

Future of Dentistry

Virtual Member Engagement Session

Sharing Our Work. Hearing Member Perspectives. **Shaping What Comes Next.**

The CDA Future of Dentistry Workgroup is examining the forces shaping the future of the profession. These include dental plan challenges and meaningful reform, medical-dental integration, artificial intelligence and emerging technologies, student debt, and evolving practice and business models. By bringing together dentists with diverse backgrounds, specialties and career experiences, the workgroup is looking beyond individual issues to understand how changes across the profession may affect dentists, their practices and the patients they serve.

The goal is to help inform the Board of Directors about where CDA can have the greatest impact and where dentists' voices are needed in decisions that shape the profession's future.

Engagement sessions with members: A summary

CDA hosted two virtual engagement sessions to share the workgroup's approach and progress and invite perspectives from members. The sessions were an opportunity for members to hear directly from the workgroup, respond to key questions through live polls, and share their experiences and opinions through open dialogue.

This engagement complements the workgroup's ongoing learning and analysis, helping to surface real-world scenarios, challenge assumptions, and identify questions that deserve further exploration.

What we shared: Three areas of focus

1. The payment ecosystem

- The sustainability and value of today's dental benefits model, including annual maximums, reimbursement and access to needed care.
- Alternative payment approaches, accountability and measures of meaningful value.
- The potential implications of integrating dental and medical coverage.

2. The clinical experience

- How evolving practice and business models—including the growth of dental support organizations—may affect clinical autonomy and professional responsibility.
- The opportunities and risks of artificial intelligence in clinical decision-making and practice operations, including around liability, privacy and oversight.

3. The care delivery system

- Opportunities to better connect oral and overall health through improved communication, coordination, referrals and information-sharing between dental and medical providers.
- The practical, financial and administrative challenges of integration, including how to preserve dentistry's distinct role and ensure smaller practices are not left behind.

What members brought to the discussion

Member comments reinforced the importance of examining these issues from the perspectives of practicing dentists and their patients. Discussions highlighted several recurring concerns and opportunities:

- **Dental benefits and reimbursement:** Existing coverage models do not adequately support access to necessary care as costs rise and benefit limits remain constrained.
- **Oral health and overall health:** Stronger medical-dental collaboration could improve prevention, recognition of health conditions, and patient outcomes.
- **Technology and professional judgment:** AI and other emerging tools can support care while maintaining dentists' responsibility for clinical decisions.
- **Practice sustainability and autonomy:** Changing business models and administrative demands may affect dentists' ability to put patients first.

Members also raised questions about how success should be measured, what evidence is needed to support potential changes, and how to translate promising ideas into practical solutions.

Live Audience Poll Responses

Most Pressing Issue	Payment System & Reimbursements: **75%** Practice Autonomy / Clinical Independence: **12%** Evolving Practice & Business Models: **10%** Artificial Intelligence Implementation: **3%**
Student Debt Severity Rating *(Impact on Enrollment & Career Paths)*	High Concern: **54%** (Moderate Concern: **27%** Low or No Active Concern: **19%**)
Other Issues *(Qualitative Member Comment Analysis)*	**Market Pressures:** Infiltration of private equity and organized dentistry's limits in commercial rate changes **Workforce Shortages:** In clinical support staff (RDA/RDH groups) **Systemic Gaps:** Inadequate Medicare Advantage dental plans; clinical training gaps in schools due to a lack of live, hands-on patient exposure **Tripartite Health:** Membership declines across the ADA/ tripartite infrastructure

An ongoing, transparent process

The workgroup is still in its information-gathering and exploration phase. It's engaging subject-matter experts, evaluating emerging evidence, considering different perspectives and identifying the questions that matter most to the profession.

The workgroup's findings will help inform an interim progress report and the continued development of recommendations for CDA leadership. The work will continue into 2027 with opportunities for members to stay informed and share additional perspectives through CDA communications and the Future of Dentistry webpage.

Learn more and share your perspective through CDA's Future of Dentistry webpage.