Survey of Oral Health Care Providers

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Canadian oral health care practices, such as dentist, denturist and independent dental hygienist offices, play a key role in delivering care to Canadians. New data released today show that most oral health care practices reported having human resources issues (80%), and operational challenges (75%).

Nevertheless, almost all (96%) oral health care practices were accepting new patients. Moreover, average appointment wait times were similar for existing (52%) and new (55%) patients (from one week to less than one month). Additionally, just under one-third (31%) of existing oral health care providers were still planning to expand their operations.

With the anticipated increase in demand for oral health care services as a result of the Canadian Dental Care Plan, the Survey of Oral Health Care Providers (SOHCP) was developed to better understand the challenges and risks Canadian oral health care practices face while delivering care in an evolving landscape.

The SOHCP is Canada's first national survey to focus on oral health care providers. The survey collected information for the most recent 12-month fiscal period for which the final day occurs on or between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024, from owners or operators of oral health care practices with a physical location within Canada that were classified as an office of dentists, dental hygienists, or denturists in the Business Register.

This release focuses on key factors related to access to oral health care services prior to the full implementation of the Canadian Dental Care Plan, such as appointment wait times for new and existing patients, as well as human resources challenges, resulting labour-related impacts, and the operational challenges that oral health care practices faced during their last fiscal year (ending on or between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024). Additionally, the survey offers insights into the business intentions of these practices for the 24 months following the survey, highlighting their diverse future plans.

Over half of practices have an average wait time for existing patients of one week to less than one month

With the anticipated increase in demand for oral health care services, wait times for an appointment can provide insight into whether oral health care practices were able to ensure that all patients had timely access to regular care. The survey collected information on wait times for existing patients (see Table 1) and new patients (see Table 2) seeking non-emergency care.

Over half (52%) of oral health care practices were able to provide non-emergency dental care appointments for their existing patients from one week to less than one month from the time of booking, while one-quarter (25%) were able to do so in less than one week. A further 17% of oral health care practices were able to offer their existing patients an appointment within one month to less than three months, and 4% were able to offer their existing patients an appointment within three months to less than six months. Few oral health care practices (2%) had no appointment to offer within less than six months.

Similar patterns were noted among the three types of oral health care practices. Around half of dentist (53%), denturist (50%) and independent dental hygienist (50%) offices were able to provide non-emergency dental care appointments for their existing patients from one week to less than one month from the time of booking.

Table 1
Percentage of oral health care practices by average wait times for non-emergency appointments for existing patients

	Dentist offices	Independent dental hygienist offices	Denturist offices	All oral health care practices
	%			
Less than one week	24.5	27.4	37.9	25.4
One week to less than one month	52.5	50.0	49.7	52.3
One month to less than three months	17.3	14.1[E]	7.4	16.6
Three months to less than six months	4.0	F	2.3[E]	3.9
Six months or more	1.7	F	2.8[E]	1.8

[E] use with caution
F too unreliable to be published
Note(s): The reference period for this survey is the most recent 12-month fiscal period for which the final day occurs on or between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024.
Source(s): Survey of Oral Health Care Providers (**5397**).

One in four oral health care practices see new patients for non-urgent dental care in less than one week

Over half (55%) of oral health care practices were able to offer a new patient an appointment for non-urgent dental care from one week to less than one month, while one in four (25%) oral health care practices were able to offer an appointment in less than one week. Just under one-sixth (15%) of oral health care practices were able to offer their new patients an appointment within one month to less than three months, and 3% were able to offer their existing patients an appointment within three months to less than six months. Very few oral health care practices (2%) were unable to offer an appointment within less than six months.

Similar patterns were noted among the three types of oral health care practices. Approximately 56% of independent dental hygienist offices were able to offer a new patient an appointment for non-urgent dental care from one week to less than a month, followed by 56% of dentist offices and 54% of denturist offices.

The data show that wait times for existing and new patients were similar regardless of the type of oral health care practice. As the implementation of the Canadian Dental Care Plan continues to roll out, it will be important to understand how wait times may be affected as demand for oral health care services is expected to increase.

Table 2
Percentage of oral health care practices by average wait times for non-urgent appointments for new patients

	Dentist offices	Independent dental hygienist offices	Denturist offices	All oral health care practices
	%			
Less than one week	24.5	27.5[E]	35.8	25.3
One week to less than one month	55.5	56.4	53.6	55.4
One month to less than three months	15.1	11.7[E]	6.2[E]	14.4
Three months to less than six months	3.0	F	2.7[E]	3.0
Six months or more	1.9	F	F	1.8

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Four in five oral health care practices have staffing or human resources challenges

The types of human resources challenges (e.g., recruitment and retention), and the operational challenges experienced within the oral health care industry provide insight into the current obstacles they are facing and may highlight issues that could impact the delivery of services in the future.

Overall, four in five (80%) oral health care practices reported having at least one staffing or human resources challenge. Dentist offices were most likely to report having at least one staffing or human resources challenge (82%), followed by independent dental hygienist (71%) and denturist (53%) offices.

Difficulty recruiting skilled employees was the most cited human resources challenge with 64% of dentist, 50% of independent dental hygienist and 37% of denturist offices.

Three in four oral health care practices face operational challenges

Three in four oral health care practices (75%) reported facing at least one operational challenge. Just over three-quarters of dentist (76%) and independent dental hygienist (75%) offices reported at least one operational challenge, compared with just over two-thirds of denturist offices (68%).

Administrative, financial, and operational-related reasons (42%) were the most reported operational challenge felt by oral health care providers, particularly among dentist offices (43%). In comparison, independent dental hygienist (49%) and denturist (33%) offices reported clientele related challenges (e.g., patient recruitment and cancellations) as the most prevalent operational challenges.

Few oral health care practices intend to reduce or cease operations over the 24 months following the survey

The business intentions of oral health care practices over the 24 months following the survey provide valued information regarding the supply of oral health care services moving forward.

As shown in Table 3, among all oral health care practices, 59% planned on maintaining their operation over the 24 months following the survey. A further 31% indicated they planned on expanding their operation, and 4%[E] (see Note to readers) indicated they planned to cease or reduce their operation. Similar trends were noted for denturist (62%), dentist (59%), and independent dental hygienist (49%) offices indicating they planned to maintain their operation. However, a higher percentage of independent dental hygienist offices planned to expand their operations over the 24 months following the survey (44%) compared with dentist (32%) or denturist (26%) offices.

Table 3
Percentage of oral health care practices by practice operations intention over the 24 months following the survey

	Dentist offices	Independent dental hygienist offices	Denturist offices	All oral health care practices
	%			
Expand operations	31.5	44.0	25.6	31.3
Maintain operations	59.2	48.7	61.5	59.2
Reduce operations	2.1[E]	1.0[E]	3.4	2.2[E]
Cease operations	1.6[E]	1.0[E]	1.8[E]	1.6[E]
Don't know	5.7	5.3[E]	7.7	5.8

[E] use with caution
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Among oral health care practices who reported planning to expand their operation, the most common method was to increase their staff (70%). This method to expand was reported by 80% of independent dental hygienist, 70% of dentist and 67% of denturist offices.

The Canadian Dental Care Plan is anticipated to increase the demand for oral health care services. Current data indicate that oral health care practices—including dentists, denturists, or independent dental hygienists—are preparing to expand or maintain their operations. Despite experiencing various challenges, most practices report being able to still provide access to care within one month.

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Note to readers

The Canadian Dental Care Plan, launched in 2023, is a Government of Canada program that provides oral health care coverage to Canadian residents with an adjusted family net income below $90,000 and without access to private dental insurance.

This release is based on results from the 2023 Survey of Oral Health Care Providers, which collected basic information on practice revenues, expenses, operations, patient volumes, wait times, and human resources, including vacancies and staffing levels.

The findings, based on responses from oral health care practice owners or operators in Canada, include offices of dentists, independent dental hygienists, and denturists. Among dental offices, the data also cover specialized practices such as endodontics, oral and maxillofacial surgery, orthodontics, periodontics, pediatric dentistry, prosthodontics, and other fields requiring additional expertise.

The reference period for this survey is the most recent 12-month fiscal period for which the final day occurs on or between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024.

Note: [E] Use with caution.

Available tables: 13-10-0907-01 to 13-10-0919-01 .

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 5397.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; **infostats@statcan.gc.ca**) or Media Relations (**statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca**).