

best practice

DENTISTRY, BUSINESS & POLICY

NOVEMBER 2024

2024 KIDS DENTAL DAY

SERVING KIDS FROM
HEAD TO TOE

MEET YOUR NEW
PROFESSIONAL RELATIONS
CONCIERGE

2025 PROCESSING POLICY
CHANGES

So far, so **good.**

We gauge the success of **Best Practice** by your feedback.

The high volume of mail and constructive comments we received after the first issue landed tells us we're off to a good start. **You're reading it. You're thinking about it. You're engaging with it.**

As a practicing dentist for more than 34 years (four as a general practitioner and 28 as a periodontist), I am keenly aware of the challenges facing our network dentists. **Best Practice** was developed in part to help you get claims paid quickly, stay on top of novel benefit enhancements and programs that may benefit you and your staff, and alert you to things to beware of.

Jeffery W. Johnston, DDS, MS

Editor | Diplomate, American Board of Periodontology
and Dental Implant Surgery | Senior Vice President of
Professional Services and Chief Science Officer

Delta Dental of Tennessee

**We received comments
regarding value-based
reimbursements.**

The information was not intended to offend dentists, or suggest dentists need a value-based program to provide quality care. **The purpose of the article was to provide baseline information on the programs and to do exactly what it's done: to prompt consideration and conversation.**

Currently, some government and commercial groups are requesting value-based reimbursement programs. We can't ignore customer demands any more than you can ignore patient demands. Just as you respond to the wishes of the patients you serve at your practice, we have a responsibility to respond to the requests of our customers.

That the article left you with many questions is not surprising. Delta Dental is still trying to determine how to best structure these programs in a manner that provides the most value to customers, dentists and members. We want and appreciate feedback from our dentists on how value-based programs can help to improve both utilization and quality of care.

I'm a dentist too. I'm aware of the challenges facing practicing dentists. As an educator of more than 35 years, I am also very aware of how student debt impacts our recent dental school graduates. As Chief Science Officer for Delta Dental of Tennessee, I am also familiar with the "other side of the story." We absolutely recognize that the cost of delivering care has increased—because the cost of administering benefits has also increased. Just as your patients demand that costs are low, we face tremendous pressure from our customers to reduce claims costs as well as administrative costs.

We have invested heavily to improve and streamline the billing systems used to process payments, streamline clerical requirements, and make the claims process faster and more convenient. Tennessee has one of the lowest administrative expense ratios among our Delta Dental peers, with \$0.88 of every dollar going to you, our providers. We constantly monitor fees and will continue to adjust in the future as business allows.

Our purpose is to improve the overall wellness of our communities through our products, advocacy, education and philanthropy. We are proud that Delta Dental has done much over the years to serve this purpose. And we also understand that we have not done this alone. Dentists, like you, have made it possible.

The American Dental Association and the Association of Health Insurance Plans Inc. agree that patients with insurance benefits are more likely to see a dentist and to utilize dental services. We must balance the need to keep insurance affordable while appropriately reimbursing our providers, so that dentists like you can keep patients in your chairs.

All comments are welcome and feedback is encouraged by all readers. Contact me at **bestpractice@deltadentaltn.com**.



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**best
practice**
DENTISTRY, BUSINESS & POLICY

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Data diligence

Andrew Woodard, chief information security officer with Delta Dental of Tennessee, talks about the efforts to keep your—and your patients’—information safe.

STORY CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE.

Data diligence

(Continued)

The numbers are sobering.

It's estimated that one cyberattack occurs every 39 seconds, and these attacks cost businesses \$3.3 billion globally.

According to research conducted by IBM, the health care industry is the hardest hit by cybercrime, with each breach costing an average of \$10.93 million in losses, a figure more than double the average of all other industries.

The health care industry has been a frequent target, and the recent attack on the Change Healthcare system is a fresh reminder of this. (See page 8 to learn how Delta Dental was able to help during the Change Healthcare event.)

Data security is top-of-mind for many in the health care world, including us at Delta Dental of Tennessee.

What cybersecurity means to us

It means protecting the data entrusted to us, including the systems and services we provide. It also means it's a team effort, where all staff must be vigilant every minute of every day. Thankfully, this commitment to cybersecurity starts at the top.

We have a plan in place if there is an incident

We practice security incident response annually, both from the business operations and technical perspectives. We also have a disaster recovery plan that



we test annually to ensure we can recover from major system and service outages.

Finally, we have excellent cybersecurity partners to ensure we're proactively testing and maintaining the cybersecurity posture of our systems.

What you can do to protect your businesses

There are some key areas of focus shown on the next page. I also want to mention that I believe in continual improvement.

There's always room to get better, whether you're a large or small organization. I can appreciate that not all of these recommendations may be practical right away and that some may already be in place, but it's good to improve over time.

Andrew Woodward | Chief Information Security Officer
Delta Dental of Tennessee

Areas of cybersecurity focus

1 SOFTWARE MAINTENANCE

- Run current versions of all operating systems, whether you use PCs or MACs. Microsoft Windows 11, for example, is the current version. Windows 7 is no longer supported, which means it no longer receives security patches to address vulnerabilities that an attacker could use to break into your computers.
- Set systems to update automatically for the most consistent patches and security updates.

2 ANTIVIRUS PROGRAMS

- Make sure an antivirus program runs on your systems, receives regular updates and runs frequent scans of your computers.

3 ACCOUNTS AND PASSWORDS

- Longer passwords—think 12 characters or more—typically need to be changed less frequently. Due to their length, you can use easier-to-remember password phrases instead of complex, unreadable options.
- Try to restrict the use of computer administrative accounts. Use a standard account for everyday use, such as surfing the internet or checking email. Administrative accounts should be limited to installing software or other similar tasks.
- Staff should use unique accounts and passwords wherever possible, especially on critical systems.

4 MULTIFACTOR AUTHENTICATION (MFA)

- MFA refers to using more than a password to access email (Microsoft, Gmail, etc.) or other systems that may store sensitive data and administrative accounts where possible.
- Examples of MFA could be an app on your smartphone that generates a number, allows you to “accept” or “reject” a login attempt, or uses a facial recognition system or thumbprint.

5 AWARENESS TRAINING

- Phishing efforts via email systems are getting more sophisticated and more challenging to spot.
- Consider regular training to help staff refrain from clicking on unknown email links and attachments and train them to never enter usernames and/or passwords upon clicking.

6 FILE, DATABASE AND SYSTEMS BACKUPS

- Ransomware malware infections try to encrypt all computer files, making them unusable. To regain access to the files and get computers to work again, threat actors will demand you pay a fee to obtain the key to unencrypt the files.
- To help mitigate the risk, identify key files and computers to back up to an offsite or cloud solution.
- Access to backup solutions should be restricted to authorized personnel using MFA.

Are you using the Dental Office Toolkit?

Purpose-built to streamline administrative tasks and improve overall efficiency within your practice, Delta Dental of Tennessee's Dental Office Toolkit™ (DOT) is the MVP of the dental office.



Online claims submission

The Dental Office Toolkit offers convenient online claims submission, eliminating the need for manual paperwork. Submitting claims swiftly leads to faster processing times and improved cash flow while reducing administrative burden.



Real-time claim status

Dental offices gain access to real-time claim status updates, enabling them to track the progress of claims effortlessly. Instant feedback on claim status minimizes uncertainty and facilitates better financial planning for practices.



Eligibility verification

The Toolkit offers eligibility verification functionalities, allowing dental offices to verify patients' coverage prior to treatment. Verification of eligibility helps prevent claim denials and ensures patients are aware of their coverage, reducing confusion and billing issues.



Fast, powerful tools

An array of tools is available in the Toolkit including a prior authorization system, procedure code search, fast and simple member search and the ability to get a member's complete dental history across all dental offices.



Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT)

The Dental Office Toolkit facilitates electronic funds transfer, allowing dental offices to receive payments directly into their designated bank accounts. This eliminates the need for manual check processing, accelerates payment cycles and improves cash flow management.



Pre-treatment estimates

Dental providers can request pre-treatment estimates and prior authorizations through the Toolkit. Patients benefit from the transparency regarding treatment costs, enabling informed decision-making and reducing unexpected expenses.



Claims attachments

The Toolkit streamlines the process of attaching images to a new claim submission form, reducing both time for providers and Delta Dental staff who currently receive the physical images.



Provider training resources

Delta Dental provides comprehensive training resources within the Toolkit, including tutorials, webinars and documentation designed to train staff and maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the Toolkit's features.



Mobile accessibility

The Dental Office Toolkit website can be viewed on a mobile device, allowing dental providers to manage administrative tasks on-the-go. This enhances flexibility, efficiency and convenience.



Dental Office Toolkit (DOT) TOP TIPS

DENTAL OFFICE TOOLKIT

SHINED DURING CLEARINGHOUSE OUTAGE

In late February, Change Healthcare was victim to a cyberattack, shutting down its systems and causing widespread delays for those using the vendor to submit claims.

The cyberattack did not impact Delta Dental's Dental Office Toolkit (DOT), which continued to receive claims, pre-treatment estimates, and direct attachments without the need for a clearinghouse or third-party system.

When utilizing DOT, most claims are processed within seconds, and the convenient online submission process eliminates the need for manual paperwork.

DOT is free to use and offers the option of electronic funds transfer, allowing dental offices to receive payments directly into their designated bank accounts within 24 to 48 hours. You'll also have access to real-time claim status updates, keeping you informed and on top of your submissions at all times.

To get started using DOT, visit:

- [DeltaDentalTN.com/Dentists](https://www.DeltaDentalTN.com/Dentists)

1

JUST BROWSING

The latest version of DOT requires the use of the latest versions of Google Chrome and Adobe Acrobat Reader. Both programs can be downloaded free and will ensure the best possible experience when using DOT.

2

ATTACH SECURELY

When submitting claims, the latest version of DOT allows for attachments to be included. You can upload attachments in the following formats: PNG, JPEG, TIFF, GIF, PDF. Word documents cannot be uploaded, but you can easily convert a Word document to PDF format.

3

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

When registering an account, you must use a first and last name that is unique to the username you have chosen. For example, if ABC Dental with TIN 123456789 has usernames 'jsmith' and 'jsmith1', the system will require a unique first name and last name for each username (ex: first name: John, last name: Smith and first name: John, last name: Smith1).

THE

STAFFING

SHORTAGE



IS RELIEF IN SIGHT?

WHAT GOES UP, MUST COME DOWN. OR SO THE SAYING GOES.

Here's a new iteration that dentists and dental office managers may find solace in: What was down is coming back up. A little. Maybe.

"We're going to be climbing out of the rut. How fast? How far? I don't know for sure," said Phil Stark of Peak Performers, a dental staffing firm. "We've seen peaks and valleys before. This is different for sure, for several reasons. But I do think we're pulling out of that valley. That said, we shouldn't think 'normal' is making a return because it's not."

What is the subject of this roller-coaster track that Stark is referencing? It's dental office

staffing, with a particular emphasis on dental hygienists.

Like many sectors in the health care field (and so many other industries), the dental world continues to face a staffing crunch that kicked off during the pandemic and has proven to be far stickier than expected.

In short, dental offices throughout the U.S. are experiencing significant staffing challenges due to a shortage of dental hygienists and dental office staff.

Stark said Peak Performers works in several states and has roughly 2,600 practices profiled in its database. This gives him a unique perspective on where the staffing pinch is felt most.

“Hygienists—that’s the most pain that practitioners are feeling. In 2019, we were placing hundreds of hygienists every month,” he said. “In 2021, we were down to 20 to 25 placements a month.”

Like so many others, Stark assumed/hoped there would be a bounce back once COVID started to recede. Thus far, any bounce has been minimal, and the data shows there may not ever be one in the traditional sense.

The ADA’s Health Policy Institute (HPI), working with the American Dental Hygienists Association (ADHA) and the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) in a 2022 study¹, took a deep dive into the dental industry’s workforce shortages, and the results are both eye-opening and predictive of the situation today.

In 2022, 40 percent of dental practices were trying to hire dental assistants or dental hygienists. Today, those numbers have decreased slightly. In its October 2023 publication Economic Outlook and Emerging Issues in Dentistry², HPI reported that the number of dentists with an inadequate number of dental assistants in their offices had dropped to 32 percent, while the number with inadequate dental hygienist staff was just less than 38 percent. The number of offices with inadequate general office/administrative staff was just less than 25 percent.

These numbers indicate a slight improvement in dental assistant and hygienist staffing since 2022 and a greater improvement in general administrative staffing. But they’re still far from the pre-pandemic figures.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

It’s easy, and significantly if not entirely accurate, to point to the COVID-19 pandemic as the cause for today’s dental staffing issues. There is no denying the impact the pandemic had on staffing. But it’s also clear that while the pandemic accelerated and magnified the issue, it is not entirely to blame.

Stark said his firm did some surveys of its own and found that a significant percentage of those leaving their dental assistant or hygienist positions did so for reasons only marginally related to COVID.

“I thought maybe they were switching careers because of family health concerns or personal health concerns or just a general fear of COVID,” Stark said. “There was some of that, but it certainly wasn’t the majority. A lot of them just found other ways to make \$25 to \$30 an hour doing things where they could work from home.”

The decline in enrollment for dental assistant and hygienist programs long predates the onset of the pandemic. In fact, enrollment in dental assistant programs has declined since 2015³. Hygienist enrollments have followed more of a peaks-and-valleys pattern but are still below the levels needed to meet current and, perhaps most significantly, anticipated future demand.

According to data from the ADA, the 2018-19 academic year saw 5,775 students enrolled in dental assistant programs. In the 2022-23 year, the number was just 4,510.

Hygienist programs saw 8,288 enrollees in 2018-19, with a dip to 7,745 in 2020-21 before rebounding to 8,642 in 2022-23.

Those numbers reflect what Stark has experienced at Peak Performers and what he’s observed in recent class sizes.

“I’ve spoken at many of the hygiene programs over the last three years. In 2022 and 2023, the graduating classes were robust,” he said. “By the time we talked to them about resumés, interviews and finding a home, 90 percent of the future hygienists already had full-time commitments in February and March before graduating in May and June.

“This year class sizes are down considerably, but only one (student) has a firm commitment. That tells me maybe some of the pressures have started to ease.”



**I’VE SPOKEN AT
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THE GRADUATING
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BUT IS IT REAL? AND WILL IT LAST?

With some evidence indicating a slight reduction in the severity of the dental labor shortage, is it time to breathe that proverbial sigh of relief? The data says no.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics anticipates 7 percent employment growth for dental hygienists over the next eight years, with more than 16,000 positions opening in that time period.

Add to that this fact: The 2022 ADA survey¹ showed a third of the dental assistant (33.7 percent) and dental hygienist (31.4 percent) workforce plans to retire by 2027.

It's also possible that the percentage of dental offices indicating shortages in assistant and hygienist staff isn't because open positions are filled but because dentists have adopted new solutions to the problem.

In the October 2023 Emerging Issues in Dentistry poll⁴, one-third of the respondents said they've adapted their office operations and duties, taking on tasks and responsibilities normally assigned to dental hygienists, dental assistants and administrative staff.

"I think it's clear that, no matter what, it's not going to be the same," Stark said. "Everybody has to adjust."

ADJUST IN WHAT WAY?

A number of surveys and research efforts have focused on learning what it will take to recruit new hygienists and dental office staff and retain those already in place. The easy answer would seem to be compensation, and indeed, the market has responded to the staffing shortage with an increase in average pay for both hygienists and general office staff.

The 2024 Dental Salary Report from DentalPost⁵ found that hygienist pay increased nearly 8 percent in 2023 to an average hourly rate of \$45.75.

The average hourly rate for practice managers jumped more than 16 percent in 2023 (\$34.21/hour) while the average hourly rate for dental assistants increased by 8.24 percent to \$25.21.

Despite these increases, the report found appreciable dissent

among dental office employees as it relates to compensation, with a decline in satisfaction of 11 percent across all positions.

The survey also provides some eye-opening stats regarding dental professionals that are either actively looking for or would consider looking for new employment, including: 42 percent of registered dental hygienists, 57 percent of dental assistants, 65 percent of billing specialists and 35 percent of practice managers.

The reasons cited for the discontent included raises that don't match inflation, availability of higher-paying jobs outside of the dental realm and a less-than-desirable company culture.

While compensation is a factor, it's far from the only consideration that should be addressed when trying to retain staff.



DELTA DENTAL PARTNERSHIP WITH TENNESSEE CAREER GUIDE DRIVES STAFFING CONVERSATION IN TENNESSEE

We know dentistry is a team effort, comprised of dentists, dental hygienists, dental lab technicians, front desk staff, assistants, and more. Each member is an integral part of serving patients. Through our partnership with the Tennessee Career Guide, we are highlighting each one of them. The guide is a resource for students to educate themselves on the many options they may take as a

career path. Delta Dental of Tennessee sponsors an article detailing the education needed, the average salary, and the duties required for each dental profession. The purpose of this is to get students interested in the field of dentistry at an early age and inspire them to follow a dental career path, no matter which one. We are committed to investing in the lives of today's students and tomorrow's workforce.

The HPI/ADHA/DANB workforce shortage survey (2022)¹ found the top three reasons for a hygienist to leave their position were:

1. Negative workplace culture
2. Lack of growth opportunity
3. Inadequate benefits

That same survey found the top three reasons for a dental assistant to leave their position were:

1. Insufficient pay
2. Negative workplace culture
3. Overworked

Several recommendations for retaining existing staff as well as recruiting new talent were offered in the report. They included compensation that is responsive to market conditions, a positive workplace culture and competitive benefits that include dental and health insurance.

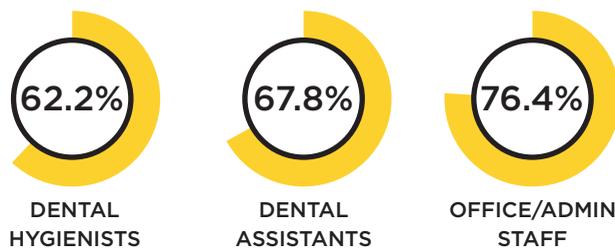
It's clear that the staffing shortage facing the dental industry is a complex issue without a single point of causation or a single path to resolution.

Actively looking or would consider looking for new employment:



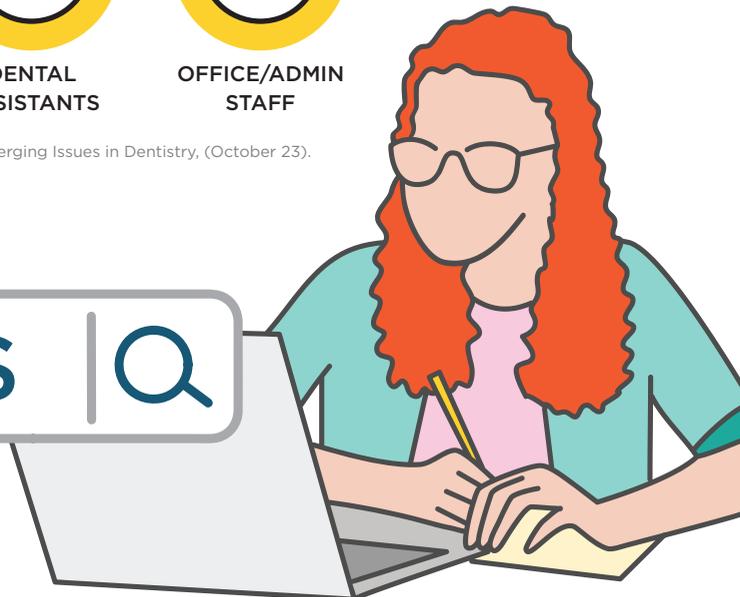
Source: 2024 Dental Salary Report, DentalPost

Percentage of dental offices that have adequate staffing for:



Source: HPI Economic Outlook and Emerging Issues in Dentistry, (October 23).

JOB-HUNTERS | 🔍



ARGININE

AN EMERGING WEAPON IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CARIES

BY JEFFERY W. JOHNSTON, DDS, MS | CHIEF SCIENCE OFFICER



Despite being a preventable disease, dental caries remain a global health crisis.^{1, 2}

The etiology and pathogenesis of caries have been well studied and have evolved significantly over the last few years. Caries are much more complicated than a single bacterium (*Streptococcus mutans*) utilizing fermentable carbohydrates to produce acid thus cavitating a tooth.³

Caries are more of a repetitive process of demineralization and remineralization.⁴ The tooth is demineralized by acids and remineralized by saliva. A carious lesion occurs when the periods of demineralization outpace remineralization. It is well understood that decreases in salivary flow and changes in salivary composition affect caries rates. Of recent interest are biofilm microbial interactions. These interactions play a role in the pH balance of the biofilm.⁵ When the pH falls below 5.5, the enamel begins to demineralize.⁶

Current strategies in managing caries involve oral hygiene improvement, controlling the frequency of carbohydrate (sugar) ingestion, fluoride and remineralizing adjuncts such as calcium phosphate preparations, biomimetic glass and oligopeptides.^{7, 8}

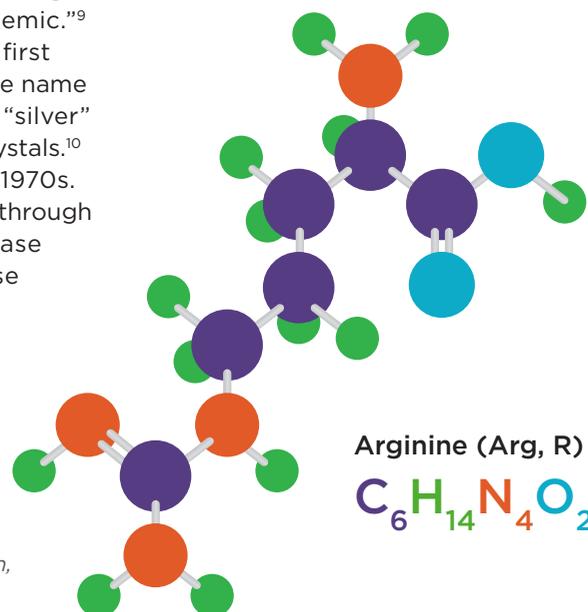
In July 2023, the American Dental Association published "Proceedings from a symposium on Arginine—A breakthrough technology fighting the caries epidemic."⁹ Arginine is an essential amino acid first isolated in 1886 by Ernst Schulze. The name is derived from the Greek word for "silver" due to the silver color of arginine crystals.¹⁰ The study of arginine began in the 1970s. Arginine is metabolized by bacteria through two pathways: the arginine deiminase system and the agmatine deiminase

system. Evidently, when arginine is metabolized by the oral microbiome, the pH is raised due to the release of ammonia as a catabolic byproduct. This pH rise reduces enamel demineralization and creates an environment more favorable for the less-aciduric bacteria.

In other words, there is a shift in the bacteria to a less cariogenic bacteria. This bacterial shift occurred in as little as two weeks in patients using an arginine-fortified dentifrice.¹¹ Arginine can also disrupt the forces that hold the biofilm together, thus affecting the cariogenic potential. This ability to raise the pH microbiome modulation to a less acidogenic composition and biofilm disruption are all novel approaches to combating caries.

Arginine is found in oral care products (dentifrice, mouthwash and varnish). There is some evidence in the scientific literature supporting products containing arginine as efficacious in arresting or reversing caries.^{12, 13, 14, 15, 16}

Future research is needed to determine if the efficacy can be improved by combining arginine with fluoride and other antimicrobial therapies to suppress cariogenic bacteria. Also, the potential side effects of arginine need investigation. Arginine looks promising as another tool in our armamentaria against caries.



To view citations and references noted throughout this publication, scan this QR code.

New Delta Dental Groups

Bull Outdoor Products, Inc	Athens
American Bedding Manufacturer	Athens
Kirkland's, Inc	Brentwood
Compassus BSMH Holdings, LLC	Brentwood
KKM Financial	Brentwood
BOS Framework, Inc	Brentwood
Odyssey Behavioral Healthcare	Brentwood
Pickett County Government	Byrdstown
SKP Health	Chattanooga
Allied Pediatrics	Chattanooga
Atomic Transport, LLC	Chattanooga
Boys & Girls Club of Chattanooga	Chattanooga
Choices Pregnancy Resource Center	Chattanooga
Southeastern Trust Company	Chattanooga
Chattanooga Anesthesia Partners	Chattanooga
The Vein Institute PC	Chattanooga
LYNC Logistics, LLC	Chattanooga
RockPointBank, National Association	Chattanooga
United Methodist Neighborhood Centers, Inc	Chattanooga
Hudson Materials Company	Chattanooga
Bradley Medical Center, LLC and Bradley Physician Services, LLC	Cleveland
Cleveland Utilities Authority	Cleveland
Advanced Transportation	Clinton
Merlin Resources, LLC	Cordova
Davis Concrete Cutting, LLC	Covington
JSJ Construction, LLC	Cross Plains
Blue Life Security LLC	Crossville
T-Square Engineering, Inc	Franklin
Yarbrough Capital	Franklin
Kellum Stem Cell Institute	Franklin
Tennessee Marble Company	Friendsville
Servant Logistics, LLC	Gallatin
Premier Benefits Group, Inc	Gallatin
McNeill Commercial Real Estate	Germantown
Nashville Ramps, LLC	Goodlettsville
WSC Solutions, LLC	Horn Lake
HTP Termite and Pest Control	Huntingdon
Kingsport Housing Authority	Kingsport

Delta Dental of Tennessee welcomes the following new groups. You can check eligibility and coverage details in real time with Dental Office Toolkit (DOT), or call customer service at 800-223-3104. If you need to register for DOT, email ProfessionalRelations1@DeltaDentalTN.com.

Kidz Academy	Knoxville
Constructive Home Solutions Inc	Knoxville
Maryville Title Agency	Knoxville
Software Factory Labs Inc	Knoxville
Little River Art	Knoxville
Green Meadows Partners, Inc	Knoxville
RBM Company	Knoxville
Waste & Water Authority of Wilson County	Lebanon
McNutt Oil Company	Maryville
A&W Compressor & Mechanical Services, Inc	Maynardville
Warren County Emergency Communications District	McMinnville
Dark Horse Management LLC	Memphis
Bluff City OB-GYN	Memphis
Waddell and Associates, LLC	Memphis
Evergreen UV, LLC	Memphis
Robert Irwin Jewelers	Memphis
Superior, Inc	Mount Juliet
Women's Health Specialists, PLLC	Murfreesboro
Craig's Tax Service Inc	Murfreesboro
O'Neil Hagaman LLC	Nashville
Pink Dog Productions, Inc	Nashville
Cushion Employer Services	Nashville
Short Term Nashville	Nashville
StudioNow, Inc	Nashville
FutureNow Marketing LLC	Nashville
Christopher A. Lee CPA PLLC	Nashville
Adventure Science Center	Nashville
Therapy Systems, Inc	Nashville
James Eyecare Inc dba Music City Optical	Nashville
Hoover Materials, LLC	Nashville
Two Hats Music Group, LLC	Nashville
TAD Benefits LLC dba Oakmont Benefits	Nashville
Claiborne Utilities District	New Tazewell
Advance Filter, Inc	Powell
Connector Distribution Corp dba Electro Mavin	Riceville
City of Ripley	Ripley
Care of Savannah, Inc	Savannah
Somerville Animal Hospital	Somerville

New Delta Dental Providers

Jeffery Chen	Alcoa
David Kim	Alcoa
Adewale Adekoya	Antioch
Arpit Patel	Antioch
Vibhuti Luther	Arlington
Stephen Ray	Ashland City
Susan Carter-O'Shea	Athens
Alaina Hansen	Athens
David Kimler	Bartlett
Marena Counce	Bartlett
Leah Lewis	Bartlett
David Pencarinha	Bartlett
Alfred Pipper	Bartlett

Delta Dental of Tennessee welcomes our new and returning contracted providers. You can check eligibility and coverage details in real time with Dental Office Toolkit (DOT), or call customer service at 800-223-3104. If you need to register for DOT, email ProfessionalRelations1@DeltaDentalTN.com.

Keisha Brady	Brentwood
Zachary Shapiro	Brentwood
Bilal Zahoor	Brentwood
Archie Bertrand	Brentwood
Jessica Dileo	Brentwood
Jasmine Benavidez	Bristol
Chad Diminick	Bristol
Michelle Finelli	Bristol
Myron Wilson	Bristol
Kudzai Chikwava	Chattanooga
Tyler Hamilton	Chattanooga
Akens Lawson	Chattanooga
Niki Patel	Chattanooga



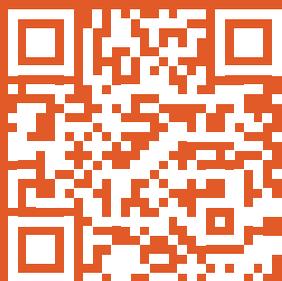
2024

KIDS DENTAL DAY



HELPING KIDS
LEARN GOOD ORAL
HEALTH HABITS AT
AN EARLY AGE IS
CRITICAL TO
SETTING THEM UP
FOR A LIFETIME OF
HEALTHY SMILES.





If you would like to volunteer or become a partner for this event, get on the list to be notified about the 2025 Kids Dental Day event by scanning the QR code above.

A dental checkup is a critical part of a child's back to school routine because children with poor oral health are three times more likely than their peers to miss school, and poor oral health can have a detrimental effect on a child's quality of life and success later in life. With that in mind, Delta Dental of Tennessee and the Nashville Sounds teamed up to create an event to serve kids in need. Three years and many added partners later, the third annual Kids Dental Day served more than 400 kids of all ages from the Nashville area.

With the addition of cityCURRENT and Samaritan's Feet, each child received free dental screenings, a new pair of socks and shoes, snacks, a new book, and Sounds

souvenirs as they prepare for the new school year. Approximately 80 percent of the kids screened at the event needed additional dental care and were able to receive a complimentary cleaning onsite, as well as a referral to Meharry or Neighborhood Health for follow up care, as needed. The high number of kids screened at the event that needed additional care (80 percent, compared to 40 percent of kids last year) underscores the urgency of reversing an alarming post-pandemic trend: the number of kids receiving routine preventive declined, resulting in increases in dental decay.

"We are thrilled with the turnout and success of Kids Dental Day, and we thank the Sounds, cityCURRENT, and all of the community partners and volunteers who helped make this event possible," said Jeff Ballard, CEO and president of Delta Dental of Tennessee. "Helping kids learn good oral health habits at an early age is critical to setting them up for a lifetime of healthy smiles, and the fun, festive atmosphere of Kids Dental Day is the perfect way to help make care more accessible and approachable to kids."

Kids Dental Day was the result of more than a dozen community partners coming together



to create a memorable experience for kids. Dentists from Meharry Medical College School of Dentistry and Neighborhood Health oversaw the dental care portion of the event, and the new socks and shoes were provided by cityCURRENT and Samaritan's Feet. The day was filled with fun activities and games provided by Nashville Public Television and visits to the Book'em Book Bus to choose a free book to take home.

The success of the event would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of more than 100 volunteers. From coordinating logistics to encouraging the children, volunteers from cityCURRENT and other local organizations played an essential role in ensuring the day ran smoothly. Their commitment and enthusiasm were instrumental in creating a positive and impactful experience for every child in attendance.

"Kids Dental Day is not just about dental health or new shoes; it's about empowering children with the knowledge that they are loved, cared for, and can achieve their future goals," said Kelly Meyers, president of cityCURRENT. "Our collaboration with

The Sounds and Delta Dental underscores our commitment to the well-being of Nashville's youth. By coming together as a community, we can provide essential services and support that will have a lasting impact on these children's lives. This event is a true testament to the difference we can make when we work together as a business community."

Children arrived throughout the day at First Horizon Park from community partners and summer programs including the Donelson YMCA, Preston Taylor Ministries, and the Hispanic Family Foundation.

Some received transportation provided by Delta Dental's Smile180 Foundation and Higginbotham Insurance. Other partners involved in the event were Kroger, who donated healthy snacks and bottles of water, and Hope Smiles, who provided the dental equipment. The Smile180 Foundation purchased dental supplies for the event.



NEWS YOU CAN USE

INTRODUCING YOUR PROFESSIONAL RELATIONS CONCIERGE

Delta Dental of Tennessee appreciates each provider in our network. The size and quality of the Delta Dental network is a key factor that sets us apart from other dental benefits providers. We want to ensure that partnership is taken care of, so we would like to introduce you to your new point of contact, Candice Cartwright.

Candice has over 15 years of experience in the insurance and healthcare industry, focusing on building relationships with clients and providing excellent customer service. Her name may be familiar to you as she has previously worked at Delta Dental as an account manager for large groups and as a professional relations representative. Now, Candice holds the position of professional relations concierge.

In this role, Candice welcomes newly credentialed providers into the network and serves as the primary provider contact, assisting you and your administrative teams with various network needs. She is excited about building relationships with you all and finds joy in welcoming new dentists to the network, whether you are joining a practice or starting one of your own.



This position allows Candice to build a rapport with you, your office administrators, and credentialing teams, making her a direct contact and source of support for your network needs. Candice is excited to be back at Delta Dental and looks forward to continuing to provide exceptional service to each of you.

Send her an email to say hello at CCartwright@DeltaDentalTN.com.

2025 PROCESSING CHANGES AND CODING

New Codes

The following list outlines new codes, deleted codes, and processing policy revisions that will take effect January 1, 2025.

- | | |
|-------|---|
| D2956 | Removal of an indirect restoration on a natural tooth. The removal of an indirect restoration is included in the definitive treatment and the fees are not billable to the patient. |
| D6180 | Implant maintenance procedures when a full arch fixed hybrid prosthesis is not removed, including cleansing of prosthesis and abutments. Benefits for D6180 are denied unless covered by group/individual contract. If implant services and D6114 and D6115 are covered, benefits are limited to once every 12 months. Benefits for D6080 and D6180 are denied if done more frequently. Fees for D6180 are not billable to the patient if done within 12 months of D6114 and D6115. |
| D6193 | Replacement of an implant screw. Benefits are denied unless implants are covered by group/individual contract. When covered, fees for replacement of an implant screw, if performed within six months of the initial placement of the prosthesis, by the same dentist/dental office, are not billable to the patient. Benefits are limited to once per implant every 24 months. Fees for D6089 are not billable to the patient on the same date of services as D6193. |
| D7252 | Partial extraction for immediate implant placement. Benefits are denied unless covered by group/individual contract. If implant services are covered, benefits are limited to once per tooth, in conjunction with immediate implant placement. |

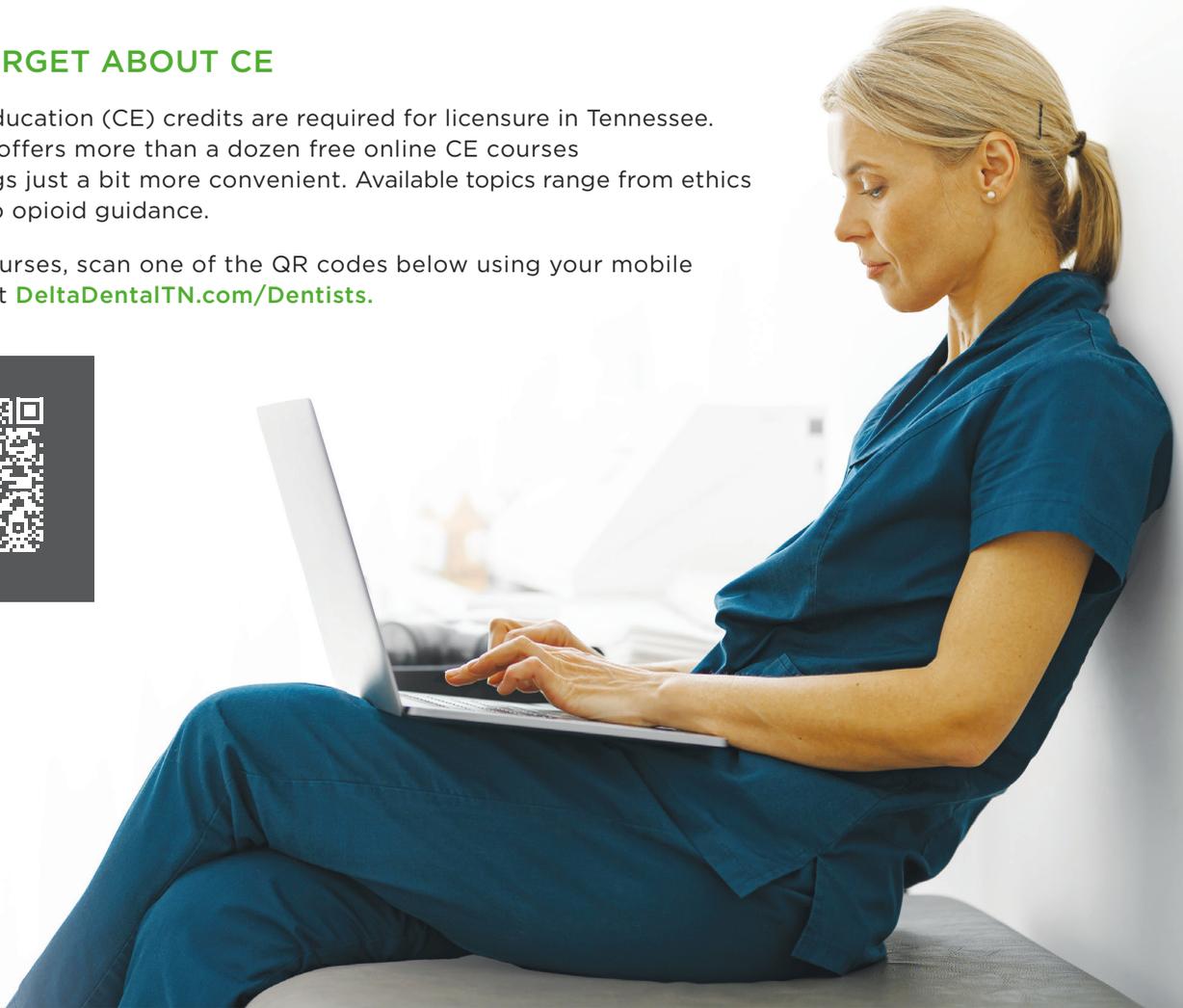
DON'T FORGET ABOUT CE

Continuing education (CE) credits are required for licensure in Tennessee. Delta Dental offers more than a dozen free online CE courses to make things just a bit more convenient. Available topics range from ethics to nutrition to opioid guidance.

To see the courses, scan one of the QR codes below using your mobile device or visit [DeltaDentalTN.com/Dentists](https://www.DeltaDentalTN.com/Dentists).



DIGITAL IMAGING: DARCY WOOD



UPDATING INFORMATION YOU NEED TO KNOW

- D7259** Nerve dissection. Benefits for nerve dissection are denied as a specialized procedure. Nerve dissection is part of D7241 and the fees are not billable to the patient when done on the same date of service.
- D8091** Comprehensive orthodontic treatment with orthognathic surgery. Benefits are denied when the supporting documentation does not meet the criteria for coverage. Fees for limited orthodontic treatment (D8010 - D8040) and comprehensive orthodontic treatment (D8070 - D8090) when submitted on the same date of service as D8091 are not billable to the patient.
- D8671** Periodic orthodontic treatment visit associated with orthognathic surgery. Fees for D8671 are not billable to the patient when done on the same date of service as D8091.
- D9913** Administration of neuromodulators. Benefits for D9914 are denied unless covered by group/individual contract.
- D9914** Administration of dermal fillers. Benefits for D9914 are denied unless covered by group/individual contract.
- D9959** Unspecified sleep apnea services procedure, by report. Benefits for D9959 are denied unless covered by group/individual contract.

Deleted Codes

- D2941** Interim therapeutic restoration - primary dentition.
- D6095** Repair implant abutmen, by report.

Processing Policy Revisions

- D4268** This procedure is considered a component of the surgical procedure (D4240, D4241, D4260, and D4261) and a separate fee is not billable to the patient.
- D8670** Fees for D8670 are not billable to the patient when done on the same date of service as D8671.
- D9994** Benefits for patient education are denied. Fees for patient education to improve oral health literacy are not billable to the patient when submitted on the same date of service as D1301, D1310, D1320, D1321, and D1330.

best practice

DENTISTRY, BUSINESS & POLICY

PROVIDER ALERT!

Effective December 31, 2024, Farm Bureau Health Plan will be terminating their Medicare Advantage coverage with Delta Dental. Please ask your patients for their new insurance card and ensure you are submitting claims to the appropriate dental carrier for service dates on or after January 1, 2025. You will see this same reminder when you log into your Dental Office Toolkit, too.

