

Current Data Describing Washington's Oral Health Workforce Supply and Demand

Presentation to the
Washington Senate Health & Long-Term Care Committee

Grace Guenther, MPA
University of Washington
Center for Health Workforce Studies
January 23, 2025

UW CHWS Study Team: Susan Skillman, MS; Samantha Pollack, MHS;
Benjamin Stubbs, MPH; Amy Clark, MS; Nhu Nguyen; Bianca Frogner, PhD



Long vacancies for WA dental assistants and dental hygienists for over a decade

Dentist Offices/Dental 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 frequently cited occupations with exceptionally long vacancies

Findings prior to Fall 2021 not shown due to space constraints.
Exceptionally long vacancies are defined by the individual respondent.

Key findings from the WA Health Workforce Sentinel Network:
<https://wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/overview/>

Employers say reasons for long vacancies include:

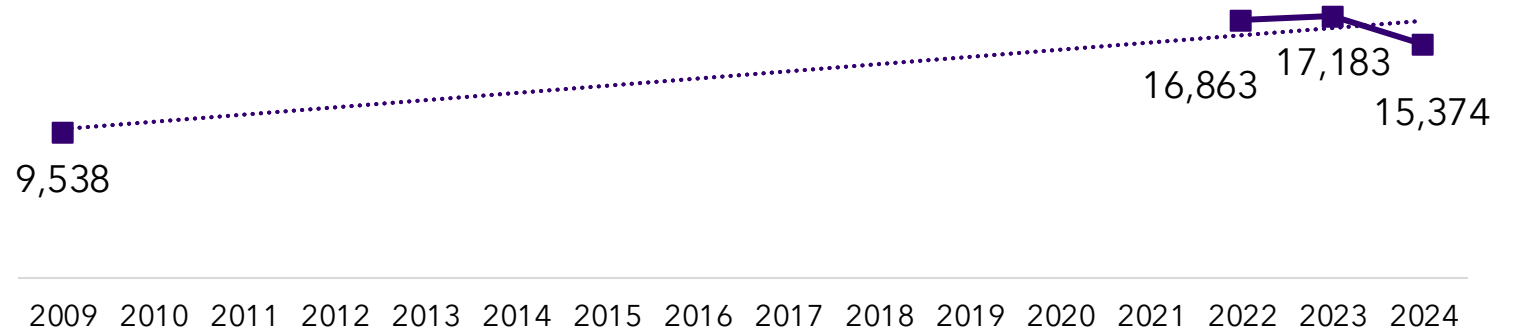
[Dental hygienist] Severe hygiene shortage due to lack of Dental Hygiene Schools [...]. Many hygienists work part time [...]. Solutions include opening more hygiene schools, allowing expanded scope for current dental assistants [...]

[Dental assistant] This was once considered an entry level position that an office could hire and train until the assistant had a skillset that could be compensated fairly. With rising wages outside of dentistry, this entry level is now on par with the same hourly rate as jobs requiring no skill at all to begin.

From WA Health Workforce Sentinel Network. Findings available here: <https://wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/overview/>

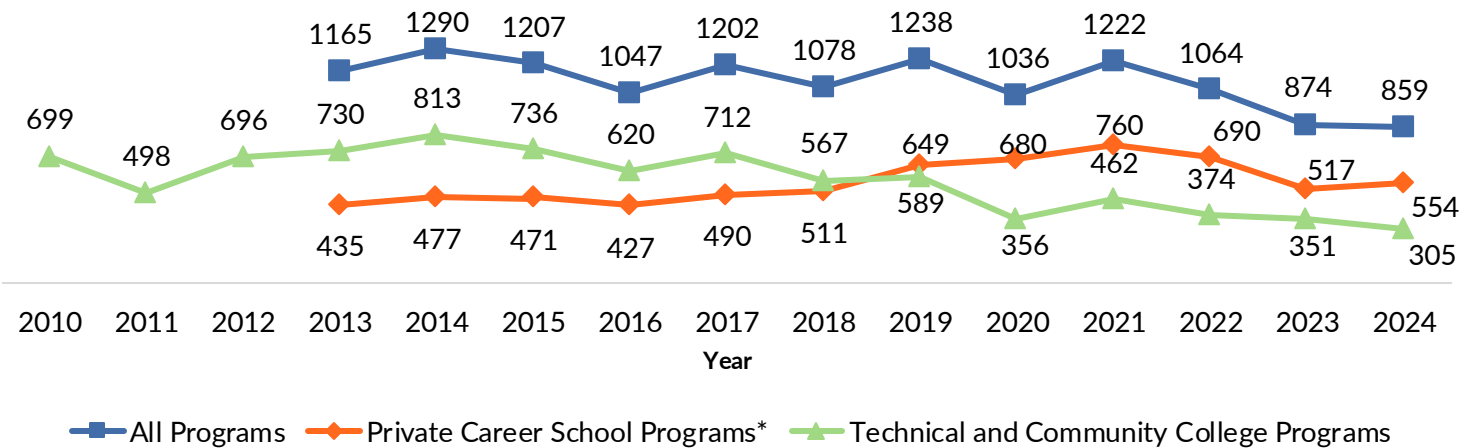
Washington's dental assistants

**> 50% increase in
WA registrations 2009-2024:**



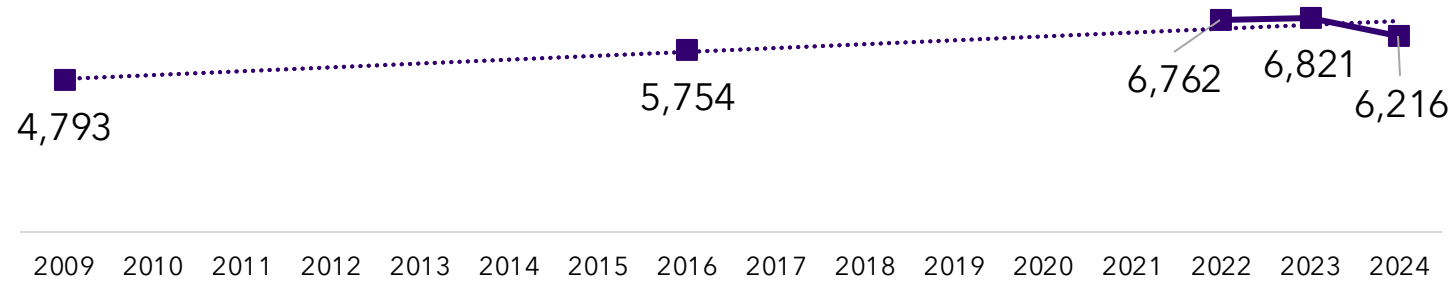
**Fewer completions from
WA education programs
2013-2024:**

(Blue = total from CTC and private school programs. Does not include OTJ and apprenticeship training)

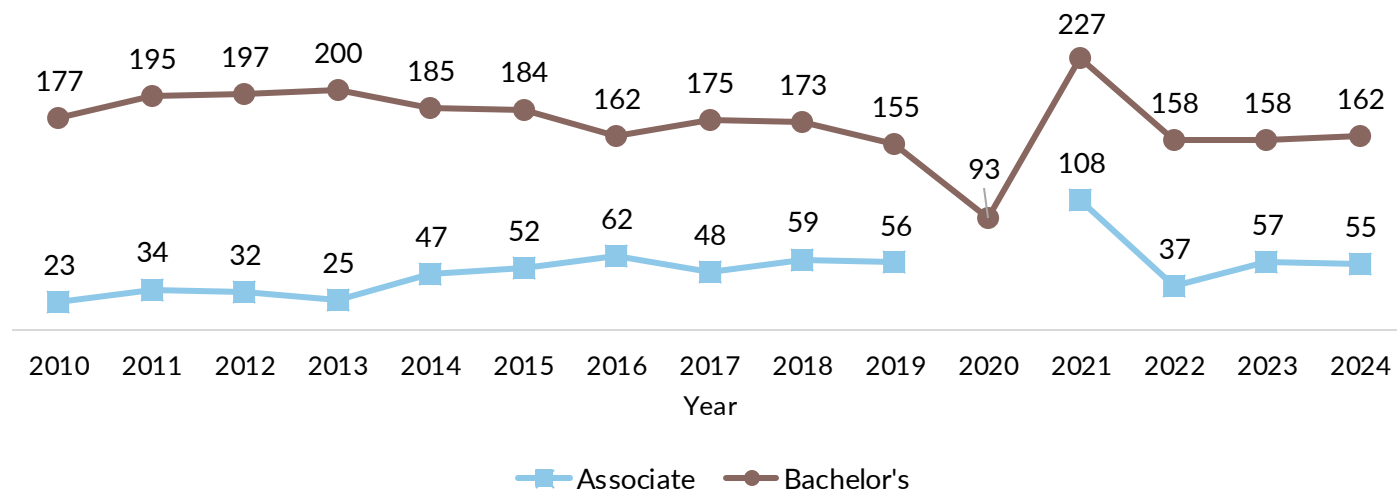


Washington's dental hygienists

30% increase in
WA licenses 2009-2024:



Little change in WA
education program
completions 2010-2024:



From WA Oral Health Workforce (WOHW)
tracking program: <https://familymedicine.uw.edu/chws/resources/wohw/>

Washington's dental assistants

2023 UW CHWS WOHW survey of currently licensed dental assistants found:

- **Most trained in WA (82%)**
- **Majority female (95%)**
- **Diverse (42% races/ethnicities other than White)**

Findings from the Washington Oral Health Workforce Tracking Program (WOHW) 2023 Dental Assistant survey:
<https://familymedicine.uw.edu/chws/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2024/05/CHWS-FR-WOHW-2024-FINAL.pdf>

Washington's dental hygienists

2024 UW CHWS WOHW survey of currently licensed dental hygienists found:

- **76% trained in WA**
- **45% held bachelor's degree, 50% held associate degree**
- **22% licensed in an additional state**
- **14% planned to retire or otherwise leave dental practice in the next few years**
- **Predominantly female (98%) and White (78%)**

Pathways into dental assisting and dental hygiene – survey findings

Dental hygienists:

About half (51%) of WA's dental hygienists in 2024 indicated they worked in another dental position prior to becoming a dental hygienist

- 42% had worked as a dental assistant
- 13% had worked in an administrative position (e.g., front office, billing)

Dental assistants:

42% of dental assistants indicated they were likely to begin an education program within the next 5 years to advance to another dental occupation.

Findings from the Washington Oral Health Workforce Tracking Program (WOHW):

- 2023 Dental Assistant survey: <https://familymedicine.uw.edu/chws/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2024/05/CHWS-FR-WOHW-2024-FINAL.pdf>
- 2024 Dental Hygienist survey: <https://familymedicine.uw.edu/chws/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2024/08/CHWS-FR-WOHW-2024-DH.pdf>

Many more details about WA's oral health workforce can be found at:

- UW CHWS WA Oral Health Workforce (WOHW) dashboard:
<https://familymedicine.uw.edu/chws/resources/wohw/>
- UW CHWS WA Health Workforce Sentinel Network:
<https://wa.sentinelnetwork.org/>

Contact: Grace Guenther, MPA
gguent@uw.edu

Findings from UW Center for Health Workforce Studies' Research on Washington's Oral Health Workforce

Skillman SM, Andrilla CHA, Alves-Dunkerson JA, Mouradian WE, Comenduley M, Yi J, Doescher MP. Washington State's oral health workforce. Final Report #130. Seattle, WA: WWAMI Center for Health Workforce Studies, University of Washington, Aug 2009.

Patterson DG, Andrilla CHA, Schwartz MR, Hager LJ, Skillman SM. Assessing the Impact of Washington State's Oral Health Workforce on Patient Access to Care. Seattle, WA: Center for Health Workforce Studies, University of Washington, Nov 2017.

Pollack SW, Guenther GA, Stubbs BA, Patterson DG, Frogner BK, Skillman SM. Characteristics of the Current Dental Assistant and Expanded Function Dental Auxiliary Workforces in Washington State. Center for Health Workforce Studies, University of Washington, May 2024.

Guenther GA, Pollack SW, Stubbs BA, Frogner BK, Skillman SM. Characteristics of the Current Dental Hygienist Workforce in Washington State. Center for Health Workforce Studies, University of Washington, August 2024.