

# Minnesota's Licensed Dental Assistant Workforce

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Office of Rural Health and Primary Care



PROTECTING, MAINTAINING AND IMPROVING THE HEALTH OF ALL MINNESOTANS

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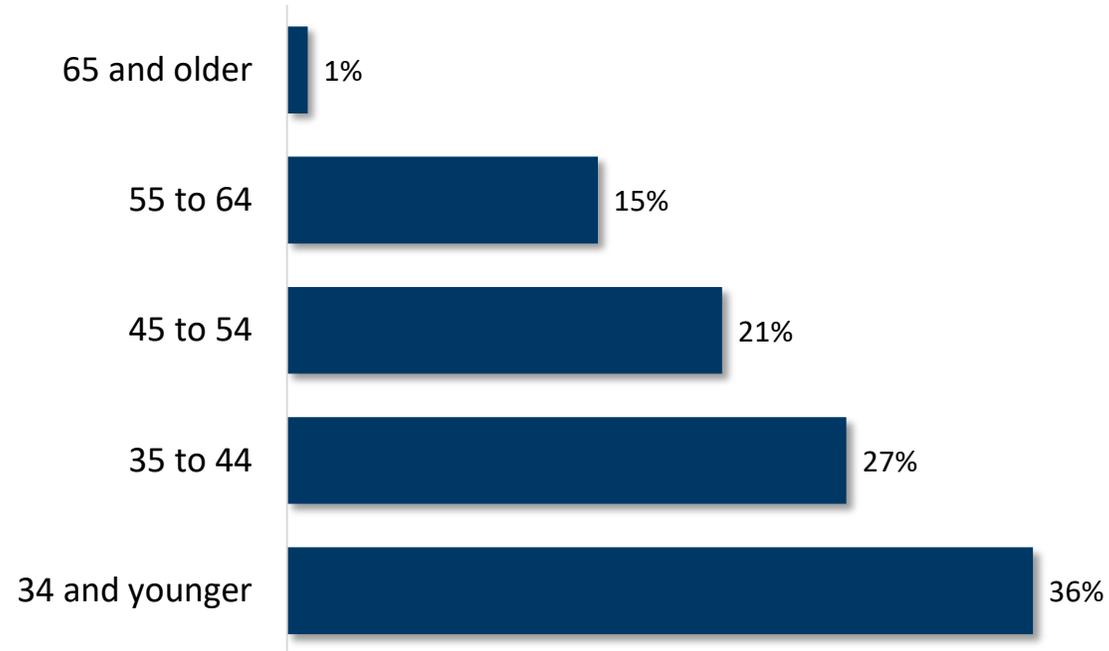
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# Summary of Findings

- According to the Minnesota Board of Dentistry, there were **7,366** dental assistants with active licenses in Minnesota as of February 2018.
- The median age of the dental assistant workforce was 39. Dental assistants are younger than the Minnesota workforce overall as well as dentists and dental hygienists ([slide 4](#)).
- Two out of five dental assistants have an associate's degree, and another 21 percent hold a post-associate credential. Younger dental assistants (age 35 and under) are more likely to have an associate's degree ([slide 7](#)).
- Dental assistants work a median of 35 hours per week. They report working more hours compared to hours previously reported (2014-2015) ([slide 9](#)).
- Sixty percent of dental assistants work in the 7-county Twin Cities metro area, which is also home to 55 percent of the state's population. Dental assistants work throughout the state and closely mirror the distribution of the population in other regions of the state ([slide 19](#)).
- While just 11 percent of dental assistants plan to leave the field in the next five years, 25 percent of those who report planning to leave say they intend to pursue careers outside their current role. Twenty-four percent of those planning to leave the field in five years or less are under 35 ([slide 10](#)).
- Ninety-six percent of dental assistants report being satisfied with their jobs in the last 12 months ([slide 17](#)).

# Demographics: Sex and Age

## Age of Minnesota Dental Assistants



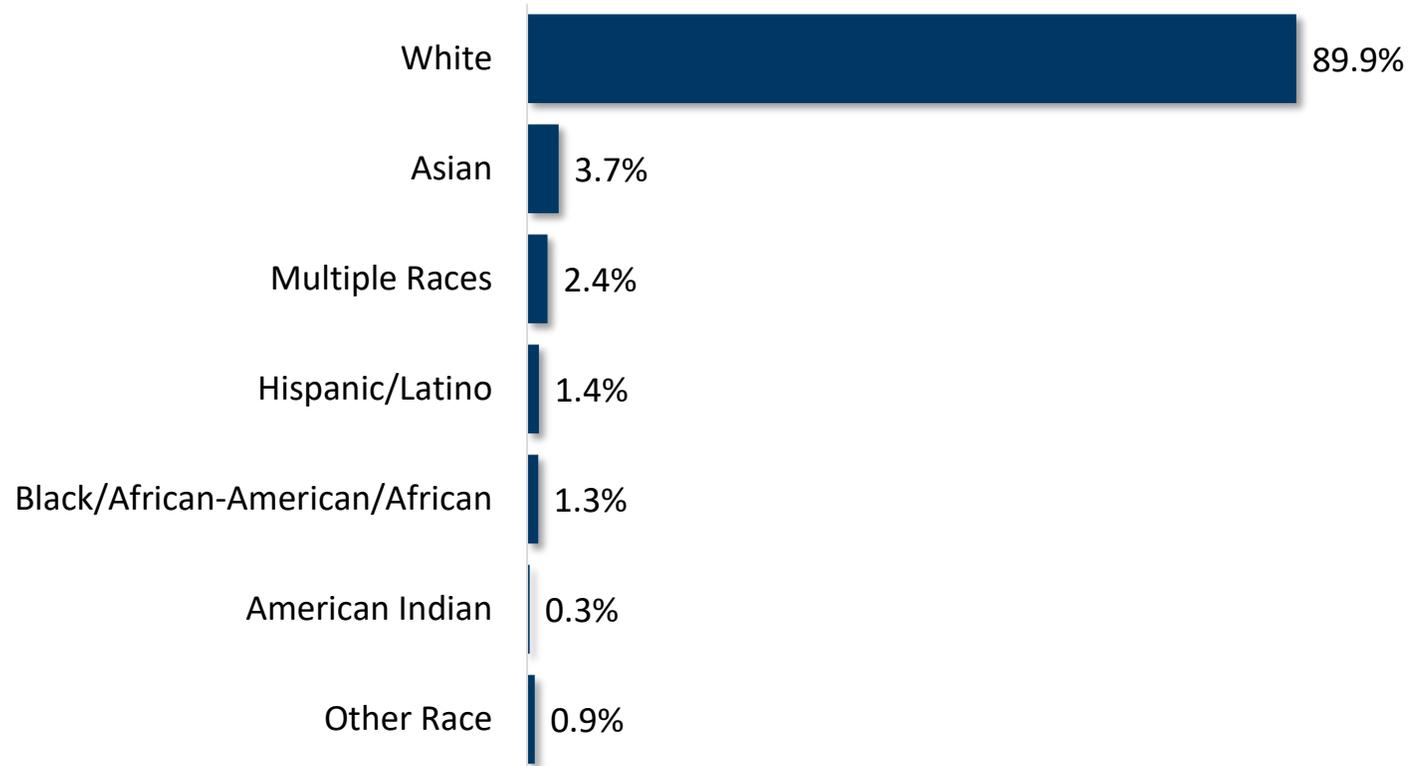
- The median age of dental assistants was 39. As a group, dental assistants are younger compared to dental hygienists (43 years), dentists (48 years), and the state's workforce overall (41 years).

Data not shown above:

- Almost all (99 percent) dental assistants are female.

# Demographics: Race and Ethnicity

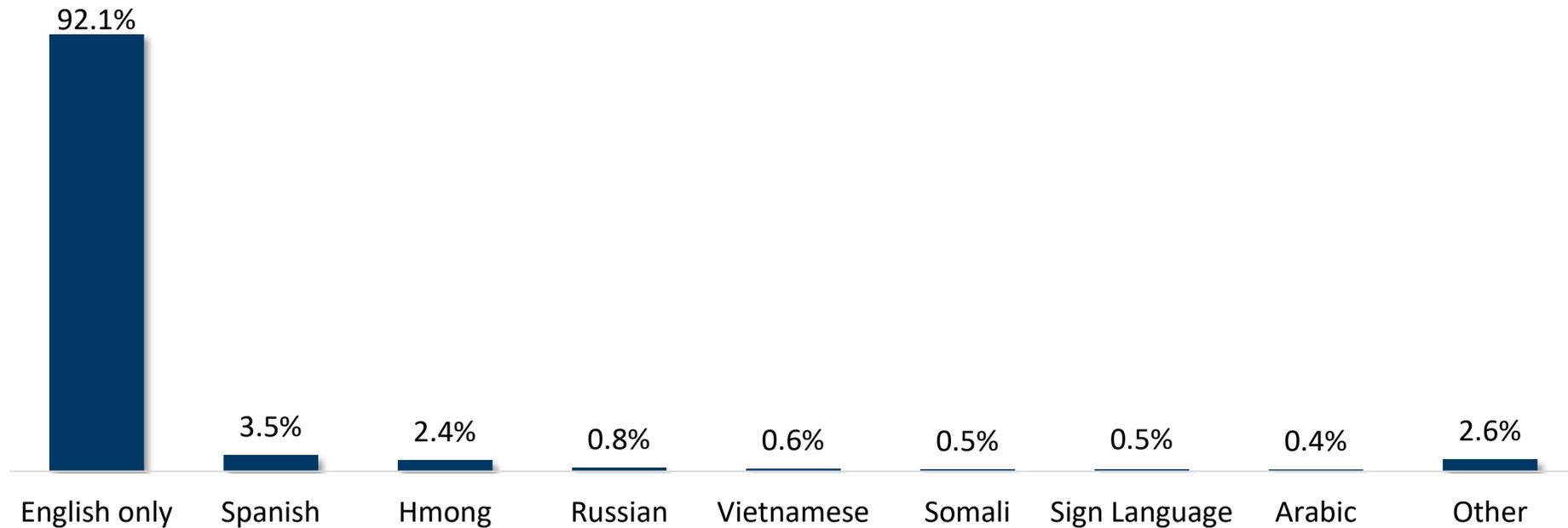
Race/Ethnicity of Minnesota Dental Assistants



- Typical of racial patterns among health care professionals, the majority (89.9 percent) of dental assistants indicated they were white. There were small shares identifying as Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and Black, African American, or African. A small share also reported identifying with more than one race.

# Demographics: Languages Spoken in Practice

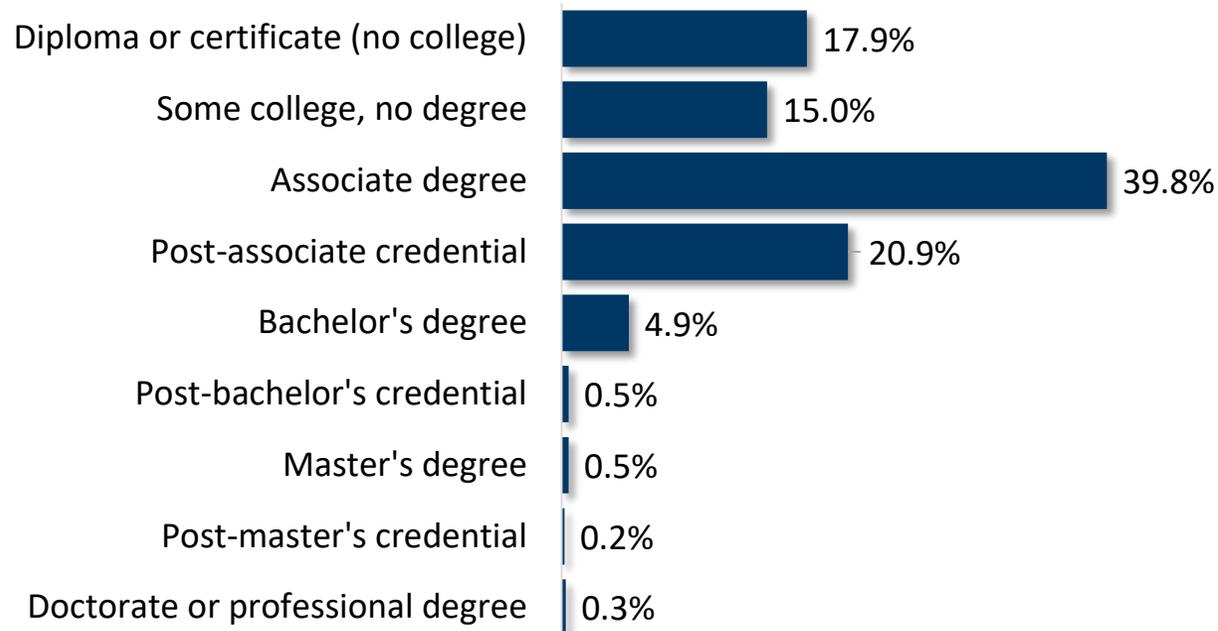
Languages Spoken by Minnesota Dental Assistants in their Practices



- The majority of dental assistants spoke only English in their practices (92.1 percent). The second most common language was Spanish, followed by Hmong. Very small shares of dental assistants spoke languages such as Russian, Somali, or American Sign Language with their patients.

# Education: Educational Attainment

## Educational Attainment of Dental Assistants



- Two out of five dental assistants have an associate degree. Younger dental assistants are more likely to have earned an Associate's degree (59 percent of those age 35 and below).
- In order to be licensed in Minnesota currently, dental assistants must graduate from an accredited education program with at least a certificate, and pass licensing exams. Dental assistants working in the field prior to 2010 when licensing requirements changed were allowed to obtain a license base on meeting alternative requirements set by the Minnesota Board of Dentistry.

Data not shown above:

- When asked how likely dental assistants were to pursue additional training or credentials to advance in their field, 12 percent responded that they were "very likely" to enroll or were "currently enrolled" in a training program. Among those who are pursuing or plan to pursue more training, many mentioned an interest in additional training in the field to advance to being a dental hygienist, a dental therapist, or getting a bachelor's degree.

# Education: Minnesota Graduates

Dental Assistant Program Graduates, by Year and Region				
Region	2014	2015	2016	2017
Twin Cities	246	249	282	234
Northeast	23	17	22	21
Southeast	19	17	14	12
Central	36	60	51	53
Northwest	68	66	78	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>380</b>

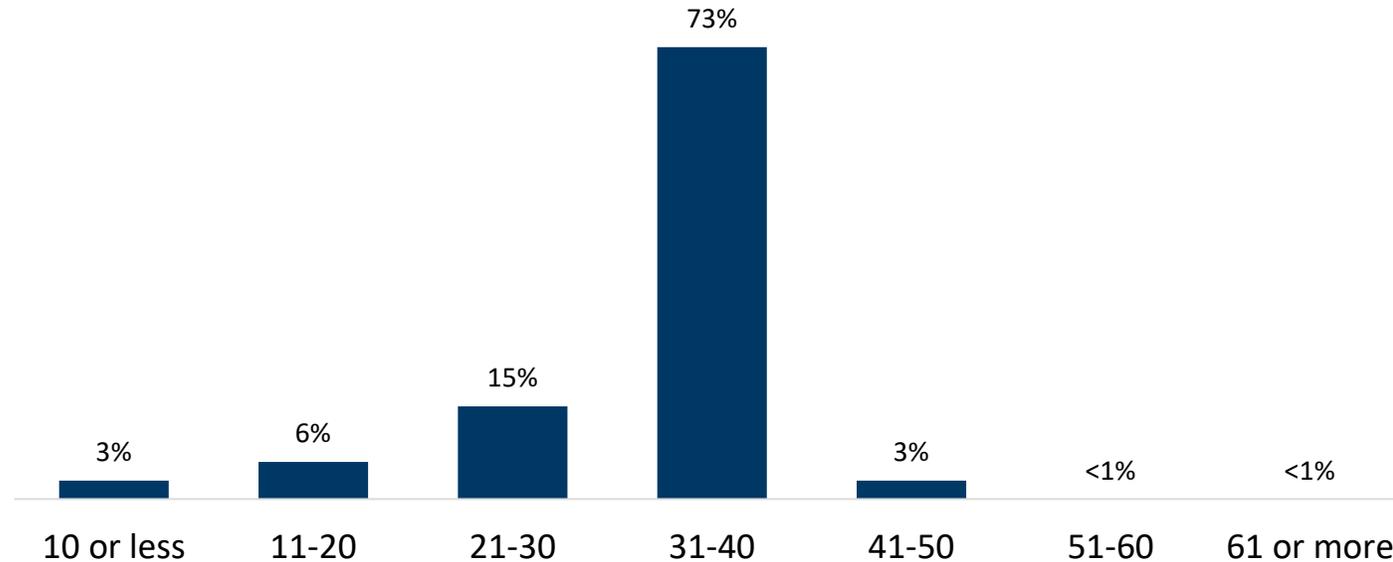
- In 2016, Minnesota programs graduated 447 dental assistants, dropping to 380 in 2017.

Data not shown above:

- Almost all (96 percent) dental assistants earned their degree in Minnesota.

# Employment: Employment & Hours Worked

Hours Worked in a Typical Week



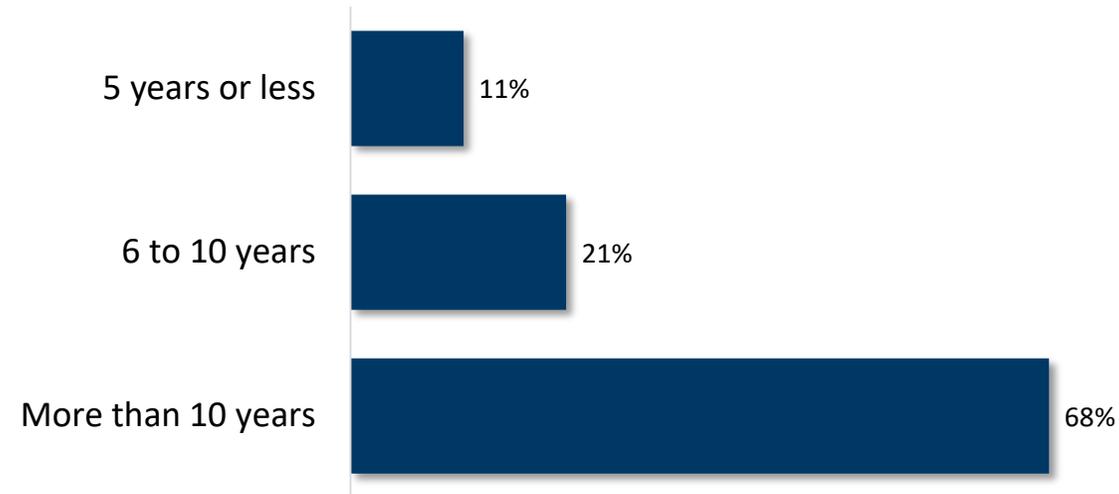
- The majority of dental assistants work between 31 and 40 hours per week. Dental assistants work a median of 35 hours per week.
- Dental assistants report working more hours now than in the past. In the 2014-2015 survey, 66 percent of dental assistants worked 31 to 40 hours per week and two percent worked more than 40 hours per week.

Data not shown above:

- An estimated **88 percent** of Minnesota licensed dental assistants reported on the MDH questionnaire that they were “working in a paid or unpaid position related to [their] license.” This share is much lower compared to other dental professionals (96% for dentists and 91% for dental hygienists). Of those dental assistants not working in a position related to their license, 47 percent are not seeking a position and 33 percent are temporarily not working. Twenty percent of dental assistants who weren’t working in a position related to their license were looking for a dental assistant position.

# Employment: Future Plans

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



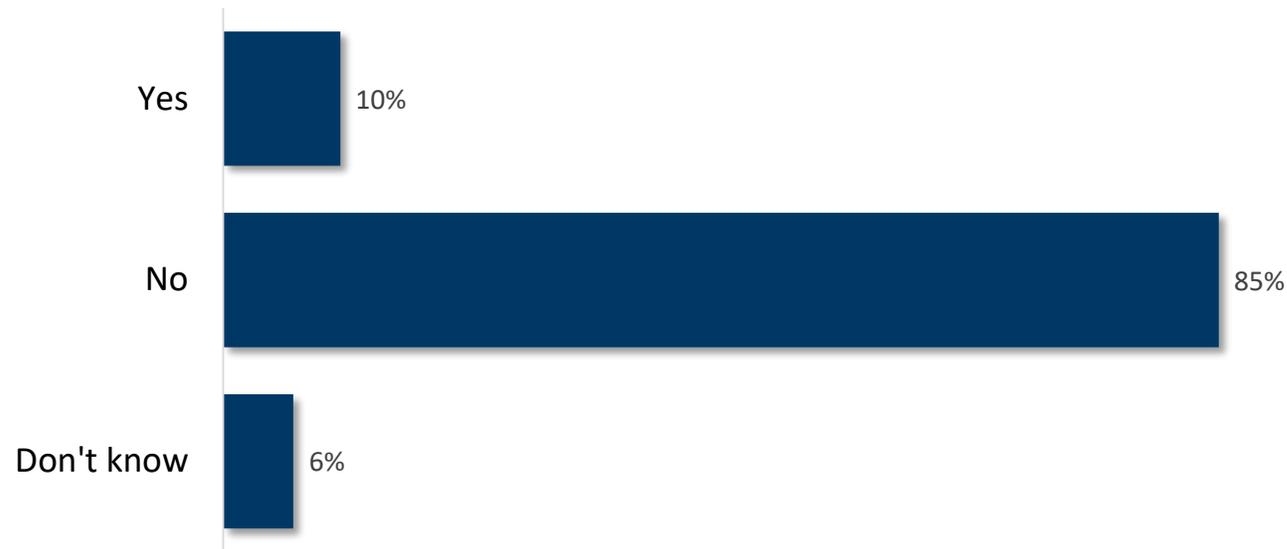
- Just 11 percent of Minnesota dental assistants indicated that they planned to leave the field within five years, suggesting a relatively stable workforce overall.

Data not shown above:

- Dental assistants planning to work five years or less were asked about their reasons for leaving the field. Among the dental assistants planning to work five years or less, 58 percent said the main reason was to retire, indicating that a sizable share intends to leave the field for reasons other than retirement (more below). In comparison, 74 percent of dental hygienists reported they plan to leave the field due to retirement.
- Notably, 15 percent of dental hygienists planning to work five years or less intended to pursue a different career. Another 10 percent of those who planned to leave the field were leaving to pursue training to advance their oral health career.
- Twenty-four percent of dental assistants planning to leave the field in 5 years or less are age 34 or under, while 47 percent are age 55 to 64.

# Dental Assistants at Work: Restorative Procedures

“Do you have a restorative procedures credential?”



- The survey asked dental assistants if they have a restorative procedures credential. This credential allows dental assistants to perform “expanded functions” beyond their typical scope of practice, freeing up the dentist to perform additional procedures. Expanded functions include placing, contouring, and adjusting amalgam restorations, glass ionomers, class I and V supragingival composite restorations, adapting and cementing stainless steel crowns.

Data not shown above:

- Forty-one percent of dental assistants with the credential report performing restorative procedures occasionally followed by 34 percent who said they never do. Another 16 percent frequently perform restorative procedures.

# Dental Assistants at Work: Work Settings

## Dental Assistants' Primary Work Settings

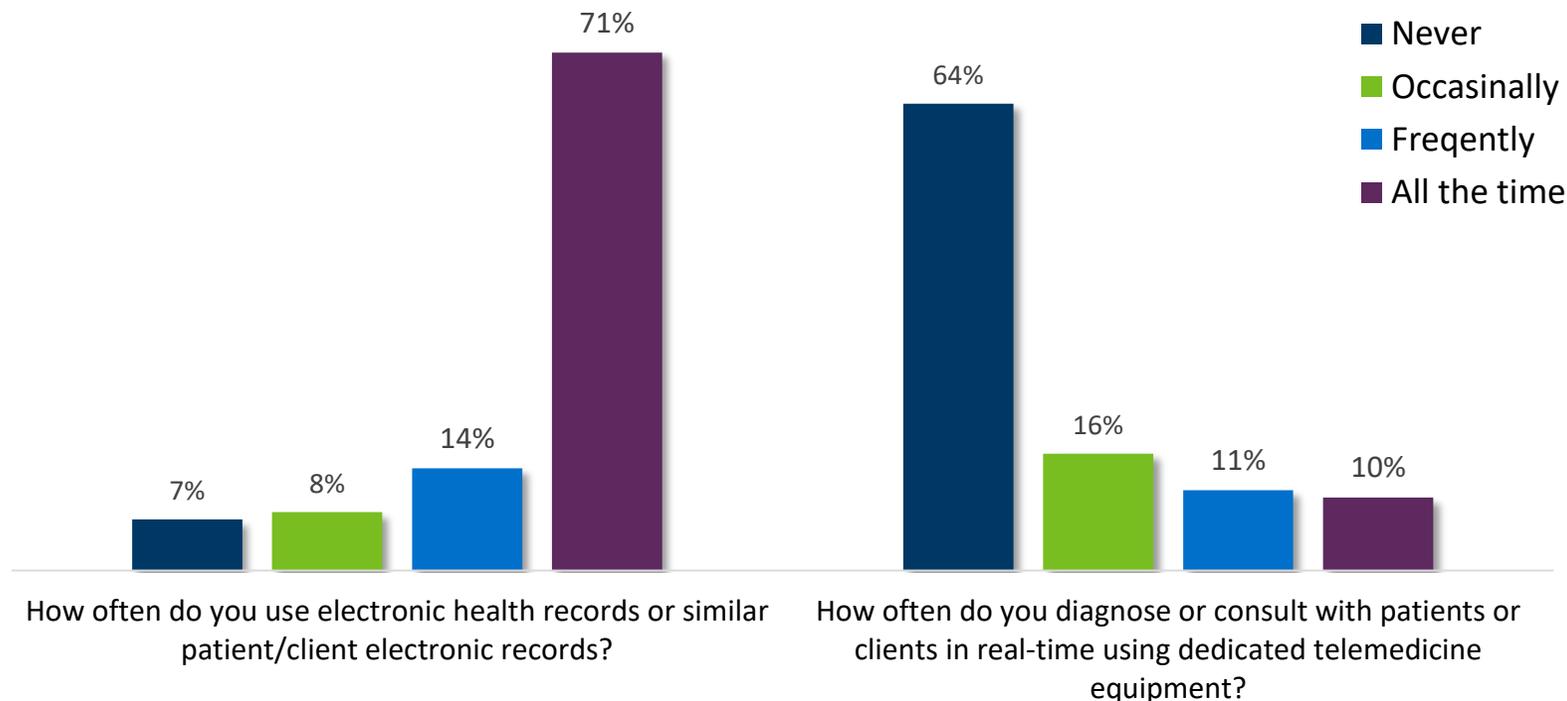
Setting	Share of PAs Working in this Setting
Clinic/Professional Office/Health Center/Ambulatory Care	89.3%
Academic (Teaching/Research)	2.4%
Community/Faith-Based Organization	2.3%
Hospital	1.2%
Insurance/Benefits Management Organization	0.7%
Public Health Agency	0.5%
Correctional Facility	0.3%
State, County, or City Agency	0.3%
Other	3.0%

- The questionnaire asked dental assistants to identify their primary work setting. The majority of dental assistants work in a clinic setting.
- A small share of dental assistants work in academic and community or faith based organization settings.

Source: MDH Dental Assistant Workforce Questionnaire, 2016-2017. Percentages are based on 2,891 valid responses. The survey includes questions on both the “primary” and “secondary” settings in which providers work. For the purposes of the analysis in this section, we present data only on the setting dental assistants reported as their “primary” setting. An analysis of dental assistants’ work settings indicates that the types of settings in which dental assistants worked did not differ depending on whether they were primary or secondary.

# Dental Assistants at Work: EHRs and Telemedicine

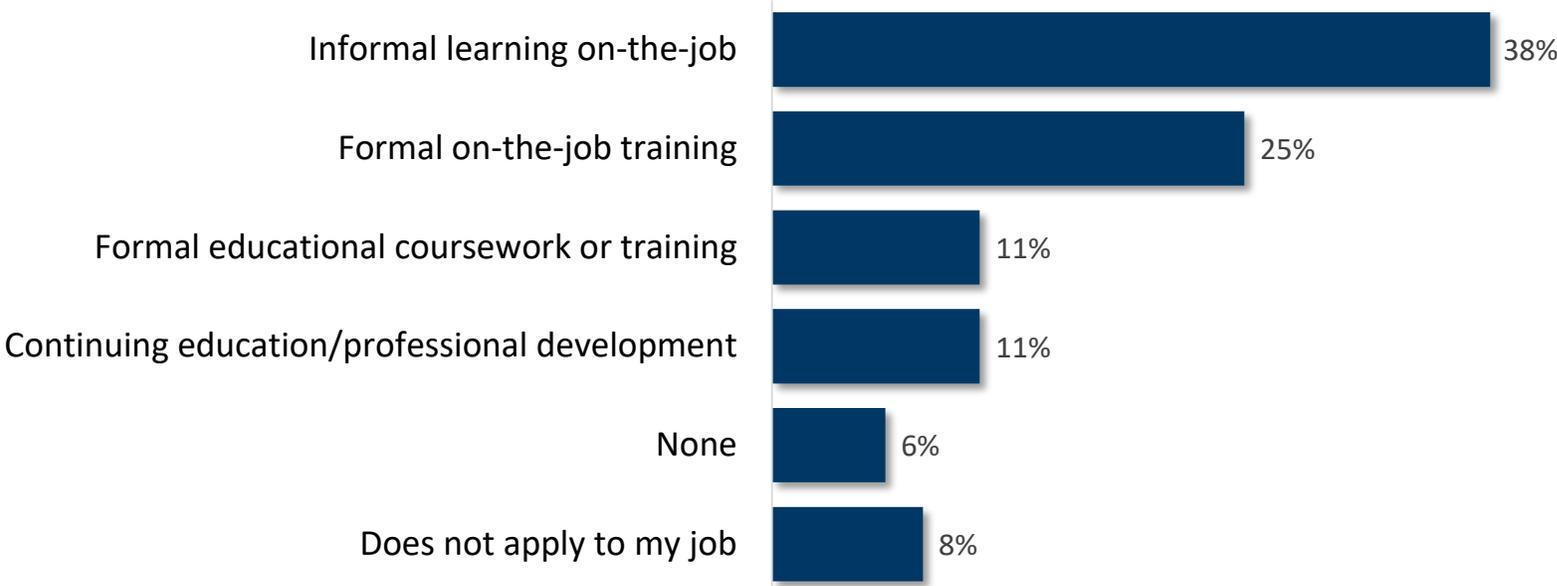
## Dental Assistants' Use of Electronic Health Records and Telemedicine Equipment



- The survey included items about the use of both electronic health records (EHRs) and dedicated telemedicine equipment. The results showed that the majority of dental assistants use EHRs “all the time.”
- Telemedicine is less frequently used—only 21 percent reported using it frequently or all the time. Most dental assistants report never using telemedicine equipment.

# Dental Assistants at Work: Teamwork

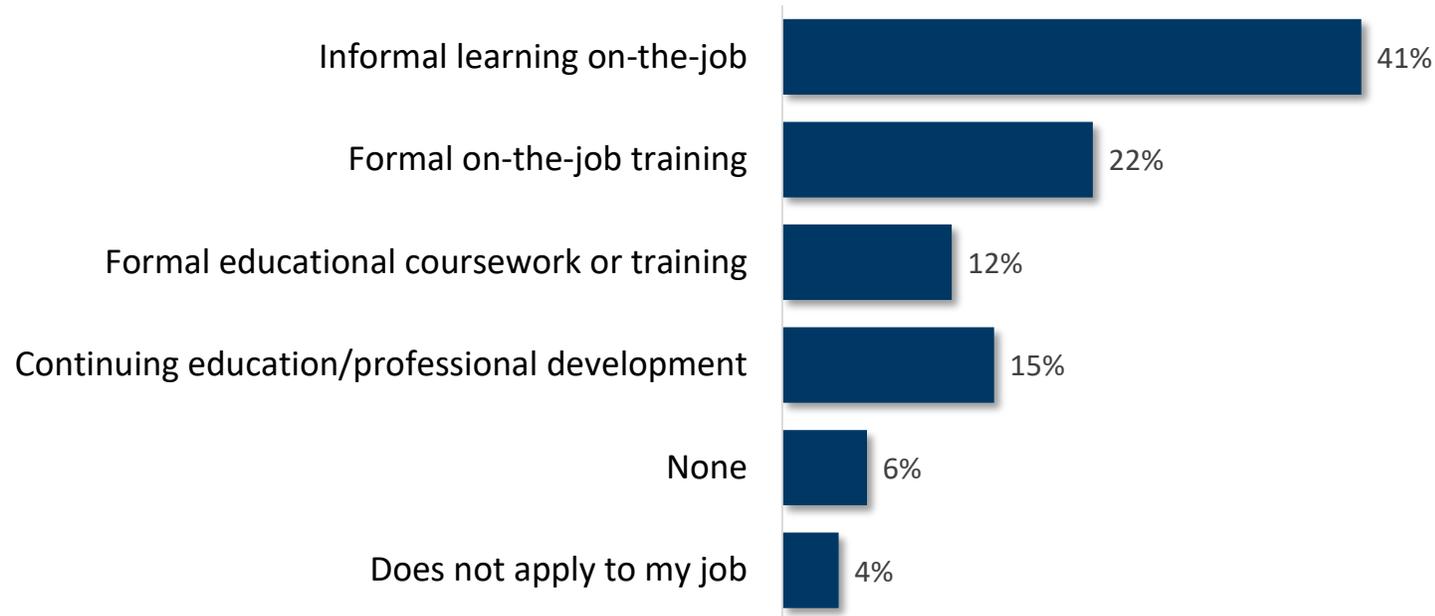
**“Which of the following work or educational experiences best prepared you to work in a multidisciplinary team when providing care?”**



- Health care providers increasingly work in multidisciplinary teams, prompting educators and health policymakers to ask how best to train providers to communicate and coordinate across professions. MDH included a question on its survey to shed light on these concerns. Sixty-three percent of dental assistants reported that learning on the job (either informal or formal) *best* prepared them to work in multidisciplinary teams.

# Dental Assistants at Work: Cultural Competence

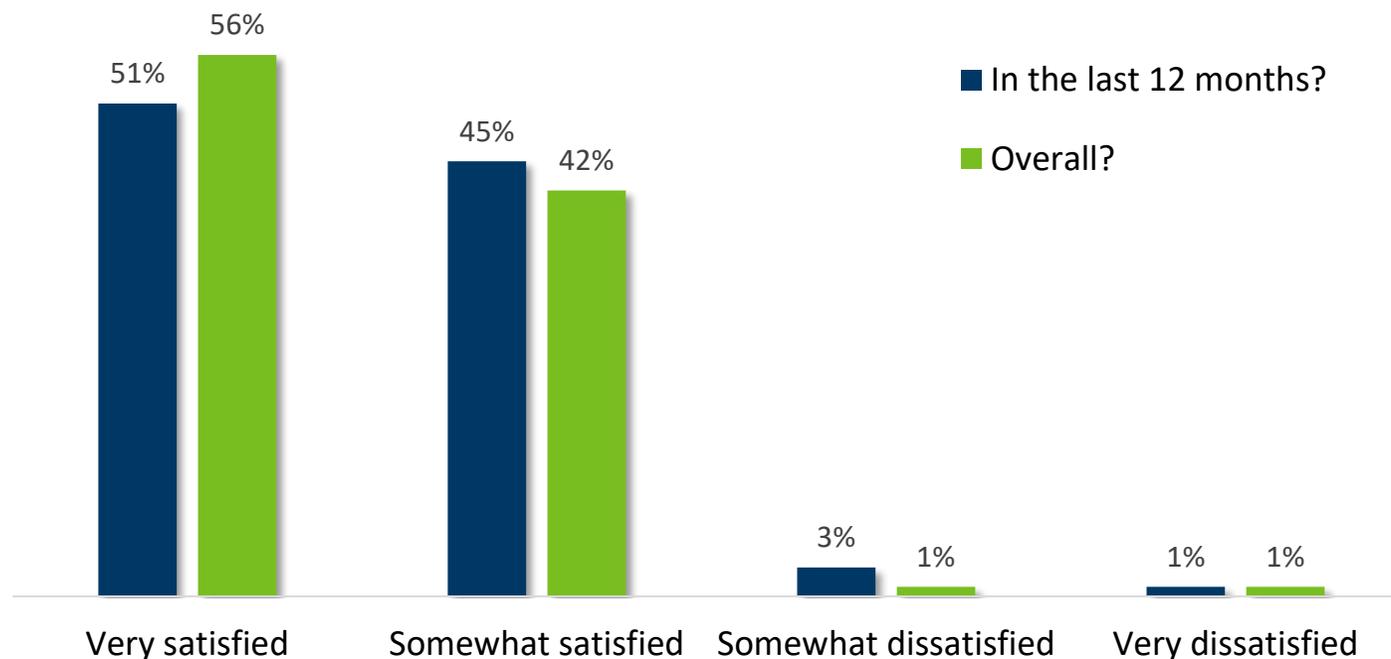
**“Which of the following work or educational experiences best prepared you to provide culturally competent care?”**



- Dental assistants most commonly indicated that informal learning *on the job* provided the best preparation for working with diverse groups of patients (41 percent).

# Dental Assistants at Work: Career Satisfaction

How satisfied have you been with your job....



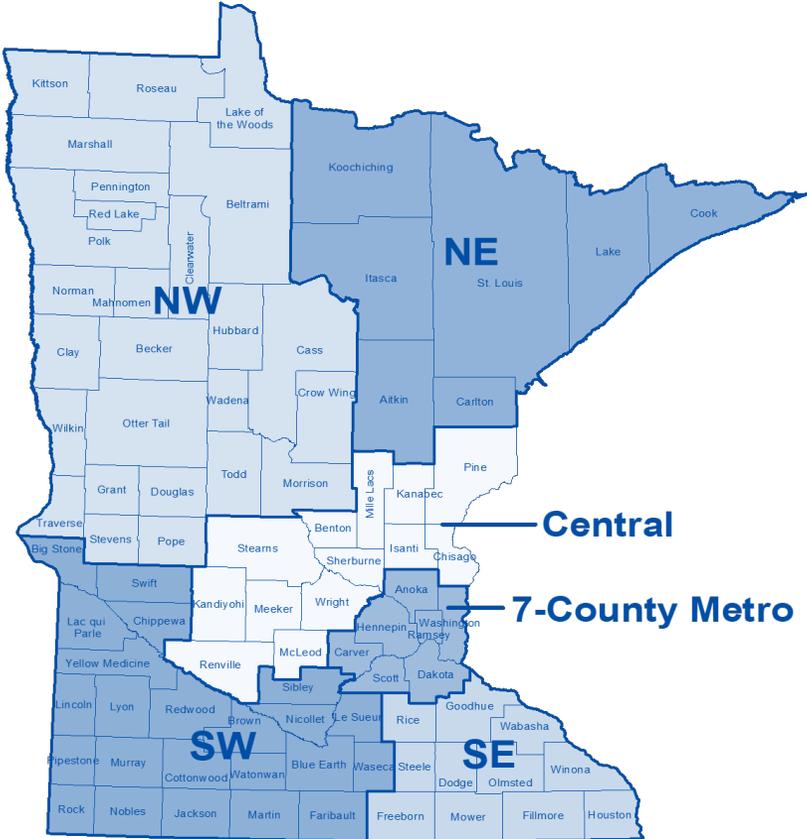
- Dental assistants are generally satisfied, both with their career overall and in the last 12 months.

Data not shown above:

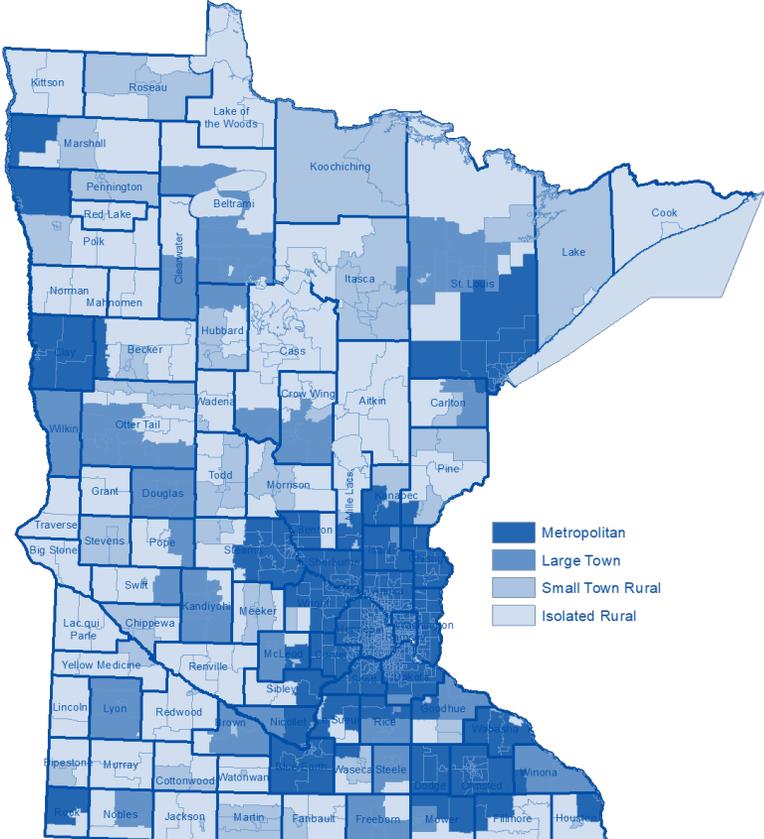
- Dental assistants were also asked about the reasons for their job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Reasons for job satisfaction included helping patients, providing oral care services, working with a good team, and opportunities for learning. Common reasons for dissatisfaction included low pay, issues with patients, dealing with insurance, and lack of recognition.

# Geographic Distribution: Two ways to present geography

By state planning areas



By rural-urban commuting regions (RUCAs)



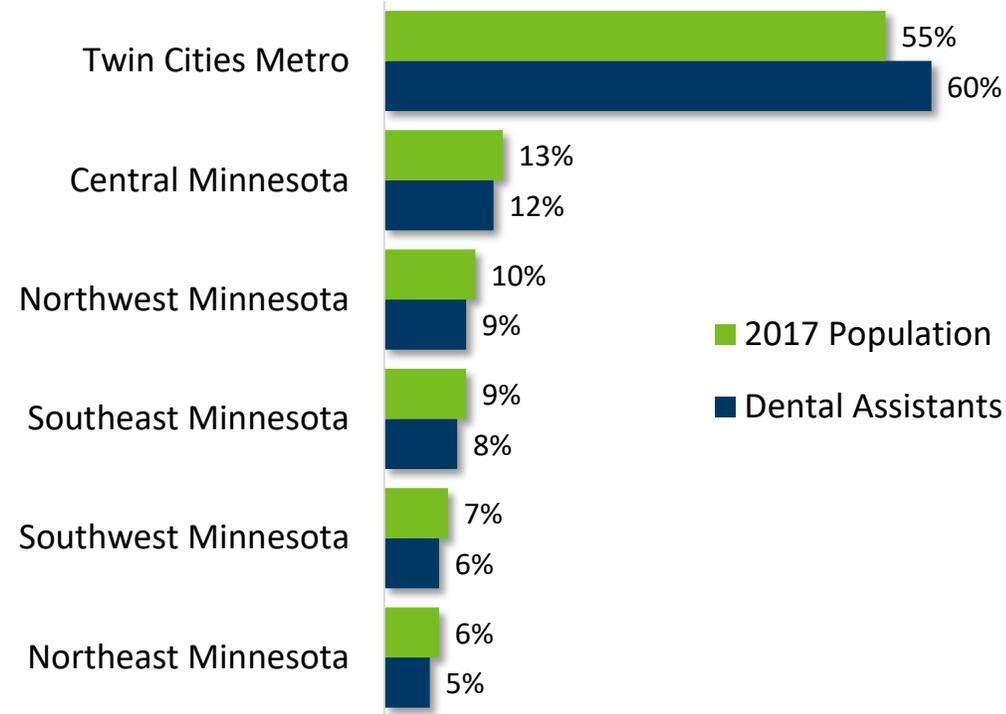
Source: Minnesota Department of Health  
Developed by the Health Resources and Services Administration's  
United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service and  
WAMI Rural Health Research Center at the University of Washington.

For more information:  
<https://apps.deed.state.mn.us/assets/lmi/areamap/plan.shtml>

For more information:  
<https://www.health.state.mn.us/data/workforce/method.html#ruca>

# Geographic Distribution: by Planning Area

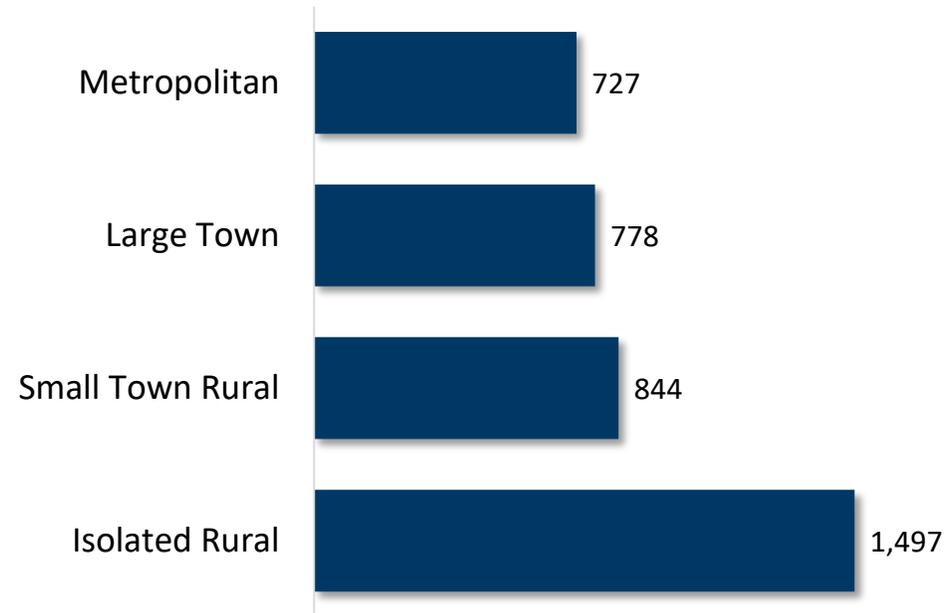
Share of Dental Assistants by State Planning Area



- Slightly over half (60%) of all dental assistants work in the Twin Cities metro area which is home 55 percent of the state’s population.
- The distribution of dental assistants closely mirrors that of the population in other regions of the state. For example 12 percent of dental assistants work in central Minnesota compared to 13 percent of the population residing there.

# Geographic Distribution: by Rurality

## Minnesota Population-to-Dental Assistant Ratio, by Level of Rurality



- Rural Urban Commuting Areas (RUCAs) define areas of the state based on population density and commuting patterns. Using RUCAs is one way to understand the distribution of oral health professionals around the state. The graph shows the share of the population for every dental assistant in metropolitan, large rural, small rural, and isolated rural areas.
- As shown, there are 727 people for every one dental assistant in urban areas of Minnesota, compared to twice that many in the most rural areas of the state. While this pattern is typical for health care providers in Minnesota, dental assistants in isolated rural areas have the lowest population-to-provider ratio among the oral health practitioners. In addition, the population-to-provider ratio in small town rural areas is only slightly higher than in urban areas.

# Methodology

The data in this report come from two sources:

- The **Minnesota Board of Dentistry (BOD)** provides data on the entire population of dental assistants who have active licenses in the state of Minnesota. The BOD maintains this database primarily for administrative purposes. BOD provides the data to the Minnesota Department of Health, Office of Rural Health and Primary Care (MDH-ORHPC). This report uses data current as of February 2018. At that time, there were a total of 7,366 active dental assistants. Analysts at the Minnesota Department of Health-Office of Rural Health and Primary Care clean, organize, clean, and geocode addresses that come from the board and survey, which is how we can identify practice locations (shown in Slides [19](#) and [20](#)).
- The **2016-2017 Minnesota Department of Health-Office of Rural Health and Primary Care (MDH-ORHPC) Dental Assistant Workforce Survey** collects additional demographic and workforce data from dental assistants. MDH-ORHPC administered the survey to all dental assistants who renewed their Minnesota license in 2016 and 2017. The response rate was 51.5 percent.
- See the ORHPC website for more details about the [methodology](http://www.health.state.mn.us/data/workforce/method.html) (www.health.state.mn.us/data/workforce/method.html) of survey.

# Notes

Visit our website at

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/orhpc/workforce/reports.html>  
to learn more about the Minnesota health care workforce.

County-level data for this profession is available at

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/orhpc/workforce/database/>

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