



What 1,129 Self-Assessments Reveal About Dental Professional Wellness

A Well-Being Index Look at Dentistry — 2025–2026 State of Well-Being Findings

ADA / National Council of Dentist Health Programs Conference

Presented by John McMahon, Director of Client Experience



John McMahon

Director of Client Experience, Well-Being Index for Dental Professionals

- Organizational wellness expert leading Well-Being Index implementation for 1,000+ healthcare and dental institutions worldwide
- Helps healthcare and dental leaders reduce burnout and build sustainable support for clinician well-being

The comprehensive well-being solution for healthcare organizations

The Well-Being Index helps organizations uncover what's really driving clinician distress, identify the groups most in need of support, build data-backed action plans, and track whether those interventions are actually working over time.

**Originally developed &
validated at Mayo Clinic**

1,000+

organizations worldwide

14+

peer-reviewed validation studies

Purpose-built for dental organizations

- **Co-developed with the American Dental Association**

The only validated, anonymous well-being tool designed specifically for the dental workforce — dentists, hygienists, and assistants — with national dental benchmark comparisons.

- **Fully anonymous**

The only identifier is an email address. Even administrators cannot link a response to an individual — removing the stigma barrier that keeps dental professionals from self-reporting honestly.

- **Under 60 seconds to complete**

Nine validated questions measuring six dimensions of distress and well-being, with immediate personalized results and national dental benchmark comparisons.

- **Real-time dashboard with dental segmentation**

Results broken down by role (dentist, hygienist, assistant), practice setting, demographics, and employment status.

- **Quarterly cadence, longitudinal by design**

Built for sustained measurement — not a one-time survey — so organizations can track whether interventions are actually working over time.

THE DATA

Dentistry Well-Being in 2025

Based on 1,129 dentistry assessments — part of 72,193 total 2025 Well-Being Index assessments



Dentistry — 2025 Headline Numbers

Drawn from 1,129 dentistry assessments completed Jan 1–Dec 31, 2025 (part of 72,193 total Well-Being Index assessments across 8 occupation groups)

45.3%

Distressed & Struggling

Up from 41.3% in 2023; sits 5.6 points above the overall healthcare average

57%

Burnout rate

2nd-highest of all 8 occupation groups

49%

Emotional hardening

Highest of any occupation group in the dataset

2x

Suicide rate

vs. general population — linked to elevated depression & emotional-problem reporting

Support staff — not just dentists — carry the heaviest load. Dental Hygienists and Dental Assistants both report higher distress than dentists themselves, even though dentists post the highest emotional-hardening rate of any group in the study.

Six Dimensions of Distress & Well-Being — Dentistry 2025

● **Burnout**

Chronic exhaustion from sustained clinical demands — the physical, ergonomic, and interpersonal toll of day-after-day patient care.

● **Suicidal Ideation Risk**

Depression and emotional distress severe enough to signal risk — a pattern this field carries more heavily than most of healthcare.

● **Severe Fatigue**

Physical exhaustion beyond normal tiredness — often a downstream effect of burnout, understaffing, or long hours spent chairside.

● **Work-Life Integration**

Whether practice demands leave room for family and rest — hard to protect under production-based scheduling and short staffing.

● **Meaning in Work**

A sense that the work is worthwhile and personally meaningful — one of the strongest known protective factors against burnout.

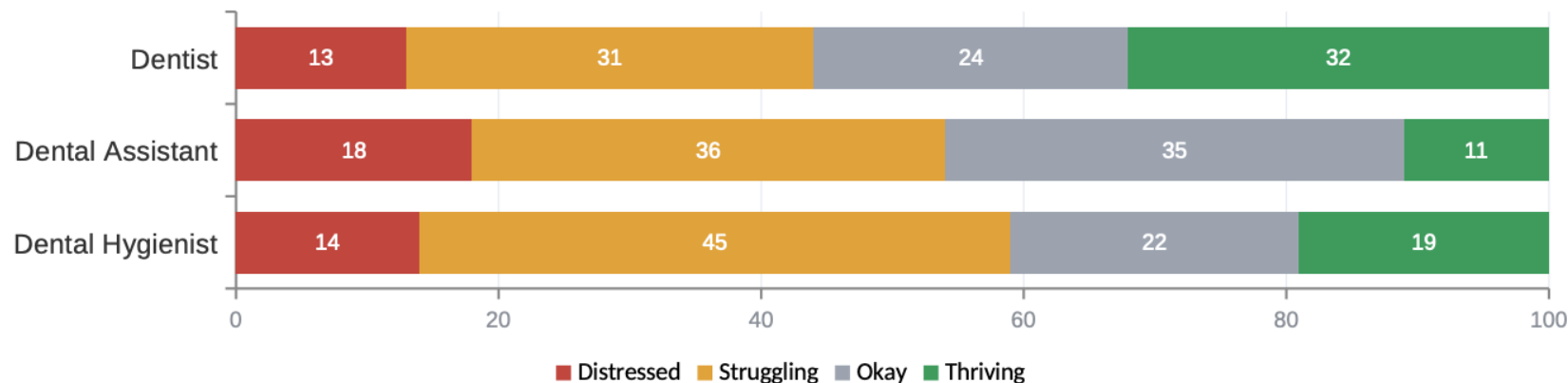
● **Quality of Life (composite)**

A composite of all nine questions into one signal — the clearest indicator of whether someone is thriving, coping, or struggling.

Note: These six dimensions are derived from nine validated assessment questions; some questions inform more than one dimension.

Well-Being by Practitioner Type

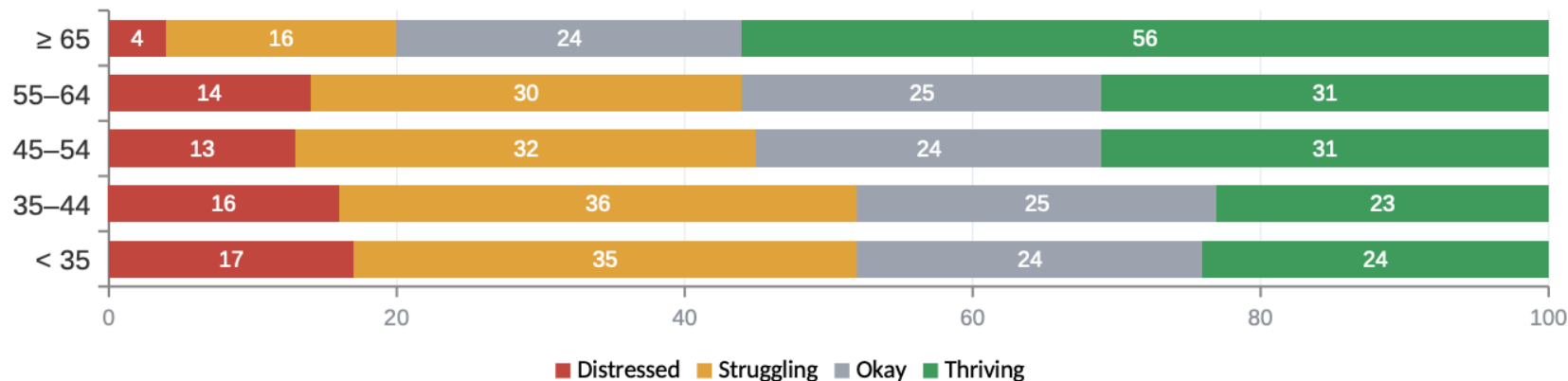
Dentists, Dental Hygienists, and Dental Assistants — 2025



The credential inversion: Hygienists show the highest distress (59.5% Distressed & Struggling), followed by Assistants (53.6%) and Dentists (43.4%). The highest-credentialed role in the practice carries the lowest distress — a sign that support staff bear a disproportionate share of the burden.

Well-Being by Age Group

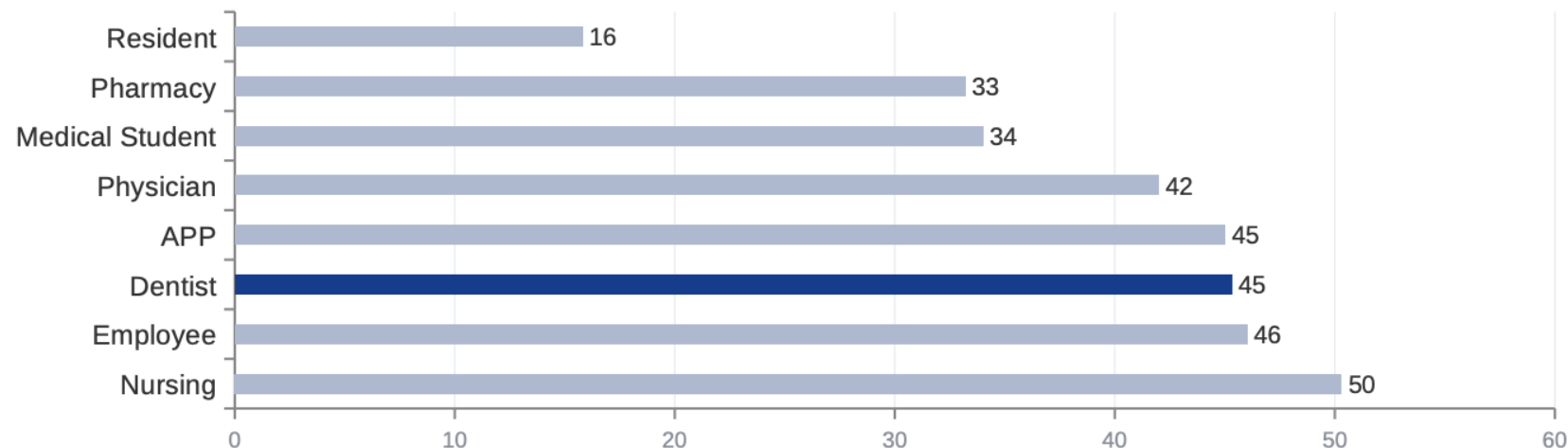
Dentistry — 2025



Interpret with caution: dentistry's age-bracket samples are relatively small. The general pattern still holds — mid-career professionals report the most distress, while those nearing retirement report the least. No age bracket falls below 40% combined Distressed & Struggling.

Dentistry Benchmarked vs. All Occupation Groups

Distressed & Struggling rate by occupation — 2025, ranked highest to lowest

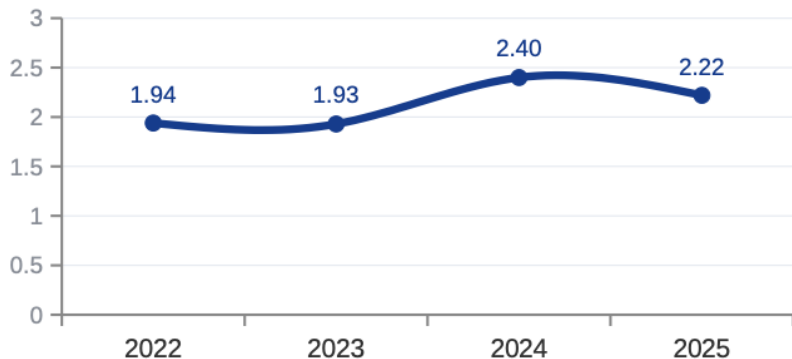


Dentistry ranks third-highest of eight occupation groups (45.3%), behind only Nursing (50.3%) and Employees (46%) — sitting 5.6 points above the overall 2025 healthcare average of 39.7%.

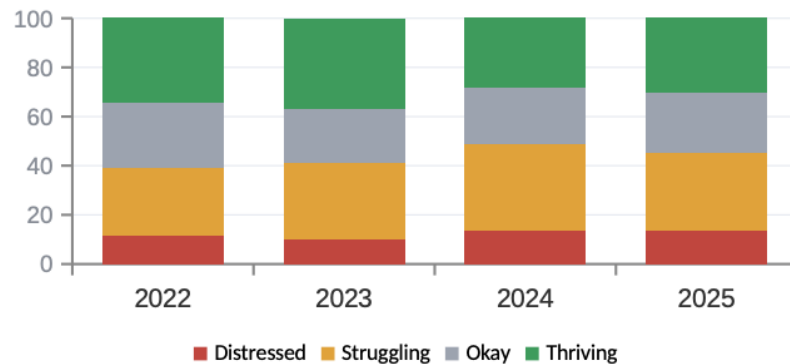
Four-Year Trend (2022–2025)

Dentistry has the shortest tracking history of any occupation group in the report

Mean Distress Score



Well-Being Snapshot (%)



Only four years of data exist for dentistry. Distress spiked in 2024 (48.9% Distressed & Struggling) before improving in 2025 to 45.3% — a 3.7-point gain, the third-largest improvement of the eight tracked occupation groups.

Risk Profile in Dentistry

2x

Dentist suicide rate vs.
general population

Highest

Combined depression &
emotional-problem reporting
of any group

49%

Emotional hardening —
highest of any occupation
group

57%

Burnout rate — 2nd-highest
of all 8 occupation groups

Published research directly links this compounding profile — high depression, high emotional problems, and elevated emotional hardening — to suicide rates approximately twice the general population among U.S. dentists.

Without anonymous, validated measurement, the dental professionals at highest risk may never self-identify — because the same conditions driving their distress can also prevent them from asking for help.

Key Takeaways

- Support staff — not just dentists — need targeted attention; hygienists and assistants report meaningfully higher distress than dentists themselves
- Meaning in work is protective, but it's eroding in the highest-burnout groups, including dentistry — worth monitoring as an early signal
- Work-life integration remains the hardest dimension to move industry-wide, and dentistry is among the groups most affected
- Continued measurement lets organizations see whether interventions are actually working — as 2025's partial recovery shows



Thank you for the invitation to present.

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