

# Minnesota's Dental Assistant Workforce, 2014-2015

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2014-2015 DENTAL ASSISTANT WORKFORCE SURVEY<sup>i</sup>

## Overall

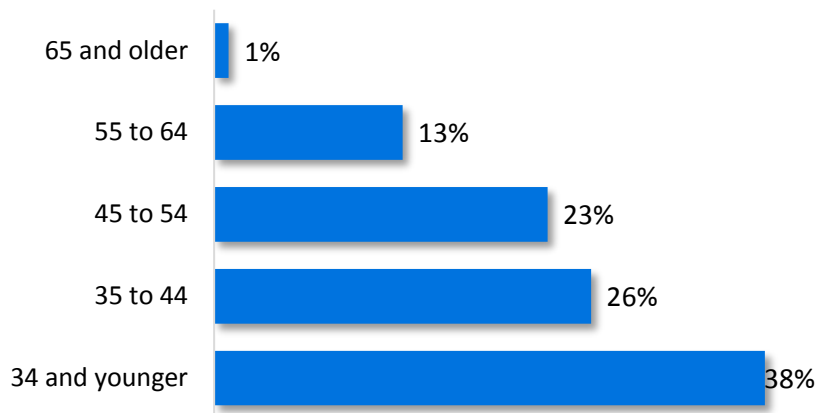
According to the Minnesota Board of Dentistry, as of December 2015, there were **7,445** actively licensed dental assistants.<sup>ii</sup>

## Demographics

**Sex.** In general, health care professions tend to be female-dominated, and this is especially true for dental assistants. Ninety-nine percent of Minnesota dental assistants are female (data not shown).

**Age.** Dental assistants are a young profession with 64 percent under age 45. The median age of dental assistants is 39.

**Age of Minnesota Dental Assistants**

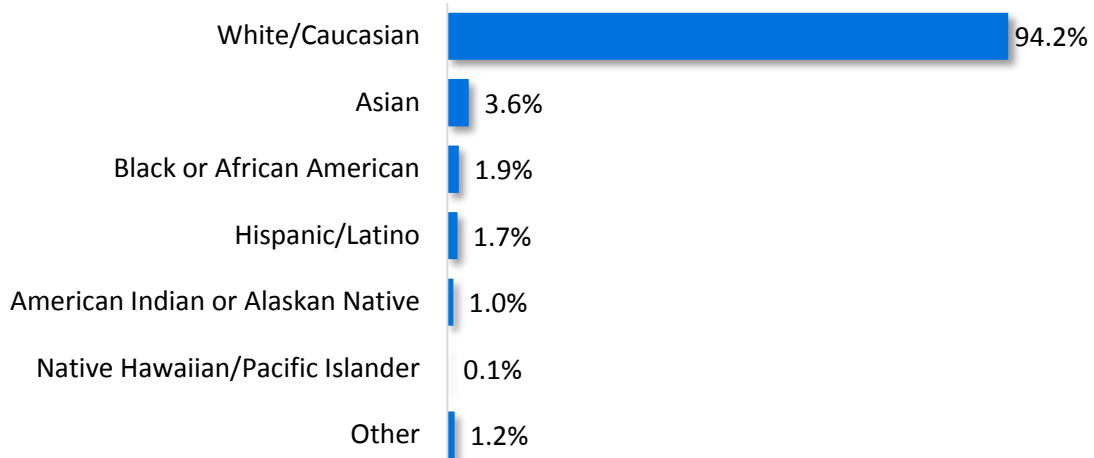


*Source: Minnesota Board of Dentistry, 2015. Analysis done by MDH. Percentages are based on 7,445 Minnesota licensed dental assistants who provided valid birth dates to the board.*

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**Race.** Typical of racial patterns among most health care professionals, the majority (94.2 percent) of dental assistants indicated that they were white. The second most common race for dental assistants was Asian. Younger age groups are a bit more diverse, with 91 percent of those age 34 and under reporting they were white compared to 98 percent of those age 55 to 64. Similar to the racial make-up of Minnesota regions, the metro area dental assistant workforce is more diverse compared to dental assistants in other parts of the state (data not shown).

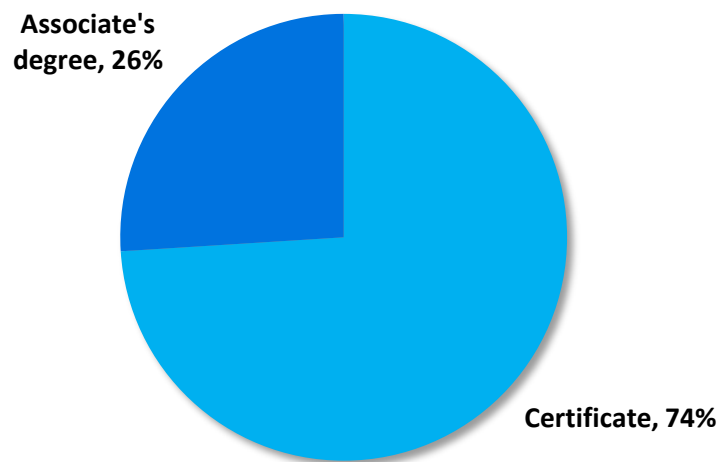
### Race of Minnesota Dental Assistants



Source: MDH Dental Assistant Workforce Questionnaire, 2014-2015. Respondents could select as many races as applicable.

**Education.** Most dental assistants obtained a Certificate. Ninety-eight percent of dental assistants went to school in Minnesota (data not shown), indicating that the labor market for dental assistants is largely local.

### Dental Assistant Education



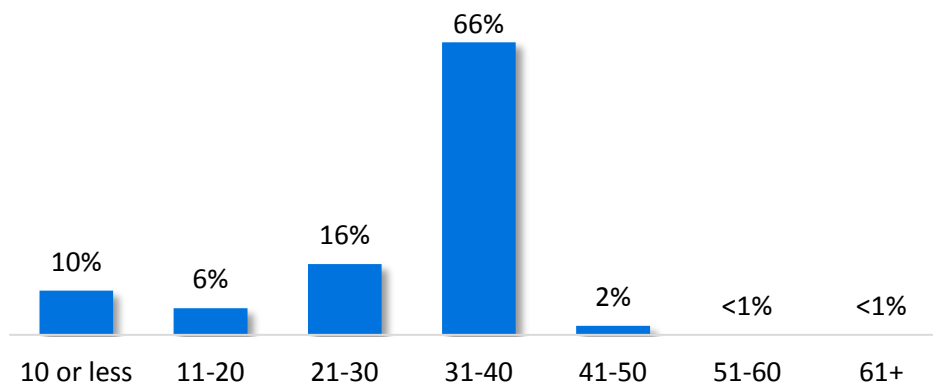
Source: MDH Dental Assistant Workforce Questionnaire, 2014-2015, based on 3,825 responses.

## Employment

**Share of Dental Assistants Employed.** Eighty-six percent of Minnesota licensed dental assistants reported on the MDH questionnaire they were “working in a paid position requiring a dental assistant license.” Additionally, 6 percent were not seeking work as a dental assistant (working in another field or unemployed) and 3 percent were not working due family or medical reasons. Three percent were seeking work as a dental assistant. The share of dental assistants working is comparable to dental hygienists, but both have lower shares working than most other health care related professions.

**Hours Worked.** In the oral health field, working slightly less than 40 hours a week is considered full-time. The median work week was 34 hours. Two thirds of dental assistants worked between 31 and 40 hours per week, and 32 percent worked less than 30 hours per week. Very few dental assistants worked more than 40 hours per week.

**Hours Worked in a Typical Week**

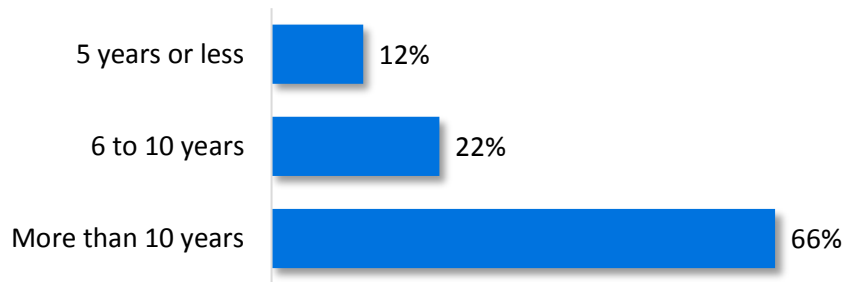


Source: MDH Dental Assistant Workforce Questionnaire, 2014-2015. The chart is based on 3,379 survey responses.

**Future Plans.** Two thirds of Minnesota dental assistants planned to work for more than 10 years. Of those who planned to leave in five years or less, 62 percent planned to retire and 26 percent planned to change professions. Dental assistants were asked “Are you planning to advance your professional training by enrolling in a dental therapist program?” One percent said they plan to while 22 percent said they “don’t know” if they will (data not shown).

Dental assistants’ responses about plans to enroll in a dental therapy program vary by region. While few say they planned to become a dental therapist, more urban dental assistants express some interest in dental therapy compared to rural dental assistants. In urban areas, 24 percent responded they didn’t know whether they planned to enroll in a dental therapy program compared to 18 percent in rural or isolated and 12 percent in small town or small rural areas (data not shown).

**“How long do you plan to continue practicing as a dental assistant in Minnesota?”**



Source: MDH Dental Assistant Workforce Questionnaire, 2014-2015. The chart is based on 3,237 survey responses.

**Work Setting.** The questionnaire asked dental assistants to identify their primary work setting. Eighty-nine percent of dental assistants work in some type of private practice setting. As more dentists practice in solo private practices in rural areas, the same is true of dental assistants.

**Dental Assistants’ Work Setting**

Setting	Share of Dental Assistants Working in this Setting
Solo private practice	38.5%
Small group private practice	36.2%
Large group private practice	14.0%
College or university	4.2%
Hospital	1.8%
Community or medical clinic	1.1%
School clinic	0.6%
Long-term care facility	0.3%
Institution	0.1%
Other	3.3%

Source: MDH Dental Assistant Workforce Questionnaire, 2014-2015. The chart is based on 3,015 survey responses.

**Geographic Distribution**

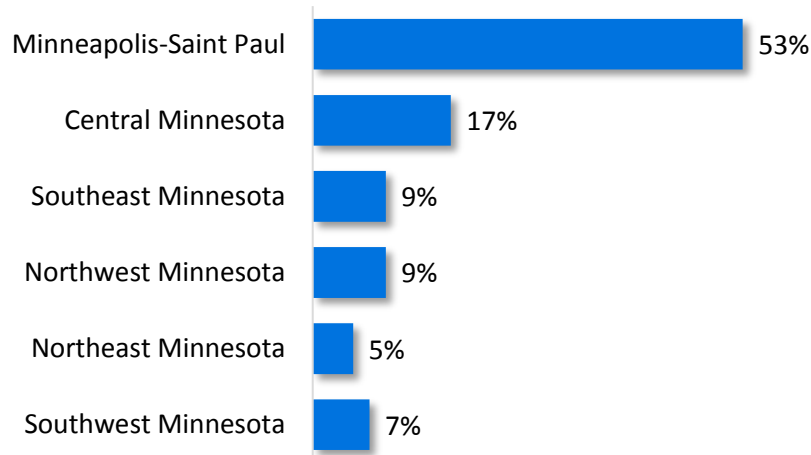
To get a sense of the accessibility of dental assistants’ services around the state, the next two charts provide two different views of geographic distribution. Analyses are based on geocoded addresses supplied to the Board of Dentistry at the time of license renewal.<sup>iii</sup>

**Distribution by Region.** The first chart shows the distribution of dental assistants across the six planning areas around Minnesota. As shown, slightly over half of dental assistants (53 percent) are practicing in the Twin Cities metro area. The remainder of the state is home to significantly smaller

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shares of dental assistants. For reference, the Twin Cities metro area houses approximately 54 percent of the state's population, with all other regions housing between 7 and 13 percent of Minnesotans. This suggests that dental assistants are located similarly to the Minnesota population, although dental assistants may be slightly more concentrated in the Central area of Minnesota than the population. The distribution of dental assistants across Minnesota regions is similar to the general population, but the same is not true of dentists who are more concentrated in the Twin Cities.

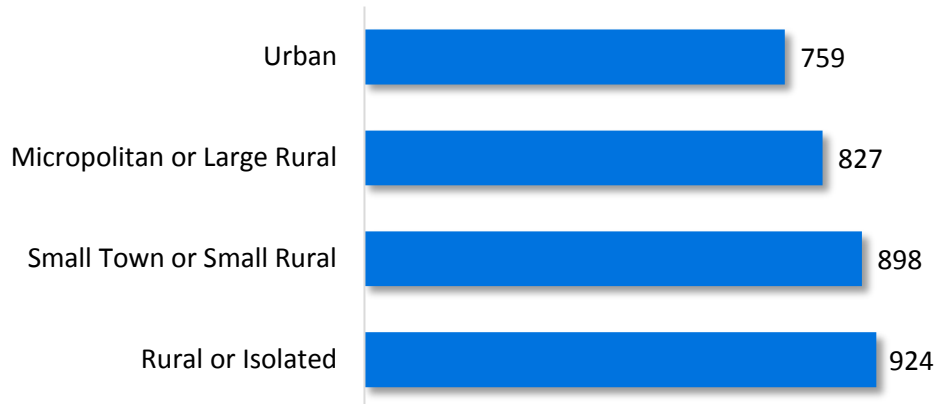
### Dental Assistants by Minnesota Region



*Source: Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) geocoding and analysis of 2015 Minnesota Board Dentistry address data. Percentages above are based on 6,739 valid Minnesota addresses.*

**Distribution across urban and rural areas.** The chart below provides another view of the geographic distribution of dental assistants, showing the size of the population for every one dental assistant in urban, micropolitan, small town, and rural areas. As shown, there are 759 people for every one dental assistant in urban areas of Minnesota, with numbers increasing slightly in more rural areas of the state. This pattern is somewhat different compared to other health care professions, where health care can be relatively inaccessible in sparsely populated areas of Minnesota. There are more dental assistants than any other type of oral health professional, leading to the lowest population-to-provider ratios and making them most available for meeting oral health needs.

**Minnesota Population-to-Dental Assistant Ratio**



Source: Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) geocoding and analysis of 2015 Minnesota Board Dentistry address data. Percentages above are based on 6,739 valid Minnesota addresses.

For more information about survey methods and regional breakouts used in this fact sheet: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/orhpc/workforce/method.html>

Visit our website at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/orhpc/workforce/reports.html> to learn about the Minnesota healthcare workforce. County-level data for this profession is available at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/orhpc/workforce/database/index.html>.

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<sup>i</sup> The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), in cooperation with the Minnesota Board of Dentistry, collected information on demographics, education, career and future plans of dental assistants during a workforce questionnaire in 2014-2015. Unless noted, all data are based on information collected from that survey. The response rate for the survey was 52 percent.

<sup>iii</sup> Of the total licensed professionals, 495 listed a practice address outside of Minnesota; 211 did not provide an address or provided an incomplete address. Based on survey responses, 14% of the total licensees are not currently practicing as a dental assistant. Thus, not all actively licensed dental assistants are part of the Minnesota dental assistant workforce.

<sup>iii</sup> Addresses may be a practice addresses or home addresses. Additionally, approximately 9.5 percent of dental assistants reported either an out-of-state address (6.7 percent) or no or incomplete address (2.8 percent) to the Board; these professionals may or may not be providing services in Minnesota, but in any case, they could not be geocoded.