

Is There a Dental Assistant Shortage in North Dakota?

North Dakota dentists have expressed concern for several years about a severe shortage of dental assistants in the state. There have not been similar concerns expressed relative to the supply of dental hygienists. In 2017, the North Dakota Dental Association (NDDA) surveyed its members to more objectively assess the dental assistant workforce. The survey results are summarized as follows:

- 70% of dentists attempted to hire a DA in the previous year-40% were unsuccessful
- 60% planned to hire a dental assistant in the next year
- 92% thought there was a shortage of dental assistants in North Dakota
- 50% would financially support expanded training options for dental assistants in the state
- 65% supported Expanded Restorative Functions training for dental assistants and dental hygienists and 2/3 of those would financially support that training

A task force was assembled working with a coalition of North Dakota stakeholders, including North Dakota State College Science (NDSCS), to determine if the accredited dental assisting program at NDSCS could be expanded to the western part of the state. The effort concluded that the cost was not feasible at this time and the coalition developed an alternate plan to try to improve the number of Registered Dental Assistants in North Dakota. The plan was funded on a one-year trial by the North Dakota Dental Foundation. The plan was for the grant to be a multi-year effort to increase the applicant pool for dental assisting as a career, to promote our current area, accredited dental assisting programs, and to promote multiple pathways to registered status. It is expected that this grant will be renewed for the next two years pending results. This strategy includes:

1. Reimbursement up to \$400 for DANB review courses taken by dental assistants currently employed in dental offices.
2. Reimbursement up to \$400 for cost of taking any parts of the DANB certifying exams.
3. Mini-grants to dental practices or training programs that host face-to-face academic/clinical review courses to prep for DANB certifying exams.
4. Reimbursement to dental professionals or entities that provide outreach presentations on dental assisting as a career to high school students and other targeted groups.
5. Marketing contract with Flint Communications of Fargo to educate target audiences about career options in dentistry.
6. A three-person committee, with representatives from the NDDA, NDDF, and NDSCS, will manage the reimbursements and reporting

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