The Shifting Dental Care Landscape

Update on Key Dental Market Trends

Marko Vujicic
Chief Economist & Vice President
Chief of International Relations

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Millions of Americans Are Skipping the Dentist. Lenders See a Financing Niche.

The New York Times

SCAM OR NOT

I Have Dental Insurance. Why Do I Pay So Much for Care?

32 MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE

The 10th Annual 32 Most Influential People in Dentistry

1. Nader A. Nadershahi, Marko Vujicic, James Schulz Jr.

Vox

POLICY / HEALTH CARE

Dental insurance isn't a scam — but it's also not insurance

How we pay for going to the dentist is supremely screwed up.

CNBC

Why you don't need dental insurance to go to the dentist

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

PERSONAL FINANCE Follow

The Complicated Financial Lives of Dentists, the Millionaires Next Door

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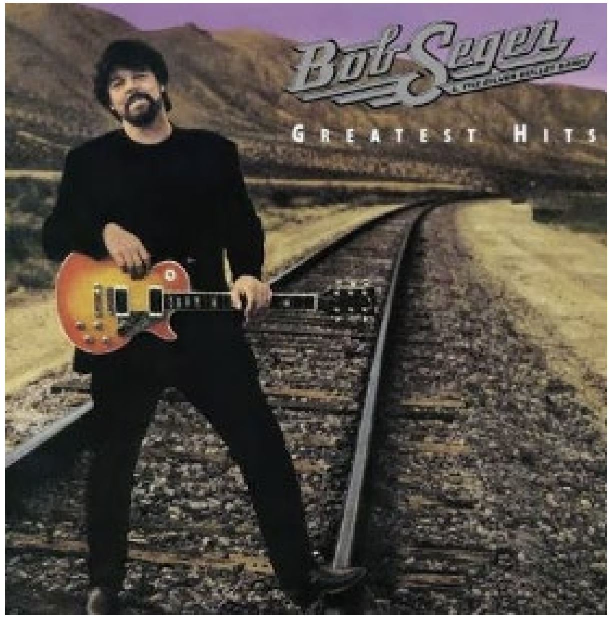
Today's Agenda

- Update on state of the dental care market
- Key trends in dental practice, the dentist workforce, dental insurance market
- Big picture: The fork in the road for the profession

Using Data and Research



Using Data and Research

Update on the Dental Care Market

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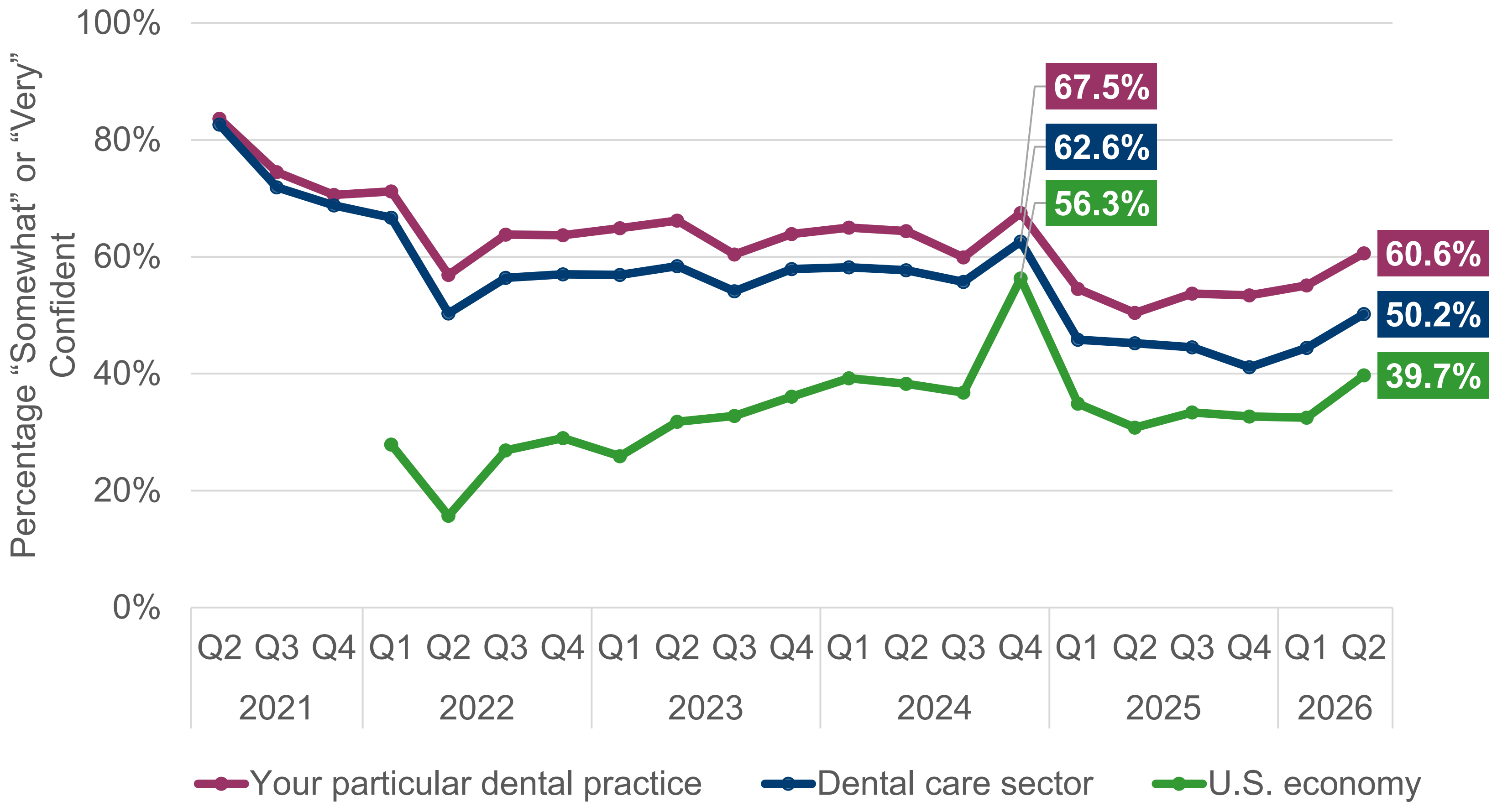
Q2 2026 State of the U.S. Dental Economy Report

This quarterly overview of the state of the U.S. dental economy from the ADA Health Policy Institute draws insights from proprietary data collected from a robust sample of dental practices in the U.S. and the latest economic data related to dentistry from various government sources. The report includes four sections:

- **Dentists' Economic Confidence:** Key indicators of the general sentiment in dental practices
- **Consumer Dental Spending:** Statistics on dental spending by households
- **Dental Practice Economics:** Trends in provider reimbursement rates, prices for dental equipment and supplies, dentist busyness, and future investment decisions
- **Dental Jobs Market:** The state of the job market in dental offices, including employment trends, staffing and recruitment issues

Dentists' Economic Confidence Steady



In Q2 2026, dentists’ confidence **in their own practice,** the **dental sector,** and the **overall U.S. economy** have gone up in Q2 2026.

While going up, confidence in all three sectors is still down from a surge in late 2024.

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

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Why Dentists Feel **Confident** about the **Dental Sector**

More dentists are confident than are skeptical in the dental care sector. These are the top reasons for this rating among dentists who are confident about the U.S. economy in Q2 2026.

TOP FIVE REASONS FOR CONFIDENCE

50.2%
Share of Dentists Confident about the Dental Care Sector in Q2 2026

1. Dentistry is always needed (39.6%)
2. Strong demand, practice busyness (22.6%)
3. Positive economic outlook in general (17.0%)
4. Patient demand exceeds supply of dentists in the area (8.0%)
5. Patient awareness/value of oral health (8.0%)

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

Why Dentists Feel **Confident** about the **Dental Sector**

WHAT DENTISTS ARE SAYING…

“People keep growing teeth and getting cavities.”

“There are not enough dentists to provide care for those who need care.”

“People will always need dental care. Things may change and look differently, but dentists will always be needed.”

“The need for basic care is recession proof.”

“It's a stable industry in an unstable world.”

“Patients have an increased awareness and greater understanding of their dental needs and wants.”

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

Why Dentists Feel **Skeptical** about the **Dental Sector**

More dentists are confident than are skeptical in the dental care sector. These are the top reasons for this rating among dentists who are skeptical about the U.S. economy in Q2 2026.

TOP FIVE REASONS FOR SKEPTICISM

25.2%
Share of Dentists Skeptical about the Dental Care Sector in Q2 2026

1. Low reimbursement, insurance pressures (34.7%)
2. Patients unwilling/unable to prioritize dental care (24.6%)
3. Rising practice costs/inflation (21.2%)
4. U.S. economic downturn (21.2%)
5. Rise in corporate dentistry/DSOs (11.0%)

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

Why Dentists Feel **Skeptical** about the **Dental Sector**

WHAT DENTISTS ARE SAYING…

"Low insurance reimbursement rates combined with rising operational costs."

"Dentistry is being taken over by the corporate entities..."

"Insurance maximums and reimbursements not keeping up with increased overhead and payroll."

"Economic pressure has been building, at some point people decide routine care is a luxury."

"U.S. economy – people cannot afford to live. Dentistry will become even more of a luxury that fewer people can afford."

"Patients seem to want to spend less on elective care and hold off on regular or critical care."

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

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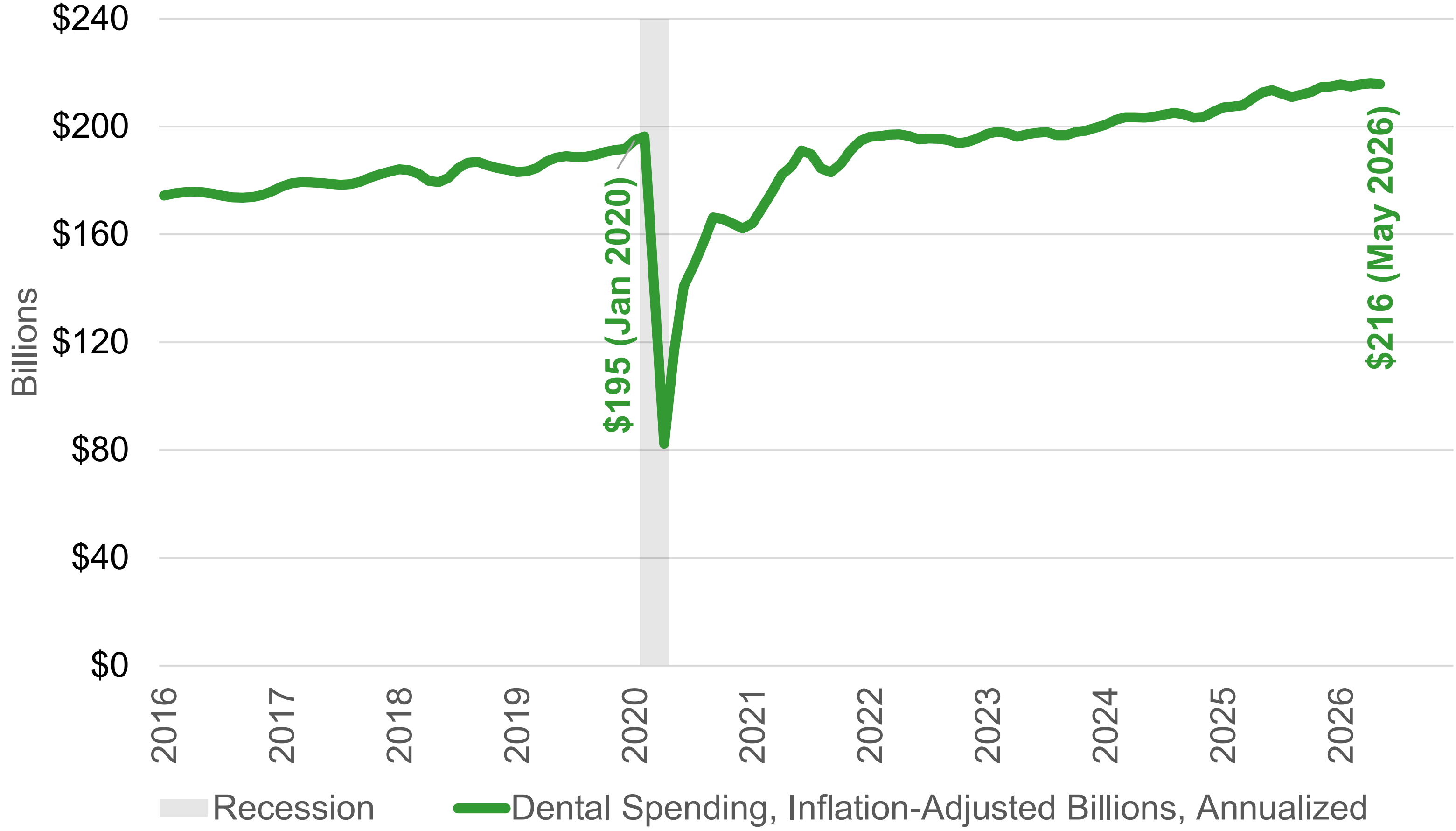
Consumer Dental Spending Up 1% in 12 Months



In May 2026, consumer dental spending was:

- Down 0.1% from month prior
- Up 0.4% year-to-date
- Up 1% from 12 months prior
- Up 11% from pre-pandemic

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis. Note: Adjusted for inflation, 2026 dollars.

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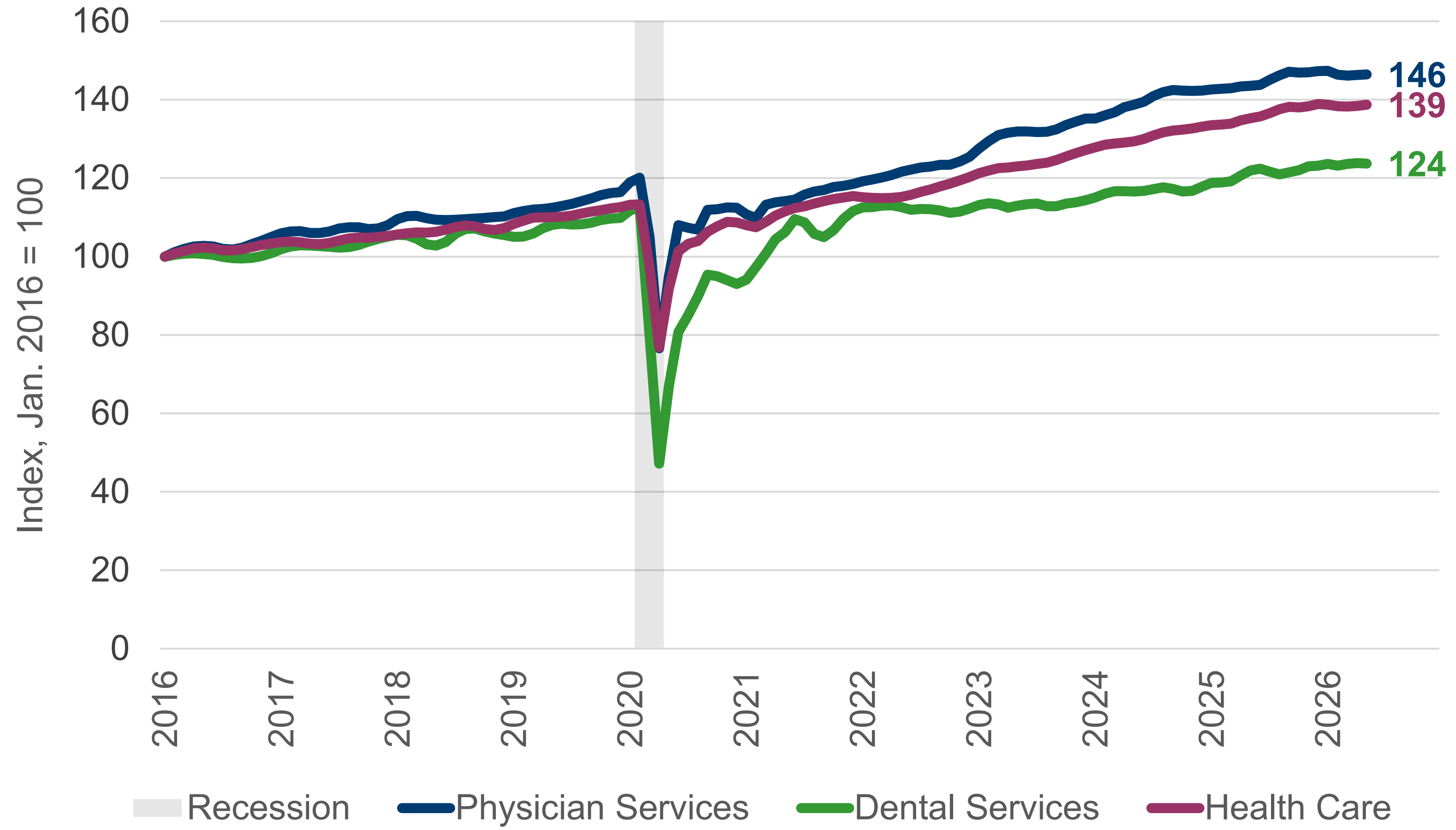
Dental Spending Lags Health Care Spending



Consumer dental spending continues to lag health care spending overall.

Over 10 years, consumer spending on:

- **physician services** is up by 46%
- **health care** is up by 39%
- **dental services** is up by 24%

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis. Note: Adjusted for inflation. Growth measured in May 2026 relative to January 2016.

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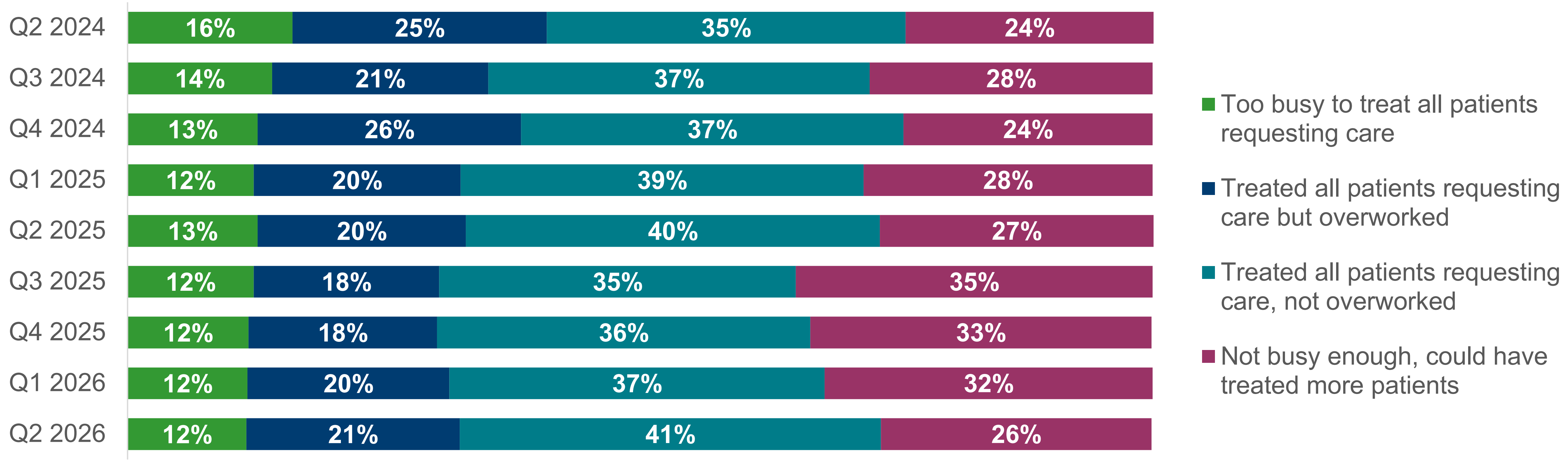
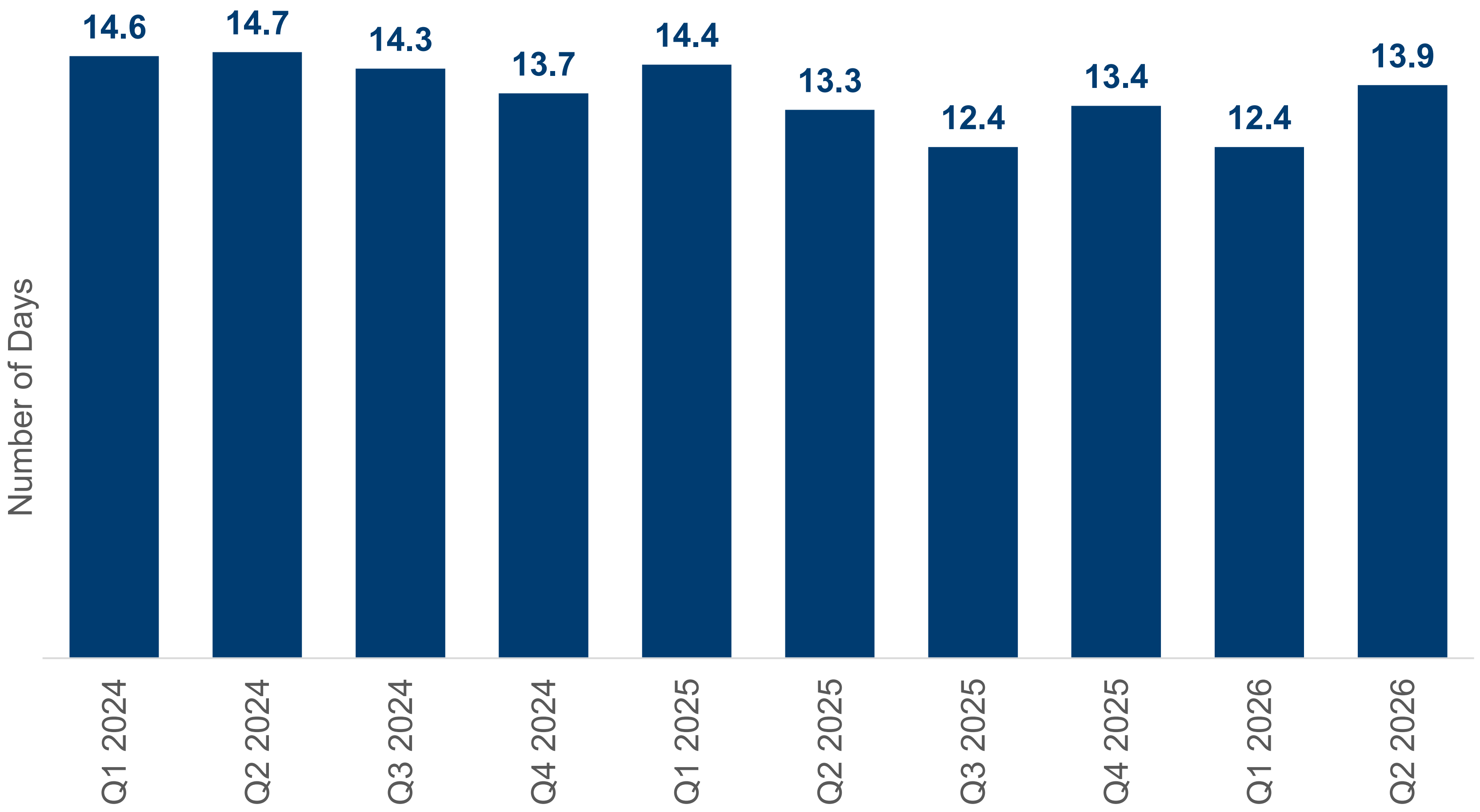
Dentists a Bit Busier



As of Q2 2026, one-quarter of dentists reported that they are **not busy enough,** down slightly from previous quarters. The share of dentists reporting they are **too busy** and **overworked** has remained stable.

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

Appointment Wait Times Up



Wait times in Q2 2026 went up slightly compared to last quarter to an average of 13.9 days but are still lower than a peak in Q2 2024.

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

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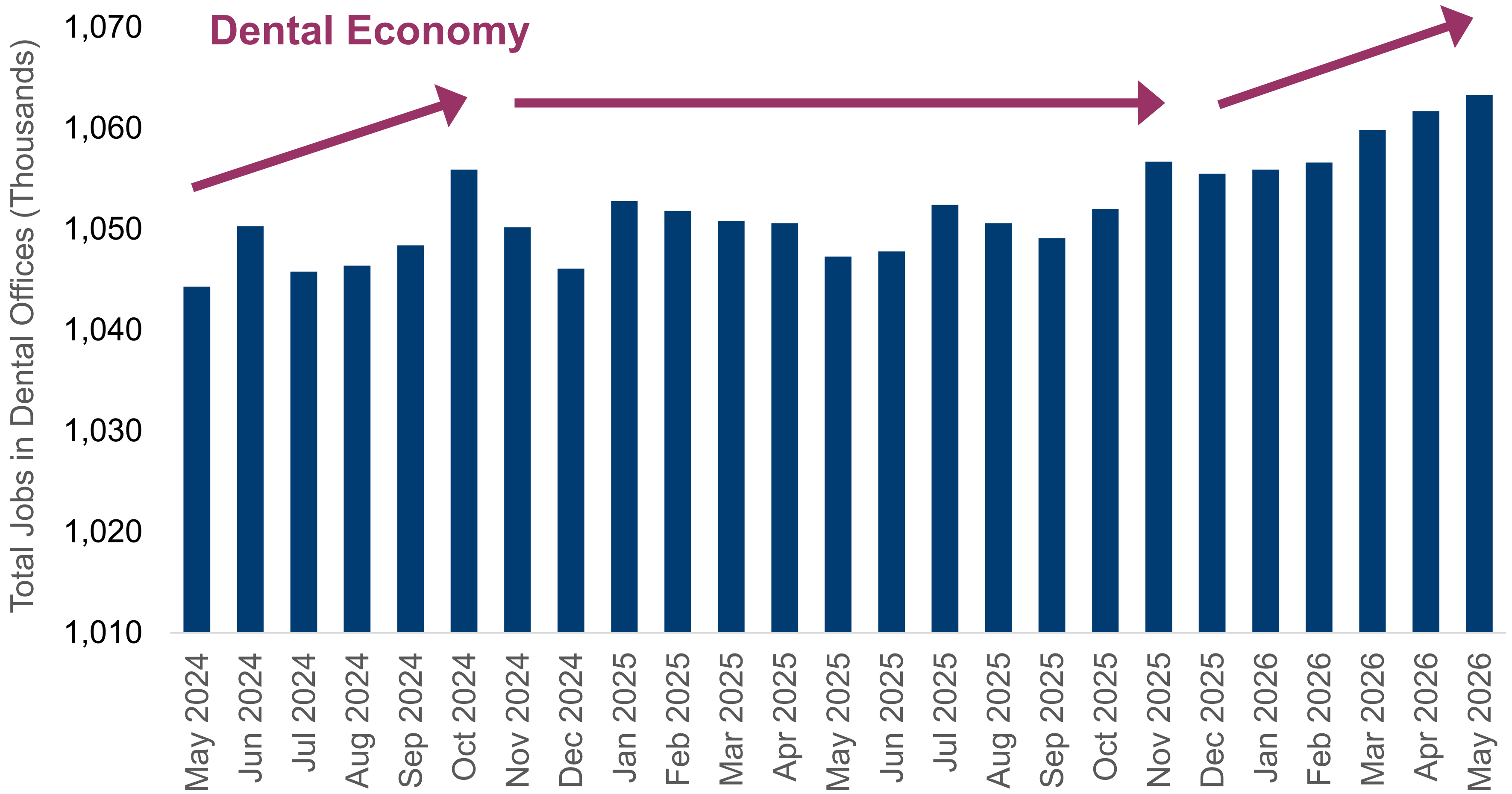
Dental Sector Employment Resuming Growth



In May 2026, the total number of jobs in dental offices was:

- Up 0.2% from month prior
- Up 1.5% over 12 months

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

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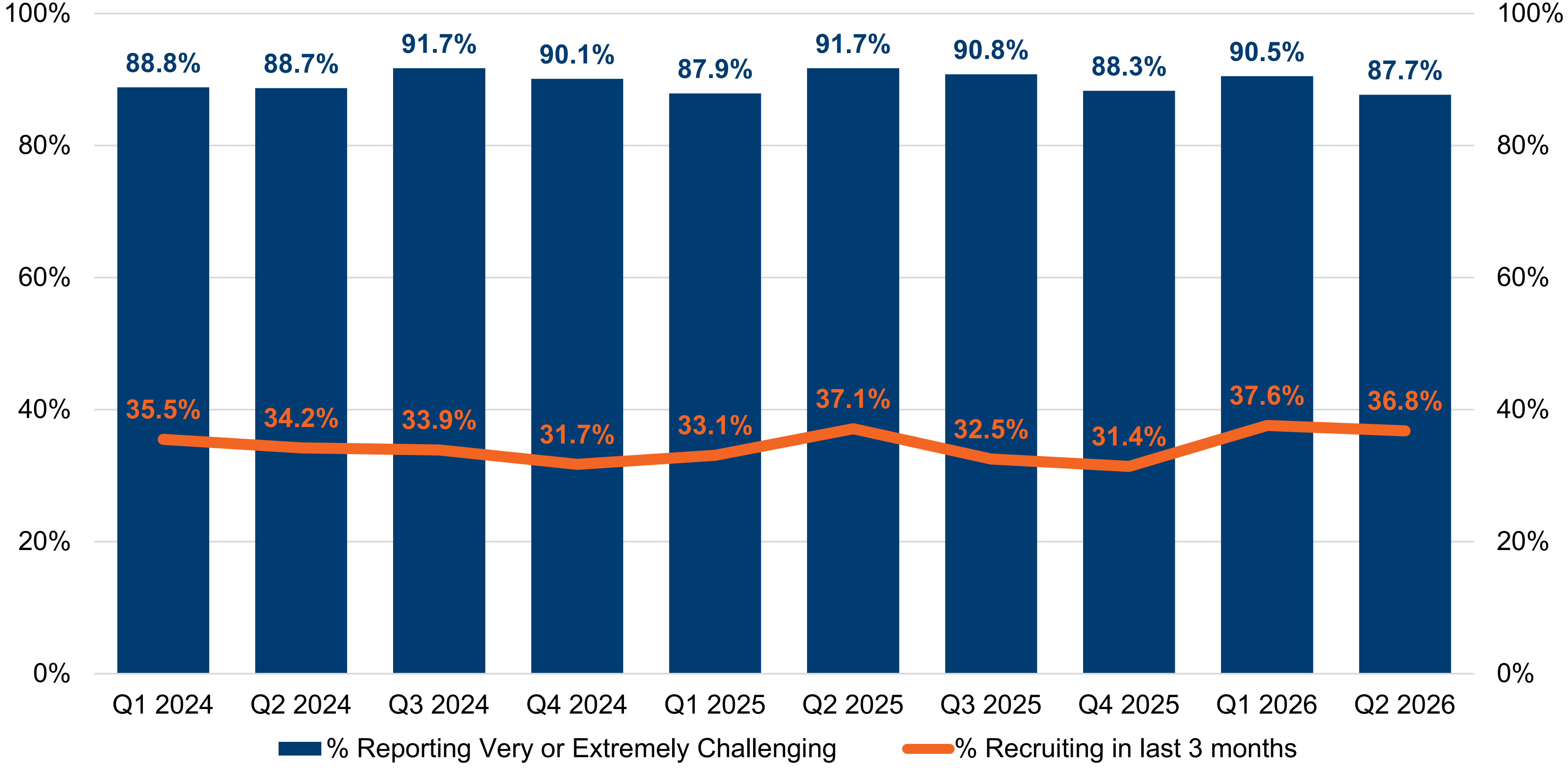
Dental Hygienists Shortage Persisting



Nearly 2 in 5 dentists were recruiting dental hygienists in Q2 2026. Among these dentists, the vast majority report recruiting hygienists is “very” or “extremely challenging.” This trend has been consistent over the last two years.

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

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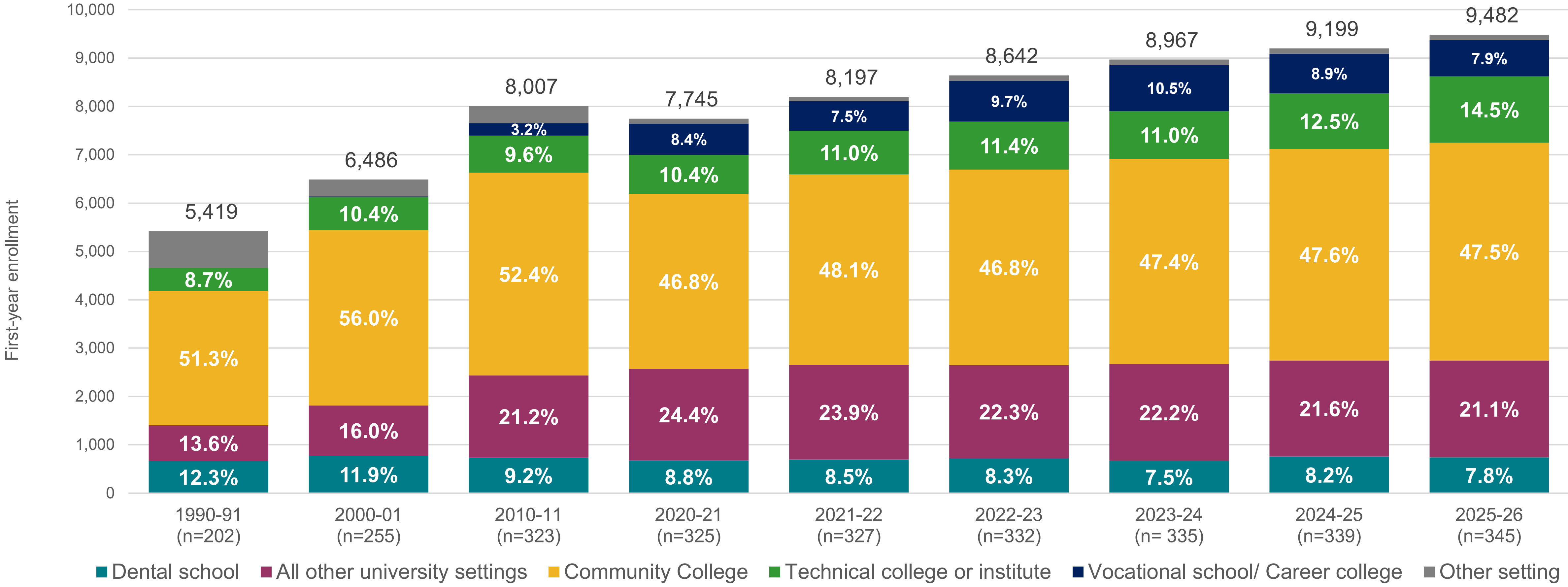
Dental Hygiene Program Enrollment Growing



First-year enrollment in dental hygiene programs reached an all-time high in 2025, representing a 75% increase since 1990.

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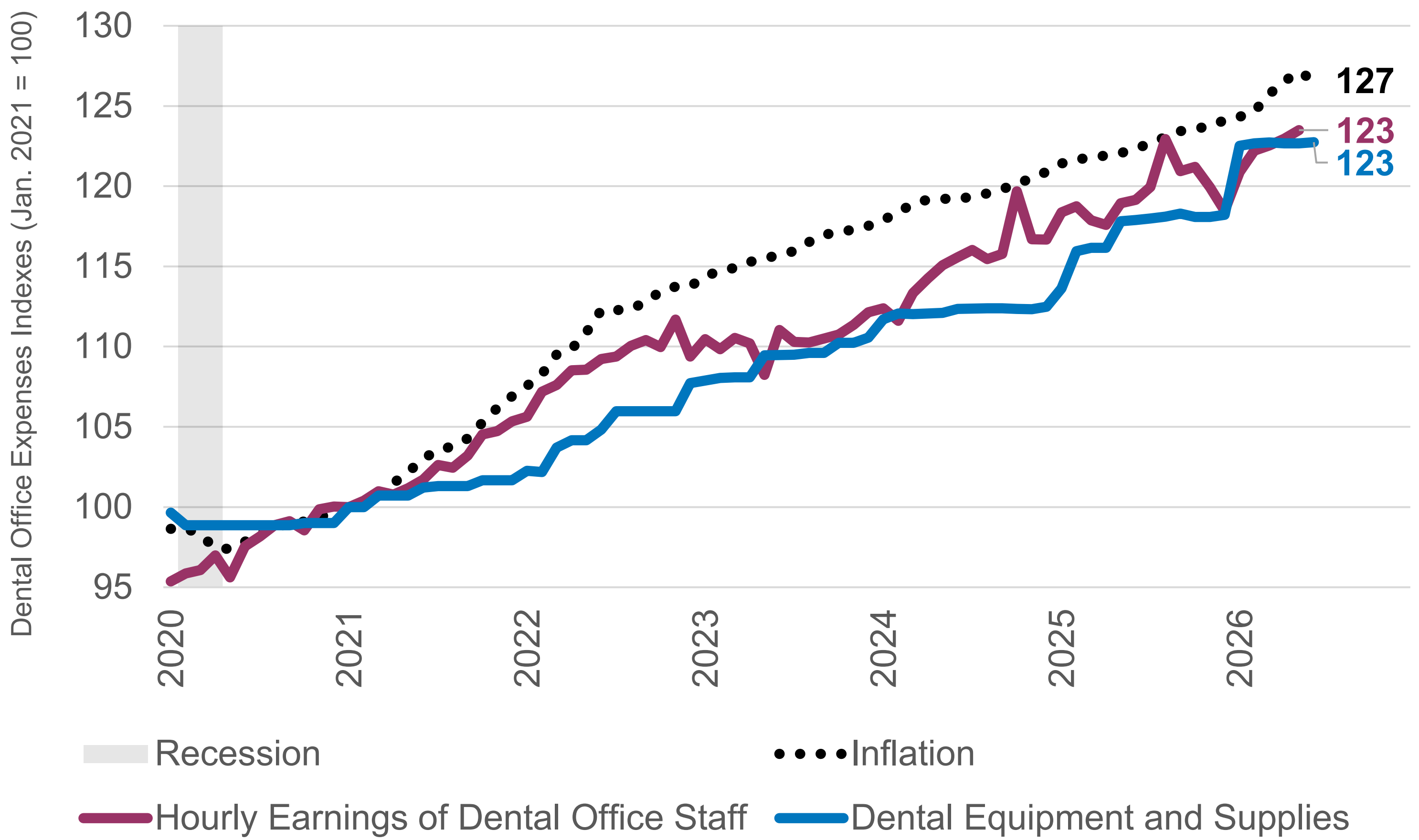
Dental Practice Expense Price Index Increasing



Since January 2021, prices for dental equipment and supplies increased by 23%. Hourly earnings of dental office staff also increased by 23%. During this period, overall inflation has been 27%.

From January through June of this year, prices for dental equipment and supplies increased by 0.2%. Hourly earnings of dental office staff increased by 2.2%. During the same period, overall inflation has been 1.8%.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

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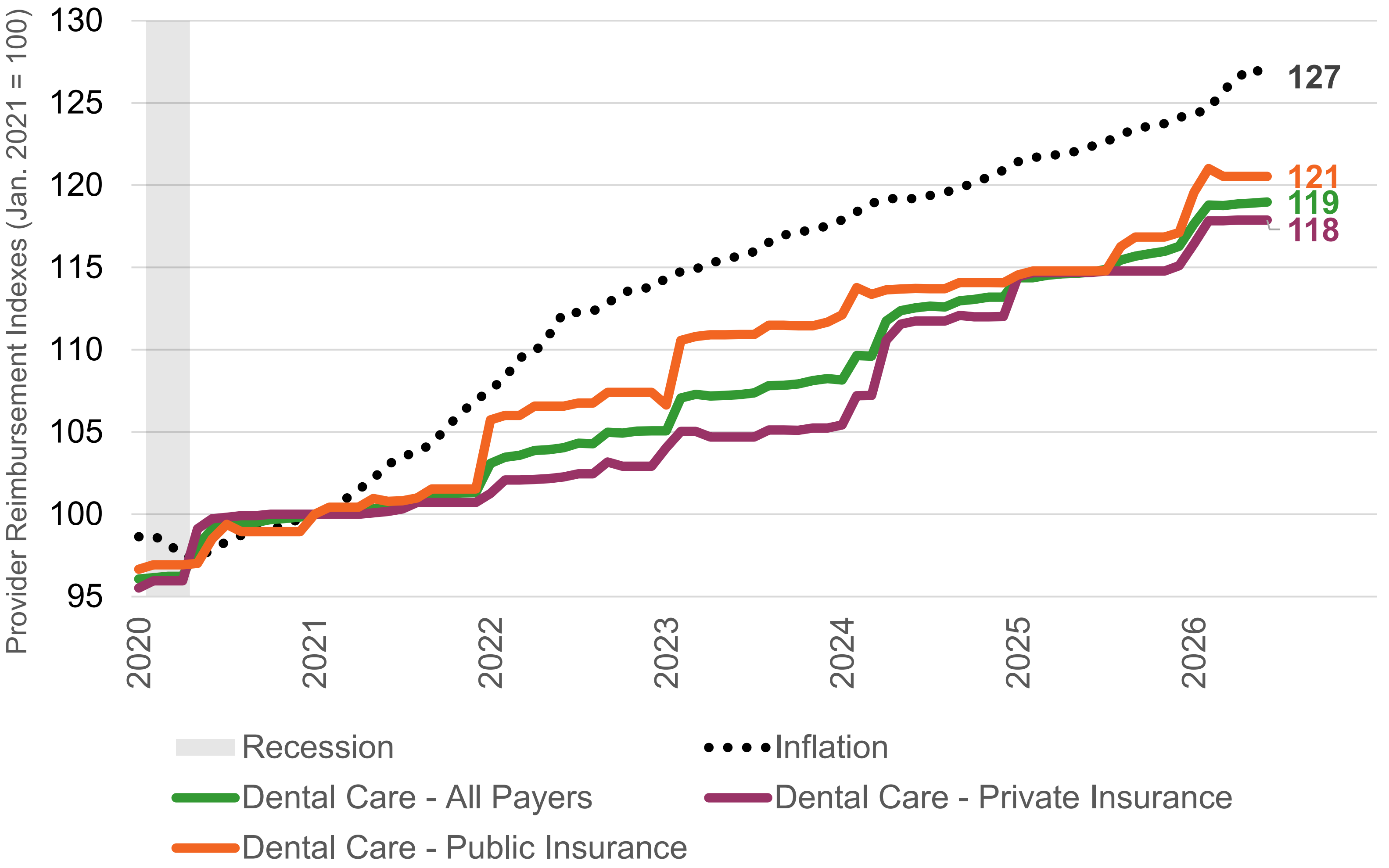
Reimbursement Rate Index Lagging Inflation

Since January 2021, the reimbursement rate index, averaged across all payer types, increased by 19% while inflation was 27% over this time frame.

From January through June of this year, the index has increased by 1.1% while inflation was at 1.8%.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

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Key Takeaways – the Dental Economy

Dentists' economic confidence is up. In Q2 2026, dentists' confidence in their own practice, the dental sector, and the U.S. economy went up from Q1 2026, continuing a trend of slight recovery following a surge and crash in confidence in late 2024 and early 2025. When asked why they were confident in the dental sector, dentists cited their belief that dentistry is always needed and that they were observing high demand from patients. U.S. consumers, meanwhile, are less confident in the U.S. economy over time.

Dentists are busier, even though dental spending is growing only very modestly. Consumer spending on dental care is up only 1% over the last 12 months. But in Q2 2026, dentists reported being busier and appointment wait times were up. It could be that aggregate dental spending does not translate directly into dentist busyness and appointment wait times. It could be that patient traffic is increasing, but for relatively low-value services. It could be dentists are working harder for the same revenue. This merits further analysis.

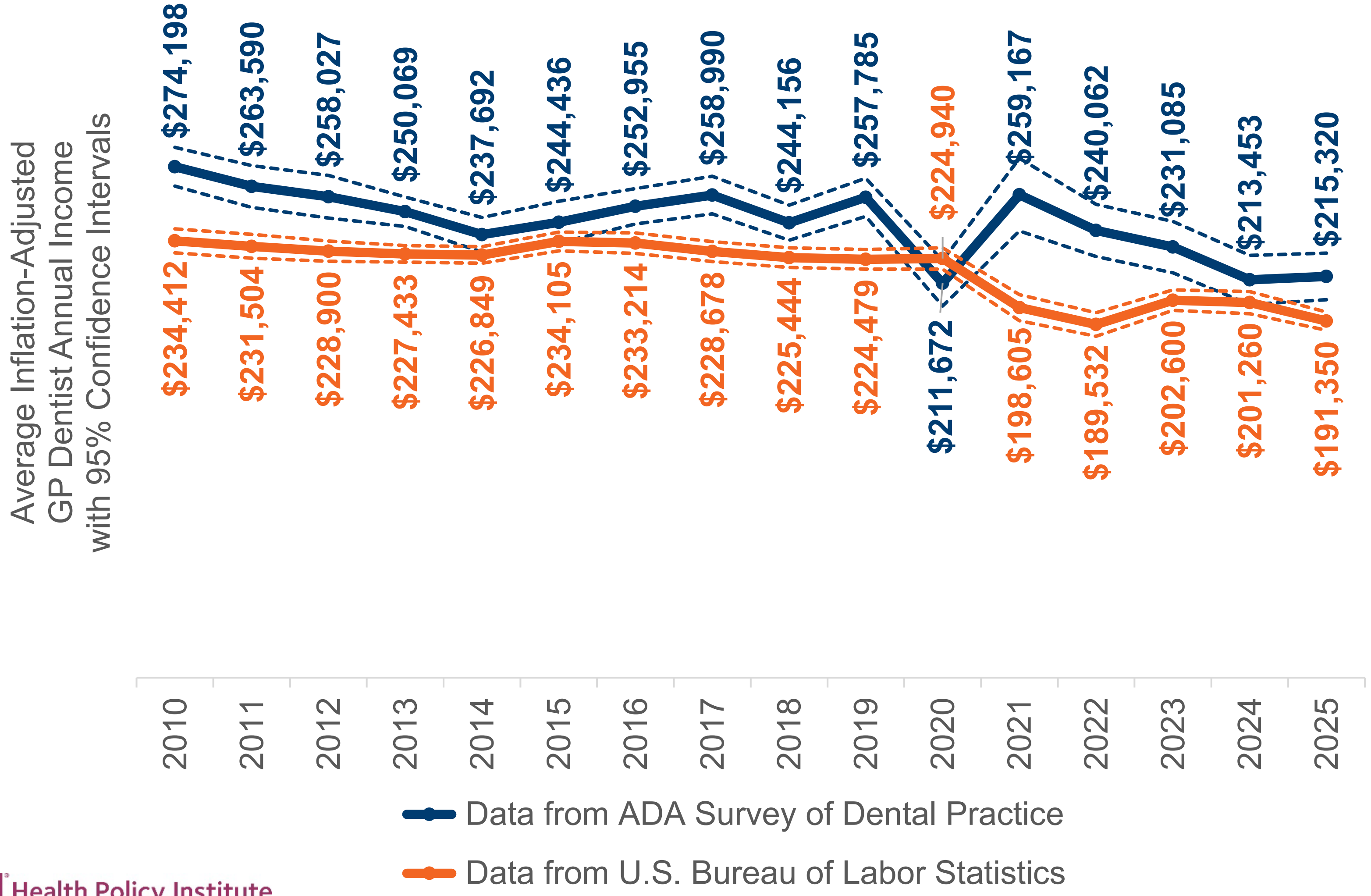
Key Takeaways – the Dental Economy

The 'fiscal squeeze' continues. Over the past five years, prices for dental equipment and supplies as well as wages of dental staff have gone up 23% while reimbursement averaged across all payor types has only gone up 19%. This has brought pressure to the bottom line for dental practices. The most recent data show this trend continuing. From January through June of this year, for example, wage increases for dental staff have outpaced inflation while reimbursement continues to lag inflation. The fiscal squeeze continues.

Total employment in the dental sector is slowly resuming growth. The number of jobs in the dental sector has grown 1.5% over the last 12 months after two years of stagnation. This could be early signs that staffing issues are easing but too soon for any definitive conclusion.

Dentists' Net Income

Dentists' Net Income Sluggish



- Data from both the ADA and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show a decline in average inflation-adjusted net income for GP dentists over 15 years.
- This reflects the "fiscal squeeze" of practice expenses growing faster than reimbursement.

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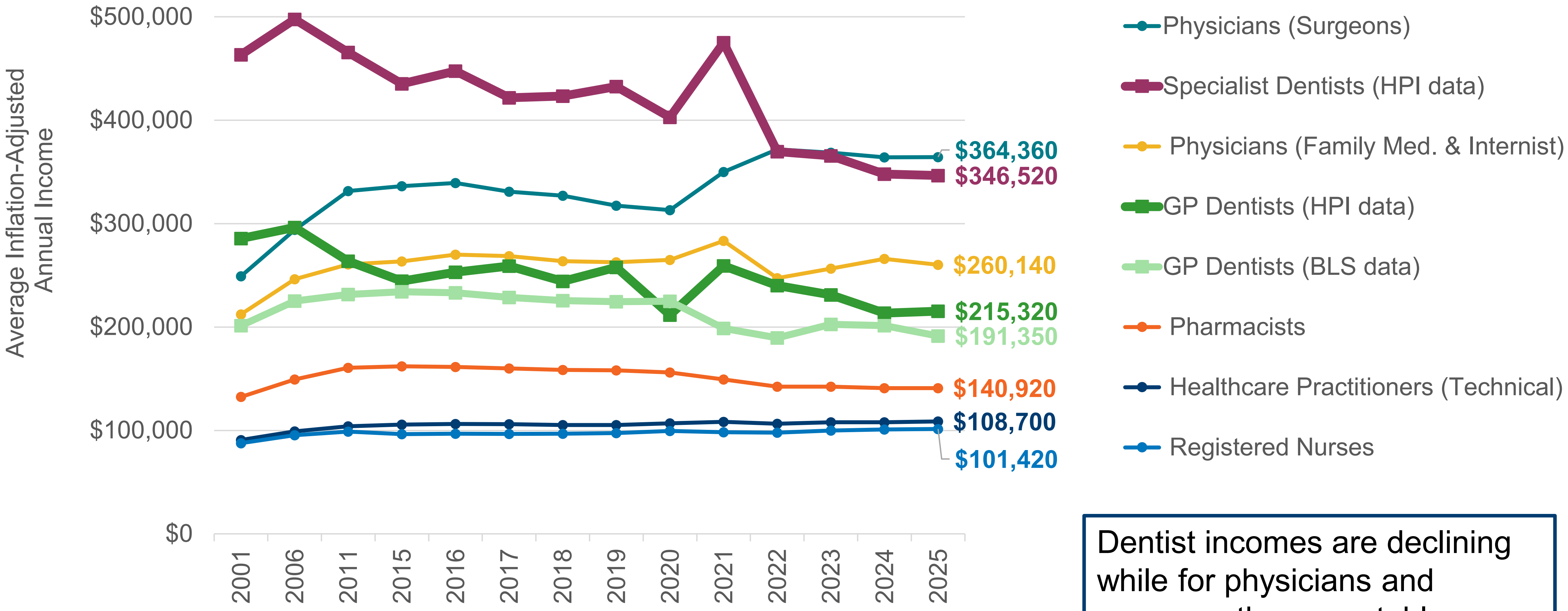
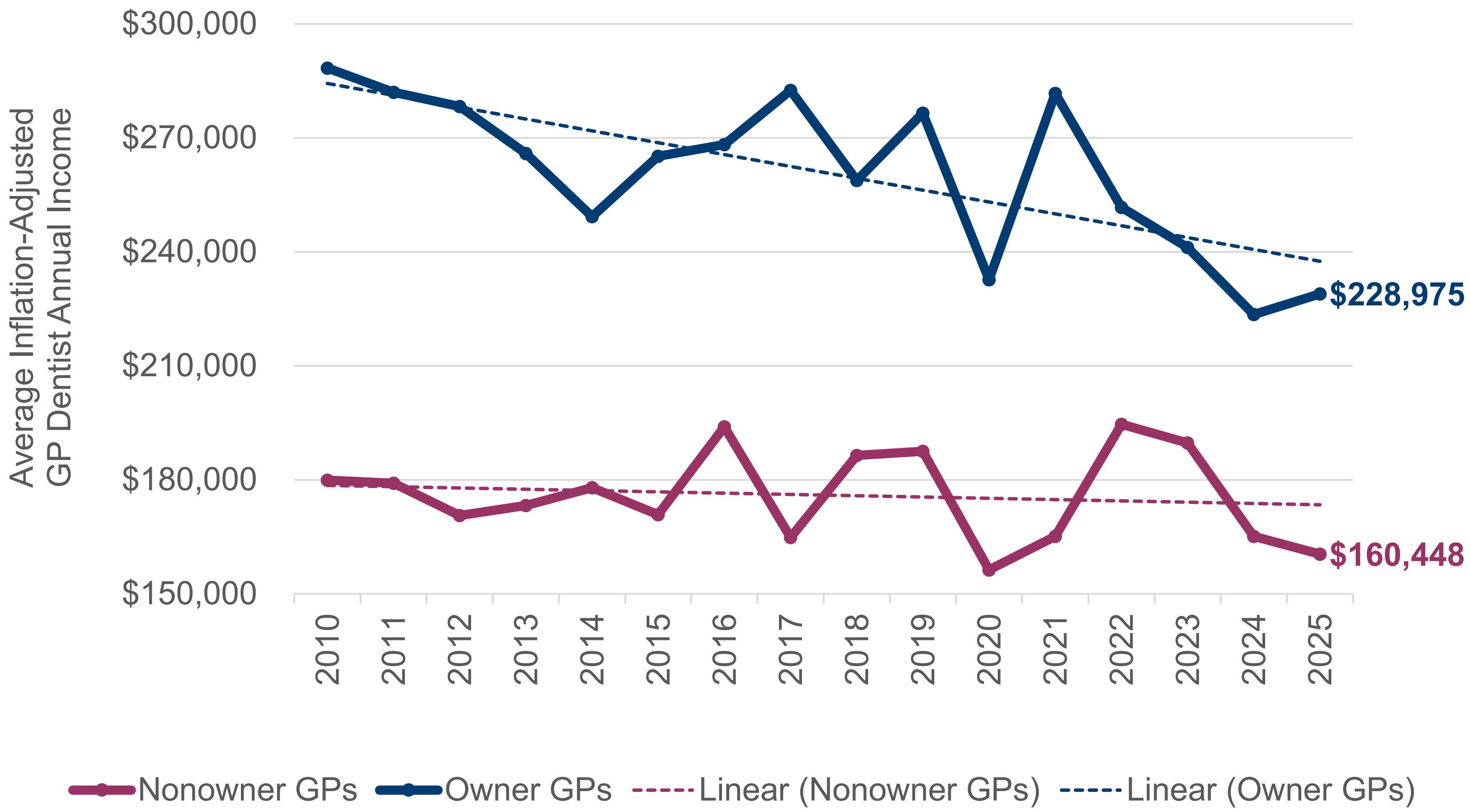
Dentists' Net Income vs Other Health Professionals



Dentist incomes are declining while for physicians and surgeons they are stable.

“Ownership Premium” is Narrowing

- The income gap between owner and nonowner GP dentists is shrinking over time.
- Comparing the 5-year period 2011-2015 with 2021-2025, inflation-adjusted incomes fell by $23,000 for owner GPs. By this measure, nonowner GP incomes were essentially unchanged.



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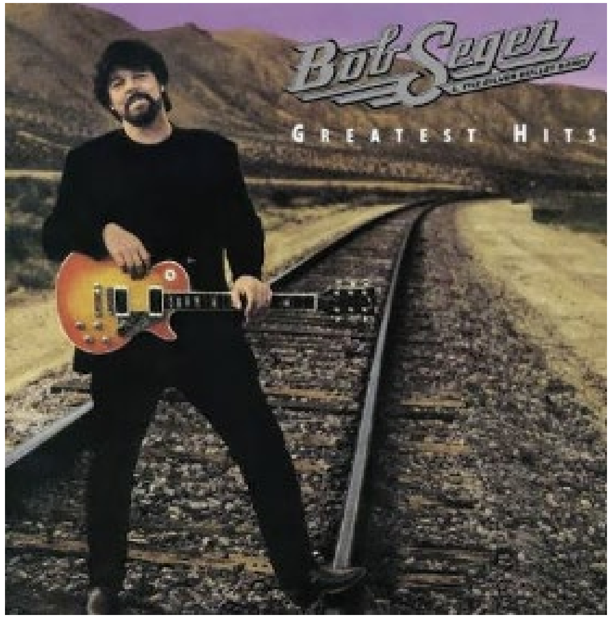
Checking in….



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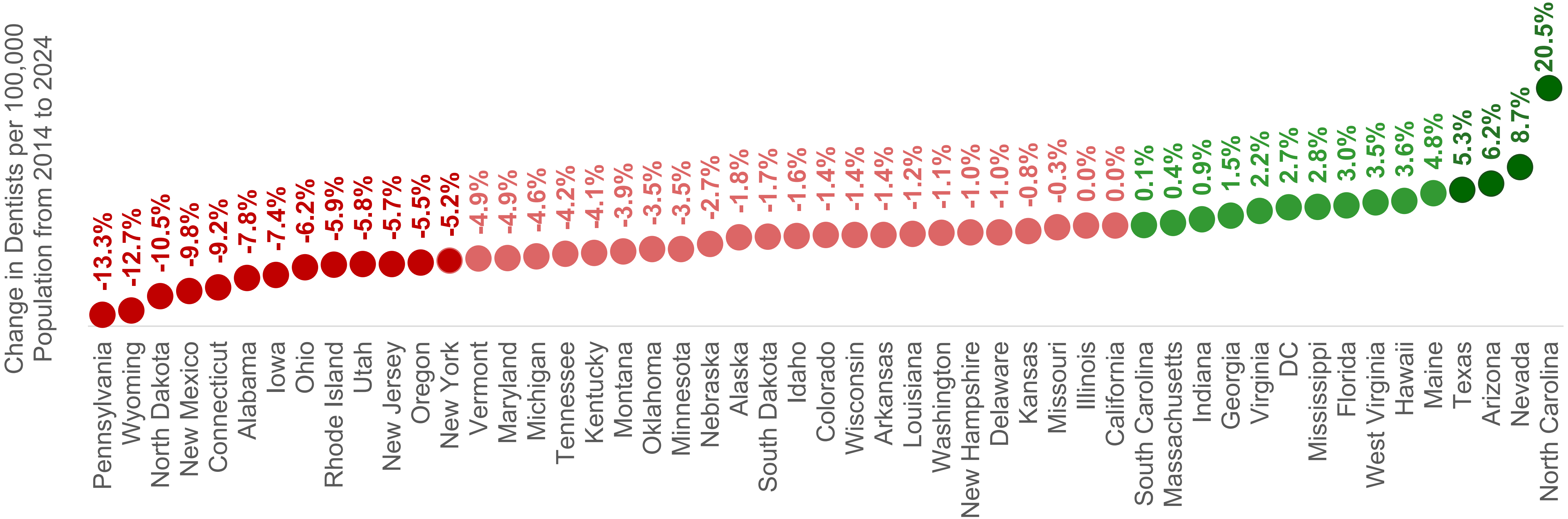
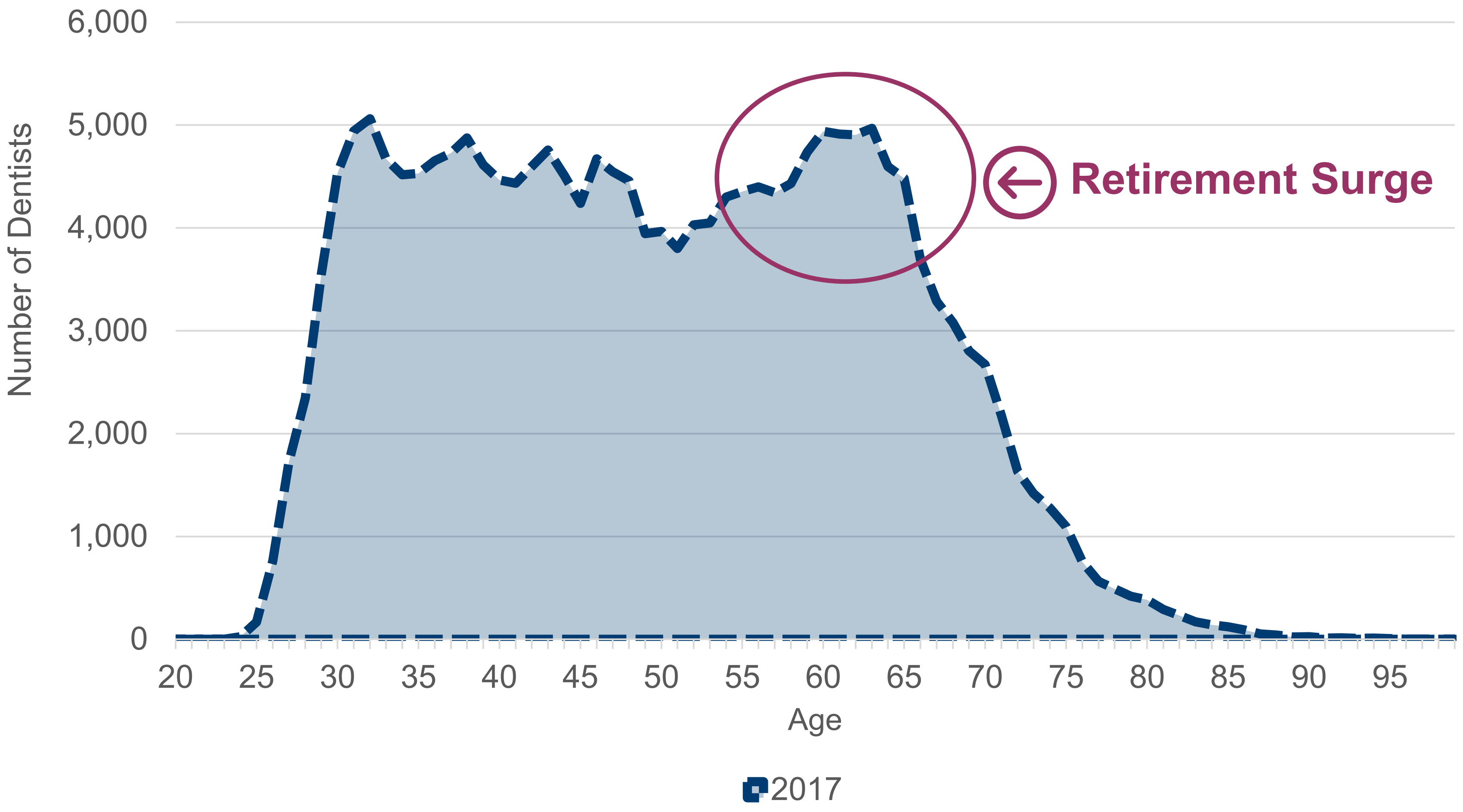
Generational Shift in the Dentist Workforce

Changes in Supply of Dentists Varied by State



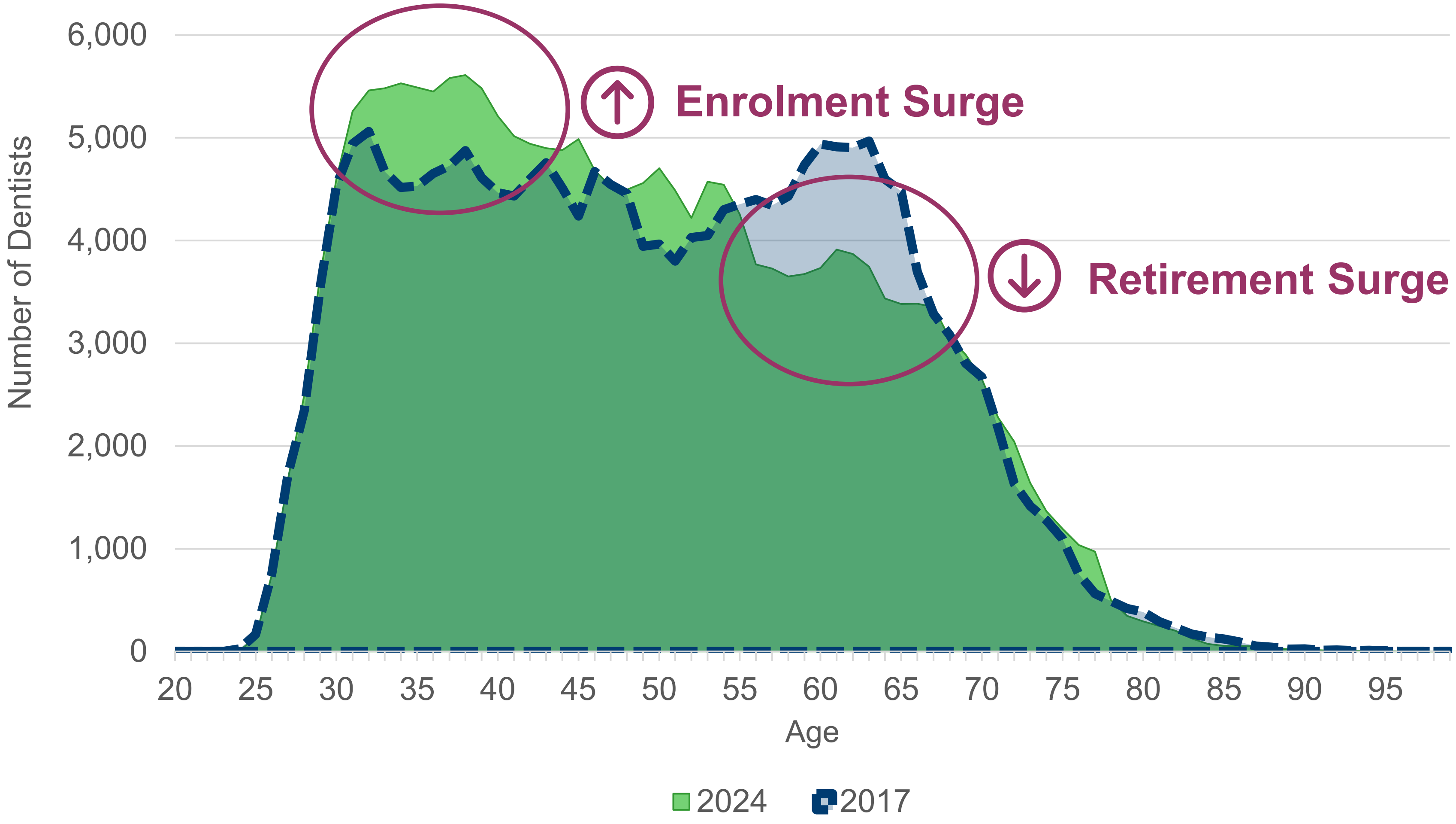
Between 2014 and 2024, most states experienced a decrease in dentists per 100,000 population while 15 states saw an increase. Various factors are at play, including retirement rates and migration of new dentists from state to state.

The US Dentist Workforce is Getting Younger



Lots of older dentists = retirement surge coming.

The US Dentist Workforce is Getting Younger



A considerable share of dentists ages 60 and older have left the workforce since 2017.

By the late 2020s, most baby boomer dentists will have aged out of the workforce.

Dentist workforce is getting much younger.

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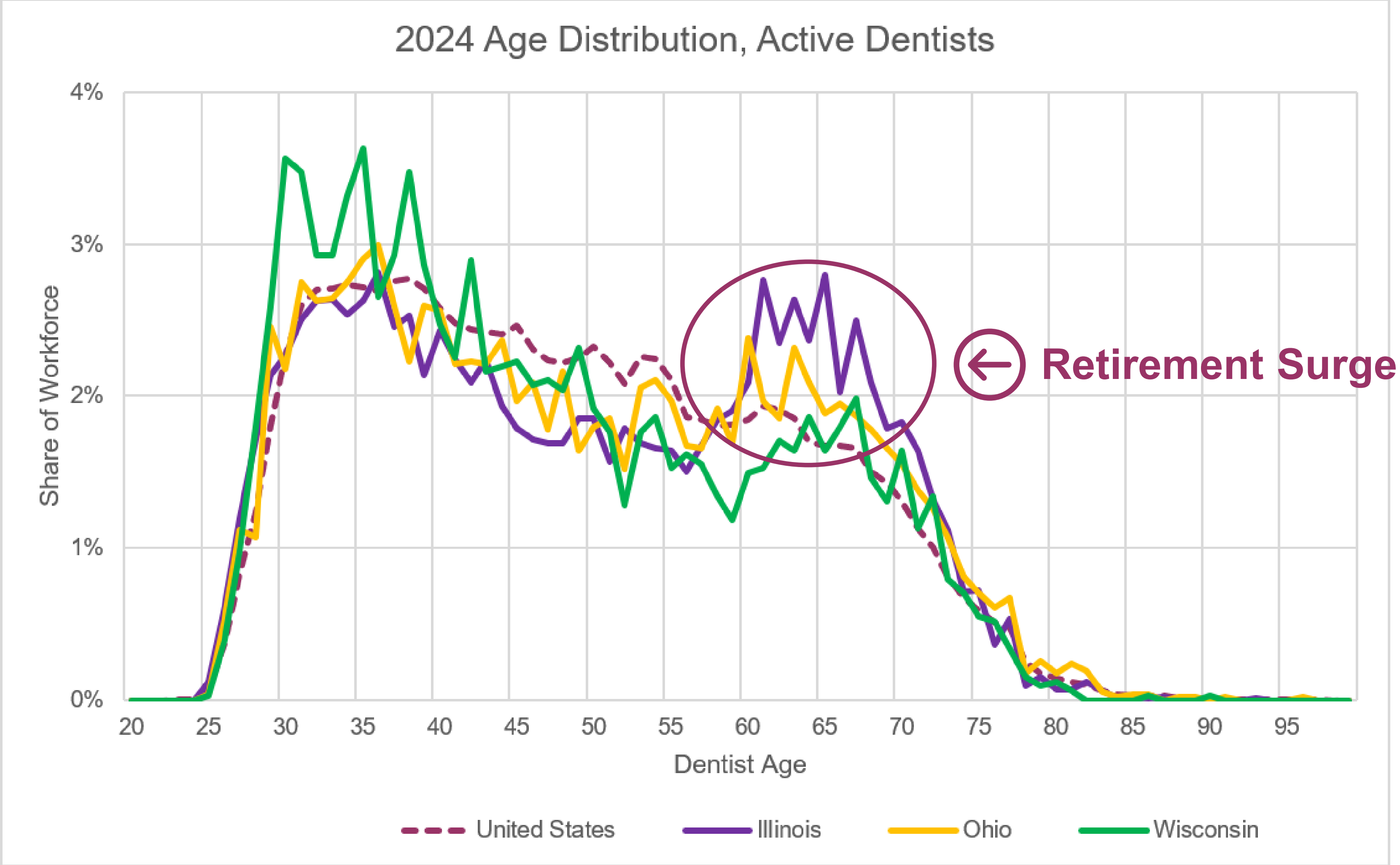
Many States With ‘Bi-Modal’ Age Distribution

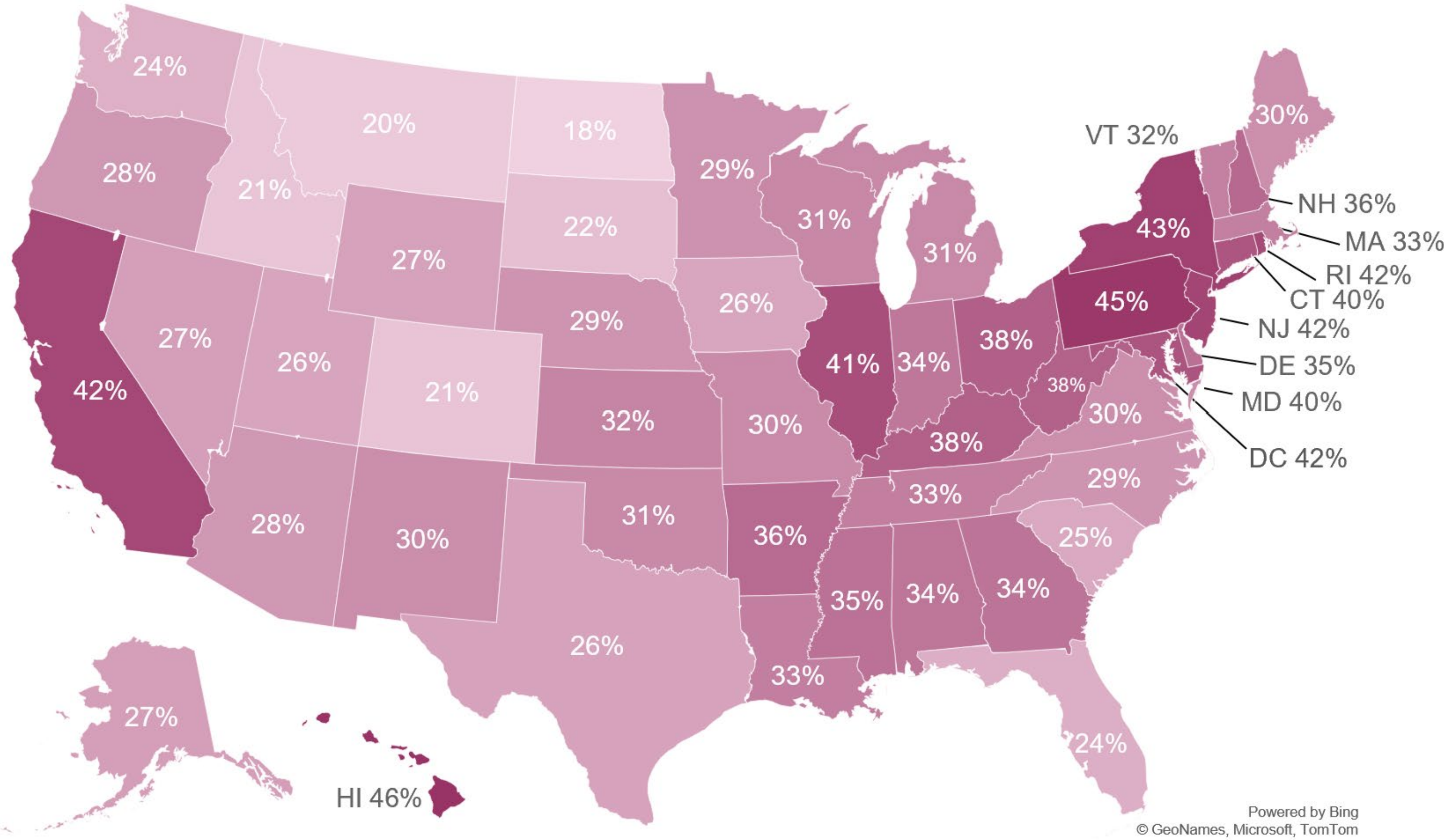


In the case of Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, the “retirement cliff” is coming fast.

Age of Dentist Workforce Varies

More than 2 in 5 dentists were ages 55 and older in states shown in **darker shades**, indicating an upcoming retirement wave in the next decade or so.

Pennsylvania has the largest shares of dentists age 55 and older.



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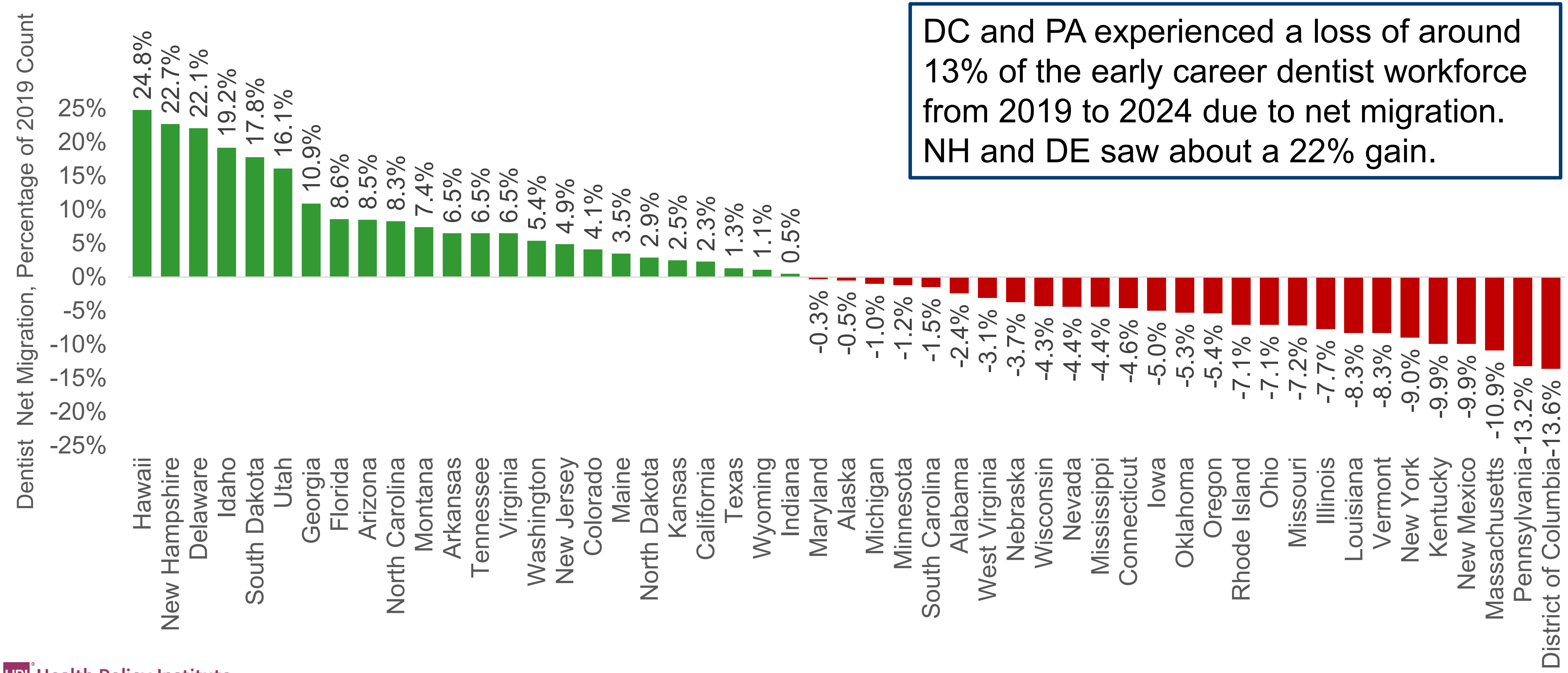
Migration, Dentists <10 Years of Experience, 2019 to 2024

DC and PA experienced a loss of around 13% of the early career dentist workforce from 2019 to 2024 due to net migration. NH and DE saw about a 22% gain.



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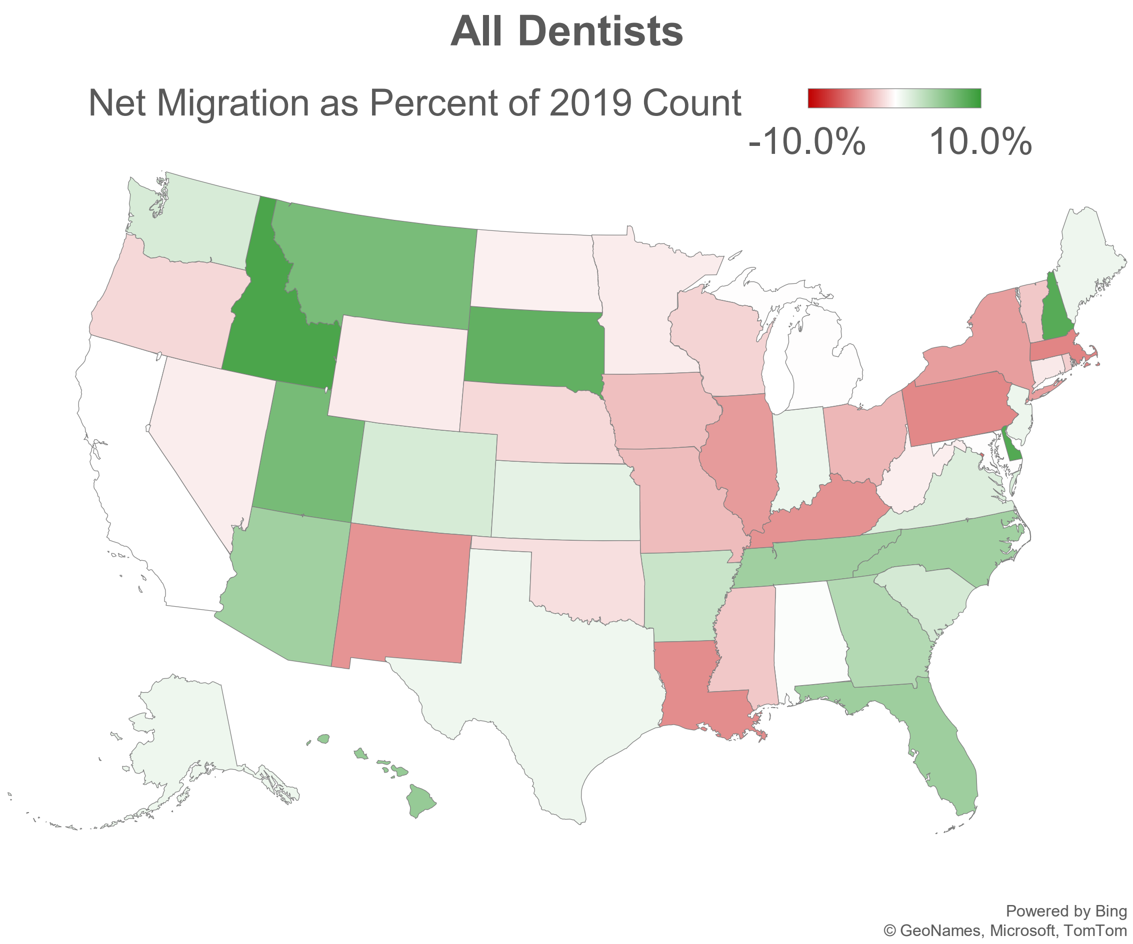
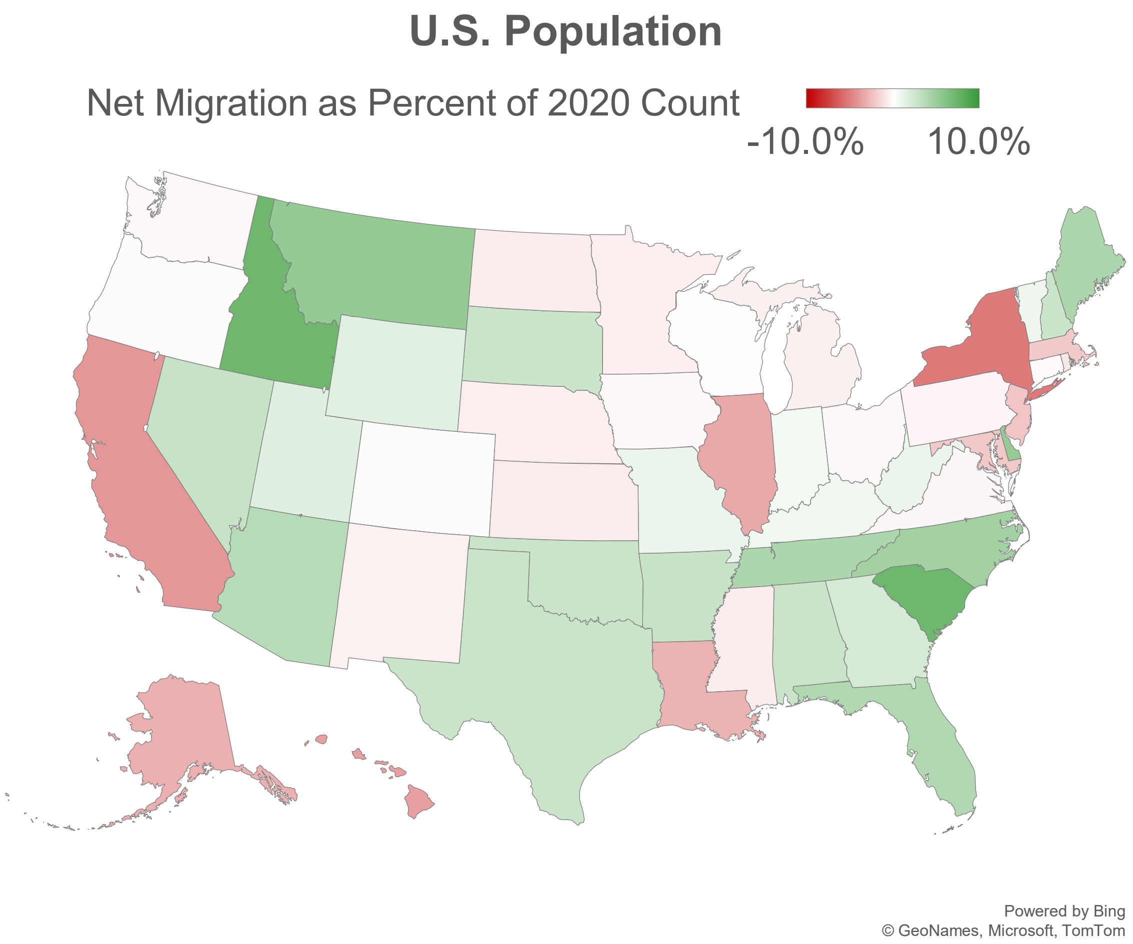
Migration, All Dentists vs. U.S. Population





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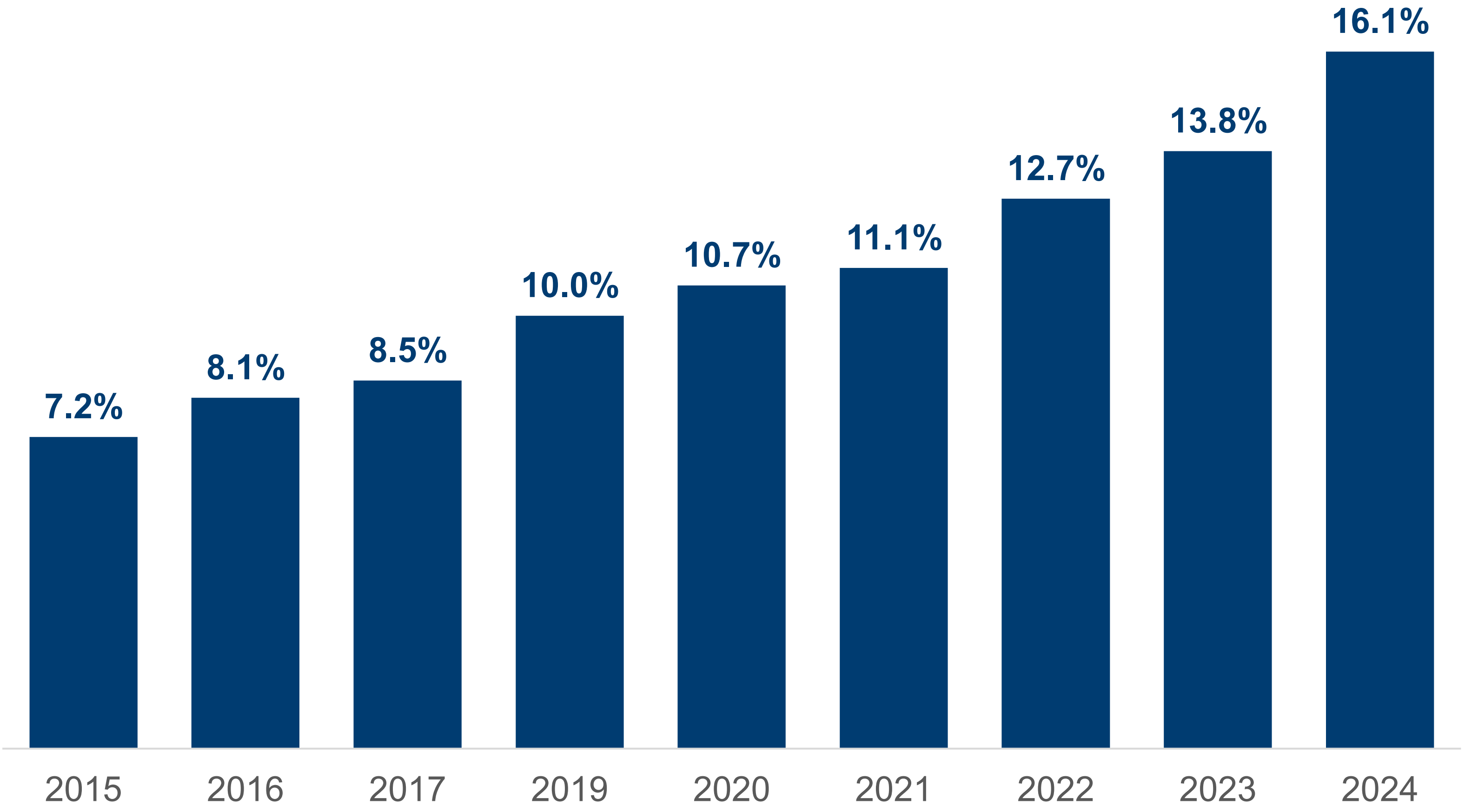
Shifting Dental Practice Structure

Dentists' Affiliation to DSOs Continues to Grow



The share of U.S. dentists affiliated with a dental support organization (DSO) has more than doubled from 2015 (7.2%) to 2024 (16.1%)

In 2024, 17.6% of female dentists and 14.8% of male dentists were affiliated with a DSO.

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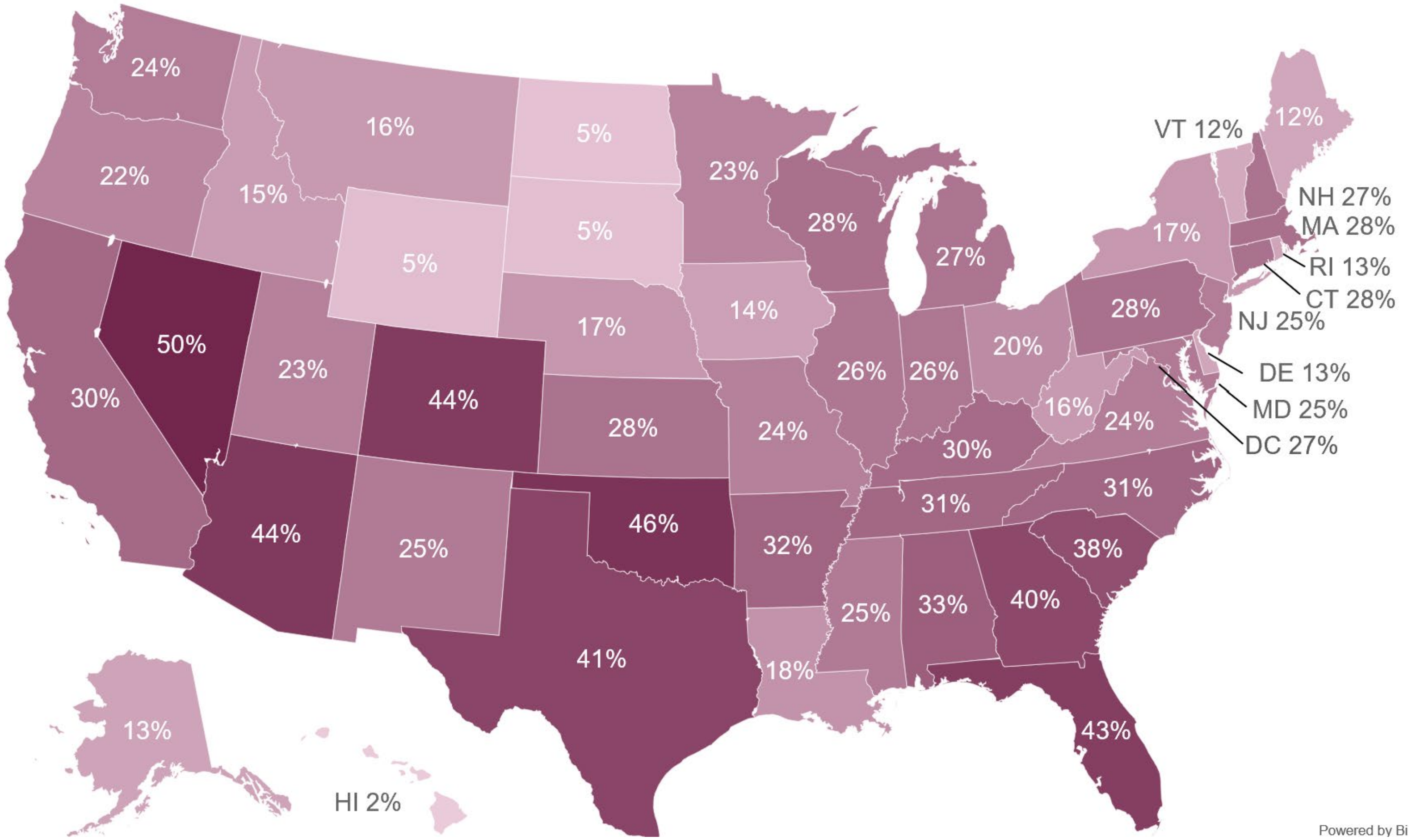
DSO Affiliation Higher for Recent Dental School Grads

Share of Dentists Less Than 5 Years Out of Dental School Affiliated with a DSO, 2024



Nearly one-third (31%) of dentists less than 5 years out of dental school are affiliated with DSOs.

In Minnesota it’s 28%.

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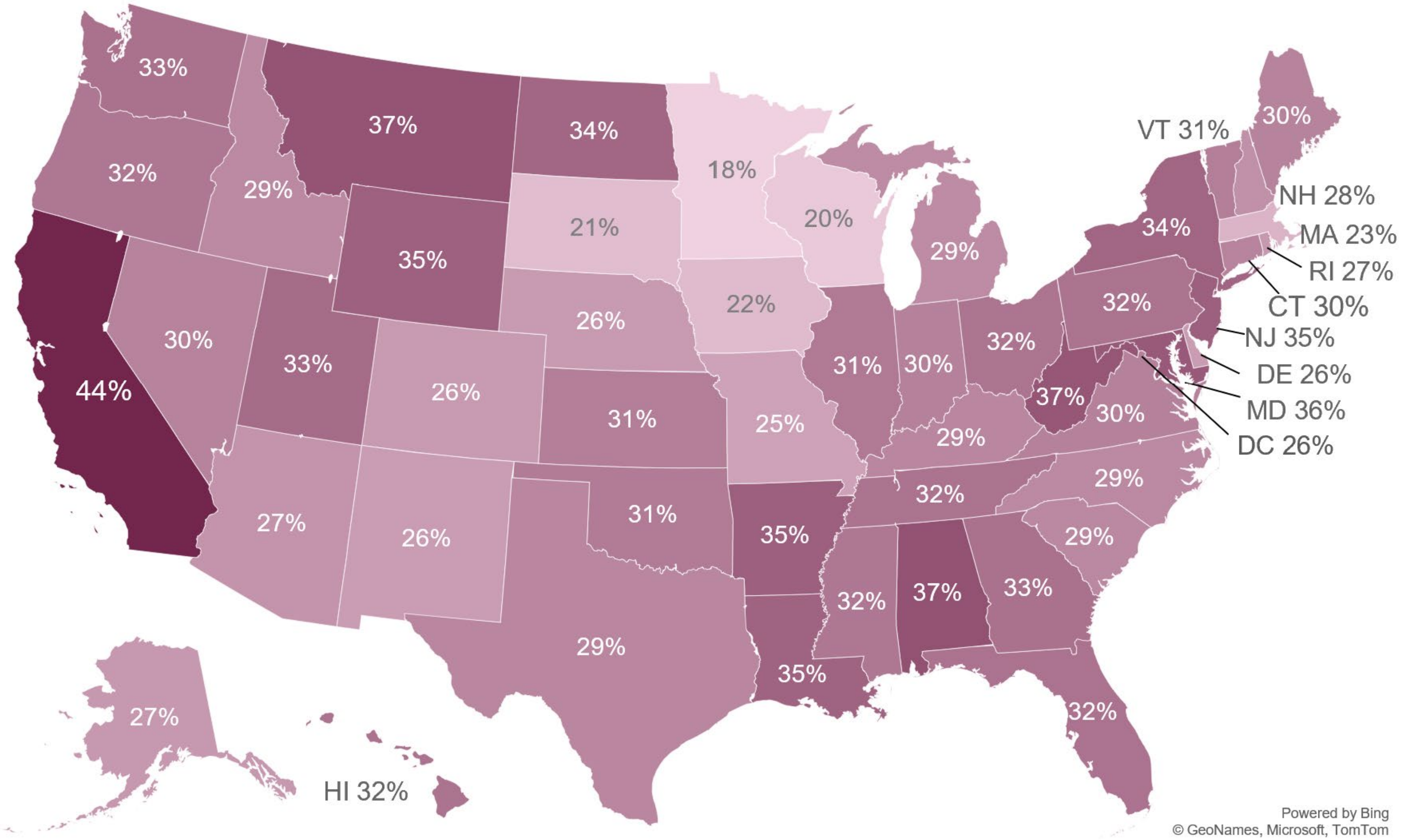
Prominence of Solo Practice Varies Across States

Share of Dentists in Solo Practice, 2024



- California has the highest share of solo practices at 44%.
- States with the lowest share of solo practices were Wisconsin (20%) and Minnesota (18%).

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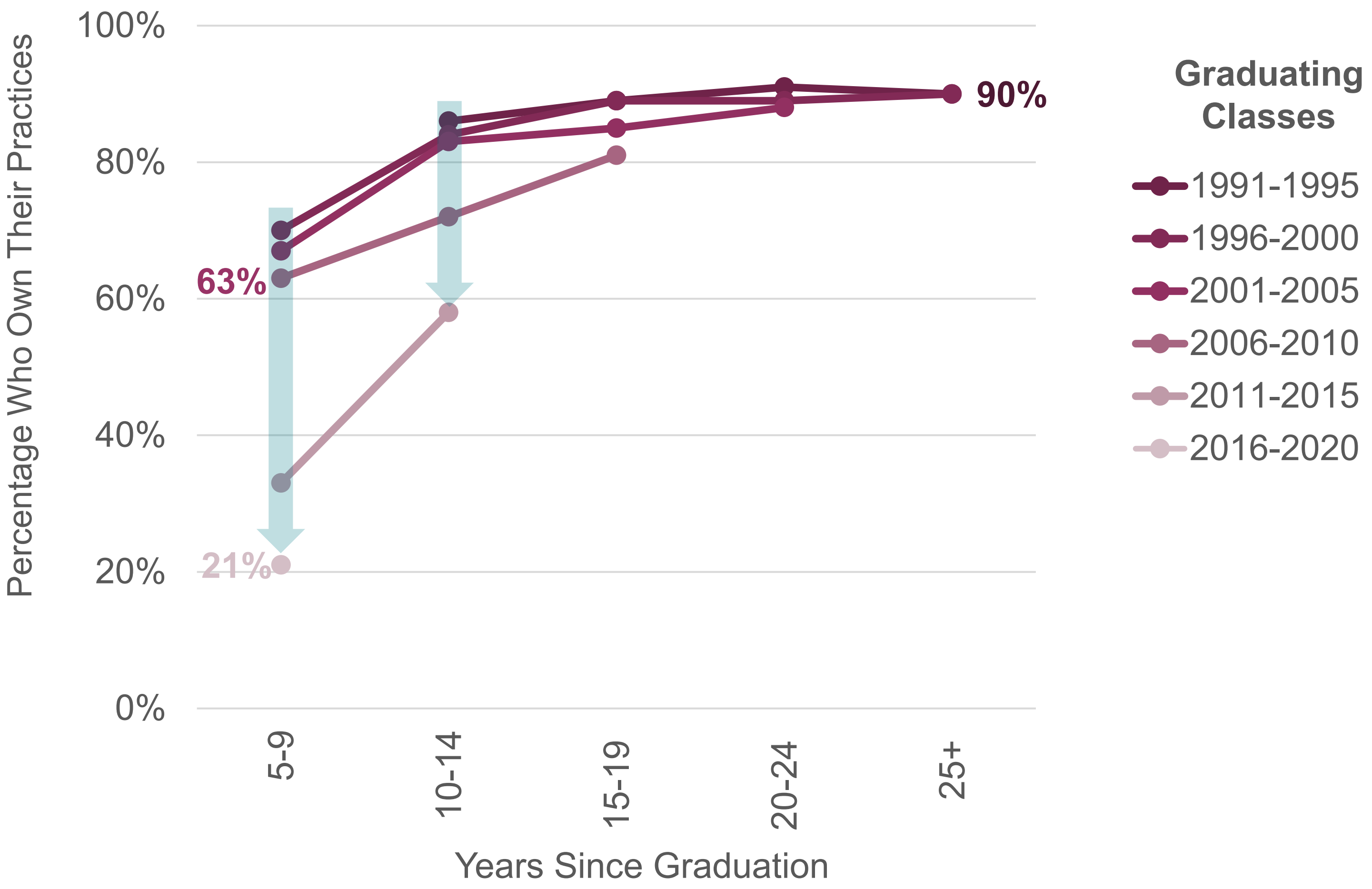
Practice Ownership is Delayed Significantly



Practice ownership rates have declined considerably in the early career stage for more recent graduate cohorts.

But ownership rates appear to "catch up" by the late career stage.

Practice ownership is significantly delayed but still appears to be the ‘endgame’ for most dentists.

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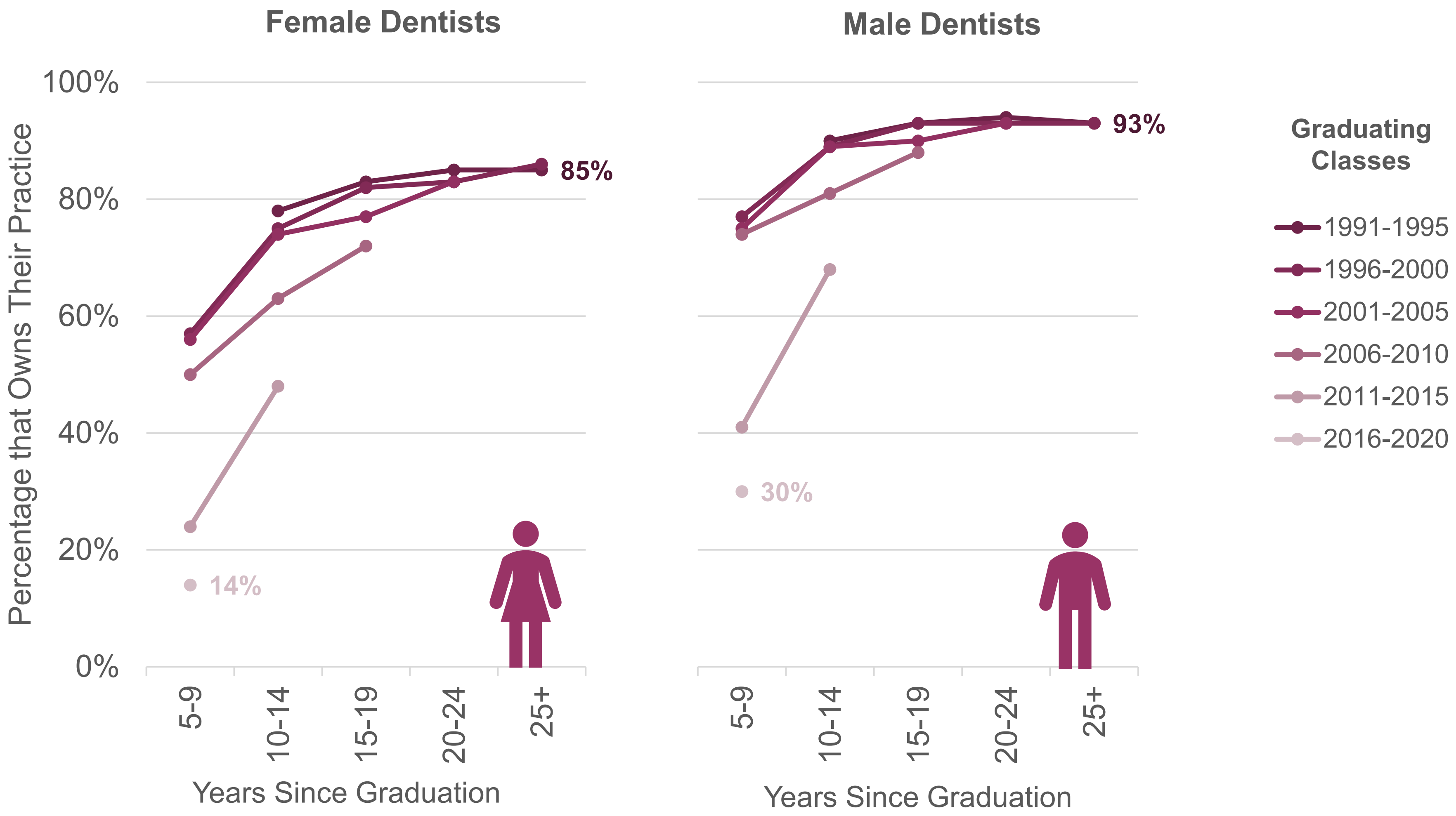
There is a Gender Gap in Practice Ownership

Ownership rates for female dentists are lower than for males at all career stages.



The Dental Insurance Landscape

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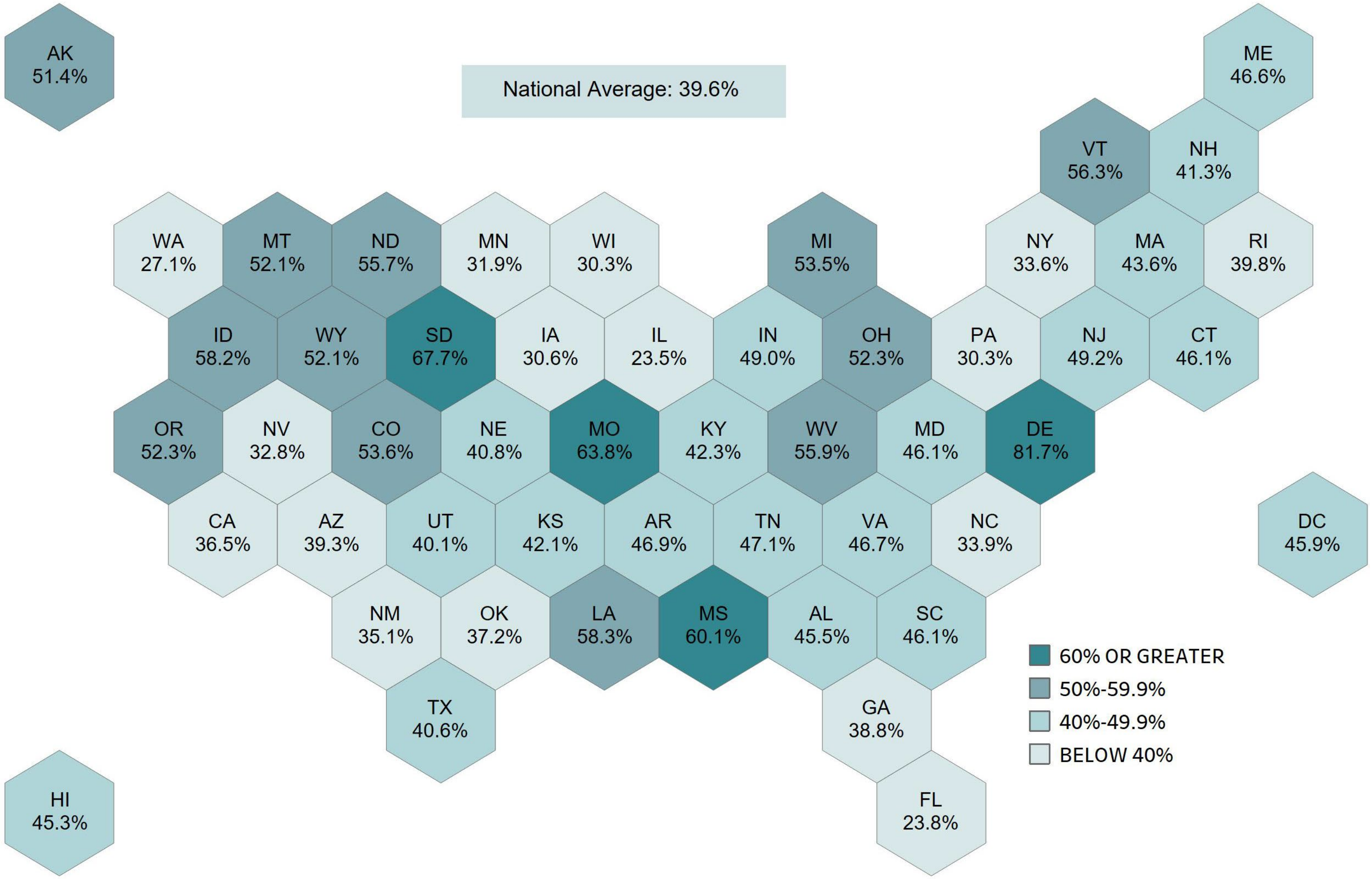
Medicaid Fee-For-Service (FFS) Reimbursement as a Percent of Average Dentist Charges for Child Dental Services, 2025



As of 2025, the Medicaid FFS reimbursement rates for child dental services are less than half of typical dentist charges in 35 states.

Note: The following states are categorized as comprehensive MCO or PAHP states by CMS (as of 2021), and should be interpreted with caution as the FFS rates may not be representative: AR, AZ, DC, DE, FL, GA, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MI, MN, MO, MS, NE, NJ, NM, NY, OH, PA, RI, TN, TX, UT, WV. This issue may apply in other states as well.

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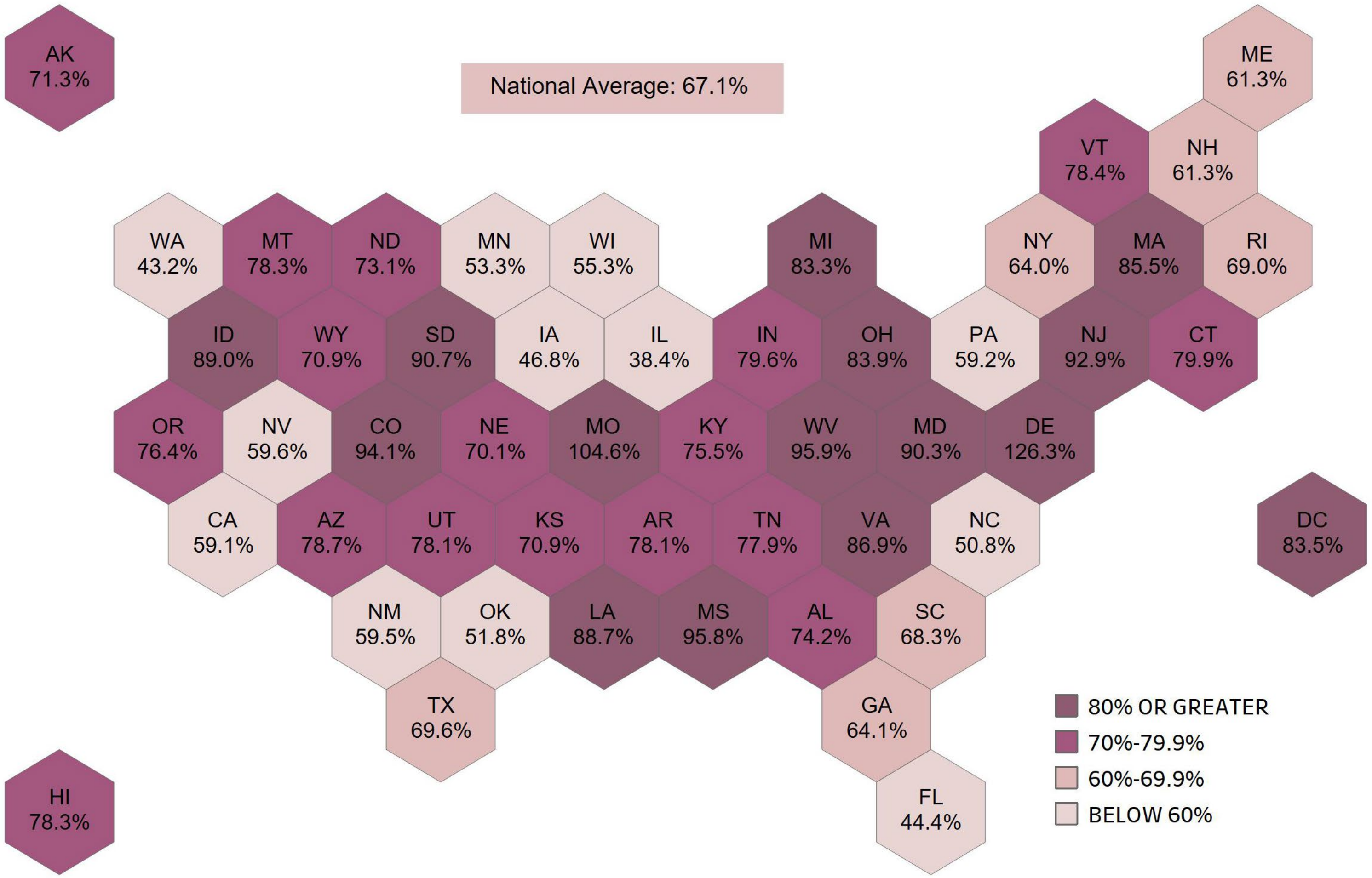
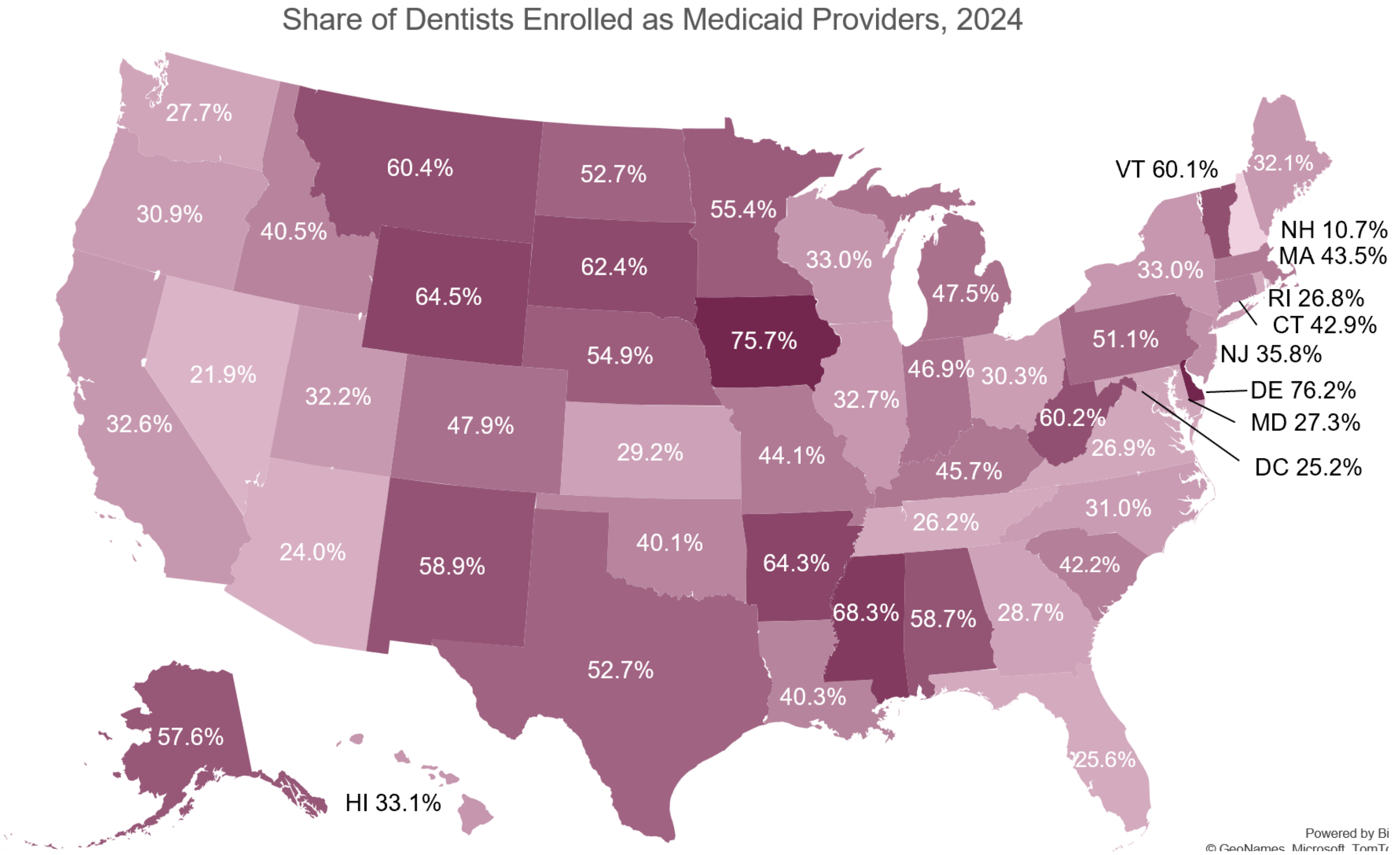
Medicaid FFS Reimbursement as a Percent of Average Private Dental Insurance Payment Rates, Child Dental Services, 2025



As of 2025, the Medicaid FFS reimbursement rates for child dental services fall below 70% of typical private dental insurance payment rates in 19 states.

Note: The following states are categorized as comprehensive MCO or PAHP states by CMS (as of 2021), and should be interpreted with caution as the FFS rates may not be representative: AR, AZ, DC, DE, FL, GA, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MI, MN, MO, MS, NE, NJ, NM, NY, OH, PA, RI, TN, TX, UT, WV. This issue may apply in other states as well.

Wide Variation in Medicaid Participation by State



- The share of dentists enrolled in Medicaid varies by state, ranging from 10.7% in New Hampshire to 76.2% in Delaware.
- Enrollment does not necessarily mean all dentists actively treat Medicaid patients.

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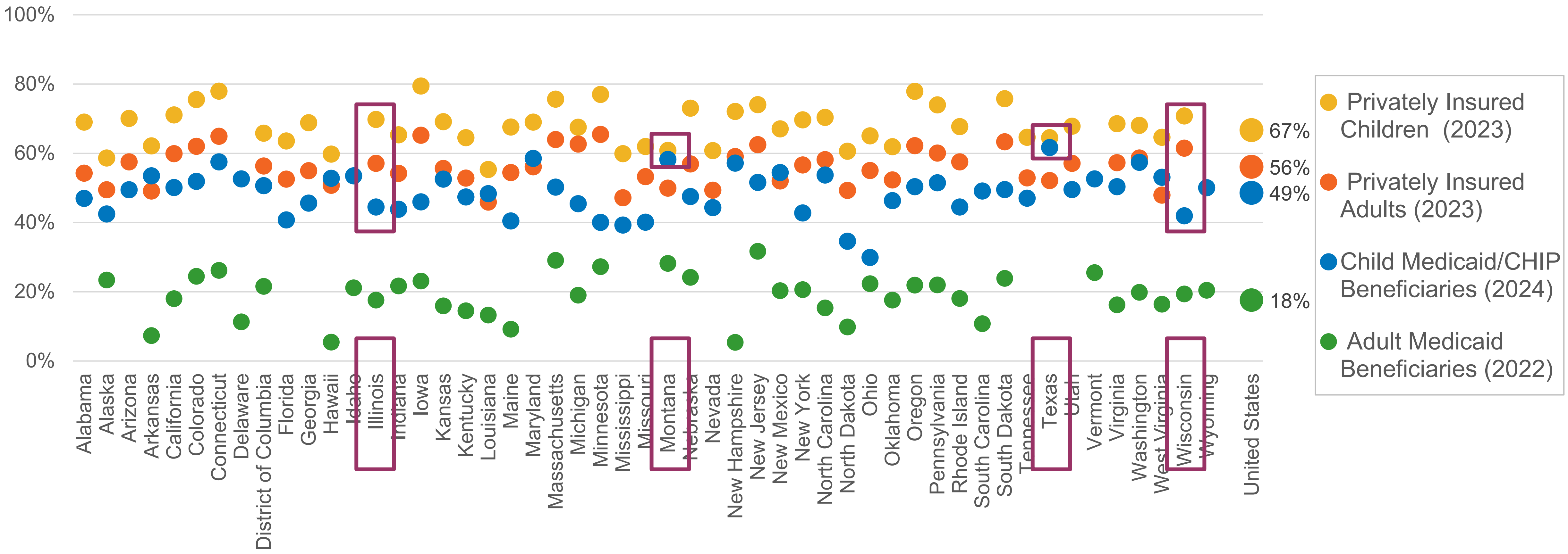
Dental Care Visit Rates Vary by State



In most states, dental care utilization is highest among privately insured children, followed by privately insured adults, child Medicaid/CHIP beneficiaries, and adult Medicaid beneficiaries.

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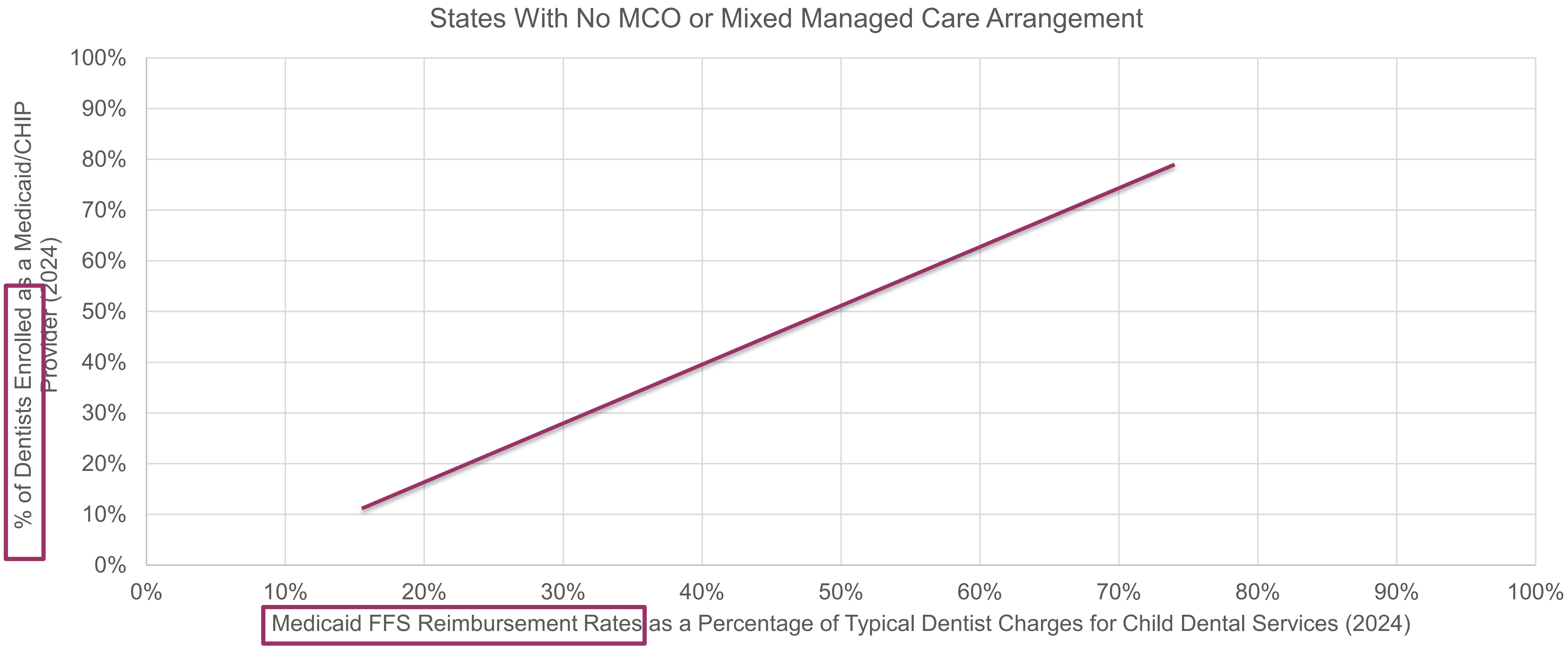
Reimbursement Impacts Medicaid Participation



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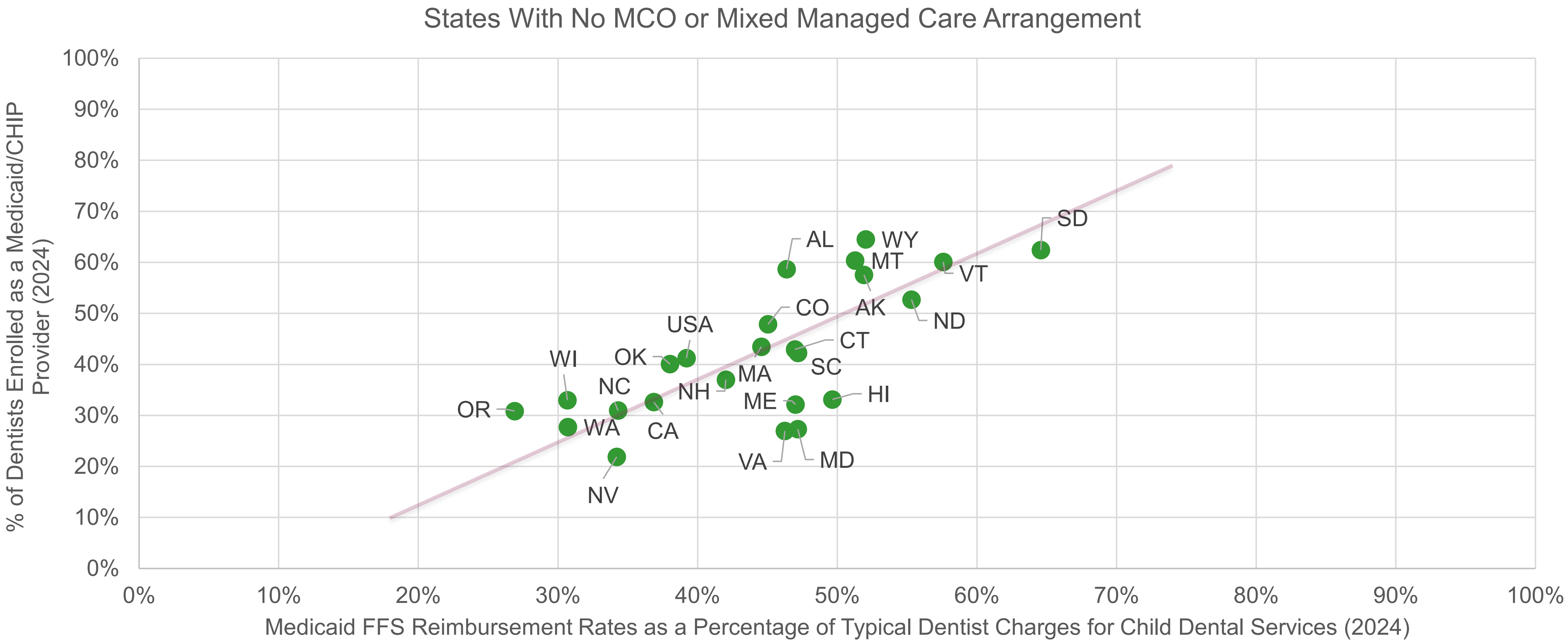

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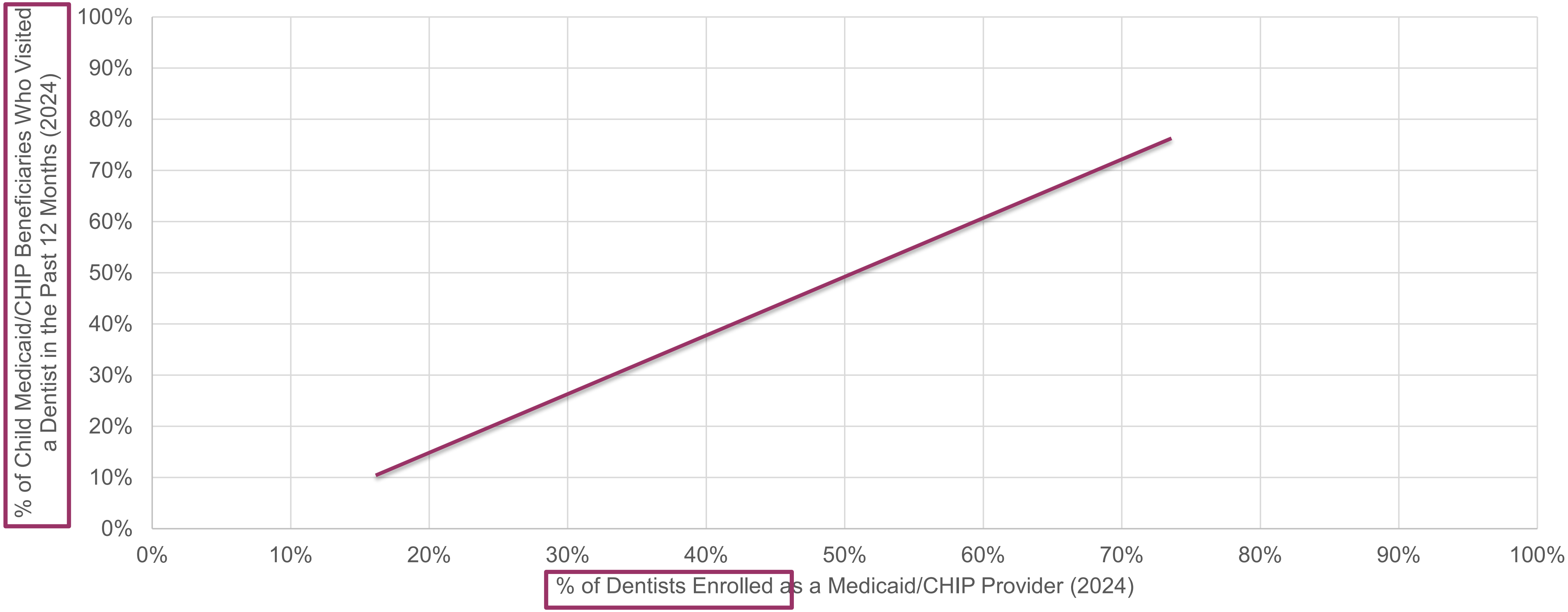
Dentist Participation Weakly Correlated with Dental Care Utilization



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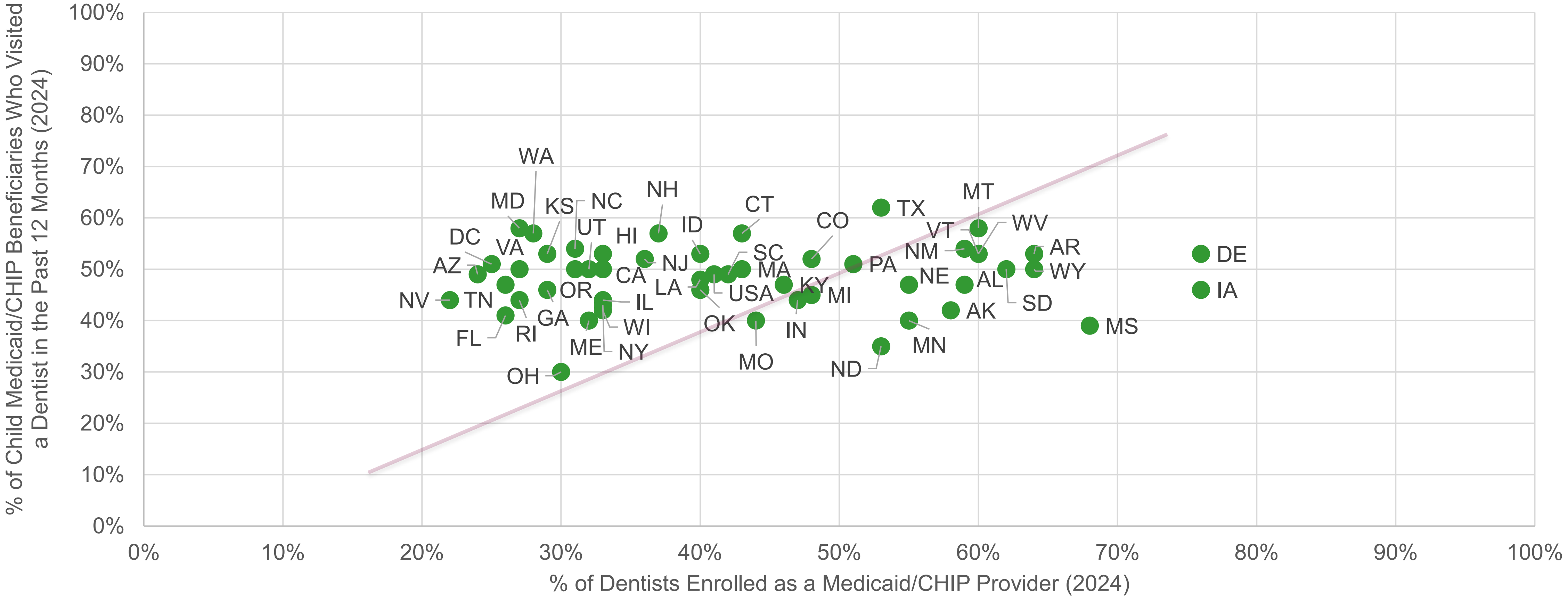
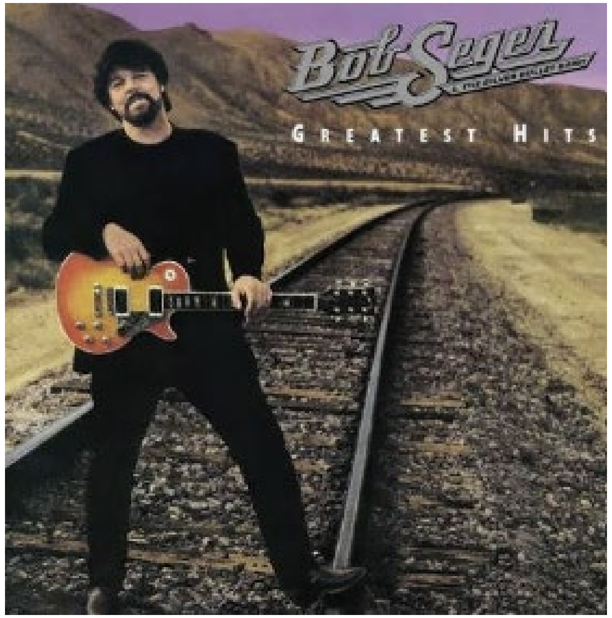


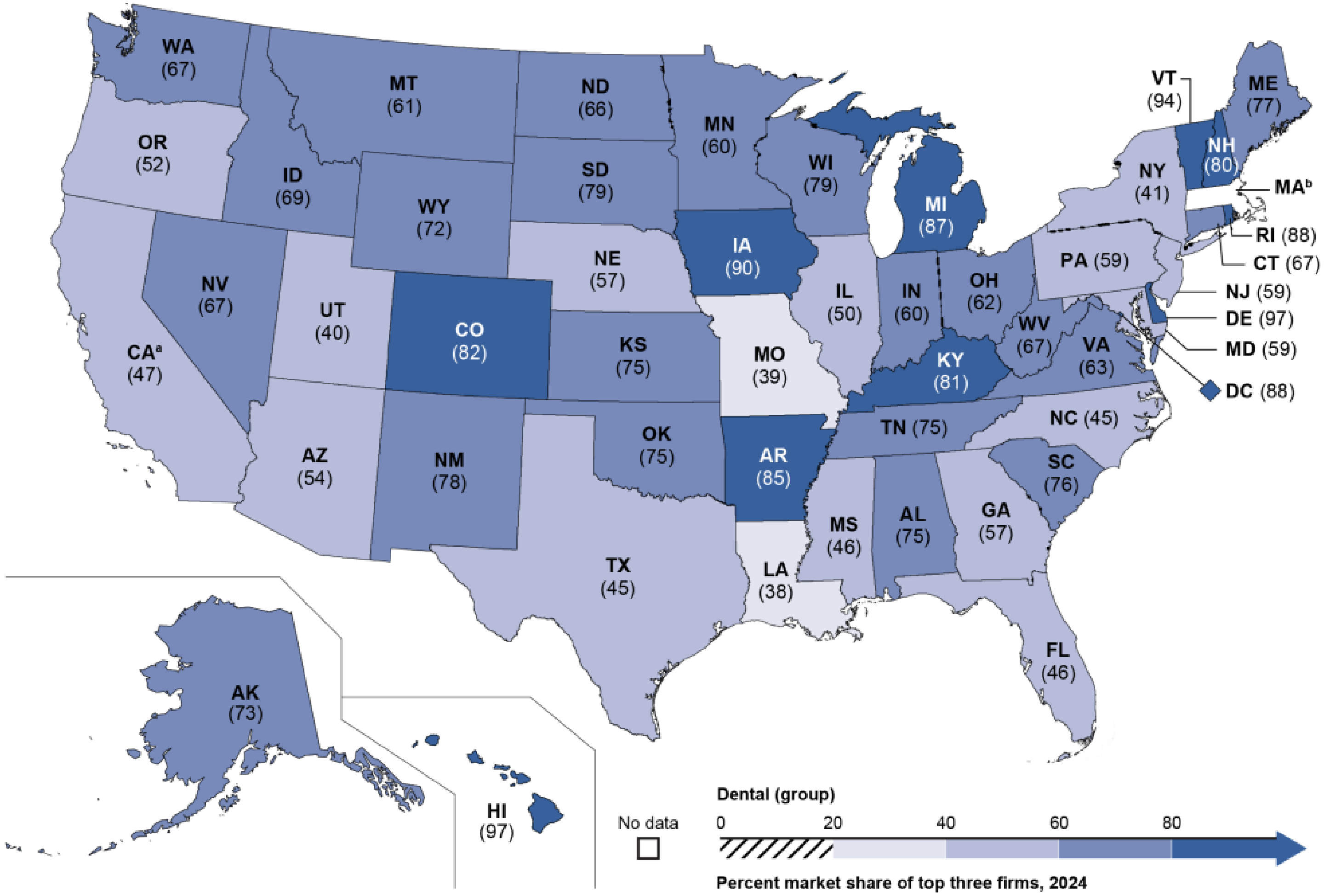
Checking in….



Private Dental Insurance Market Structure

- In Minnesota, the top 3 dental insurers have 60% of the market. In Kansas, it’s 75%.
- Lots of variation across states in market concentration

Figure 1: Combined Market Share by State for the Three Largest Stand-Alone Dental Insurers in the Group Insurance Market (2024)



Source: GAO analysis of data from the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC); map resources (map). | GAO-26-107787

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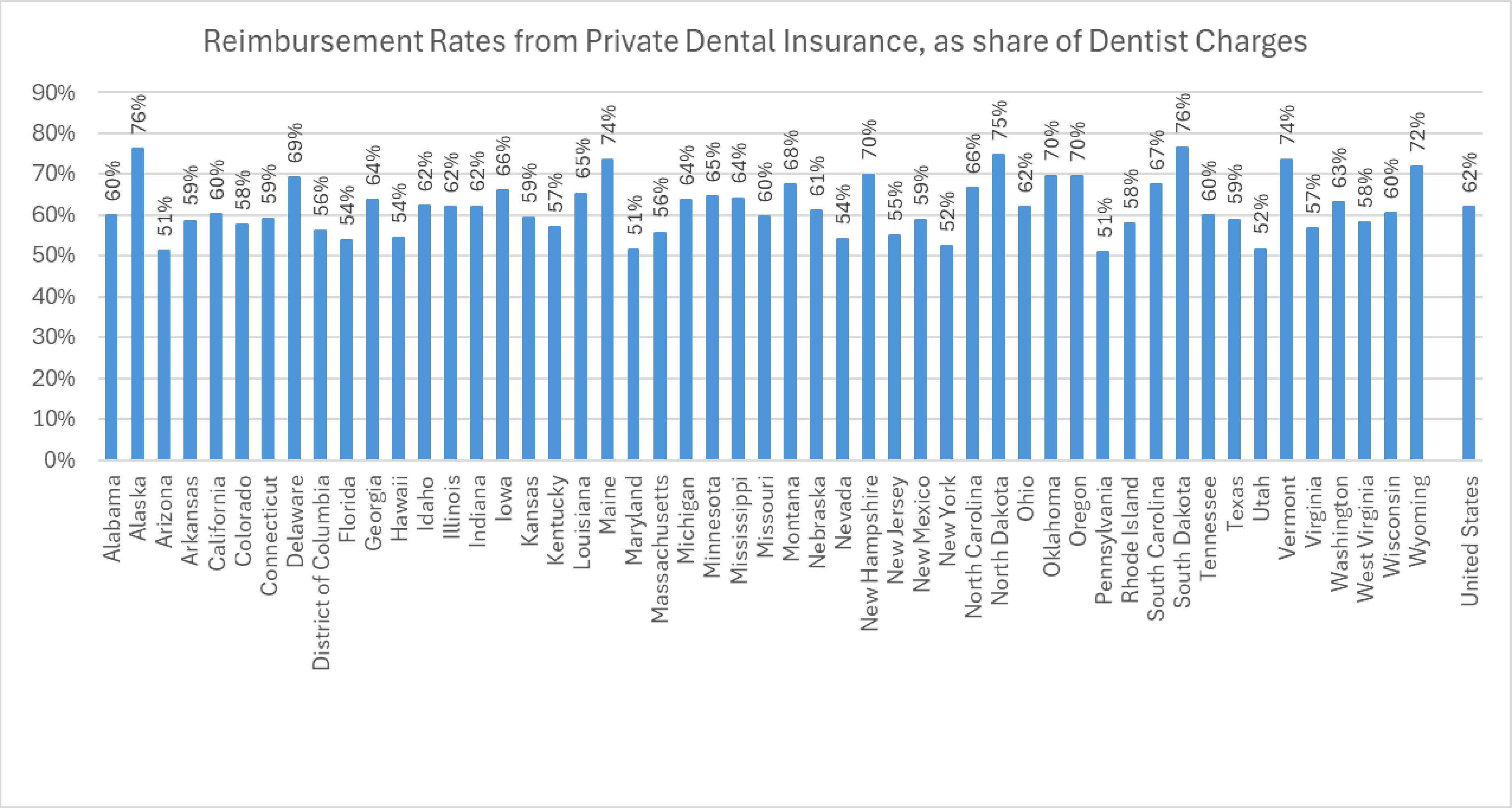
Private Dental Insurance Reimbursement



- Typical reimbursement rates from dental insurers average 62% of dentist charges.
- There is a wide range across states, from 51% to 76%.

Private Dental Insurance Reimbursement

HSR Health Services Research

RESEARCH BRIEF

An Early Look at the Effects of the 2022 Dental Loss Ratio Ballot Initiative in Massachusetts. Have Dental Insurers Increased Prices for Dental Services?

Kamyar Nasseh, Marko Vujicic

DLR requirement led to a stabilization in reimbursement rates in Massachusetts, while reimbursement rates continued to decline within in a group of comparison states.

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Bigger Picture…

Oral Health is Health

The Washington Post

America's well-being depends on oral health

It affects every person in the country — and it's time to make it great

By Brett Kessler, D.D.S.
President, American Dental Association

As a new presidential administration takes office, I'm writing on behalf of the more than 159,000 members of the American Dental Association (ADA) to invite everyone in the American government to take this moment to consider one of the most important issues facing the country today: our oral health.

Oral health affects everyone's overall health and well-being. While policy discussions around health care often focus on medical conditions, it is crucial to recognize that oral health is the bedrock of overall health, with far-reaching implications for physical, mental and social wellness.

Research conducted by the ADA's Forsyth Institute and the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research have established a clear connection between oral health and various systemic diseases, including heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes and hundreds of other associated ailments.

Imagine not being able to chew food, speak clearly or smile because of pain, infection or missing teeth. The impact on quality of life is undeniable.

Sadly, tens of millions of Americans are suffering right now. Some neglect oral health while others face significant barriers to accessing dental care, with many unable to afford necessary treatments or lacking insurance coverage that includes dental services.

It is time for a fundamental change in America's approach to dental care and dental insurance.

As the leading voice for oral health and dentistry, the American Dental Association is committed to improving America's oral health and working with you to bring about meaningful change.

of Health and Human Services, more than 51 million school hours are missed annually because of poor oral health.

America's workers are also dramatically affected by poor oral health. In fact, more than 92 million hours of work are missed annually because of emergency dental care, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Dental fitness is considered one of the eight domains of the Department of Defense's Total Fitness Framework. It is one of the key reasons military personnel cannot deploy. Upwards of 10 percent of our active military are deemed unfit for deployment because of dental issues.

America's public insurance programs is critical to improving health.

2. **Prevention:** Stop problems before they start. Regular dental visits, brushing twice daily with fluoride toothpaste, maintaining a balanced diet low in added sugars and ultra-processed foods and avoiding tobacco and nicotine products is critical to reducing tooth decay and inflammation, which affects whole body health. Maintaining a robust community water fluoridation initiative – which adjusts the level of naturally occurring fluoride in water to combat tooth decay – is proven to prevent dental disease before it starts.

It is time for a fundamental change in America's approach to dental care and dental insurance.

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Oral Health is Health

Guest Editorial

Make America Healthy Again

What it could mean for oral health

Brett H. Kessler, DDS; Richard J. Rosato, DMD

As a nation, we have an opportunity to put the mouth back into the body and bring better oral health to more people living in the United States.

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The Fork in the Road

1. Do we want to get millions of more Americans into a dental home…or is it ok that half the population does not go to the dentist regularly?

2. Do we think dentistry is truly ‘essential’ health care…or is it more of a discretionary, self-pay, elective type of service?

3. Do we want to walk the walk on mouth-is-connected-to-body and truly integrate oral health into mainstream healthcare…or should oral health remain largely siloed off?

If it's 'Yes', 'Yes', and 'Yes'…

1. **Dental insurance reform.** Transform dental 'insurance' into true insurance. Regulate insurance so that essential oral care services must be covered, prevention is at zero cost, out-of-pocket spending limits apply for consumers, medical loss ratio limits and other accountability measures apply to insurers.

2. **Dental insurance expansion.** Mandate, or incentivize, dental insurance coverage expansion. This includes through Medicare, Medicaid, federally-facilitated marketplaces, employer-sponsored market.

3. **Medical-dental integration**. Lay infrastructure for a screening and referral system – two way – between dental and medical providers. Develop clinical protocols, data sharing infrastructure, quality metrics, and work on culture change.

Thank you!

ADA.org/HPI

hpi@ada.org

marko-vujicic

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