



# Virginia Dental Workforce Council

Report to the VDA House of Delegates

JANUARY 2024



**Virginia Dental**  
ASSOCIATION

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Addressing the oral healthcare needs in all of our communities will require a dental workforce to meet those needs. There are innumerable potential barriers to access to dental care throughout the country, but the root cause of many of these issues is that there aren't providers in the area with the capacity to see additional patients.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the ADA has found that half of dentists nationally have personally taken on duties that were previously assigned to other team members, shifting their time to activities that don't allow them to practice at the top of their license. But as you'll see in the pages that follow, there isn't one simple explanation or solution to the workforce challenges we face, and the challenge is different in different parts of the Commonwealth.

The Virginia Dental Workforce Council brought in program directors, dentists, state officials, and workforce experts to bring solid numbers around the workforce needs in Virginia and to identify short- and long-term solutions.

I thank them all for donating their time and talent to addressing this critical need. This report is an important step in bringing forward solutions, structures and relationships that will elevate our oral healthcare workforce needs and put in place long-term solutions to address our future oral healthcare needs.

Please use this report as a resource. In the months ahead, the data you find in the report will be included and updated as new information becomes available on the Virginia Dental Association's website at [vadental.org](http://vadental.org).

To effectively implement the report's recommendations and address the identified needs, we will need our members and their teams engaged. If you would like to be part of the next steps in this process, please reach out to me or a VDA team member to connect with local efforts.

Thank you again to the many VDA members and professionals who devoted time to working on this issue and getting us to this point. The future of dentistry in Virginia is bright, and I have been encouraged over this past year how much willingness there is to work together to make sure Virginia is a national leader in addressing our dental workforce needs.

Sincerely,

**Dr. Cynthia Southern**

Chair

Virginia Dental Workforce Council

**Cynthia Southern, DDS (Chair)**

Virginia Dental Association

**Heather Anderson, MPH**

Virginia State Office of Rural Health

**Benjamin Barber, MPP**

Virginia Health Catalyst

**Cathy Berard, BSDH, RDH, FADHA**

Virginia Dental Hygienists' Association

**Emily Kate Bowen, DDS, MA**

Mountain Empire Community College

**Jenna Chun**

VCU School of Dentistry, Class of 2024

**Denise Claiborne, Ph.D., RDH**

Old Dominion University

**Benjamin Crowley, DDS**

Brightwork Family Dentistry

**Marlon Goad, DDS**

Wytheville Community College

**Marge Green, MS, RDH, FADHA**

Virginia Dental Hygienists' Association

**John Hall**

Virginia Department of Veteran Services

**Sarah Holland**

Virginia Health Catalyst

**Sara Holston, DDS**

Appalachian Highlands Community  
Dental Center

**Antwon Jacobs, MBA**

Virginia Department of Veteran Services

**Sara Leon-Guerrero Harrison,  
CDA, CRFDA, CDIPC**

Virginia Dental Assistants Association

**Melanie Love, DDS**

Northern VA Dental Society

**Marion Manski, MS, RDH**

VCU School of Dentistry

**Misty Mesimer, MSCH, RDH, CDA**

Germanna Community College

**Darla Miller**

Virginia Association of Career and  
Technical Education

**Tripp Perrin**

Lindl Corporation

**Rufus Phillips**

Virginia Association of Free and  
Charitable Clinics

**VaCora Rainey, DDS**

VCU School of Dentistry

**Anthony Reedy**

Virginia Department of Labor

**Yetty Shobo, Ph.D.**

Virginia Healthcare Workforce  
Data Center

**Amber Shuler, RDH, MDH**

Wytheville Community College

**Carlos Smith, DDS, M.Div**

VCU School of Dentistry and  
Virginia Health Catalyst

**Crystal Stokes**

Virginia Department of Education

**Kelly Tanner, PhD, RDH**

Virginia Peninsula Community College

**Marlana Thomas, MS, RDH, CTTS**

Virginia Western Community College

**Heather Tuthill, MPH, BSDH, RDH**

Virginia Dental Hygienists' Association

**Emily Webb**

Virginia Chamber of Commerce

**Missy Wesolowski**

Lindl Corporation

## Virginia Dental Association Team

**Ryan Dunn**

CEO

**Laura Givens**

Director of Legislative & Public Policy

**Shannon Jacobs**

Director of Communications

**Paul Logan**

Director of Strategic Initiatives/Innovation

## Timeline

### **April 14, 2023**

Virginia Workforce Council Convenes at VDA Headquarters

### **June 9, 2023**

Virginia Workforce Council Meets (virtual)

### **August 4, 2023**

Virginia Workforce Council Meets (virtual)

### **September 24, 2023**

Virginia Workforce Council Preliminary Findings Presented to Virginia Dental Association Board of Directors

### **November 17, 2023**

Virginia Dental Workforce Council Meets to Review Draft Report to the VDA House of Delegates

### **January 18-20, 2024**

Virginia Workforce Council Report Presented to the VDA House of Delegates

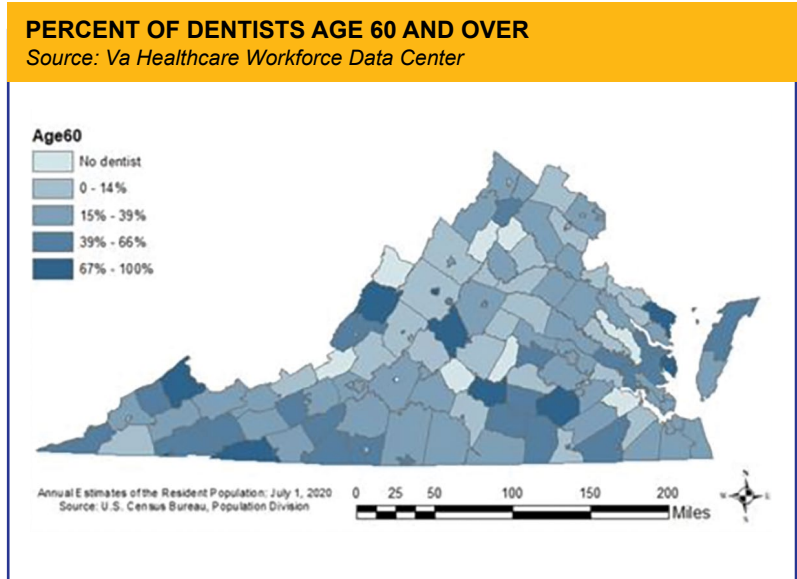
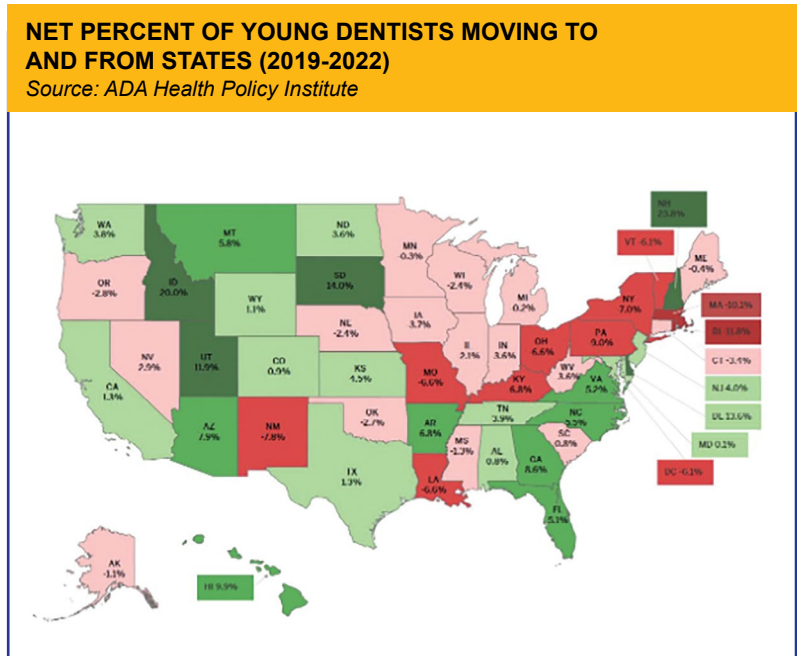
### **Continued Meetings and Collaboration with Council Participants to Implement Recommendations**

## Early Outcomes

- Closer working relationship with VDHA, joint effort to preserve dental hygiene program at Virginia Peninsula Community College
- Closer relationship with new leadership at Virginia Community College System
  - Partner association for November 29 VCCS Healthcare Summit to identify regional healthcare workforce priorities
- New data available on Virginia's dental workforce needs
- New opportunities available to promote allied dental careers
  - Mission Tomorrow presentation to 12,000 Richmond-area 8th graders and high schoolers in October
  - Presentation to guidance counselors from around Virginia in March in Williamsburg on the opportunities available through dental careers
- Brought CODA to the table to consider changes in ratios that limit flexibility of allied dental programs
- Education of VDA members around DAll program
- New open channel with Virginia's Department of Veterans' Services around career opportunities
- Closer relationship with allied dental program administrators and channels to promote openings through the VDA Career Center for their graduates
- Legislative priorities to address challenges to licensure and remote supervision

## Dentists

- The ratio of dentists to overall population in Virginia is greater than the national average and has grown over time
  - 63.83 dentists per 100,000 population in Virginia vs. 60.77 nationally
- Virginia has more young dentists moving in from other states than out and 84% of our newly licensed dentists in the past five years graduated from dental programs outside of Virginia
- Virginia's challenge is in making rural areas outside of the urban crescent attractive for the dentists graduating and moving to the state
- An aging dental workforce in rural areas makes this challenge an urgent one to address
- Compared with pre-pandemic, half of dentists now report personally doing more duties previously performed by dental hygienists, administrators or assistants, as staffing challenges persist. Not caring for patients at the top of their license limits the dentists' ability to see new patients.
- Newly opening dental schools at Lincoln Memorial University and Highpoint University are recruiting dental students from Virginia and have plans for dental clinic partnerships in rural Virginia that have the potential to help address needs and give students familiarity with those areas as they consider where to practice
- Approximately 100 dental students graduate annually from the VCU School of Dentistry, about half of whom are recruited from Virginia. Their students have service-learning rotations in 14 free and charitable clinics in health profession shortage areas in-state
- The school itself is the largest dental Medicaid provider in Virginia, but its current facilities, with tens of millions of dollars in deferred maintenance, are not suited to its growing role in providing dental care to patients from across Virginia



## Dental Hygienists

- Virginia’s concentration of dental hygienists is slightly less than the national average, but our above-average concentration of dentists creates a greater workforce gap than indicated by the population
- 41 of Virginia’s localities have more dentists than hygienists, while the national ratio is approximately equal
- The largest gaps in raw numbers can be found in densely populated areas in Northern Virginia and the Richmond area, which also have concentrations of dentists well above the state average

County	Year	FTE-Dentist	FTE-RDH	Hygienist minus Dentist	Hygienist to Dentist Ratio
Fairfax County	2022	610.9	431.2	-179.7	70.58%
Richmond City	2022	141.9	78.1	-63.8	55.04%
Henrico County	2022	157.9	115.2	-42.7	72.96%
Arlington County	2022	117.1	78.5	-38.6	67.04%
Loudoun County	2022	200.1	161.6	-38.5	80.76%
Prince William County	2022	184.6	149.5	-35.1	80.99%
Falls Church City	2022	33.9	14.7	-19.2	43.36%
Fredericksburg City	2022	40.8	24.6	-16.2	60.29%
Prince George County	2022	22.2	6.2	-16	27.93%
Alexandria City	2022	80	66	-14	82.50%
Fairfax City	2022	29.9	16	-13.9	53.51%
Portsmouth City	2022	35.2	22.4	-12.8	63.64%
Harrisonburg City	2022	33.4	25.1	-8.3	75.15%
Albemarle County	2022	65.5	58.1	-7.4	88.70%
Richmond County	2022	16.5	10.2	-6.3	61.82%

- 67 percent of licensed dental hygienists in Virginia received their initial professional degree in-state
- Germanna Community College has started a new dental hygiene program with an enrollment of five students per class, expected to increase to 10 in a few years as they build out a new space – Their first class graduated in December, 2023.
- Virginia Peninsula Community College recently paused admissions to its program and the VDA has been working with VDHA through the workforce council to address barriers to continuing the program – Approximately 40 dentists and dental hygienists participated in a November, 2023 community meeting to help identify a path forward for the program

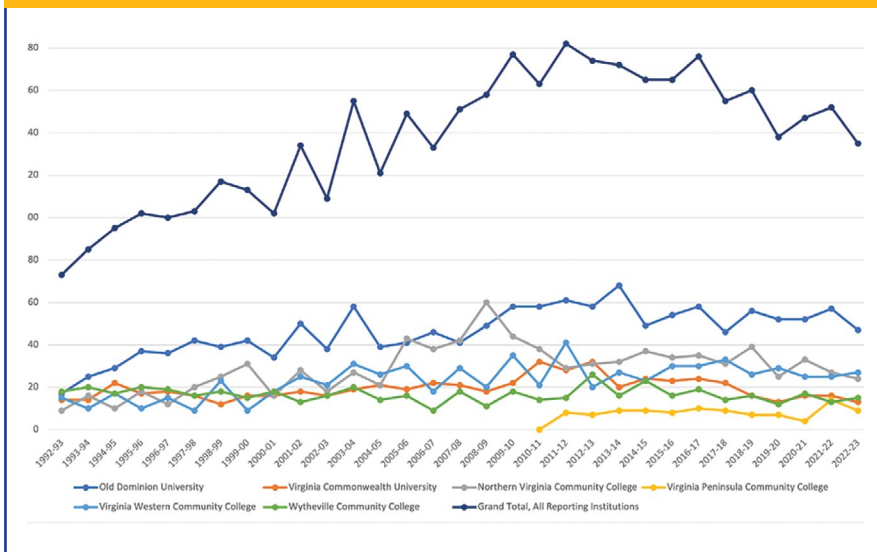
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## Dental Hygienists (continued)

- Since peaking at 182 in 2011, the overall number of Virginia graduates from dental hygiene programs has declined, down to 135 students in 2023
- The share of newly licensed hygienists coming from out-of-state programs has increased somewhat – 41% in the past five years compared to 33% overall
- The dental hygiene programs in closest geographic proximity to the areas with the largest workforce gaps are Northern Virginia Community College and the VCU School of Dentistry
- Areas like Norfolk, Virginia Beach, James City County and Roanoke, in close proximity to strong hygiene programs have healthier dentist to hygienist ratios
- The workforce of dental hygienists has grown faster than the rate of full-time-equivalent hygienists, meaning they are working on average fewer hours per person
- Dental hygiene programs are experiencing significant challenges with hiring and retention of full-time and adjunct faculty and proper funding as they have been impacted by increased costs
- They are also experiencing challenges in licensure, with the Board of Dentistry creating a redundant requirement for hygienists who go through training to become an expanded function dental assistant

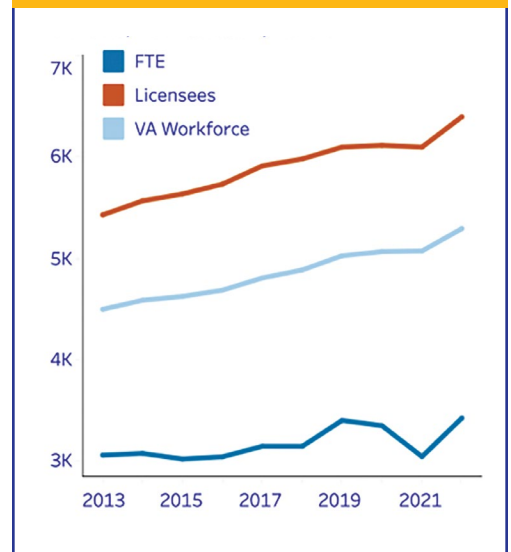
### VIRGINIA DENTAL HYGIENE PROGRAM GRADUATES BY INSTITUTION

Source: Virginia State Council of Higher Education



### LICENSEES, VA WORKFORCE, AND FTE

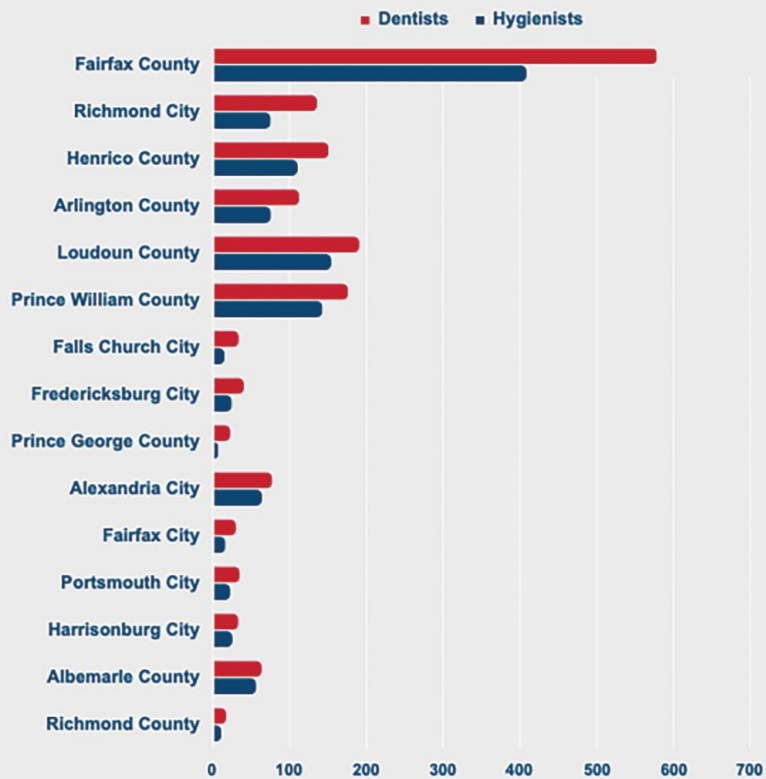
Source: Virginia Healthcare Workforce Data Center Center



- **Make healthcare workforce data more accessible for policymakers**
  - Create a VDA Dental Workforce Dashboard that makes all available workforce data easily accessible
- **Elevate dental workforce needs among policymakers and VCCS**
  - Participate in VCCS Healthcare Summit with Governor's Administration November 29, 2023
  - Regular discussions with VCCS administration
  - Seek individuals with dentistry background to serve on workforce boards and commissions
- **Promote careers in dentistry, particularly in healthcare provider shortage areas and make it easier for dentists and dental hygienists to practice in areas of need**
  - Career fair toolkit
  - Support and promote VCU Dental Explorer Days
  - Expand activities as G3 program ambassador, which offers tuition assistance for 30% of current VCCS dental hygiene and dental assisting students
  - High school guidance counselor outreach
  - Clear path for military veterans and spouses to pursue dental careers
  - Earned media opportunities
- **Support Virginia's dental programs**
  - New Dental School Building at VCU
  - Address faculty, facility and funding needs for allied dental programs and barriers to expanding class needs in areas with significant shortages
  - Address causes of attrition in allied dental programs
  - Continue to seek changes from CODA to allow for appropriate flexibility for allied dental faculty
  - Address allied dental program capacity in areas of significant need
- **Address barriers to licensure for dentists and hygienists**
  - Ensure a clear, predictable process
  - Support entry into the Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact to allow an additional path to licensure
- **Address barriers for free and charitable dental care**
  - Additional dental and allied dental student partnerships
  - Partnership with clinics to credential dentists for Medicaid
  - Formal partnerships for connecting the workforce with opportunities
- **Address barriers to entering the workforce**
  - Partnerships with dental education programs to promote career opportunities through VDA Career Center
  - Mentorship and residency opportunities in high need areas
- **Support federal initiatives through the ADA**
  - CODA flexibility
  - Reauthorizing the Action for Dental Health Act workforce grants directed towards programs for dentists and other dental professionals
  - S 862, the Restoring America's Health Care Workforce and Readiness Act, which would double funding for the National Health Service Corps' scholarships and loan repayment programs for health care workers, including dentists and dental hygienists, who serve in federally designated shortage areas
  - S 704, the Resident Education Deferred Interest Act, which would address the difficulty, or inability, of those who must undertake several years of dental residency with very low pay to begin repaying student debt immediately



## Virginia Localities with the Largest Gap Between Dentists and Hygienists



## 2023 Dental Hygiene Program Graduates by Institution

