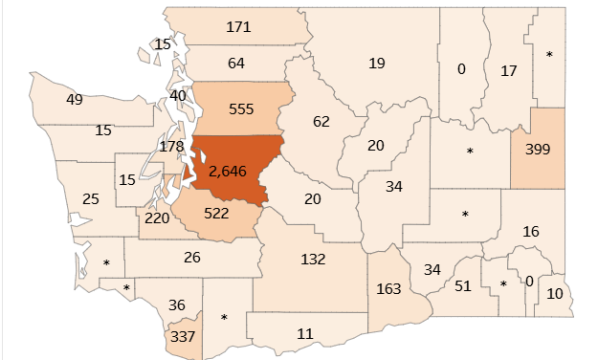
Distribution of Washington Dentists based on credential mailing address (2024)

Select occupation:
 Select year:
 Select geography:
 Select measure:

Dentist credentials with a Washington mailing address: 5,920

Geographic region ordered by measure
(Click to highlight the map)

King County
 Snohomish County
 Pierce County
 Spokane County
 Clark County
 Thurston County
 Kitsap County
 Whatcom County
 Benton County
 Yakima County
 Skagit County
 Chelan County
 Walla Walla County
 Clallam County
 Island County
 Cowlitz County
 Franklin County
 Grant County
 Lewis County
 Grays Harbor County
 Douglas County
 Kittitas County
 Okanogan County
 Stevens County
 Whitman County
 Jefferson County



* Measures for locations with 1 - 9 dental professionals are not shown to protect confidentiality

Check out our rural brief!



<https://familymedicine.uw.edu/chws/resources/wohw/>

Background

Average percentage of adults in Washington who visited a dentist in the past year, 2022



Average percentage of adults in Washington with dental insurance, 2022



Source: Washington State Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2022.

Oral Health Workforce Demand Statewide

Dentist Offices/Clinics

Top occupations with exceptionally long vacancies							
Rank	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Fall 2023	Spring 2024	Spring 2025
1	Dental assistant	Dental hygienist	Dental hygienist	Dental hygienist	Dental assistant	Dental hygienist	Dental hygienist
2	Dental hygienist	Dental assistant	Dental assistant	Dental assistant	Dental hygienist	Dental assistant	Dental assistant
3	Dentist	Office personnel	Office personnel	Office personnel	Dentist	Dentist	Office personnel
4	Office personnel	Dentist	Dentist	Dentist	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Office personnel	Dentist

← Most cited

Severe hygiene shortage due to lack of Dental Hygiene School and very short average career for hygienists (7 years). Many hygienists work part time with reduced hours. Solutions include opening more hygiene schools, allowing expanded scope for current dental assistants [...]

Source: https://wa.sentinelnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/08/WASentinelNetwork_DentalOfficesClinics_Brief_2025Spring.pdf

Recruitment and Retention Strategies Statewide

In the past year, what strategies has your dental office/organization used to recruit and retain your workforce and how effective have these strategies been in achieving your recruitment and retention goals?

Strategy	Percent of respondents
Changes to wages	96.8%
Changes to schedules or work hours	60.3%
Changes to benefits	58.7%
Updating dental equipment/tools	46.0%
Modification of workflow and/or staffing configuration	39.7%
Improvements to workplace ergonomics to minimize repetitive stress injuries	25.4%
Other strategies	7.9%

They have been effective, but you can't keep raising salaries to keep people. There is a cost of doing business and the reimbursement rate is stagnant.

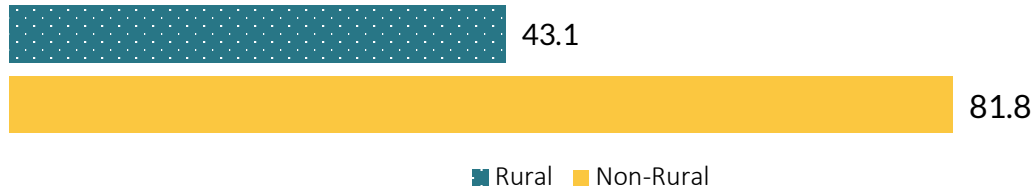
Good at retention of existing [employees], still not effective in obtaining new employees.

Source: https://wa.sentinelnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/08/WASentinelNetwork_DentalOfficesClinics_Brief_2025Spring.pdf

More findings: <https://wa.sentinelnetwork.org/>

Oral Health Workforce Distribution

Number of licensed dentists in Washington per 100k population, 2024



- The number of dentists per 100,000 population was almost 2 times more, or about 40 dentists, in urban counties compared to rural counties.
- Dental hygienists and dental assistants are more evenly spread between rural and urban counties with a difference of about 5 dental hygienists and 11 dental assistants per 100,000 population.

Number of licensed dental hygienists in Washington per 100k population, 2024



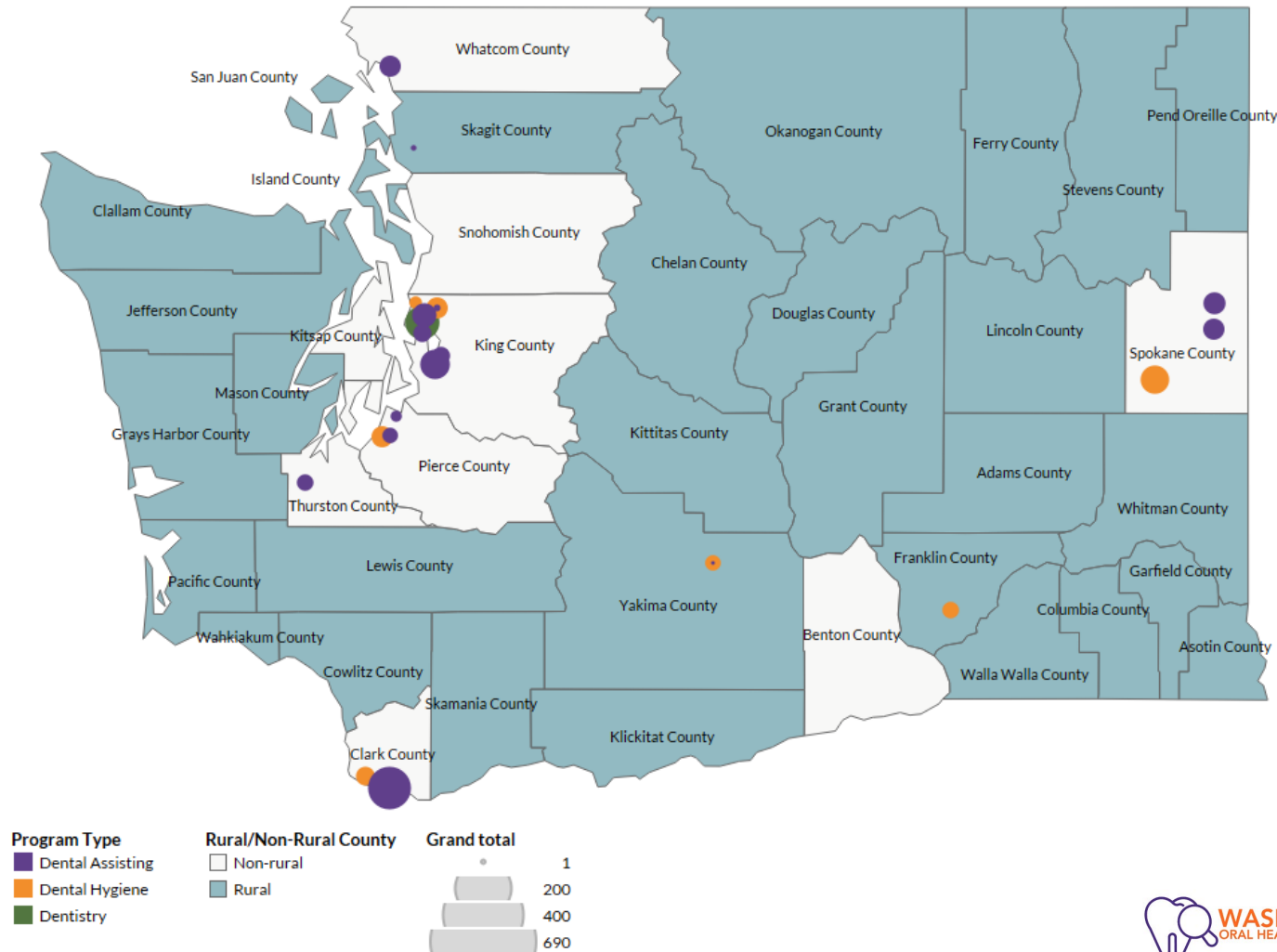
Number of registered dental assistants in Washington per 100k population, 2024



Source: Washington State Department of Health's health professional license records as of December 2024. Mailing addresses used for county-level analyses may not reflect practice location.

Education and Training

Dental and Oral Health Education and Training Program Locations and Completions in Washington by County Rural Classification, 2023



The U.S. Department of Education's national database, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and the Washington Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board from the Web-based Data and Reporting System (WBDRS). The map does not include the two dental assistant apprenticeship programs or the six CTE programs in the state.

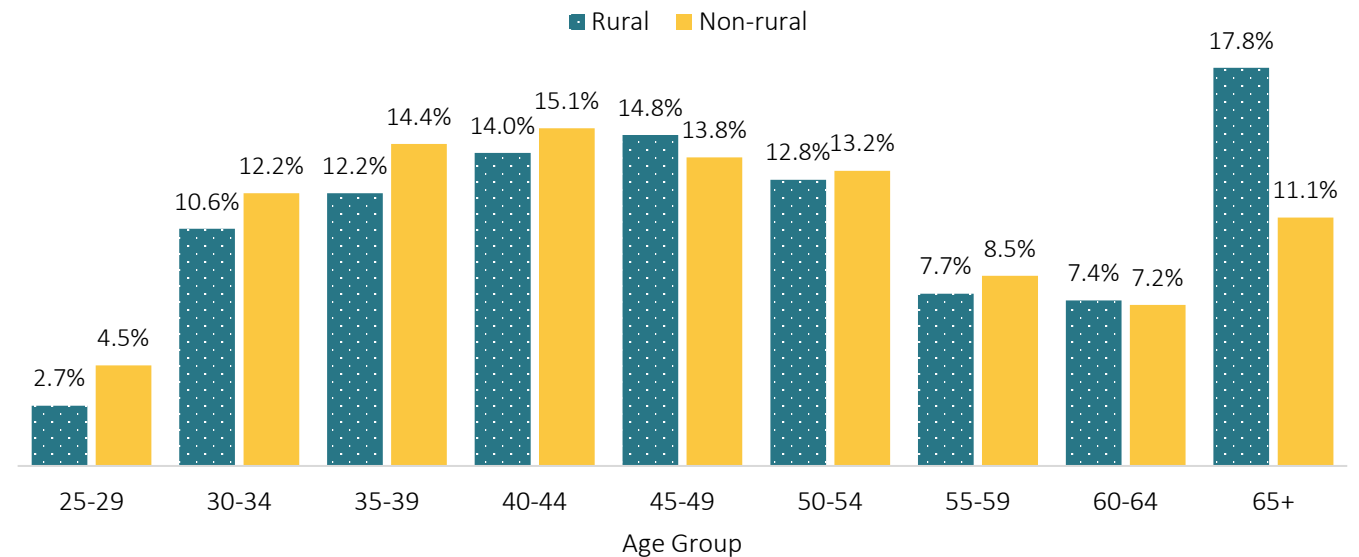
Workforce Demographics

Percentage of Female Washington Dentists, Dental Hygienists, and Dental Assistants by County Rural Classification, 2024

Occupation	% Female in Rural	% Female in urban
Dentists	23.0%	38.7%
Dental Hygienists	97.7%	95.5%
Dental Assistants	96.3%	94.0%

Source: Washington State Department of Health's health professional license records as of December 2024. Mailing addresses used for county-level analyses may not reflect practice location. Note: Calculations do not include missing, prefer not to answer or other. Does not include n=327 for dentists, n=479 for dental hygienists, and n=5,124 for dental assistants.

Percent of Dentists in Each Age Category by County Rural Classification, 2024



Source: Washington State Department of Health's health professional license records as of December 2024. Mailing addresses used for county-level analyses may not reflect practice location.



Thank you!

The Washington Oral Health Workforce (WOHW) Tracking Program, is supported by Delta Dental of Washington and the Washington State Legislature. WOHW provides critical data to improve workforce development in oral health and guide practice and policy to help ensure the state's population has access to needed oral health care.

More information can be found at: <https://familymedicine.uw.edu/chws/resources/wohw/>.

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