The Central Valley Health Policy Institute surveyed dental providers nationwide, as a timely response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey aimed to understand the dental providers’ perspective on how dentistry is and will be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and to know their suggested policy recommendations to support the dental community.

Ninety-two dental providers responded to our survey from 47 states. Practices located in California made up 34% of responses. Respondents worked at different types of dental settings.

Among those who applied for the financial support, the percentage of respondents who believed that the amount was adequate to their business needs was 62% while 33% believed it was not adequate, and 5% perceived the amount as neither adequate nor inadequate for them.

Changes in the dental practices due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Many respondents shared that they added some modification to their facility such as: removing all fabrics from the waiting room for easier disinfection, adding an air purifier, ultraviolet light disinfection lamps, plexiglass to protect their front desk staff, consider air filtration, enclose operatory rooms, use the extraoral suction device, and ensure enough stock of PPE. Reducing patients’ volume seen every day, reducing the number of staff, staff and patients’ screening, using Teledentistry, focusing more on prevention and patient education, and increasing the fees were some of the measures that some respondents intend to employ due to the pandemic. Few respondents were not optimistic and considered "looking for alternative careers."

Most of the required measures to ensure safety for the dental team and patients will cause an increase in the overhead expenses. 27% is the average percentage increase in the cost of dental care due to the pandemic, as seen by respondents.

The potential increase in the cost of dental care may have an impact on the ability of dental providers to keep all their staff employed and their ability and willingness to treat patients with different kinds of insurance.

56% of respondents were more likely to keep all their staff employed

44% of respondents were more unlikely to keep all their staff employed

40% of respondents were unlikely to keep treating Medicaid (public insurance) patients

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Increasing the reimbursement rates for most covered services by all dental insurances, reimbursing dentists suitably for the infection control and prevention measures and for the Teledentistry code, prioritizing dental providers in the provision of PPE, and the need to focus more on the preventive dentistry were some of the policies and considerations that our respondents supported.

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This work was funded by DentaQuest Partnership for Oral Health Advancement.