

Washington's Oral Health Workforce

Susan M. Skillman MS*, C. Holly A. Andrilla MS*, Joseli Alves-Dunkerson DDS MPH MBA†, Wendy E. Mouradian MD MS‡, Melissa Comenduley*, Jessica Yi*, Mark P. Doescher MD MSPH*

Who Provides Oral Health Services in Washington?

A wide range of health care providers supply oral health services to Washington residents. Varying amounts of information are available to describe their number and characteristics. The oral health workforce supply is unevenly distributed across the state, with 34 out of 39 state counties having federal designation as a dental Health Professional Shortage Area in 2009.

Washington's Oral Health Workforce, 2009

Dentists	5,819 licensed
Dental hygienists	5,014 licensed
Expanded function dental auxiliaries (EFDAs)	New profession in Washington in 2008, all in training
Dental assistants	9,327 registered
Denturists	138 licensed
Primary care providers	More than 1,000 physicians, 2,000 advanced practice nurses, and 850 physician assistants trained in pediatric oral health prevention
Supporting caregivers	2,500 in-home caregivers trained in oral health services

■ The number of Washington-licensed **dentists** increased by 34% and **dental hygienists** by 50% between 1995 and 2009.

■ 81% of **dentists** and 79% of **dental hygienists** with Washington licenses in 2007 practiced in-state.

■ 77% of Washington's practicing **dentists** were in general practice, another 4% were in pediatric practice, and overall, 74% were in independent/solo practice.

■ 96% of Washington's practicing **dental hygienists** were in private offices or clinics. The remainder worked in public health, education, or other positions.

■ The supply of licensed **dentists** and **dental hygienists** per population varied greatly among Washington counties

(ranging from 9 to 103 dentists and 13 to 86 dental hygienists per 100,000 county residents).

■ **Expanded function dental auxiliaries (EFDAs)** became a licensed profession in 2008.

■ Few data are available on the distribution of **dental assistants** because licensure, for which the state maintains more detailed data, is not required for this profession (dental assistants become a registered profession in 2008, so more data will become available).

■ The number of **denturists** has grown to 138 in 2009 since the profession was first licensed in Washington in the 1990s.

■ Growing numbers of Washington's **physicians, advanced practice registered nurses, and physician assistants** have received the required training to deliver (and receive payment for) dental disease preventive services during well-child exams.

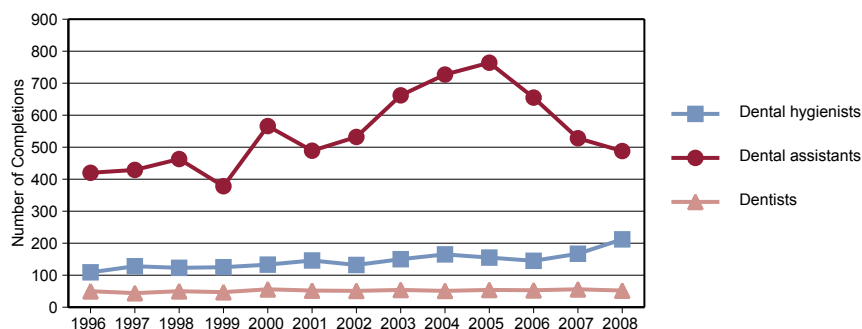
Washington's Future Oral Health Workforce Supply

While much of Washington's oral health workforce has been increasing in size, it may not be able to keep pace with the increasing oral health needs of the state's population as it grows and ages, and as the professionals from the baby-boom generation retire. The number of professionals completing oral health education programs in Washington increased only slightly between 1996 and 2008.

■ There were 1 **dentist**, 10 **dental hygienist**, 3 **EFDA**, 33 **dental assistant**, and 1 **denturist** education programs in Washington in 2009.

■ Expansion of **dentist** education capacity was proposed in 2009 for the University of Washington School of Dentistry through the Regional Initiative in Dental Education (RIDE) program (designed to increase dentist supply in rural and underserved areas), as well as for **dental hygienist** and **dental assistant** programs.

Oral Health Education Completion Trends in Washington, 1996-2008



* University of Washington Center for Health Workforce Studies.

† Washington Department of Health, State Oral Health Program, Office of Maternal and Child Health.

‡ University of Washington School of Dentistry.

- General practice and pediatric **dental residency** expansion was proposed in 2009 because of the success of these programs in producing dentists who remain in underserved communities after completing training.
- The number of students completing **dental hygienist** education annually in Washington increased 94% between 1996 and 2008. There were 488 **dental assistant** completions in 2008, more than the 420 completions in 1996 but significantly fewer than the 764 completions in 2005.
- The average age of Washington's **dentists** in 2007 was 49, and about half will reach retirement age (65) within 15 years. **Dental hygienists'** average age was 45, and a third will reach retirement age within 15 years.
- In-migration and out-migration are important factors in Washington's oral health workforce: 58% of Washington's **dentist** and 21% of **dental hygienist** supply obtained their dental education outside of Washington. An estimated 80% of UW School of Dentistry graduates practice in the state.

Developing an Oral Health Workforce to Serve Underserved Populations

Untreated oral diseases and access to preventive oral health care persist as problems for many Washington residents. A variety of programs and services in the state help to meet these needs.

Programs to encourage providers to work in underserved areas:

Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs): Obtaining federal designation as a dental HPSA allows state participation in National Health Service Corp and other workforce development programs. In 2009, 34 of the state's 39 counties submitted requests or were designated as whole or partial county dental HPSAs.

Loan Repayment and Scholarship Programs: These state and federal programs have helped dentists and dental hygienists complete and pay for their dental education in return for providing services to underserved populations.

Washington State Department of Health: Public Health—employs two public health dentists who assess the state's oral health needs, develop collaborative policies, and promote mass preventive measures. **Office of Rural Health—**helps rural and underserved communities gain access to oral health services by administering grant programs and recruiting providers to underserved areas.

University of Washington School of Dentistry: Programs to strengthen the state's oral health workforce serving underserved communities include the offices of *Educational Partnerships and Diversity*, *Regional Affairs Outreach Program*, and the *Regional Initiatives in Dental Education (RIDE)*.

Health Careers Camps and Internships: Programs to promote oral health careers among Washington's youth include *Project HOPE* (Health Occupations Preparatory Experience), *ConneX*, and *Dental Camp*.

Programs providing direct oral health services to underserved populations include *Medicaid Oral Health Service Providers*, *Community and Migrant Health Centers*, *Corrections Dental Facilities*, *Dental Hygiene Clinics*, *Dental Residencies*, *Mobile Dental Clinics*, *Tribal Dental Clinics*, *multiple University of Washington School of Dentistry Programs*, *the Volunteered/Retired Program (VRP)*, *Washington Dental Service Foundation Oral Health Connections*, *Washington State Dental Association Outreach*, *Washington State Health Care Authority Community Health Services Program*, and various other charitable and low-cost care programs.

Policy Options to Ensure an Effective Oral Health Workforce

A multi-pronged, strategic and collaborative approach to workforce planning is needed to meet Washington's current and future oral health care needs, including the following:

- **Promote interest in oral health professions** among young people.
- **Support general and pediatric dentistry and dental public health education programs** in order to improve the capacity of the workforce to care for underserved and special populations.
- **Support early prevention of dental caries** to reduce future demand for services by promoting and implementing public health measures.

- **Continue and expand programs that promote practice in primary care and dental workforce shortage areas**, such as loan repayment, scholarships, and programs that reduce barriers for volunteer and retired providers to donate their services.
- **Support collaborative and inter-professional medical and oral health education and practice** to improve care effectiveness and efficiency.
- **Explore new ways to use allied health dental providers** to increase workforce capacity and efficiency.
- **Monitor trends in the state's oral health workforce** through commitment of resources for ongoing data collection and analysis.

Findings from this study are more fully described in WWAMI Center for Health Workforce Studies Final Report #130: Skillman SM, Andrilla CHA, Alves-Dunkerson JA, Mouradian WE, Comenduley M, Yi J, Doescher MP, Washington State's Oral Health Workforce, November 2009, http://depts.washington.edu/uwrhrc/uploads/CHWS_FR130_Skillman.pdf.

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