

26 September 2025

Professor Barney Glover, AO  
Commissioner  
Jobs and Skills Australia  
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations  
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Dear Professor Glover

### **Submission to inform Jobs and Skills Australia's advice to Government on the 2025 Core Skills Occupations List**

The Australian Dental Association (ADA) thanks Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) for the opportunity to provide input to inform its advice to Government on the 2025 Core Skills Occupations List (CSOL).

#### **Recommendations**

1. We recommend that the Dental Assistant occupation be included on the CSOL, with an intent of establishing a pathway for temporary work visas, supporting a more sustainable workforce and helping address retention issues in the dental sector.

#### **About the ADA**

The ADA is the peak national body for Dentists in Australia. Representing more than 17,000 members, the ADA provides a unified voice for the dental profession, offering expert advice and advocacy on all matters relating to oral health and dental practice. The ADA is committed to advancing the oral health of all Australians through evidence-based policy, professional development, and community education. As the authoritative source on dental care and policy, the ADA works closely with government, regulatory bodies, and other health organisations to shape a sustainable and accessible dental care system for the future.

#### **Context**

This consultation seeks submissions to help JSA advise the government on the 2025 CSOL. The CSOL is a list of occupations for the employer-sponsored temporary Skills in Demand visa. JSA will recommend occupations for inclusion based on two main criteria: the Occupation Shortage List (OSL), which uses in-depth business recruitment analysis, and a wide range of other economic data and stakeholder feedback.

#### **The Australian dental workforce**

The Australian dental workforce comprises a range of professionals, including Dentists who provide comprehensive care, as well as 13 types of Dental Specialists in disciplines including orthodontics, oral and maxillofacial surgery, and special needs dentistry. The workforce is also supported by a variety of allied dental practitioners, including Oral Health Therapists, Dental Hygienists, and Dental Therapists, who provide a restricted scope of practice compared to dentists. Completing the team are Dental Prosthetists who create dentures directly for patients, Dental Technicians who work in labs to fabricate dental appliances, and Dental Assistants who

provide essential support in clinics.

The CSOL presently includes several roles within the dental sector. Occupations that it lists are Dentist, Dental Specialist, Dental Hygienist, Dental Prosthetist, Dental Technician, and Dental Therapist. This inclusion on the CSOL indicates that these roles are considered to be in demand and may be eligible for employer-sponsored temporary visas.

The absence of Dental Assistants from the CSOL creates an imbalance in Australia's dental workforce. A Dentist's ability to perform their core work is severely limited without a Dental Assistant's support. This issue extends beyond Dentists, as other dental practitioners like Dental Hygienists, Oral Health Therapists, and Dental Prosthetists also routinely rely on their assistance. This oversight makes current initiatives to increase the supply of dental practitioners on the CSOL less logical and less effective, as they fail to address the critical need for a complete dental team.

### Shortages of Dental Assistants

Dental Assistants are crucial to the efficient operation of dental practices, performing a range of clinical and administrative tasks. They support dentists and allied dental practitioners by preparing treatment rooms, sterilising instruments, managing patient records, and scheduling appointments, allowing dental practitioners to focus on patient care.

The profession's demographic profile suggests a high level of workforce instability. Dental Assistants have a median age of just 30 years<sup>1</sup>, compared to 39 for all occupations. This indicates a younger workforce, which often has a higher turnover rate. Further, only 45% of Dental Assistants work full-time hours<sup>2</sup>, compared to the national average of 69%. The high rate of part-time work, combined with the low median age, may contribute to retention challenges and create a less stable workforce.

ADA members report to us localised, and for certain practices highly challenging shortages of Dental Assistants. As explained above, this issue can impact *other* dental occupations, because of the necessity of Dental Assistants in the clinical environment, and can therefore compromise the availability of dental services to patients.

### Contributing factors

The shortage is a complex issue, with several key factors thought to be driving it:

- Anecdotal evidence suggests a high turnover rate among Dental Assistants, with many leaving the profession over recent years.
- Experienced Dental Assistants are leaving the profession for industries like construction, retail, and warehousing, which can offer higher wages and few training requirements.
- Some training providers struggle to secure sufficient clinical placements for students, which creates a bottleneck in the pipeline of new graduates.
- Dental Assistants are not on the CSOL, which makes it impossible for practices to sponsor qualified international workers, with many on Working Holiday visas unable to continue in their roles.

We have received multiple reports from dentists who have employed Dental Assistants whose visa requirements dictate that they can only work for a fixed period or are limited to certain hours. Many of these assistants and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/occupation-and-industry-profiles/occupations/4232-dental-assistants>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

their employers, along with the community, would benefit from the ability to be sponsored on a longer-term basis.

### *Impacts of shortages*

The lack of a stable dental assistant workforce has significant negative consequences:

- A shortage of Dental Assistants puts immense pressure on the entire dental workforce, forcing other professionals like Dentists, Specialists, Dental Therapists, and Hygienists to perform additional duties that reduce their ability to work to their full potential and efficiently care for patients.
- The inability to recruit and retain Dental Assistants directly reduces a practice's capacity to provide timely and effective care to patients.
- Practices with severe shortages of Dental Assistants face an increased risk of financial instability and closure due to the potential loss of both Dentists and patients. Many practices run with tight profit margins, the loss of efficiency caused by a lack of appropriate Dental Assistants increases the risk of a practice becoming financially unviable.

### *Business responses to Dental Assistant shortages*

In response to these challenges, dental businesses have been implementing various strategies to attract and retain staff, including:

- Some practices are offering increased wages, in some cases substantially exceeding industry award rates, to attract candidates.
- Businesses are taking on more trainees directly from TAFE and other educational providers to address the lack of experienced applicants.
- Some practices are investing in continuous professional development (CPD) courses to upskill existing staff and improve retention.

Despite these initiatives, there are still reports of localised shortages negatively impacting the provision of dental services.

### *Addressing oral health workforce maldistribution in rural and regional Australia*

Oral health is a critical albeit overlooked part of the health system. Health workforce challenges are particularly acute in rural and regional Australia. ADA welcome the opportunity to discuss health workforce maldistribution for both Dental Assistants and Dentists, to ensure oral health is embedded in all health workforce planning.

### *Proposed solutions*

To create a more sustainable workforce and address long-term retention issues, the ADA advocates for consideration of including the Dental Assistant occupation on the CSOL to create a pathway for temporary working rights which should lead to a more sustainable workforce and help address retention issues.

### **Final remarks**

Thank you for considering the ADA's submission on this matter. As outlined, we are advised that shortages of Dental Assistants have been placing considerable pressure on certain dental practices, compromising their ability to deliver essential oral healthcare to the community. The absence of this occupation from the CSOL is a barrier

preventing the dental sector from accessing international workers to fill these crucial roles. The inclusion of Dental Assistants on the CSOL would provide a treatment for this.

We could welcome the opportunity to meet with JSA to progress these issues. Please do not hesitate to contact

Yours sincerely,

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