



2025

The State of Dental

A comprehensive report examining dental practice and patient perspectives on key issues in modern dentistry, including operational challenges, cost, and access to care.



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Introduction

The dental industry is pivotal, shaped by evolving patient behaviors, significant technological advancements, and persistent economic challenges.

Dental practices struggle with inflation, low insurance reimbursement rates, and staffing shortages while patients navigate financial barriers that impact their ability to access care. Simultaneously, technological advancements, such as diagnosis, clinical tech, and practice management software, create new opportunities for dental professionals and patients. This report is based on surveys of dental professionals and patients, providing insights into the current landscape and the trends shaping the industry's future.

This report examines both dental practice and patient perspectives and highlights key issues in modern dentistry—from operational challenges to patient concerns about cost and access to care. Insights from 867 dental professionals and 1,005 American adults give us a comprehensive, 360-degree view of the state of dental care.

867

Dental
professionals



1,005

American
adults

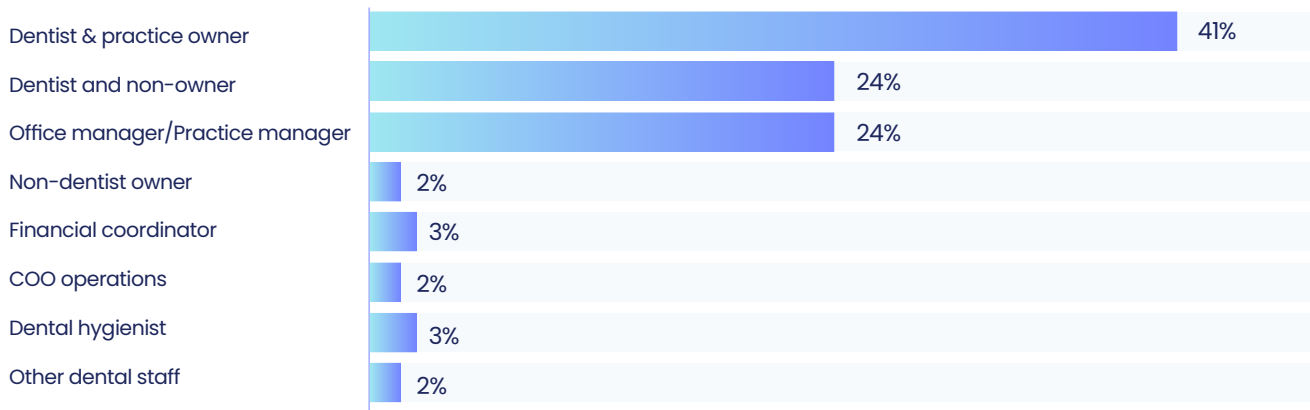


The Dental Practice Perspective

Survey Demographics

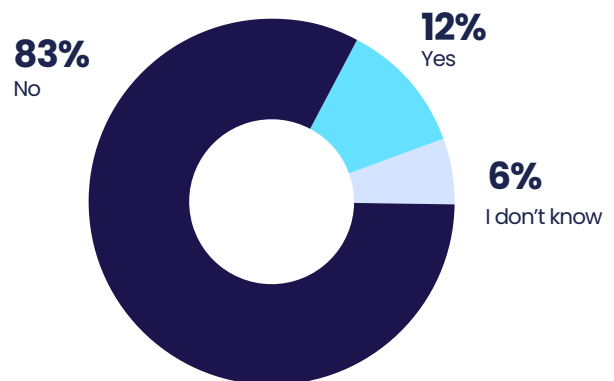
Our survey includes a diverse range of dental professionals, offering a comprehensive industry view. 65% of respondents were dentists, while the remaining participants consisted of practice owners, office managers, and treatment coordinators. Notably, 42% of respondents were practice owners, highlighting the perspectives of those directly responsible for managing operations and finances.

What is your role in the practice?



Is your dental practice part of a DSO (Dental Support Organization)?

Most respondents (89%) work in privately owned practices, and 11% are part of DSOs. This mix provides valuable insights into the operational challenges and opportunities faced by practices of various sizes.



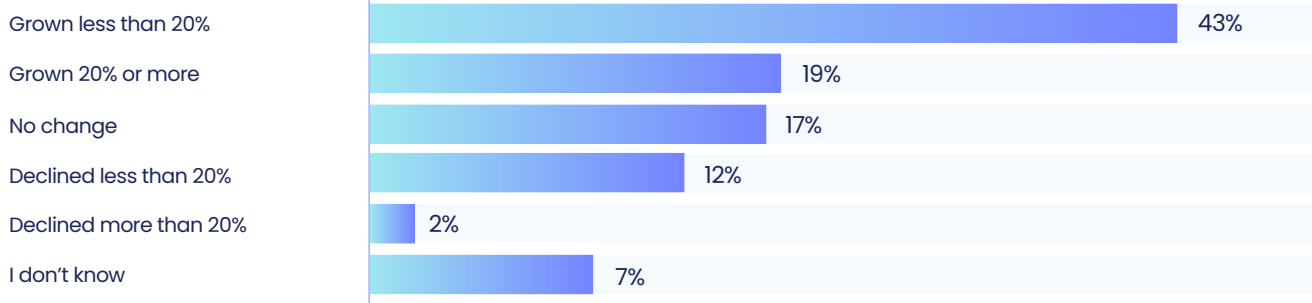
Production Growth

Despite economic challenges, many dental practices have maintained or increased their production. 60% of practices reported production growth over the past year, with one-fifth of practices experiencing a significant increase of 20% or more. A subset of 14% of respondents did see practice production decrease. High-growth practices have distinguished themselves by strategically leveraging patient financing solutions and adopting new technologies to streamline operations and improve patient care.

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To your best estimate, how has your practice revenue changed over the last 12 months?

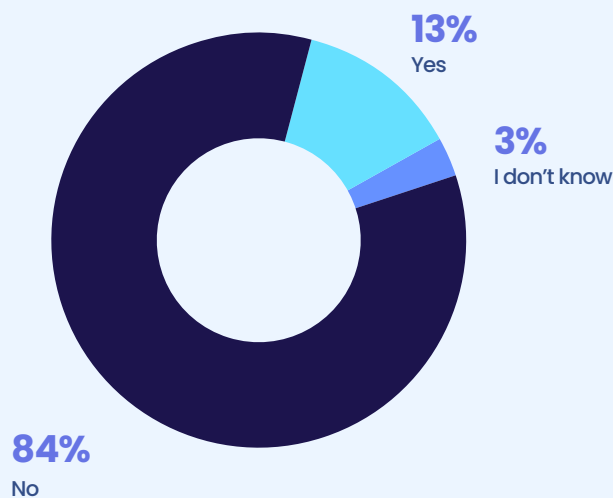


Technology Adoption

New technology is considered essential to a dental practice's success. 87% of respondents felt new technology is essential, and 62% believed it's very or extremely important. Throughout 2023-24, 28% of respondents reported implementing new diagnosis and

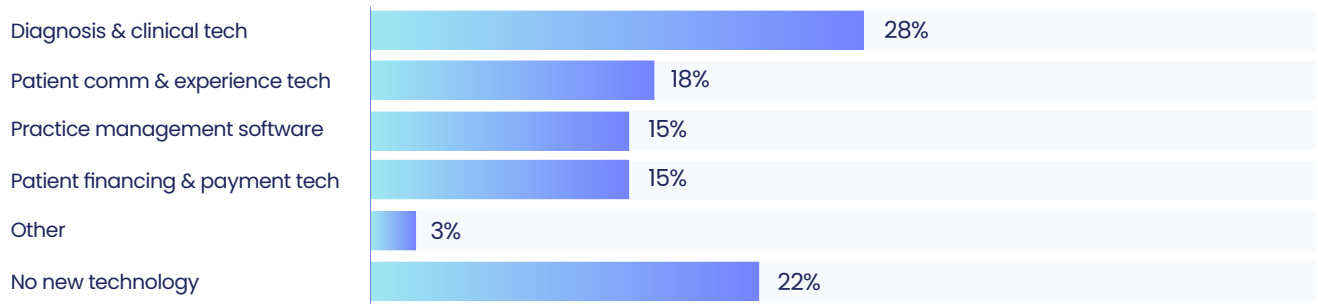
clinical technology. Additionally, 18% have invested in technology to improve patient communications, 15% have implemented new practice management software, and 15% have onboarded a new patient financing or payment technology.

Do you use ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Claude.ai or another similar generative AI technology for your practice?



Although generative AI has become a buzz in pop culture, only 13% of respondents report using any form of generative AI within their practice. Those who have adopted generative AI primarily use it to improve patient communications.

What types of technology has your practice implemented in the last 12 months?



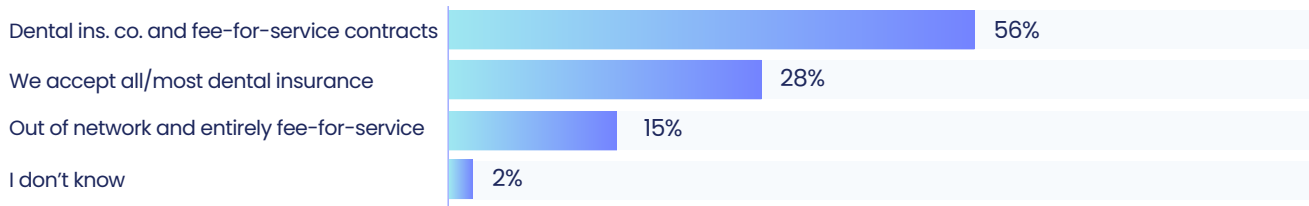
Paying for Treatment

Among the respondents, 15% operate strictly on a fee-for-service model, avoiding dental insurance entirely. Meanwhile, 56% take a hybrid approach, credentialing with select dental insurance companies offering higher payouts and utilizing a fee-for-service model. As a result, patients reported an average

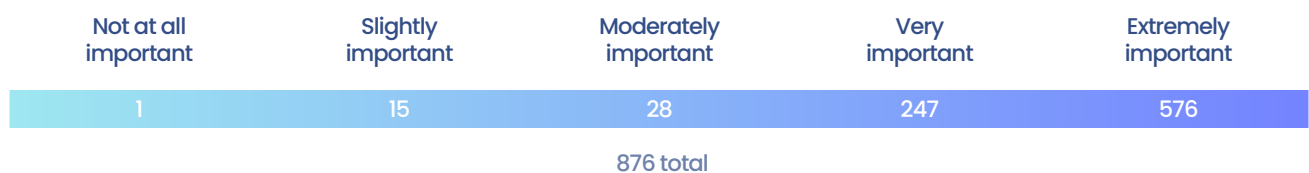


out-of-pocket expense of \$370 per visit. Due to limited insurance coverage, patient financing has become a common practice in the industry. However, as the range of financing providers has expanded, dental professionals are placing greater emphasis on the integrity of these providers. Notably, 94% of respondents stated that the patient experience is very or extremely important. This focus on patient care is reflected in their criteria for selecting vendors: integrity and quality of product/service ranked higher than cost. Additionally, 80% agreed that offering fast, safe, and secure financing solutions improves the patient experience.

Which of the following describes your relationship with insurance companies?



How much does the patient experience matter to you?

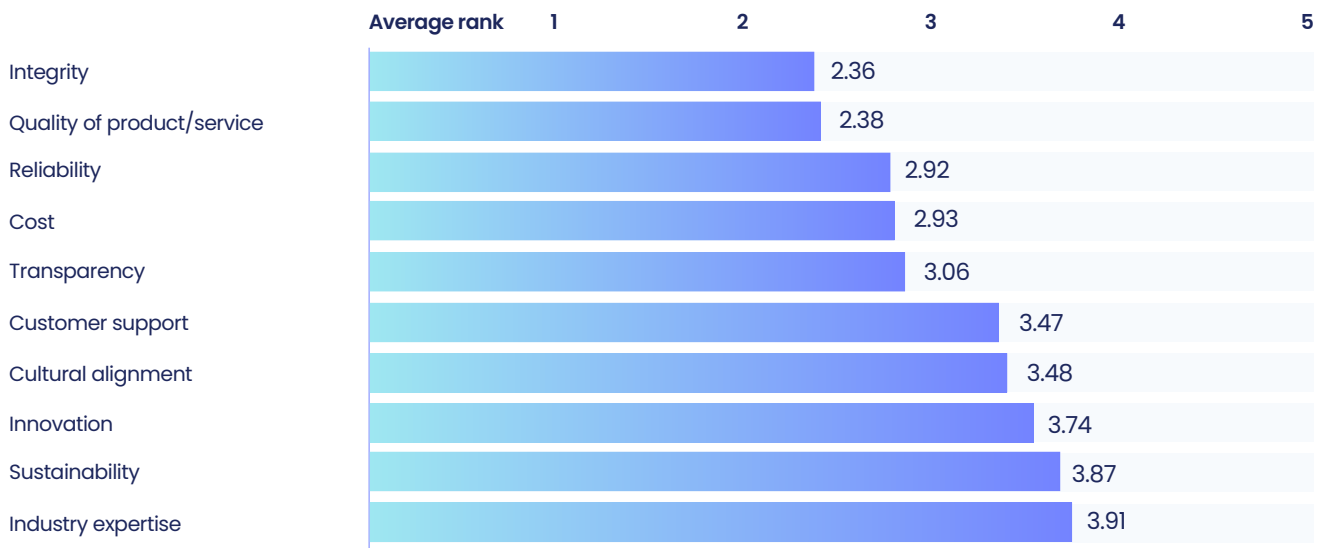


80% of surveyed professionals agreed that offering fast, safe, and secure financing solutions improves the patient experience.

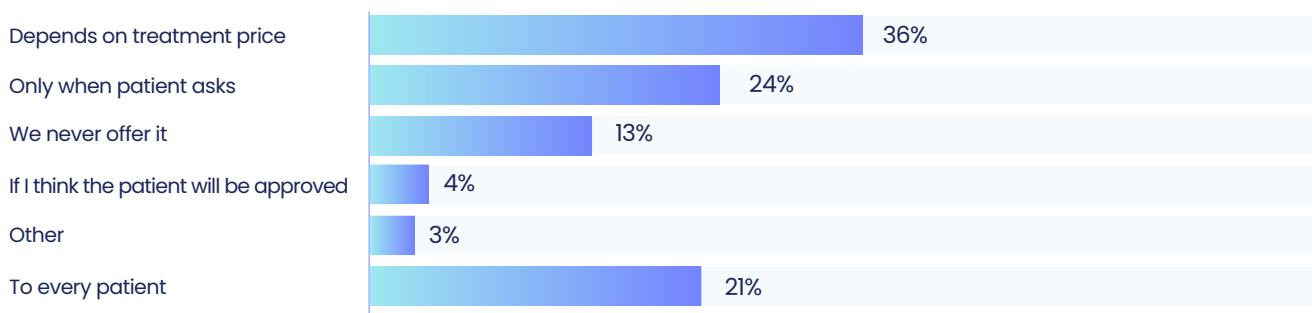
When offering financing, most respondents reserve it for patients who request it (24%) or when the treatment cost is significant (36%). Office staff cited several reasons for not offering

financing: including the belief that patients don't need it, concerns about hidden fees or deferred interest traps, and the perception that application processes are too lengthy.

Rank (1-5) what values you care most about when partnering with a vendor for your dental practice



How often do you offer patient financing to your patients?

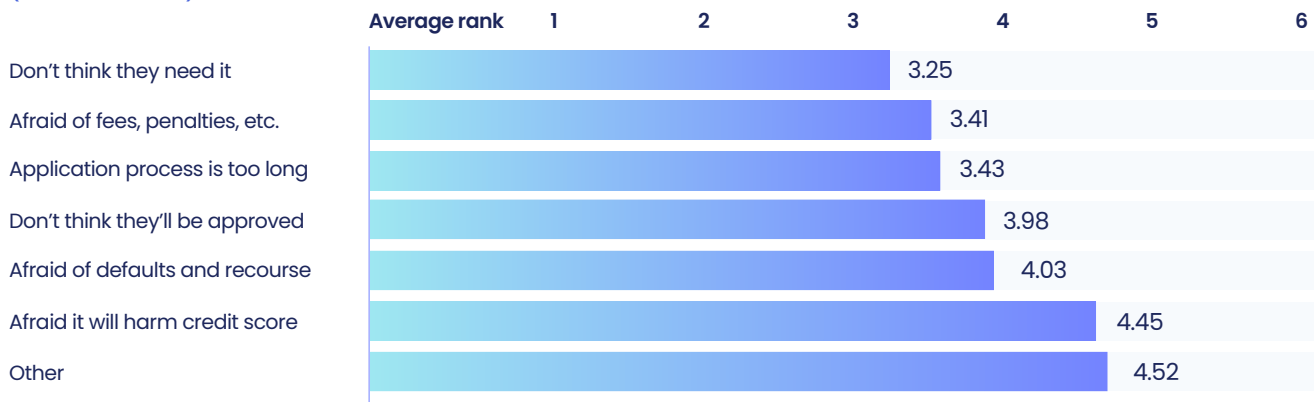


Concerns about unethical practices by financing providers are valid. For instance, a 2023 WalletHub survey revealed that 62% of Americans believe deferred interest promotions should be illegal. Supporting this sentiment, 34% of respondents indicated they cared deeply about whether a financing company charges late fees or penalties to patients. In comparison, 36% had moderate concerns, and 25% expressed minimal to no

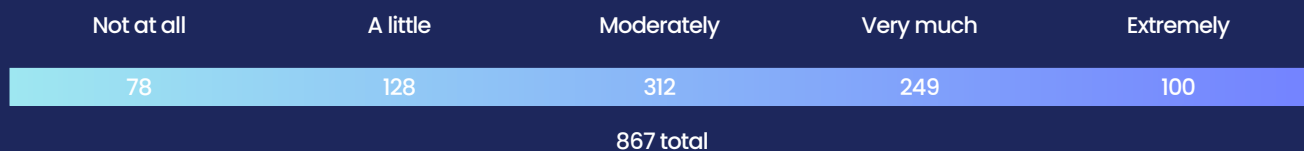
concern about negative financing experiences for their patients. This discrepancy between prioritizing patient experience and tolerating potentially harmful financing practices is worth addressing. The patient experience extends beyond the practice visit. It includes the entire patient journey, from start to finish, including the payment plan's duration and terms, from start to finish, including the payment plan's duration and terms.

What are the reasons you or your staff would not offer financing to patients?

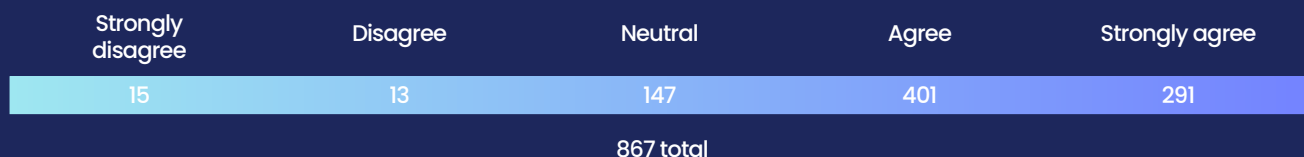
(1 most-6 least)



How much do you care that some patient financing companies charge late fees or penalty APRs?



To what extent do you agree that offering fast, safe and secure financing improves the overall patient experience at your practice?

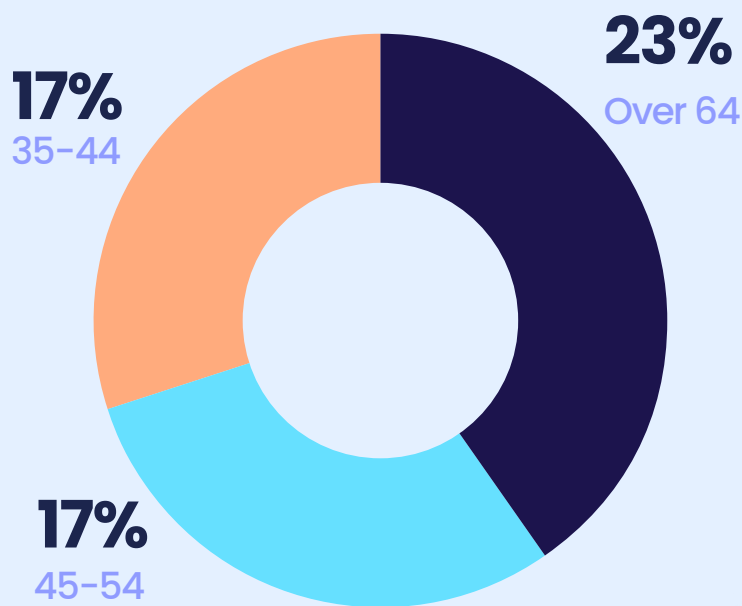


The Patient Perspective

Survey Demographics

The patient survey collected responses from 1,005 American adults who visited a dentist within the past two years. The largest age group represented was adults over 64 (23%), followed by those aged 35-44 (17%) and 45-54 (17%). This provides valuable insights into a mature patient base likely managing long-term dental care needs and younger adults who may be more focused on preventive care or family dental decisions.

Age of adult patients who have visited a dentist in the past two years



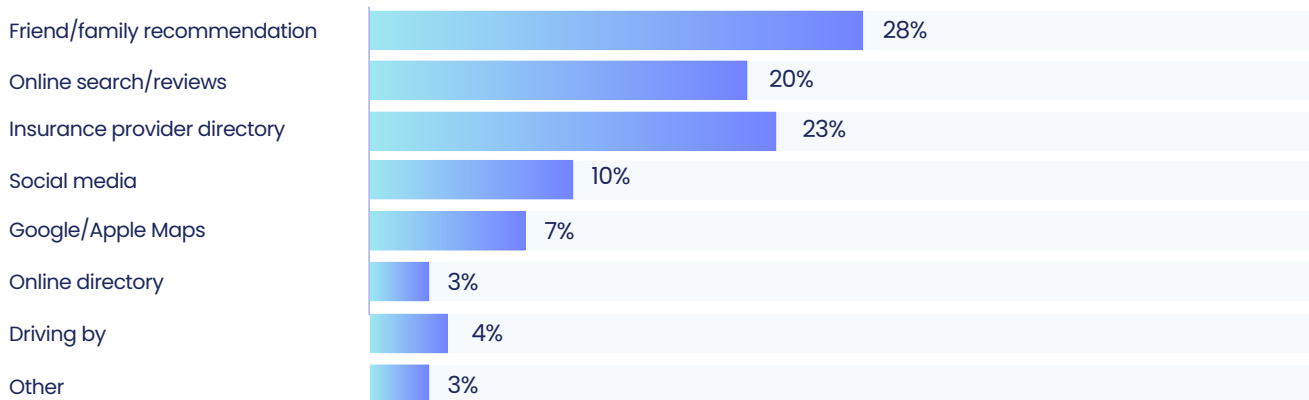
Finding and Choosing Dentists

How do patients find their dentists? The survey found that 43% of respondents rely on word of mouth, while 28% use online searches and review platforms to find dentists. Insurance networks are critical for 22% of respondents, particularly those seeking in-network care to minimize costs. Distance plays a significant role in patients' decision-making process. 54% of patients are willing to travel up to 15 miles for dental care, while only 15% are comfortable traveling more than 30 miles.

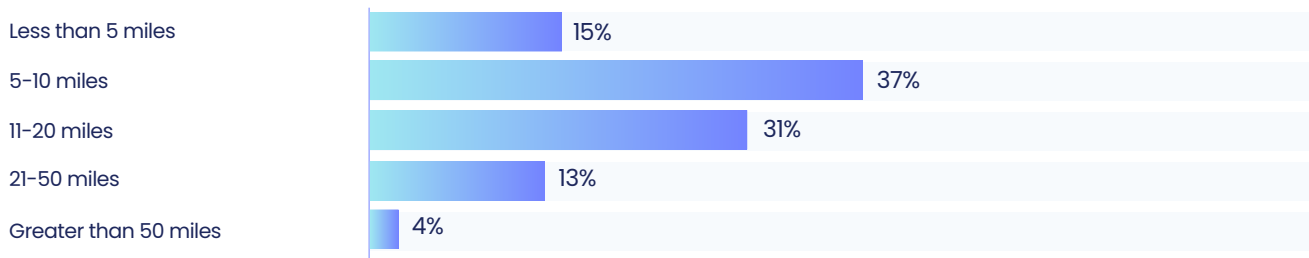


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How do you typically find a dentist for general dental care?



How far are you willing to travel for a dental appointment?

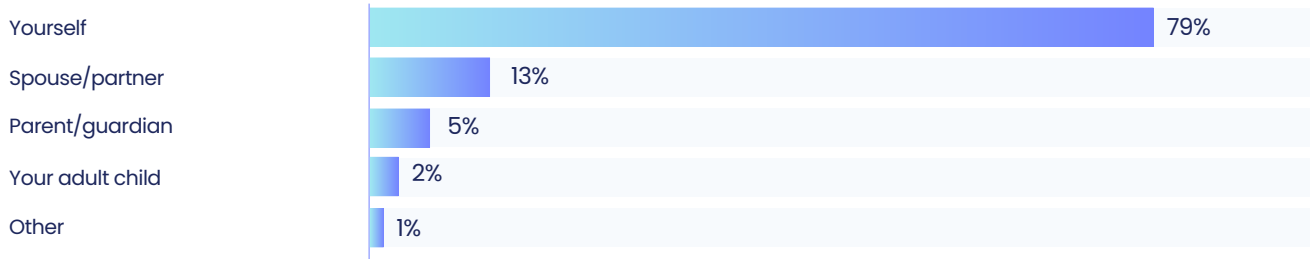


Booking Appointments

Appointment scheduling responsibilities typically fall to the patient, with 62% of respondents indicating that they handle their own bookings. Among families, 25% of respondents stated that one household member—often a parent or spouse—manages appointments for everyone. While 48% of patients prefer booking by phone, online scheduling is gaining traction, with 34% using digital platforms.



Who in your household typically books appointments?



Fears and Concerns About Dental Visits

Despite the importance of regular dental care, many patients still harbor fears or anxieties about their dental visits. 55% of respondents said they feel apprehensive or anxious about visiting the dentist. 24% of respondents cited fear of pain as their primary concern when visiting the dentist, which increases to 36% when you include those who mention a fear of needles. 14% of patients expressed anxiety about the potential cost of treatment, especially if they were unsure whether their insurance would cover the full cost.

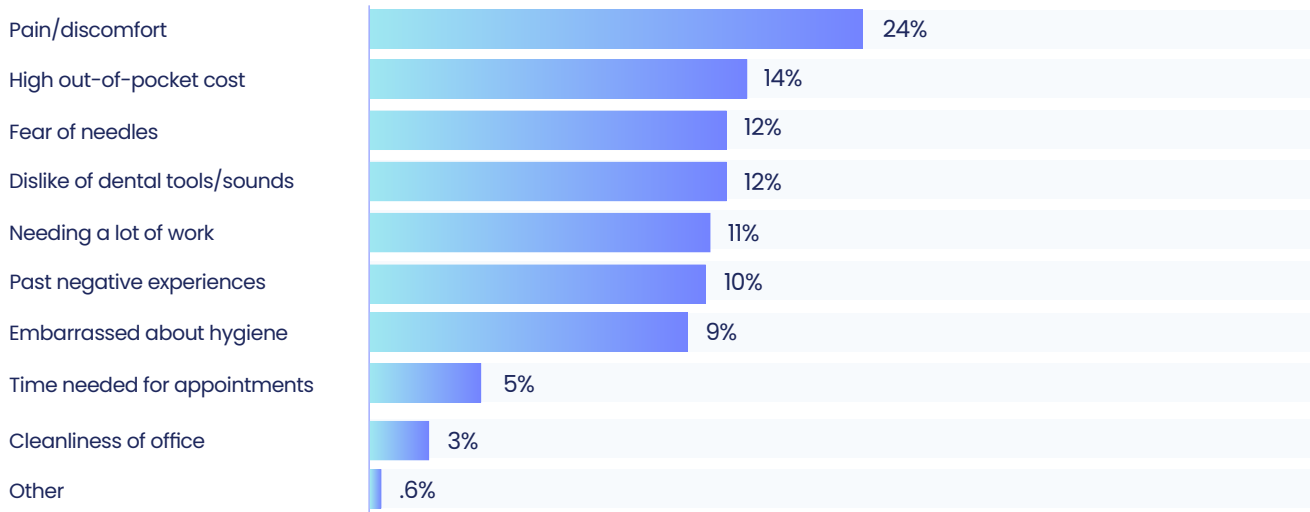
For 10% of patients, negative past experiences with dentists, such as discomfort during procedures or inadequate communication, have contributed to their reluctance to visit regularly. Another 10% mentioned concerns about finding out they need extensive work.



Fear
and pain are the
main concerns when
visiting the dentist

Interestingly, 9% of respondents revealed that embarrassment about the condition of their teeth or gums was a significant factor preventing them from visiting the dentist more frequently. A focus on empathetic and non-judgmental communication from dental staff may help ease fears and improve patient comfort.

What makes you feel apprehensive or anxious about going to the dentist?



A focus on empathetic and non-judgmental communication from dental staff may help ease patients fears and improve patient comfort.

Reasons for Last Dental Visit

The survey also explored why patients visited the dentist most recently. Most patients (43%) reported that their last dental visit was for a routine cleaning or check-up. Preventive care is the primary reason for dental visits, highlighting the importance of regular hygiene appointments.

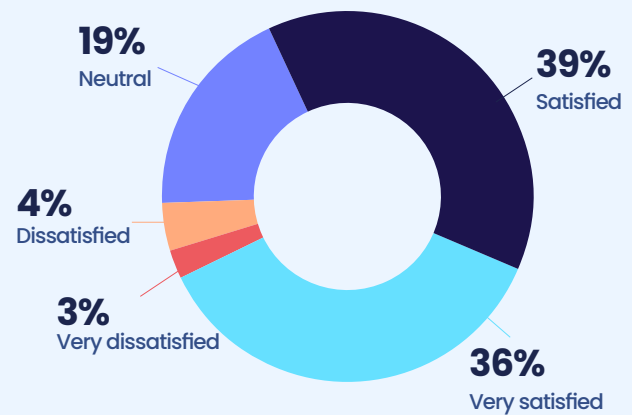
However, 25% of patients said they visited their dentist because they were referred for specialized care, such as periodontal or surgical treatment. 15% of patients reported visiting their dentist for cosmetic procedures, such as teeth whitening, veneers, or orthodontics. Cosmetic dentistry is particularly popular among younger adults, with patients aged 25-44 most interested in elective treatments.

Overall, patients feel good about their last dental visit. An overwhelming 76% of respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their previous visit.

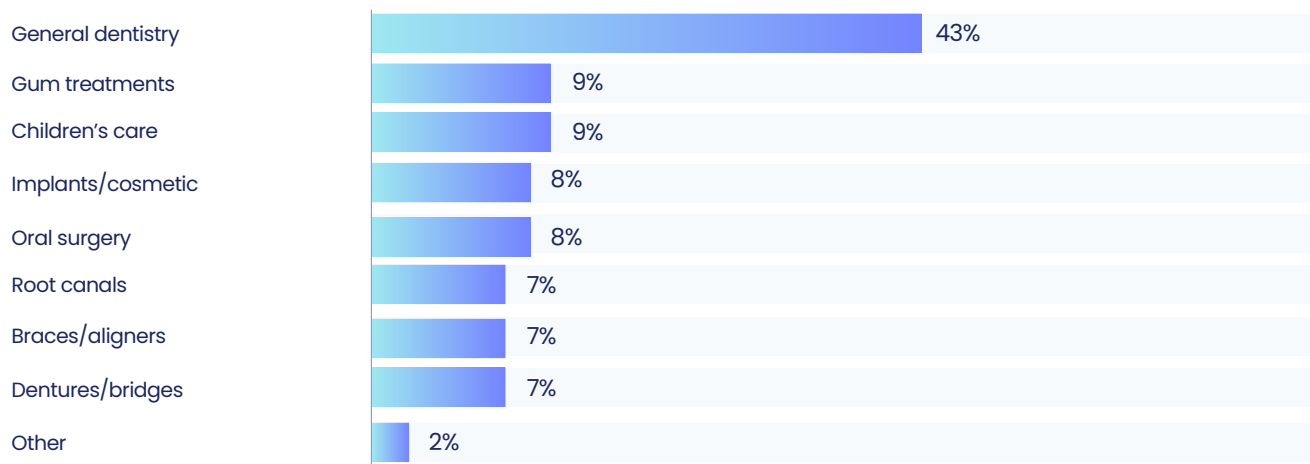


Preventive
care is the top
reason patients visit
the dentist

Overall experience



What types of dental work have you/others in your household received in the last 2 years?



Financial Barriers to Dental Care

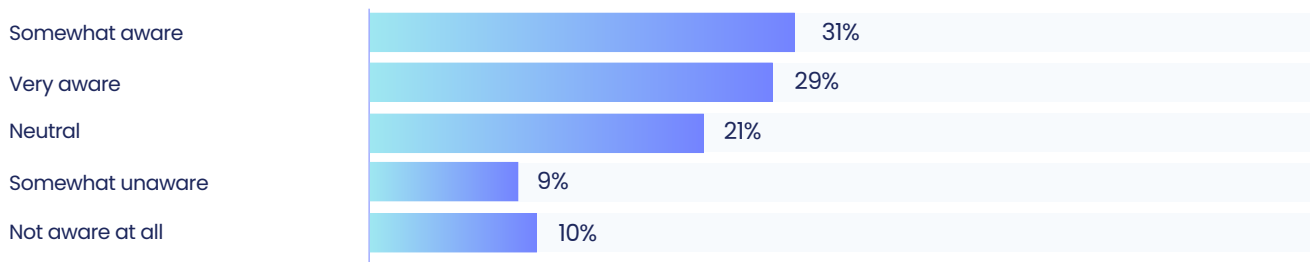
Economic factors play a significant role in patients' ability to access dental care. Over the past two years, 47% of respondents have delayed or skipped dental treatment due to financial difficulties, emphasizing the growing need for flexible payment plans and affordable financing options.

Regarding financing, patients are increasingly looking for flexibility and ease of access. 44% of patients indicated they are interested in using buy now, pay over time options to pay for out-of-pocket expenses, with nearly 20% saying they were very interested in these options. The primary reasons for considering financing are to manage considerable expenses (33%) and to avoid using credit cards with high interest rates (23%), for flexible budget management (23%), and to access necessary treatments sooner (17%).

53% of patients said they prefer to know about financing options before or while booking their appointment, and 26% said they'd like to apply for financing when booking their exam

When asked when they would like to be informed about financing options, 53% of patients said they prefer to know about financing options before or while booking their appointment, and 26% said they'd like to apply for financing when booking their exam. The responses suggest that early and transparent conversations about costs can ease concerns and encourage patients to proceed with treatment.

How aware were you that financing options might be available before your most recent dental visit?



The responses suggest that early and transparent conversations about costs can alleviate concerns and encourage patients to proceed with treatment.

Additionally, 35% of patients stated they were aware of available financing options at their dental practices. However, 65% indicated that they either had limited awareness of financing solutions or had not been offered financing, suggesting a communication gap.

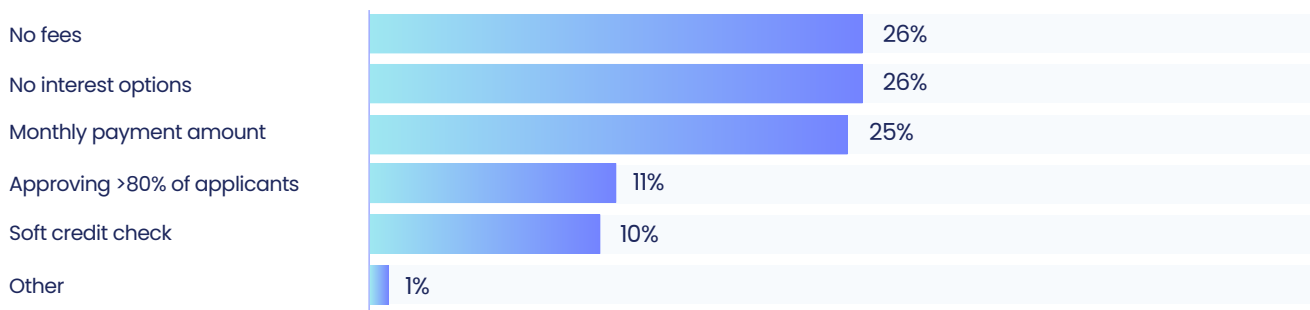
Practices that proactively discuss financing options during initial consultations and make it part of the treatment planning process are more likely to see higher patient satisfaction and treatment acceptance. Lastly, when considering financing options, patients find payment plans with true no-interest options (26%), no added fees (26%), and low monthly payments (25%) the most appealing features.



**No fees,
and true no-interest
options are the most
appealing financing
features**

Practices that proactively discuss financing options during initial consultations and make it part of the treatment planning process are more likely to see higher patient satisfaction and treatment acceptance.

What features make financing options most appealing to you?



65% of patients surveyed indicated that they either had limited awareness of financing solutions or had not been offered financing, suggesting a communication gap.

Charting the Future of Dental Care

The dental industry is navigating a transformative era of technological innovation, shifting patient expectations, and economic pressures. Insights from our comprehensive surveys of dental professionals and patients reveal a complex landscape where operational challenges and financial barriers intersect with growth opportunities and enhanced patient care.

For dental practices, leveraging technological advancements and prioritizing patient experience have proven effective strategies for sustaining production growth and addressing financial barriers. High-growth practices exemplify the potential to integrate innovative solutions such as new patient financing options, improve patient satisfaction, and drive business success. However, challenges continue, including finding enough staff, dealing with complicated insurance policies, and ensuring fair and ethical financing options.

From the patient's perspective, financial constraints, fear of pain, and anxieties around treatment costs continue to hinder access to dental care. However, the growing interest in flexible financing options highlights a clear opportunity for practices to better address patients' needs by offering transparent and accessible payment solutions. Early

communication about costs and financing, along with empathetic patient interactions can alleviate concerns and encourage treatment acceptance.

Ultimately, the dental industry stands at a crossroads. By focusing on patient needs, using new technology, and being transparent about care and costs, dental professionals can strengthen patient relationships while adapting to the changing dental industry. This report serves as a foundation for understanding the industry's current state and envisioning a path toward a more inclusive and innovative future in dental care.

To learn more about Sunbit's
patient financing solution,
visit sunbit.com/dental.

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