

The State of the U.S. Dental Economy


4th Quarter 2025 Update
Plus: A Look Ahead into 2026

Q4 2025 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 issue

Plus: A Look Ahead into 2026

This quarter's report also includes valuable insights from dentists on what's ahead in 2026 for dental practices.



Top Challenges

Most cited challenges expected by dentists in the year ahead and how that compares by practice modality.

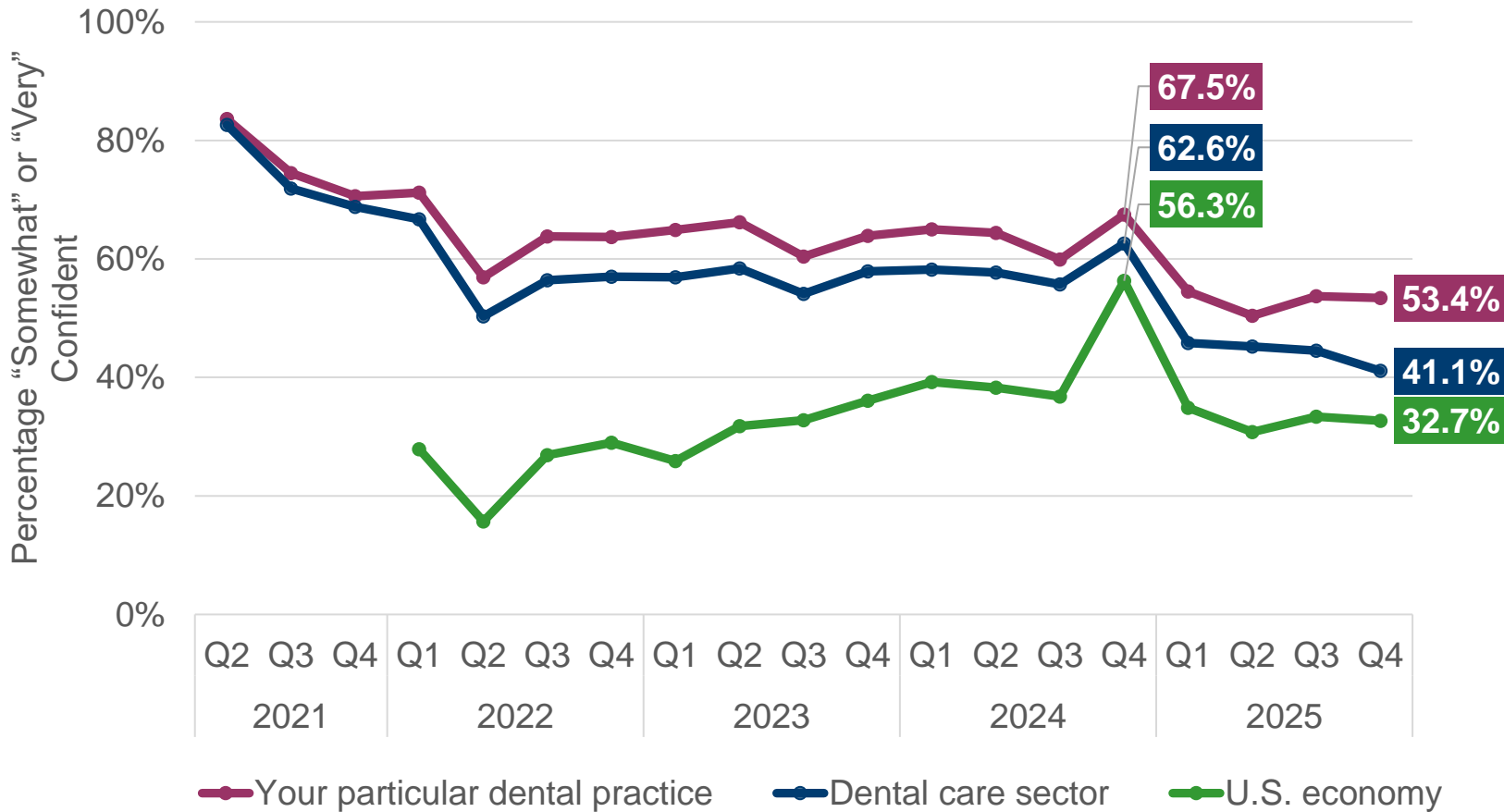


Investment Plans

Dentists' practice plans for the year ahead, including adding staff, purchasing equipment, and more.

Dentists' Economic Confidence

Dentists' Economic Confidence Lower than a Year Ago



All measures of economic confidence are at a much lower level than a year ago. Measures have remained stable since Q1 2025, however.

In Q4 2025, dentists' confidence in the overall economy for the next six months stayed about the same compared to Q3.

Dentists' confidence in the dental care sector went down slightly while confidence in their own practice stayed the same between Q3 and Q4 2025.

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

Why Dentists Feel **Confident** about the U.S. Economy

More dentists are skeptical than are confident in the overall U.S. economy. These are the top reasons for this rating among dentists who are **confident** about the U.S. economy in Q4 2025.

TOP FIVE REASONS FOR CONFIDENCE

32.7%
Share of Dentists
Confident about the
U.S. Economy in
Q4 2025

1. Faith in current U.S. leadership (58.0%*)
2. Key economic indicators stable or improving (52.1%)
3. U.S. economy always resilient (51.8%)
4. Trade, tariff & tax policies retain economic strength (40.5%)
5. No specific reason, generally optimistic (16.0%)

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

* Percentage of respondents confident about the U.S. economy who select this as a reason.

Why Dentists Feel **Skeptical** about the U.S. Economy

More dentists are skeptical than are confident in the overall U.S. economy. These are the top reasons for this rating among dentists who are **skeptical** about the U.S. economy in Q4 2025.

TOP FIVE REASONS FOR SKEPTICISM

47.9%

Share of Dentists
Skeptical about the
U.S. Economy in
Q4 2025

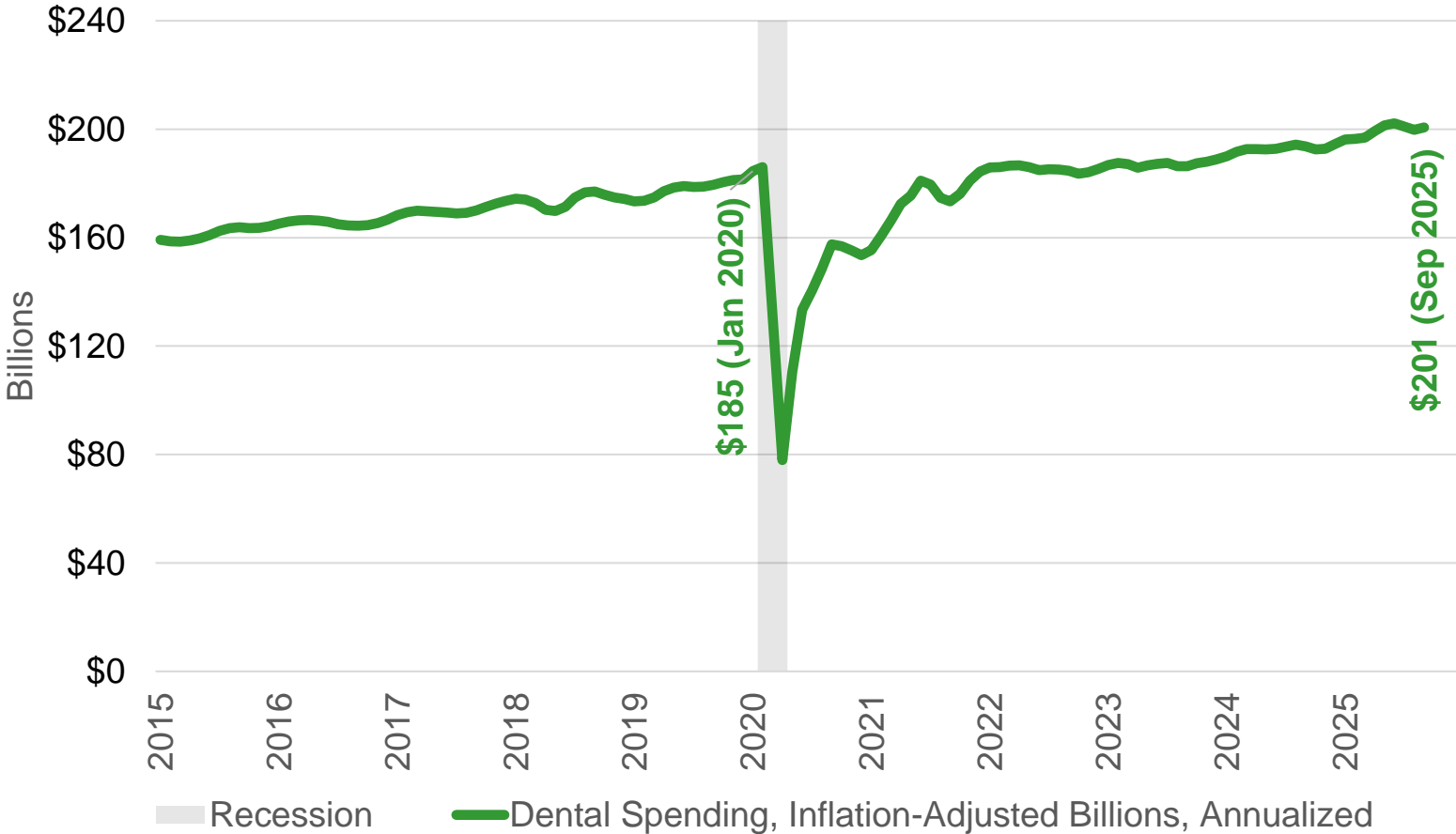
1. Impact of tariffs, rising costs concerns (82.7%*)
2. Too much economic uncertainty (74.7%)
3. No faith in current U.S. leadership (62.0%)
4. Domestic social/political unrest hurting the economy (59.3%)
5. Increasing national debt hurting the economy (47.1%)

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

* Percentage of respondents skeptical about the U.S. economy who select this as a reason.

Consumer Dental Spending

Consumer Dental Spending Up 3% in 2025

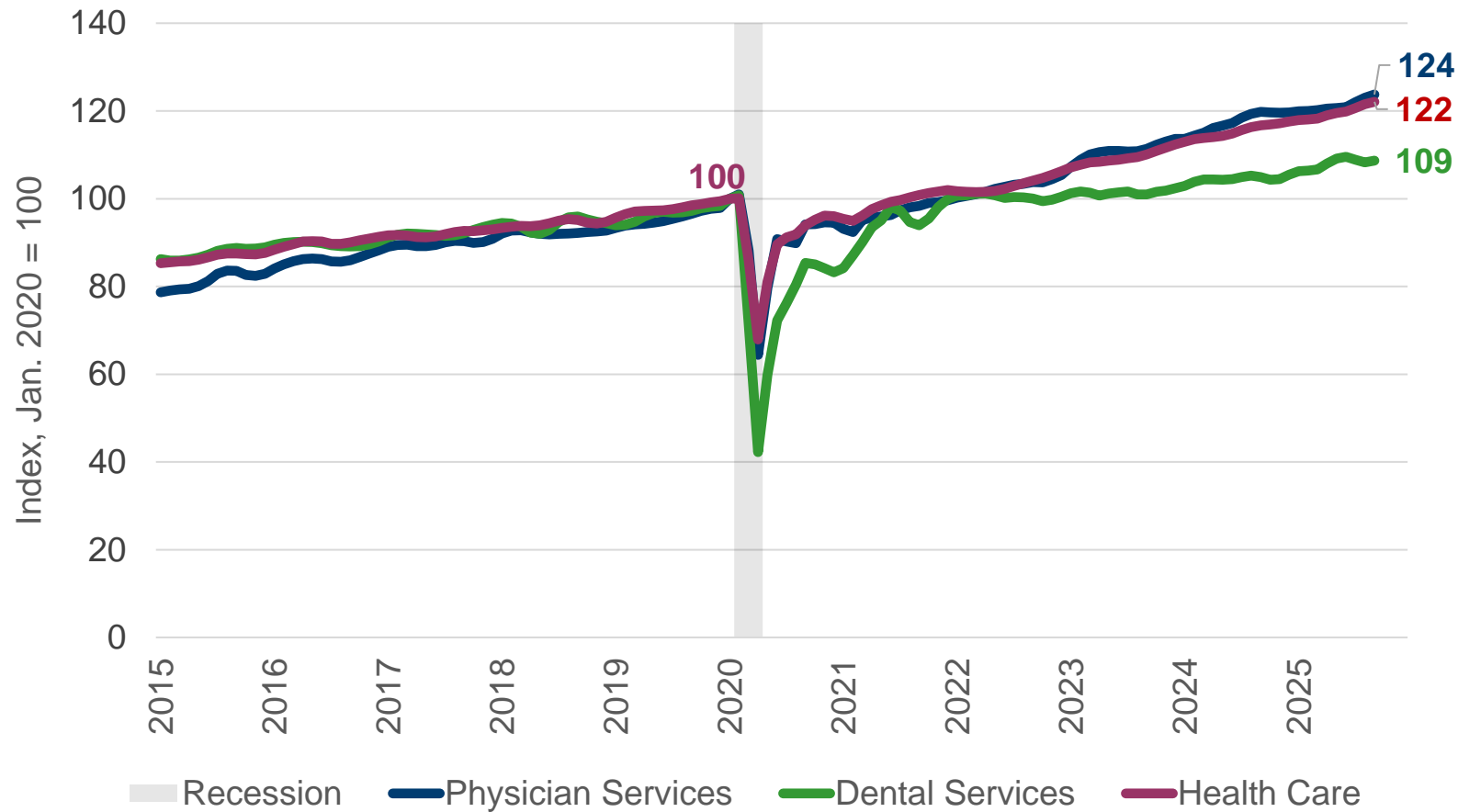


In September 2025, the latest data available from the BEA, consumer dental spending was **up**:

- 0.4% from month prior
- 3% in 2025 (Jan-Sept)
- 4% from 12 months prior
- 9% from pre-pandemic

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis. Note: Adjusted for inflation, 2025 dollars.

Dental Spending Lags Health Care Spending



Consumer dental spending continues to lag health care spending overall.

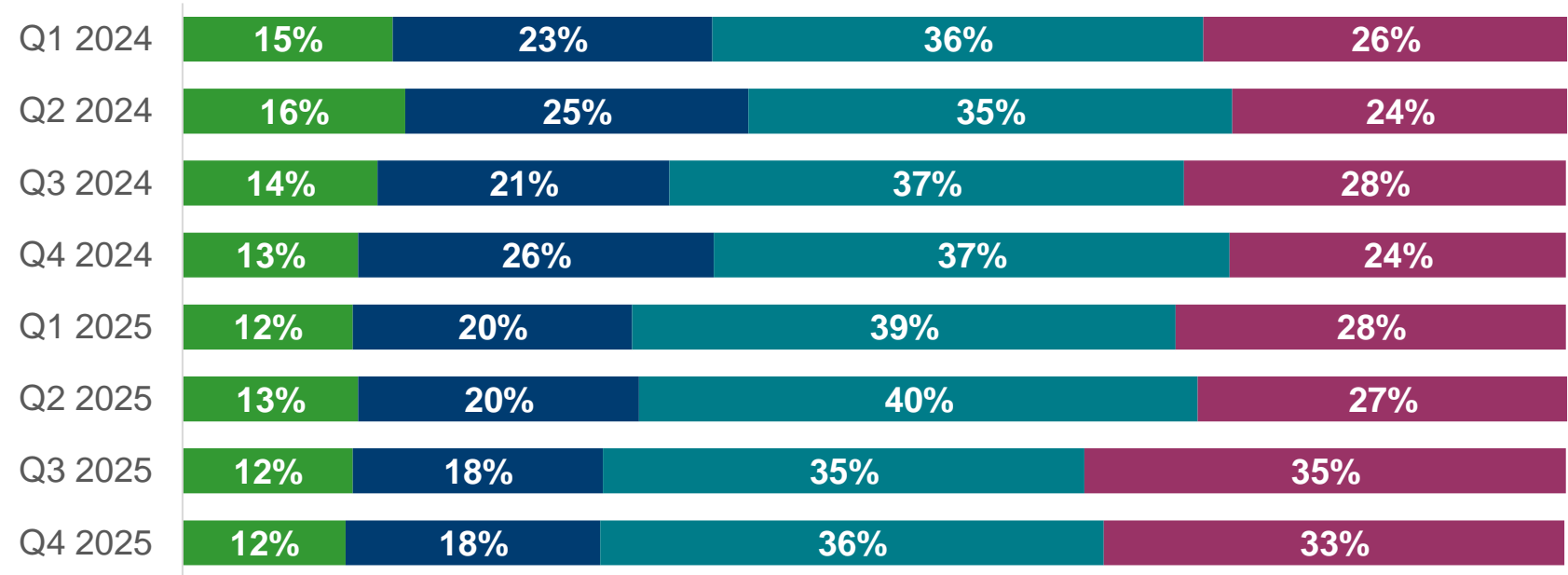
Five years post-pandemic, consumer spending on:

- **physician services** is up by 24%
- **health care** is up by 22%
- **dental services** is up by 9%

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis. Note: Adjusted for inflation. Growth measured in September 2025 relative to January 2020.

Dental Practice Economics

One-Third of Dentists Not Busy Enough

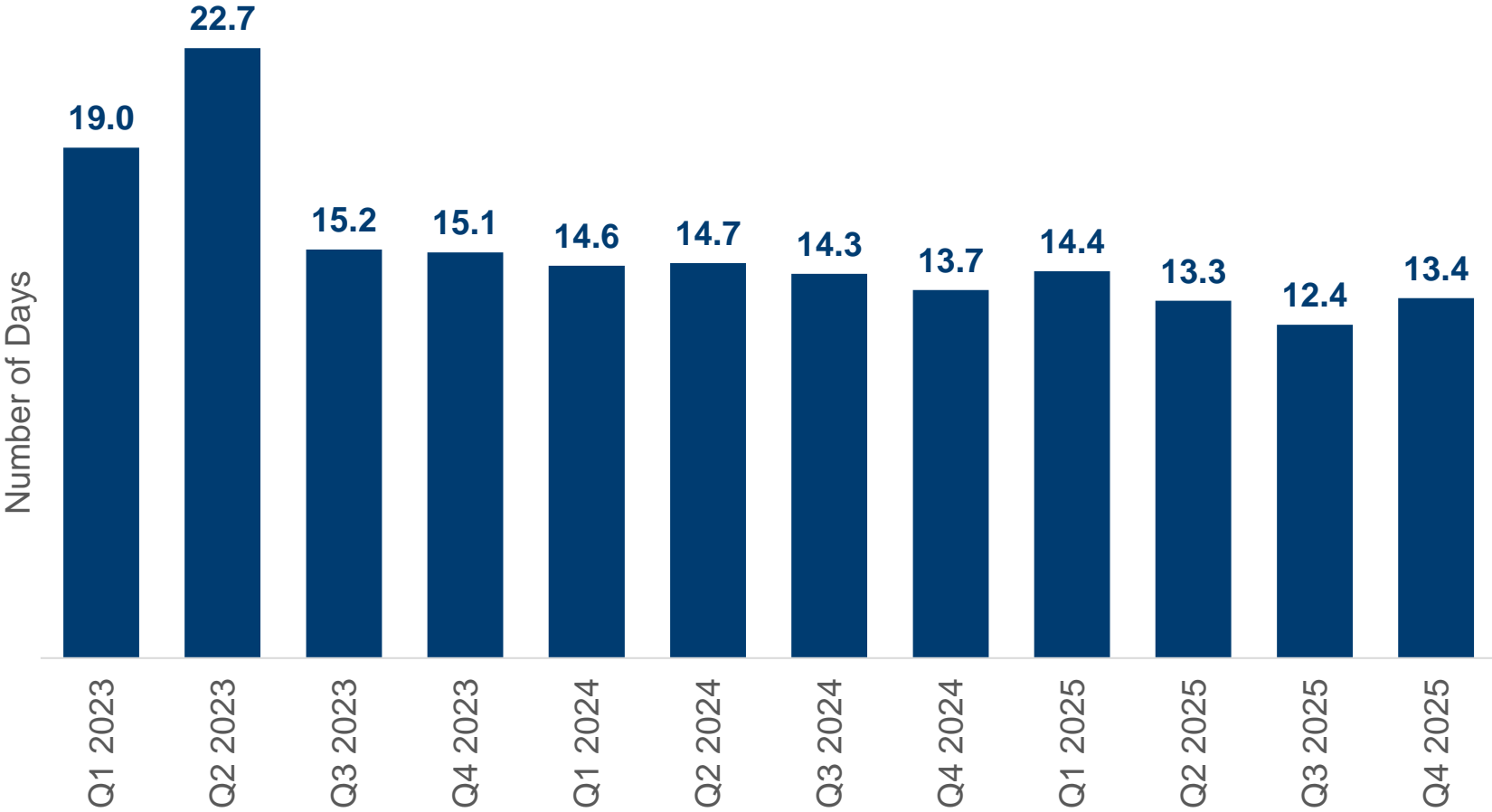


- Too busy to treat all patients requesting care
- Treated all patients requesting care but overworked
- Treated all patients requesting care, not overworked
- Not busy enough, could have treated more patients

In Q4 2025, one-third of dentists reported that they were **not busy enough** while 12% reported they were **too busy to treat all patients**, and 18% reported that they **treated all patients but were overworked**.

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

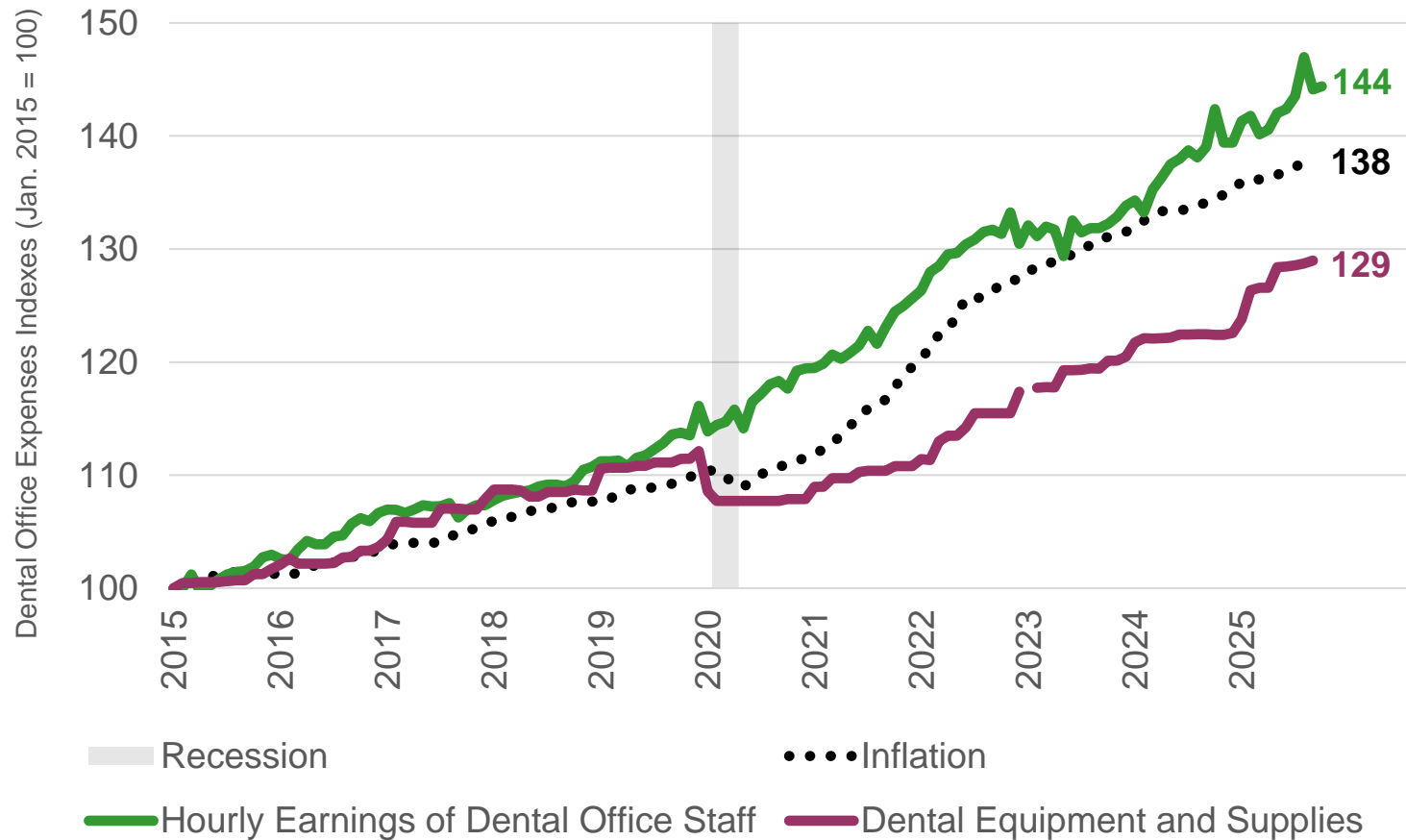
Appointment Wait Times Stable



Appointment wait times for new patients went up slightly in Q4 2025, to an average of 13.4 days but are roughly the same as a year ago.

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

Prices for Equipment and Supplies Increasing



In September 2025, prices for dental equipment and supplies increased and are up 5% from the beginning of the year.

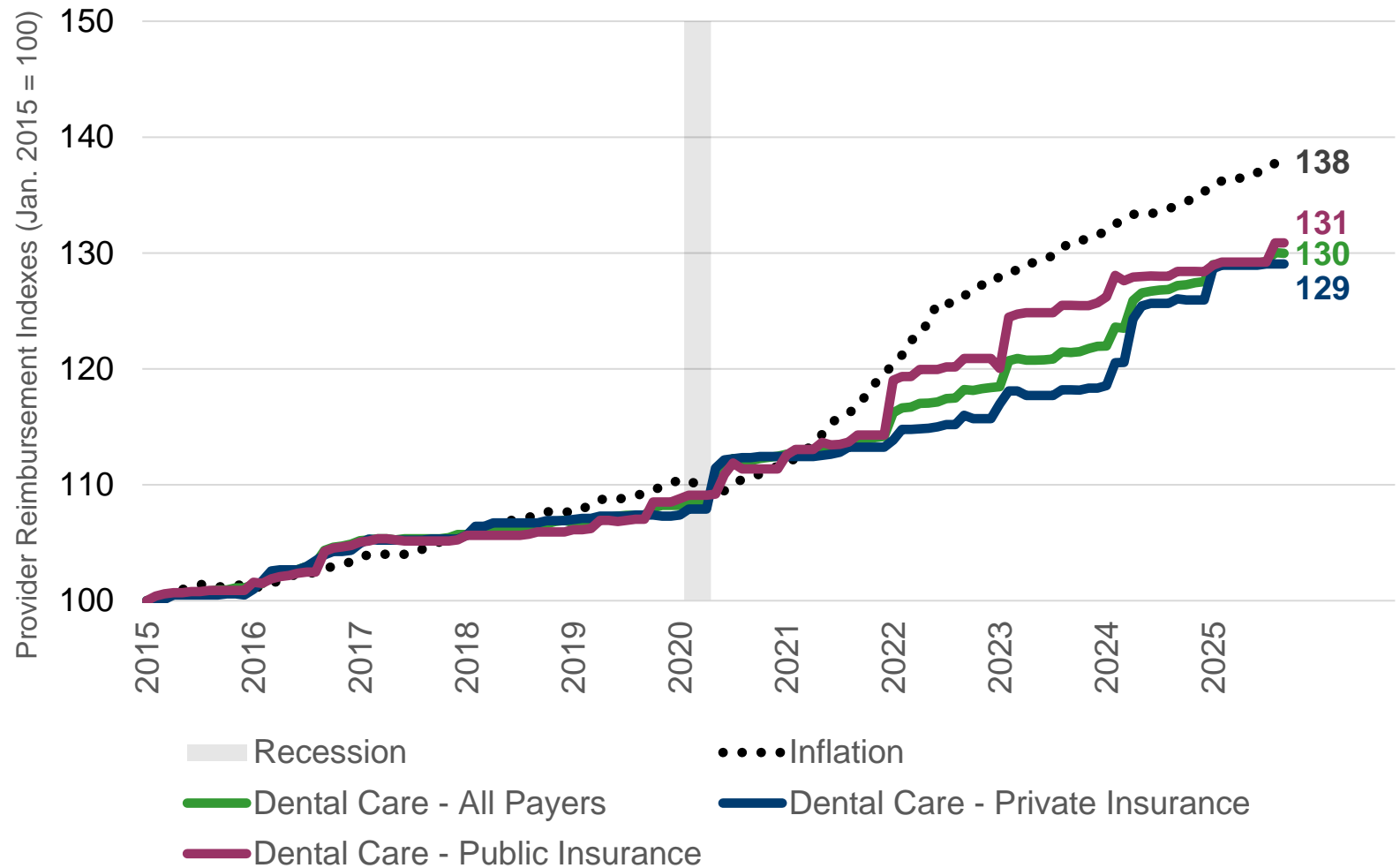
Hourly earnings for dental office staff have fluctuated recently. Longer term, however, they have risen slightly faster than overall inflation.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Reimbursement Rates Not Keeping Up with Inflation

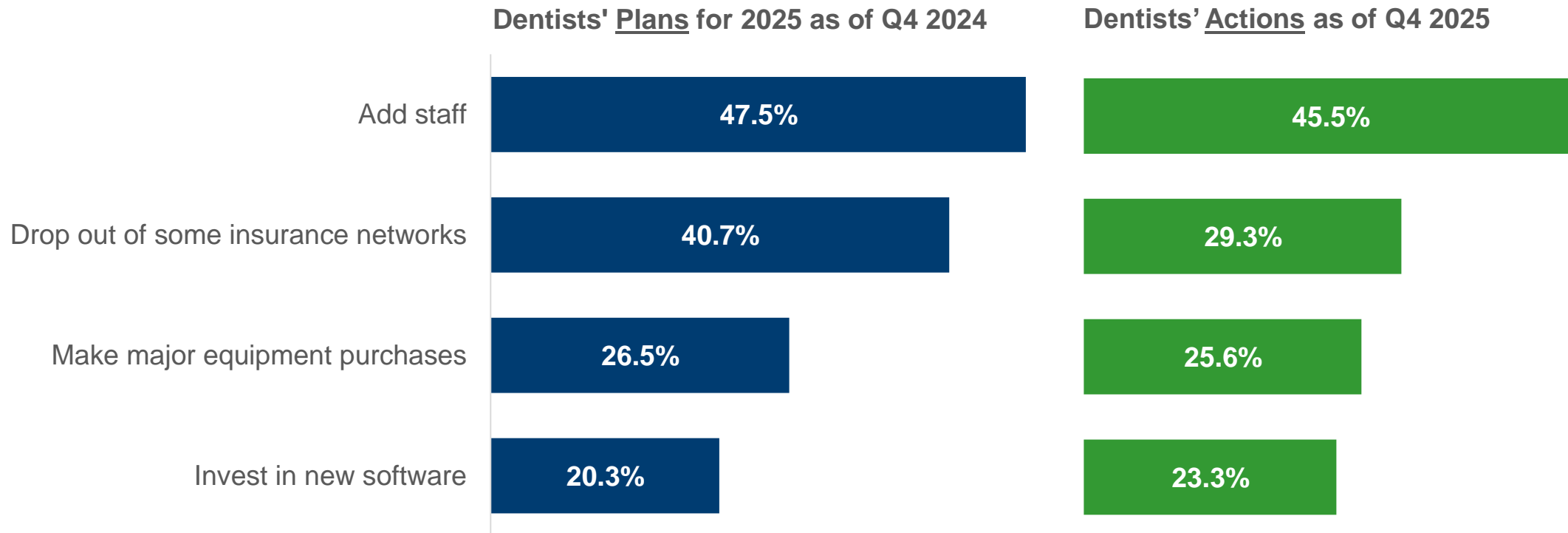
In September 2025, provider reimbursement rates in the dental sector were stable. However, longer term, they are not keeping pace with overall inflation and certainly not with practice expenses.

These trends are putting a significant “fiscal squeeze” on dental practices.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Dentists' Intentions vs. Actions in 2025



In Q4 2024, dentists were asked about **their plans for 2025**. We asked them in Q4 2025 whether they **had taken action** on any of these plans. Dentists have largely followed through with their plans, except for dropping out of insurance networks.

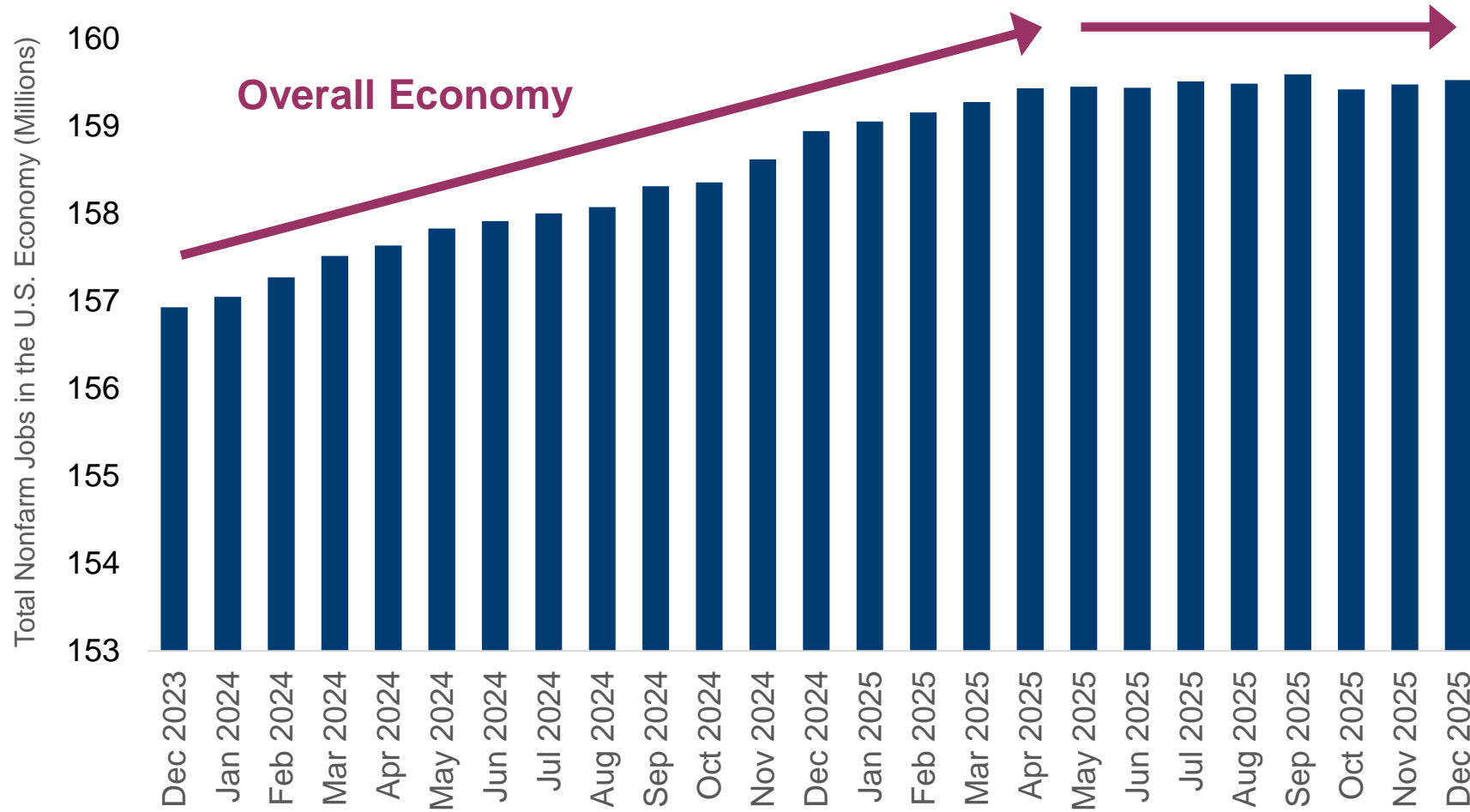
Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

HPI Health Policy Institute

ADA American Dental Association®

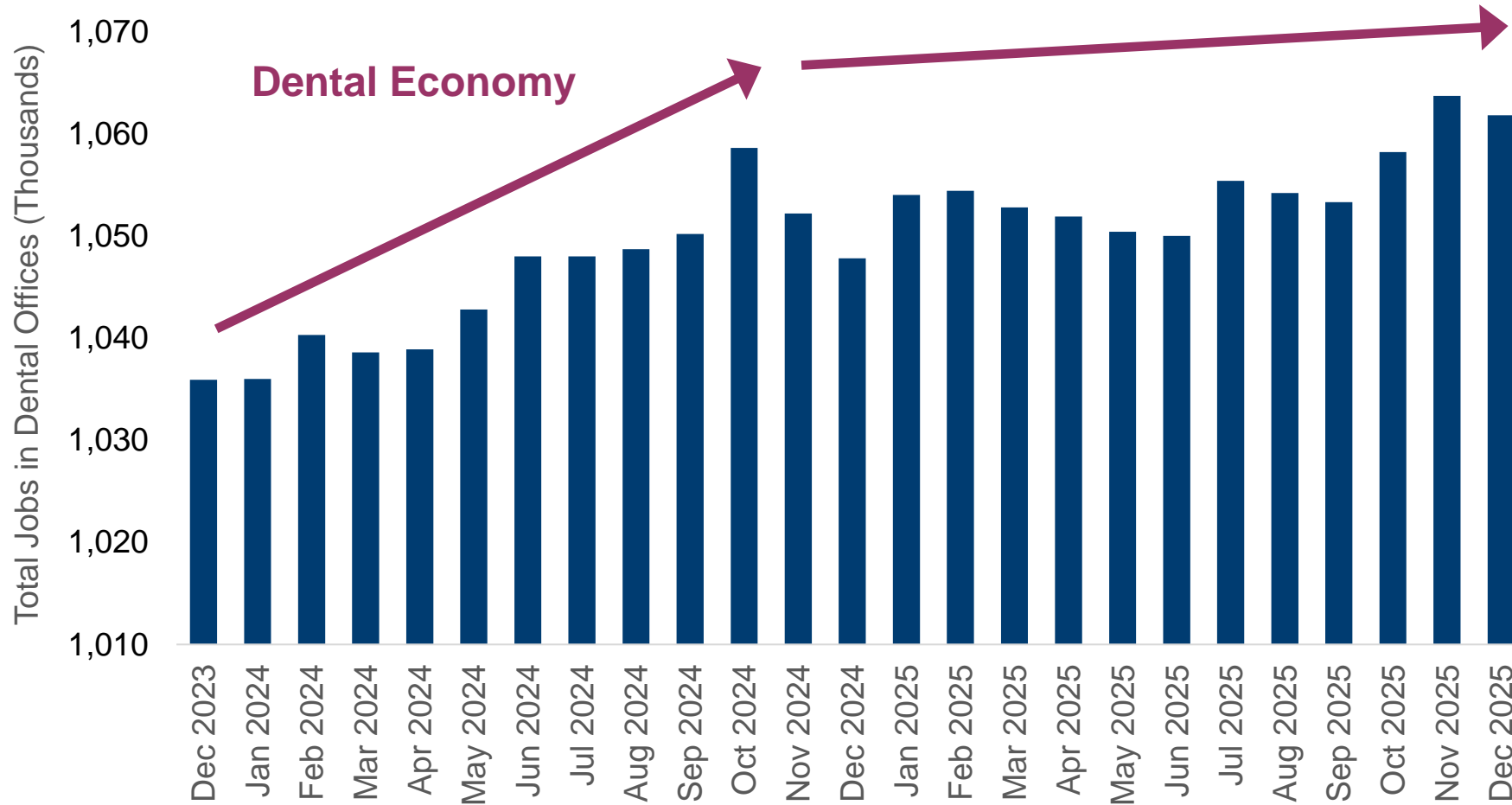
Dental Jobs Market

U.S. Economy Adding Jobs at Slower Pace



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Dental Sector Employment Growing

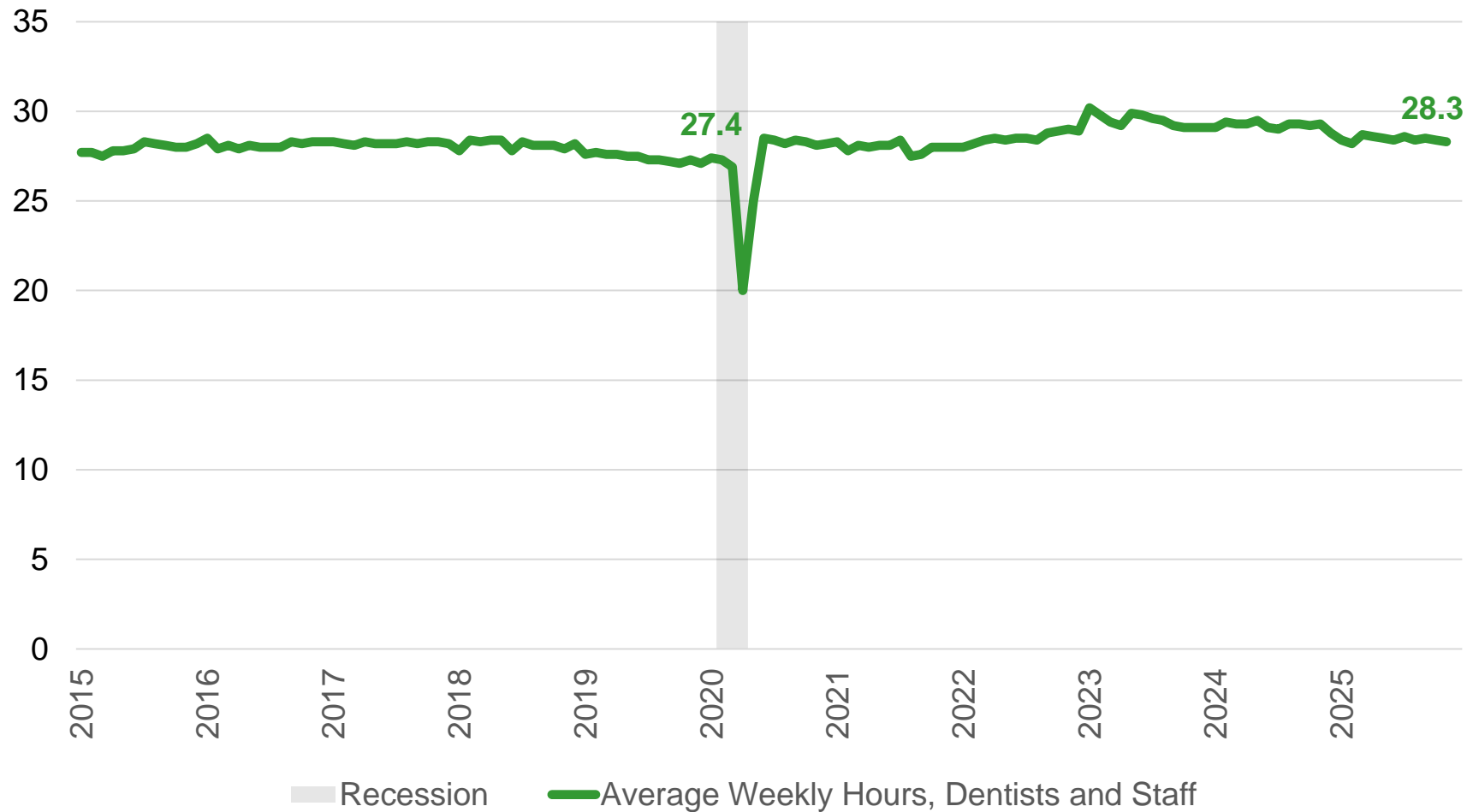


In December 2025, the total number of jobs in dental offices was:

- Down 0.2% from month prior
- Up 1.3% in 2025

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Fewer Hours Worked in Dental Sector

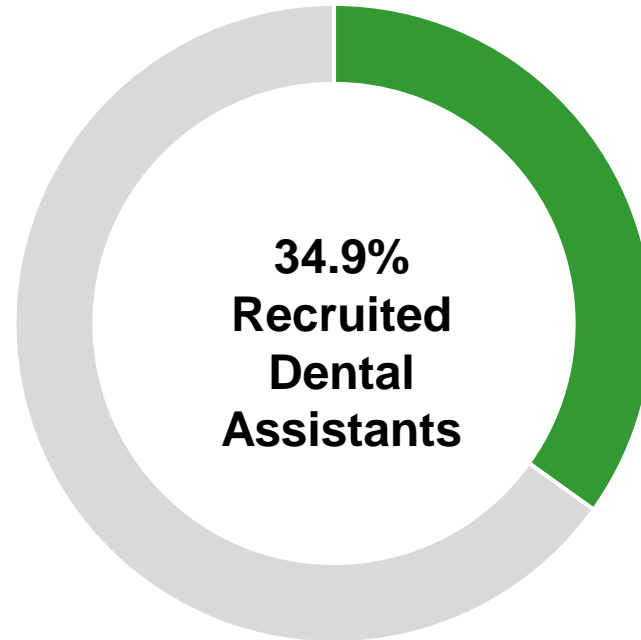
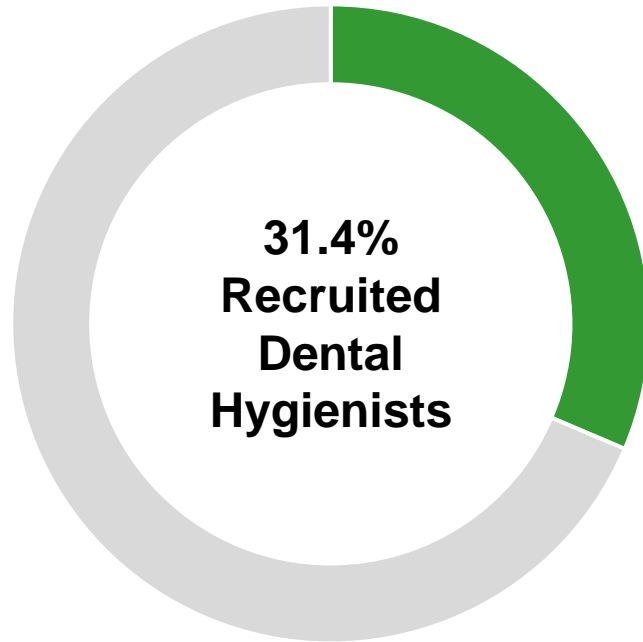


There is a slight downward trend from a year ago in hours worked. Specifically, in November 2025, average hours worked per week among dentists and their staff were:

- Down 0.1 hour from month prior
- Down 0.5 hour so far in 2025
- Down 1 hour from 12 months prior
- Up 0.9 hour from pre-pandemic

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

About 1 in 3 Dentists Recruiting in Q4 2025

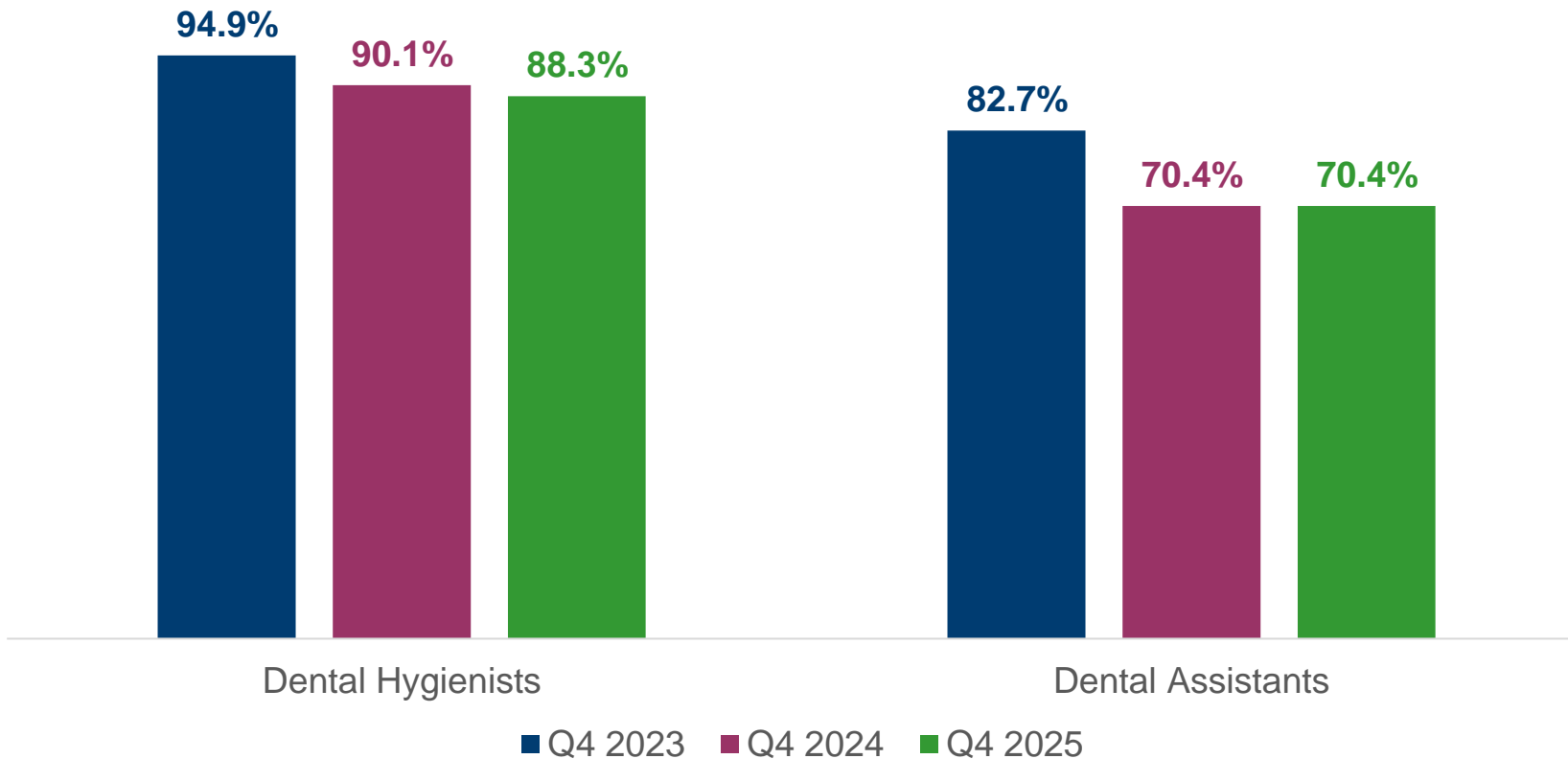


Nearly one-third of dentists (31.4%) reported that they recruited dental hygienist positions in the past three months.

A slightly larger share (34.9%) recruited dental assistants.

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

Dental Hygienists Hardest to Recruit



Among the 1 in 3 dentists who have recently recruited practice staff, the share who rate recruiting dental assistants as "very" or "extremely challenging" has gone down while remaining virtually unchanged for dental hygienists over the past three years.

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

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A Look Ahead into 2026

Top 3 Challenges Facing Dental Practices for 2026



Insurance (55.3%*)



Staffing (54.2%)



Overhead costs (41.5%)

Looking ahead to 2026, dentists were asked to cite the top 3 challenges facing their practice. Insurance issues (e.g., low reimbursement, denials), staffing shortages, and overhead costs were the top 3 concerns among dentists for 2026. This is similar to predictions for 2025.

Other cited challenges include increasing or maintaining patient volume (31.8%), overall economy/inflation (9.7%), and patient refusal or delay of treatment due to inability to pay (8.8%).

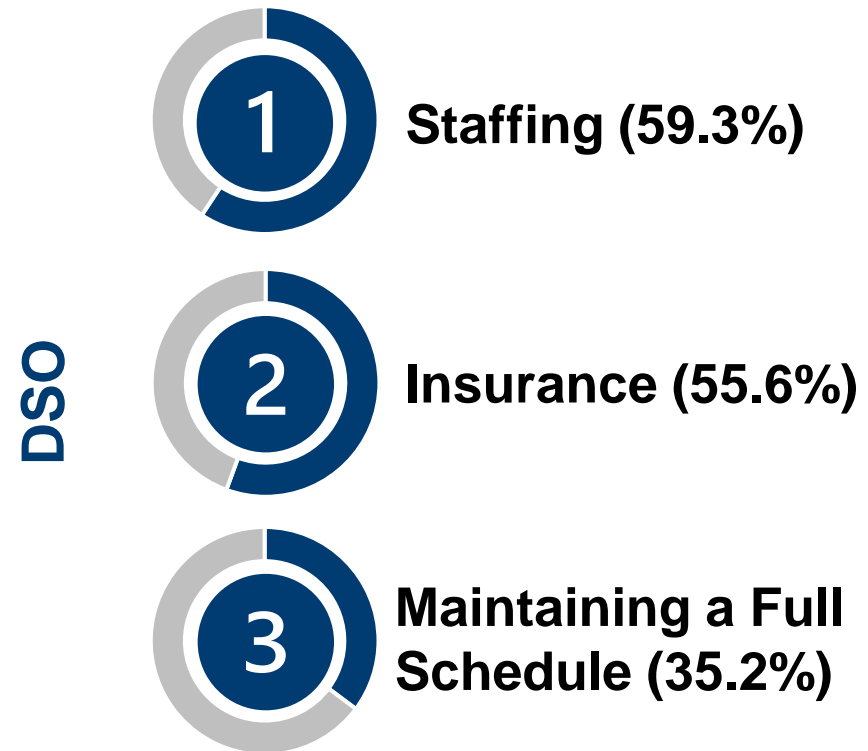
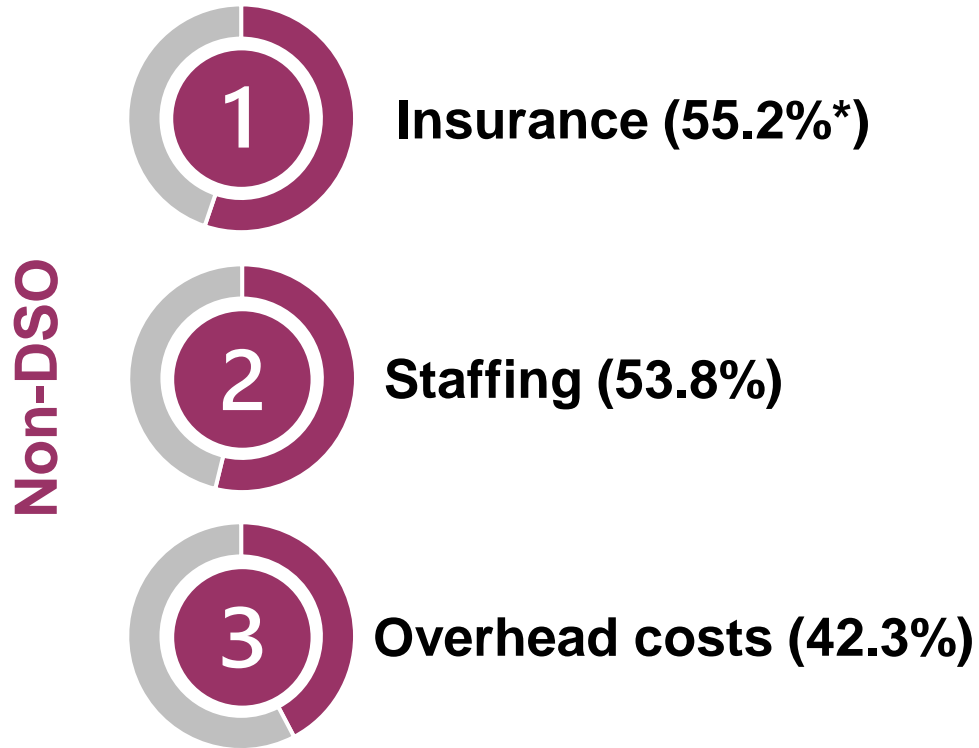
Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

HPI Health Policy Institute

ADA American Dental Association*

* Percentages indicate the share of dentists who cited that particular challenge.

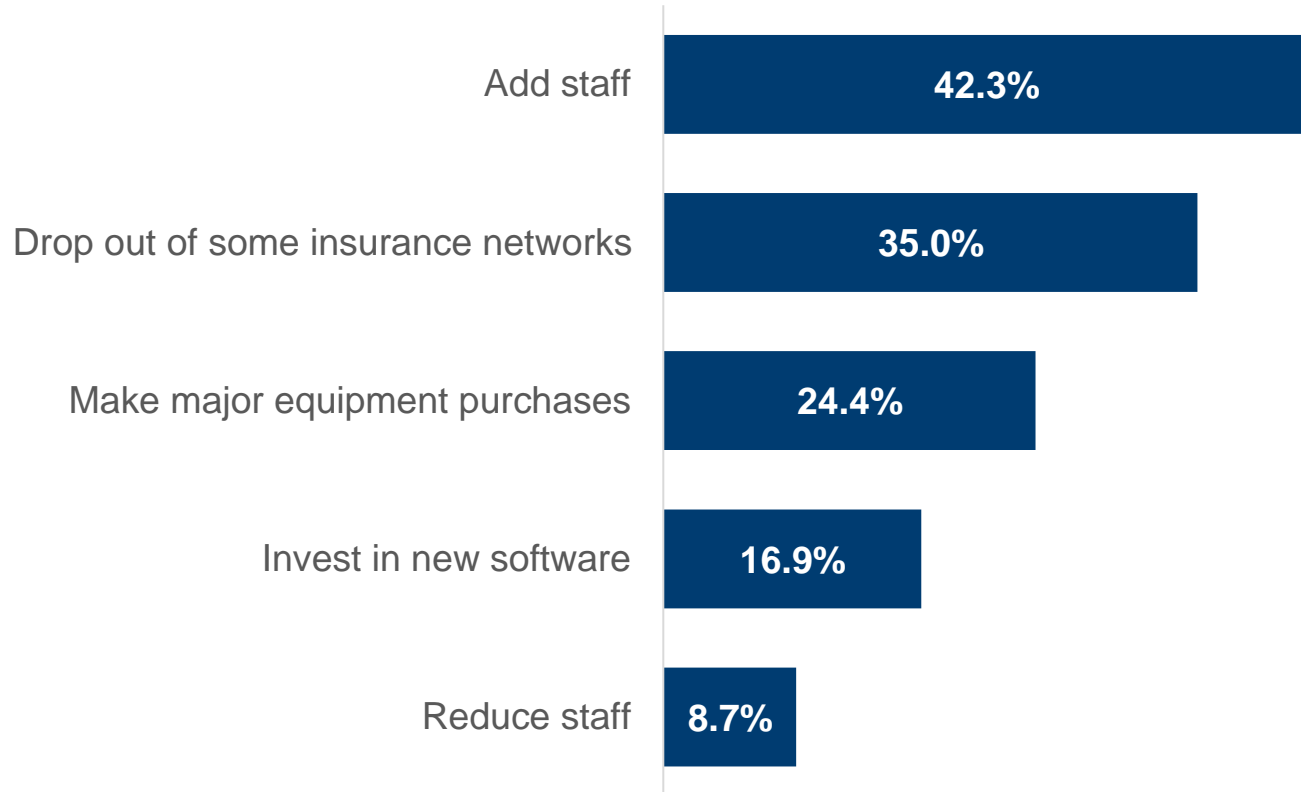
Top 3 Challenges for 2026: Non-DSO vs. DSO Dentists



Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

* Percentages indicate the share of dentists who cited that particular challenge.

Looking Ahead to 2026: 2 in 5 Dentists Plan to Add Staff

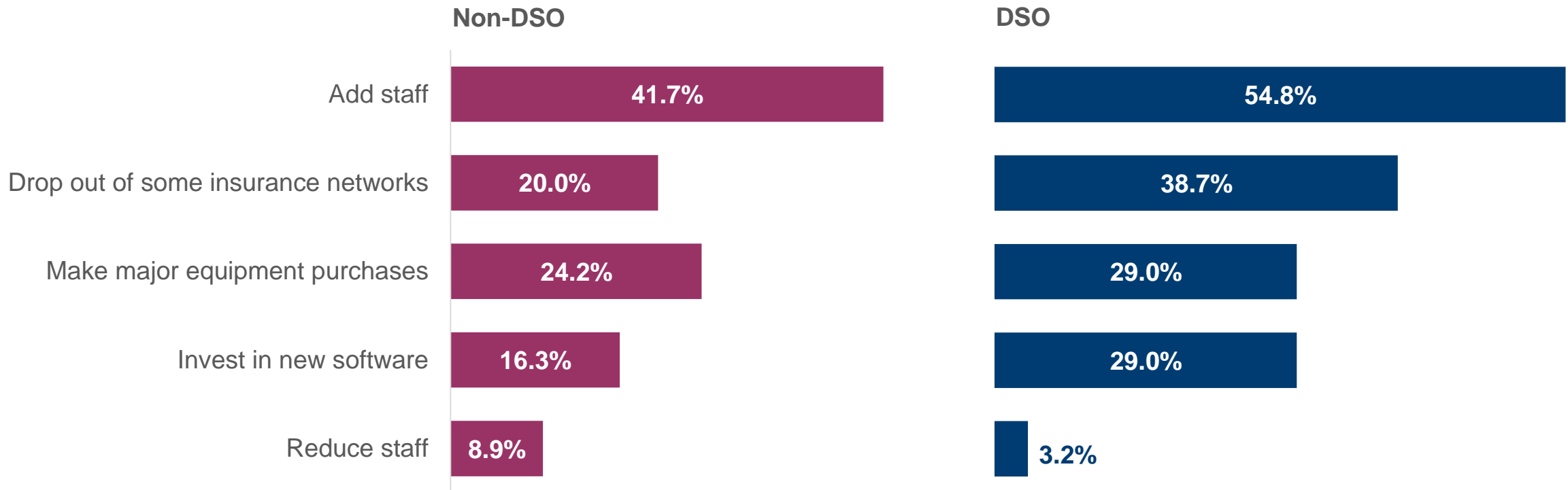


Dentists were asked about **their plans looking ahead to 2026**. More than two out of five dentists reported that they plan to add staff at some point in 2026, and more than one-third plan to drop out of some insurance networks.

Other priorities cited by smaller shares of respondents include remodeling/expanding practices, selling/closing, retiring, and joining insurance networks.

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

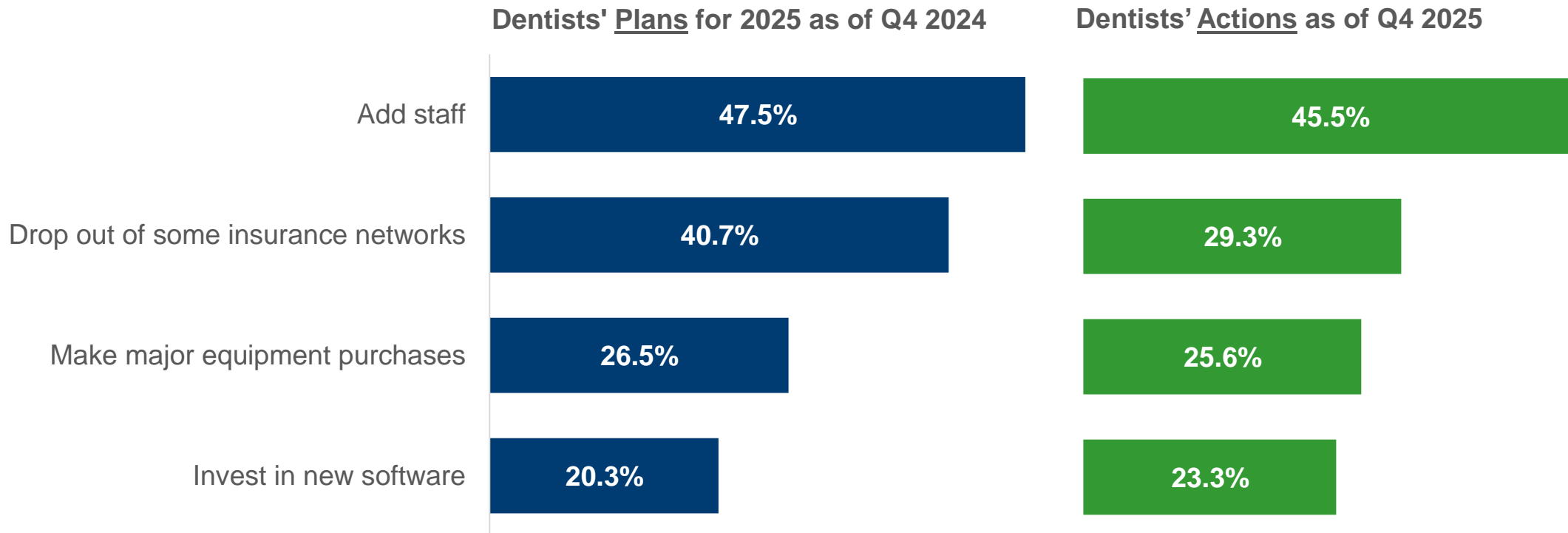
Non-DSO and DSO Dentists' Plans for 2026



A larger share of dentists affiliated with DSOs plan to take action in the Top 5 plans for 2026 when compared to non-DSO dentists. One exception is in reducing staff.

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

A Caveat: Dentists' Intentions vs. Actions



In Q4 2024, dentists were asked about **their plans for 2025**. We asked them in Q4 2025 whether they **had taken action** on any of the items. Dentists have largely followed through with their plans, except for dropping out of insurance networks.

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute

HPI Health Policy Institute

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Key Takeaways for Q4 2025

Key Takeaways



Consumer dental spending is growing modestly while dentist busyness is stable.

Consumer spending on dental care is up 4% over the last 12 months (and 9% since the COVID-19 pandemic). The modest growth in spending is easily absorbed within dental practices. In Q4 2025, one-third of dentists reported that they are not busy enough, up from one-quarter of dentists in Q4 2024. Appointment wait times for new patients have been stable throughout 2025.



Relative to Q3, **dentists' economic confidence is stable** but down considerably from the surge in confidence that occurred one year ago. Factors driving down economic confidence include the potential impact of tariffs, rising costs, and general economic uncertainty.

Key Takeaways



Prices for dental equipment and supplies are up 5% since the beginning of the year. Provider reimbursement rates, meanwhile, are growing much slower and are actually not keeping up with inflation. The “fiscal squeeze” on dental practices continues.



The job market for the dental sector has grown less than 2% since the beginning of 2025. One in 3 dentists continue to recruit dental hygienists – a number that has remained more or less stable since the pandemic – and filling open positions remains extremely challenging.

Key Takeaways

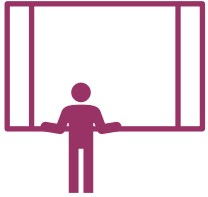


Looking ahead to 2026, **the top themes for dentists are adding staff and dropping out of insurance networks**, with more than one-third of dentists planning to make these changes. About one-quarter also intend to purchase major equipment.



Also looking ahead to 2026, **dentists' top concerns are insurance** – specifically low, delayed or denied reimbursement – **and staffing issues**. Dentists' other top concern is increasing overhead costs.

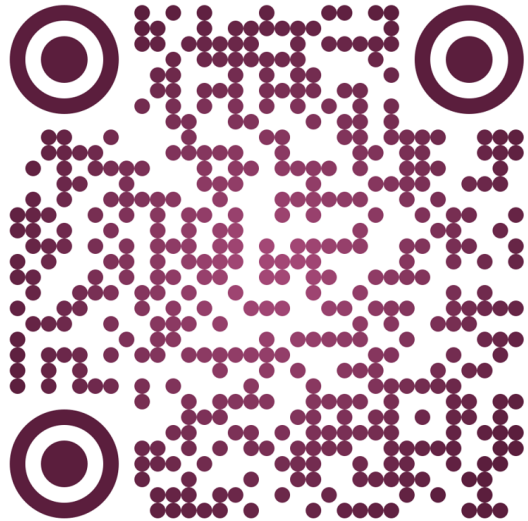
Big Picture



Summing up, 2025 ended with stable economic confidence among dentists, a trend of modest growth in dental spending, and a continued "fiscal squeeze" stemming from equipment and supply prices, as well as wages, rising faster than reimbursement rates. Dentist busyness levels were down slightly in 2025, something we will monitor closely going forward.

Looking ahead to 2026, continued uncertainty is a key theme. Dentists are concerned about dental insurance issues, staffing shortages, and rising overhead costs. A significant share intend to drop out of at least some dental insurance networks. Overlaying this is considerable uncertainty around the impact of tariffs and the overall U.S. economy. At the same time, there is strong desire to expand staffing and some positive signs related to investing in major equipment.

Thank you!



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Data Sources and Methods

Data Sources and Methods

Dentists' Economic Confidence

- **Slides 5 to 7**

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute, Economic Outlook and Emerging Issues in Dentistry Poll, Q4 2025. Available at <https://www.ada.org/resources/research/health-policy-institute/economic-outlook-and-emerging-issues>, accessed Jan. 12, 2026.

Notes for Slide 5: Data represent the combined share of dentists responding, “somewhat confident” or “very confident” to “Looking ahead the next 6 months, how confident are you in the economic conditions in... (1) your particular dental practice, (2) the dental care sector, and (3) the U.S. economy.”

Notes for Slide 6-7: Data represent a summary of open-ended responses to question, “Please briefly describe the reasons for your skepticism/confidence in the overall U.S. economy.”

Data Sources and Methods

Consumer Dental Spending

- **Slide 9**

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Table 2.4.6U, Real Personal Consumption Expenditures, Dental Services, Chained Dollars [Billions of chained (2017) dollars]. Table 2.4.5U, Personal Consumption Expenditures, Dental Services [Billions of current dollars]. Months are seasonally adjusted at annual rates. Available at <https://www.bea.gov/data/consumer-spending/main>, accessed Dec. 29, 2025.

Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, NBER based Recession Indicators for the United States from the Peak through the Trough [USRECM], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Available at <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/USRECM>, accessed Dec. 29, 2025.

Notes: The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) releases monthly estimates of consumer spending for dental services. Each month's spending amount is annualized, i.e., presented as the amount of spending that would occur in a year, based on that month's rate of spending. This graph represents inflation-adjusted spending in terms of 2025 dollars.

Data Sources and Methods

Consumer Dental Spending

- **Slide 10**

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Table 2.4.6U, Real Personal Consumption Expenditures, Health Care, Physician Services, Dental Services, Chained Dollars [Billions of chained (2017) dollars]. Table 2.4.5U, Personal Consumption Expenditures, Health Care, Physician Services, Dental Services [Billions of current dollars]. Months are seasonally adjusted at annual rates. Available at <https://www.bea.gov/data/consumer-spending/main>, accessed Dec. 29, 2025.

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Population [POPTHM], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Available at <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/POPTHM>, accessed Dec. 29, 2025.

Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, NBER based Recession Indicators for the United States from the Peak through the Trough [USRECM], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Available at <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/USRECM>, accessed Dec. 29, 2025.

Notes: These indexes measure the change over time in spending relative to January 2020. An index value of 101 would indicate spending 1% higher than the spending level in January 2020.

Data Sources and Methods

Dental Practice Economics

- **Slides 12-13**

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute, Economic Outlook and Emerging Issues in Dentistry Poll, Q4 2025. Available at <https://www.ada.org/resources/research/health-policy-institute/economic-outlook-and-emerging-issues>, accessed October 1, 2025.

Notes for Slide 12: Data represent a summary of answers to question, “Which of the following best describe your general busyness level over the last 3 months?”

Notes for Slide 13: Data represent a summary of answers from owner dentists to the question, “[If accepting new patients] Currently, how many business days does the average new patient have to wait for an initial appointment (excluding emergencies)?” Respondents of this question had previously answered “Yes” to the question, “Is your practice currently accepting new patients?”

Data Sources and Methods

Dental Practice Economics

- **Slide 14**

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics, Average hourly earnings of production and nonsupervisory employees, offices of dentists, seasonally adjusted. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/ces/data/>. Accessed Dec. 29, 2025.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Producer Price Index by Commodity: Miscellaneous Products: Professional Dental Equipment and Supplies (WPU156501071), not seasonally adjusted. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/ppi/databases/>. Accessed Nov. 25, 2025.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Consumer Price Index (CPI-U), All Items, seasonally adjusted. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/cpi/data.htm>. Accessed Dec. 18, 2025.

Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, NBER based Recession Indicators for the United States from the Peak through the Trough [USRECM], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Available at <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/USRECM>, accessed Nov. 25, 2025.

Data Sources and Methods

Dental Practice Economics

- **Slide 14 (continued)**

Notes: “Hourly Earnings of Dental Office Staff” is the label for the index of average hourly earnings of production and nonsupervisory employees in offices of dentists. Average earnings are a measure of gross payrolls divided by total hours worked. The index for Dental Equipment and Supplies reflects the change in prices received by domestic producers of those products.

- **Slide 15**

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Producer Price Index by Commodity, PPI Commodity data for Health care services-Dental care, seasonally adjusted. PPI Commodity data for Health care services, not seasonally adjusted. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/ppi/databases/>. Accessed Nov. 25, 2025.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Consumer Price Index (CPI-U), All Items, seasonally adjusted. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/cpi/data.htm>. Accessed Nov. 25, 2025.

Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, NBER based Recession Indicators for the United States from the Peak through the Trough [USRECM], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Available at <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/USRECM>, accessed Nov. 25, 2025.

Data Sources and Methods

Dental Practice Economics

- **Slide 15 (continued)**

Notes: These indexes measure the average change over time in prices received by domestic health care providers. Prices collected for the Producer Price Index reflect the total amounts received by providers for rendering services to patients. The index for Dental Care measures change in the reimbursement amount dentists receive per visit for a representative snapshot of dental service delivery. Includes payments from patients, private insurance, Medicaid, Medicare, and other payers.

- **Slide 16**

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute, Economic Outlook and Emerging Issues in Dentistry Poll, Q4 2025 and Q4 2024.

Notes: Data for the graph *Dentists' Plans for 2025 as of Q4 2024* represent owner dentist responses to the question, "Looking ahead to 2025, how likely are you to do each of the following for your practice?" Data for the graph *Dentists' Actions so far in 2025 as of Q4 2025* represent owner dentist responses to the question, "Since the beginning of 2025, have you done any of the following in your practice?" Responses include dentists who selected "very likely" or "somewhat likely."

Data Sources and Methods

Dental Jobs Market

- **Slide 18**

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Current Employment Statistics. All employees, millions, total nonfarm, seasonally adjusted. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/ces/data/>. Accessed January 9, 2026.

- **Slide 19**

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Current Employment Statistics. All employees, thousands, offices of dentists, seasonally adjusted. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/ces/data/>. Accessed January 9, 2026.

- **Slide 20**

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Current Employment Statistics. Average weekly hours of all employees, offices of dentists, seasonally adjusted. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/ces/data/>. Accessed January 9, 2026.

Data Sources and Methods

Dental Jobs Market

- **Slide 21-22**

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute, Economic Outlook and Emerging Issues in Dentistry Poll, Q4 2025. Available at <https://www.ada.org/resources/research/health-policy-institute/economic-outlook-and-emerging-issues>, accessed October 1, 2025.

Notes for Slide 21: Data represent those responding to the question, "Currently, or at any time during the last 3 months, have you recruited any of the following positions?"

Notes for Slide 22: Data represent those choosing the "very challenging" and "extremely challenging" responses to the question, "How challenging has it been to recruit the position(s) below?" Respondents of this question had previously answered "Yes" to the question, "Currently, or at any time during the last 3 months, have you recruited any of the following positions?"

Data Sources and Methods

Looking Ahead to 2026

- **Slides 24-28**

Source: ADA Health Policy Institute, Economic Outlook and Emerging Issues in Dentistry Poll, Q4 2025.

Notes for Slide 24: Data represent the percentage of responding dentists who cited these particular challenges in their answer to the question, “Looking ahead to 2026, what are the top 3 challenges for your practice?”

Notes for Slide 25: Data represent the percentage of responding dentists who cited these particular challenges in their answer to the question, “Looking ahead to 2026, what are the top 3 challenges for your practice?”

Notes for Slide 26: Data represent owner dentist who responded “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to the question, “Looking ahead to 2026, how likely are you to do each of the following for your practice?”

Notes for Slide 27: Data for the graph Dentists' Plans for 2025 as of Q4 2024 represent owner dentist responses to the question, "Looking ahead to 2025, how likely are you to do each of the following for your practice?" Data for the graph Dentists' Actions so far in 2025 as of Q4 2025 represent owner dentist responses to the question, "Since the beginning of 2025, have you done any of the following in your practice?" Responses include dentists who selected “very likely” or “somewhat likely.”

Data Sources and Methods

Looking Ahead to 2026

- **Slide 24-28 (continued)**

Notes for Slide 28: Data for the graph Dentists' Plans for 2025 as of Q4 2024 represent owner dentist responses to the question, "Looking ahead to 2025, how likely are you to do each of the following for your practice?" Data for the graph Dentists' Actions so far in 2025 as of Q4 2025 represent owner dentist responses to the question, "Since the beginning of 2025, have you done any of the following in your practice?" Responses include dentists who selected "very likely" or "somewhat likely."