

Oral Health Workforce Burnout in the Safety Net

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Oral Health Workforce Research Center (OHWRC)

- OHWRC is based at the Center for Health Workforce Studies (CHWS), School of Public Health, University at Albany, State University of New York (SUNY)
- OHWRC was formed as a partnership between CHWS and the Healthforce Center at the University of California, San Francisco
- OHWRC, established in 2014, is 1 of 9 health workforce research centers in the country funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the only one uniquely focused on the oral health workforce

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Background

- Burnout is a situational, context-dependent phenomenon engendered by work-related stressors with consequences tied primarily to professional attitudes, behaviors, and performance, although it has also been associated with personal mental health diagnoses such as depression¹
- Burnout is prevalent among health care workers in the US,² including oral health providers³
- COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing burnout issues across the health care workforce^{3,4}

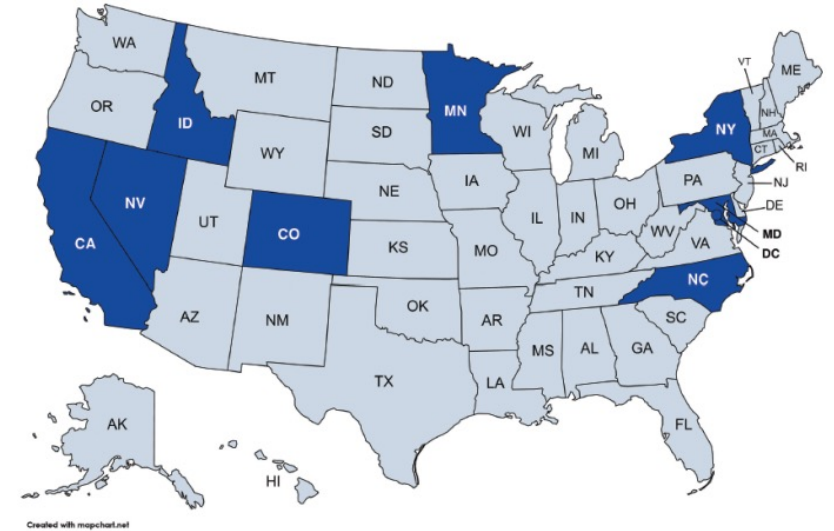


Identifying Strategies to Improve Oral Health Workforce Resilience



Methods

- This study assessed environmental, organizational, and personal factors that contributed to burnout among oral health providers in the safety net
- From May to September 2022, interviews were conducted at 11 safety-net dental organizations, including 9 FQHCs
- 26 key informants (2 CEO/Executive Directors, 6 non-clinical directors, 9 clinical directors, 2 dentists, 4 dental hygienists, 1 dental assistant, 2 administrative staff)
- An interview protocol guided the interviews
 - Interviews conducted on Zoom and transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose V.9.0 for coding and analysis



Results: Stressors at the Environmental Level

- Most immediate stressors were directly related to the pandemic
 - Changing policies and requirements
 - Inconsistent uniformity of policies and regulations
 - Closure of services that impacted childcare

Stressors at Organizational Level

- Non-emergency dental services were interrupted
- Difficulties obtaining sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Changing clinical protocols
- Reassignments, furloughs, and shortages
- Increased resignations and turnover, especially among dental hygienists and dental assistants
- Higher demand when services resumed
- More complex and severe conditions from oral health neglect

Stressors at Individual Level

- Concerns about aerosol-generating procedures
- Transmitting COVID-19 to loved ones
- Furloughs
- Stressors related to childcare (closure of schools and day care centers)

Strategies to Address Burnout

- **Organizational**

1. **Work-Life Balance Support**
 - More time-off
 - Leniency around taking time off
 - Flexible scheduling
2. **Employee Well-Being Assistance**
 - Counselling support
3. **Recognition and Compensation**
 - Extra pay and breaktime
4. **Communication and Engagement**
 - Staff feedback

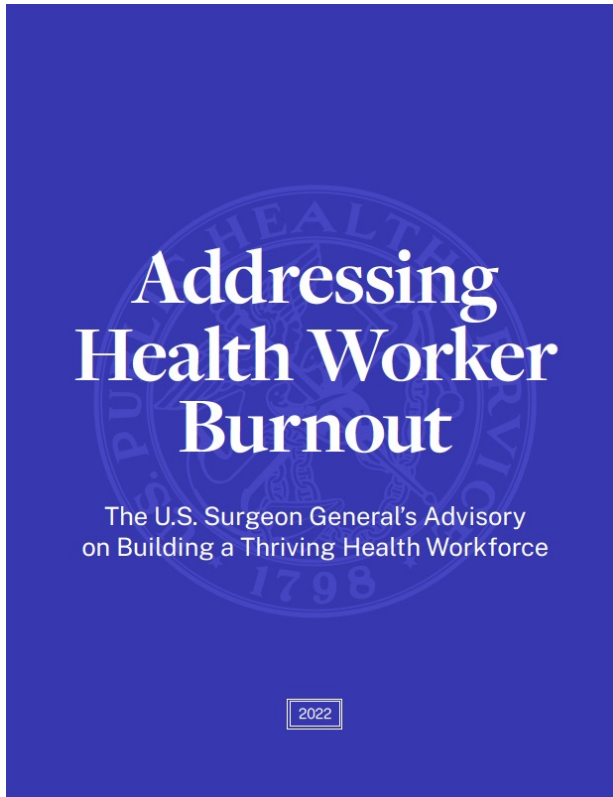
- **Individual/Interpersonal**

1. **Wellness and Relaxation Activities**
 - Guided nature walks
2. **Mental Well-Being Practices**
 - Gratitude exercises

Burnout in Oral Health Workforce- What Do the Data Say?

- Nearly 8-out-of-10 oral health clinicians reported experiencing symptoms of burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mar 2020-Sep/Oct 2021) (OHWRC, 2023)⁴
- Nearly 4-in-10 oral health clinicians reported similar experiences both at the time of the survey (Sep/Oct 2021) and prior to pandemic (OHWRC, 2023)⁴
- March 2021 ADA Dentist Health and Well-Being Survey of dentists found 16% had experienced anxiety and 13% had experienced depression⁵

Resources



<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/health-worker-wellbeing-advisory.pdf>



<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/workplace-mental-health-well-being.pdf>

The burden of burnout

Dentists share ways to lighten the load, prioritize mental health



<https://adanews.ada.org/new-dentist/2022/may/the-burden-of-burnout/>

CAREER & PROFESSION

Recovering from burnout: 5 steps to reclaim your life

<https://www.rdhmag.com/career-profession/article/14279250/burnout-in-dental-hygiene-5-steps-to-reclaim-your-life>

5 ways dental assistants can prevent and manage burnout

<https://www.danb.org/news-blog/detail/blog/dental-assistants-burnout-management-prevention>

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5. American Dental Association. 2021 Dentist Well-Being Survey Report. American Dental Association website. Accessed March 11, 2024. <https://ebusiness.ada.org/Assets/docs/101863.pdf>

Questions?

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