

## **CDHA Response to [article published by Oral Health Group](#) reporting on the recent petition on workforce.**

The Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA) is aware of the petition circulating under the title: *“Allow ITDs (Internationally trained dentists) to provide preventive and other care (e.g., cleaning) under supervision”* and offers the following points for clarification and consideration:

The question to be asked is, is there a shortage of dental hygienists across Canada, or is it an issue of maldistribution and unhealthy work environments?

The 2023 CDHA Survey on Healthy and Respectful Workplace collected dental hygienists' experiences in their work environments over the last 12 months.

The data showed that within the last 12 months, 6 out of 10 dental hygienist respondents have personally experienced and/or witnessed some form of harassment, bullying, abuse, and/or violence in their workplace. Furthermore, dentists and office managers were most often the source of mistreatment. What is most crucial is the impact these incidents of harassment, bullying, abuse and/or violence in the workplace had on dental hygienists, with 39% of them considering quitting their job, 14% resigning, and 7% taking a leave of absence.

This data shows a better alternative **to ensure a strong dental hygiene workforce: Ensure healthy and respectful workplaces.**

CDHA's 2023 Job Market and Employment survey reported that approximately one out of four dental hygienists may leave the profession within the next five years, with the majority (64%) citing planned retirement as their primary reason for leaving. Recent data from CIHI shows that the number of dental hygienists has grown steadily over the last 15 years, with a total of more than 33,600 licensed dental hygienists in Canada, with the majority practising in Ontario (approximately 43%). Last month, Statistics Canada shared “Workforce renewal in health occupations”, a new study focused on the healthcare workforce in the context of an aging Canadian population. The renewal ratio for dental hygienists (the extent to which workers approaching retirement age can be replaced by younger workers entering the workforce) was very high at 2.6. Furthermore, the number of dental hygiene graduates keeps increasing in many programs across the country, and the number of graduates largely outweighs the number of dental hygienists projected to leave the profession.

In the absence of strong data on the oral health workforce in Canada, CDHA has partnered with the Canadian Dental Association on a submission to the Oral Health Access Fund for the project “Improving Access to Oral Health Services through Equity-Focused, Population Needs-Based and Inclusive Oral Health Workforce Modelling and Planning to Inform Policy Directions.” This project will develop a robust, equity-focused, pan-Canadian oral health needs-based workforce analytical model and planning process to identify and project policy-actionable gaps to enhance workforce size, mix, and distribution.

Ensuring an adequate supply of oral health professionals is critical. Oral health staffing is multifactorial and complex. Collaborative dialogue and examination of all factors impacting the workforce are critical to ensuring appropriate care for Canadians' oral health.