

2026

Dental Assistants Salary and Satisfaction Survey

DANB



Why earn certification?

- Increased knowledge
- Stand out when applying for jobs
- Personal pride
- Higher confidence
- Career satisfaction



Dental Assistant Pay

Certified Dental Assistants (CDAs) earn

17% more

(\$4 per hour more)

\$24

PER HOUR

**NOT CERTIFIED
DENTAL ASSISTANT**

\$28

PER HOUR

**DANB CERTIFIED
DENTAL ASSISTANT**

All salary figures are median hourly pay. Median pay is the middle wage in a group of dental assistants, meaning half earn more than the median and half earn less. The median is a more stable figure than the average because the median is not skewed by outliers and better reflects the typical value.

“

It is so worth investing in yourself and your career! I hold my CDA title and am very proud of it. Being a Certified Dental Assistant is truly so valuable.

— Hilary O., CDA, RDH

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BENEFITS OF CDA CERTIFICATION



“

One of the things I like most about being a dental assistant is that I can improve my worth through education. I don't have to wait on someone to give me a raise; I can go out and get certified and earn my raise.

— Emma M., CDA

Professional

- Increased knowledge
- Greater potential for career growth
- Stand out when applying for jobs



Personal

- Increased pride
- Greater confidence
- Higher job satisfaction

Financial

- Higher pay
- More raises
- More employer benefits

“

Earning CDA certification reinforced my commitment to professional growth and lifelong learning. I am proud to be part of a profession that helps improve patients' health, comfort, and confidence.

— Ashley M., CDA, surgical dental assistant

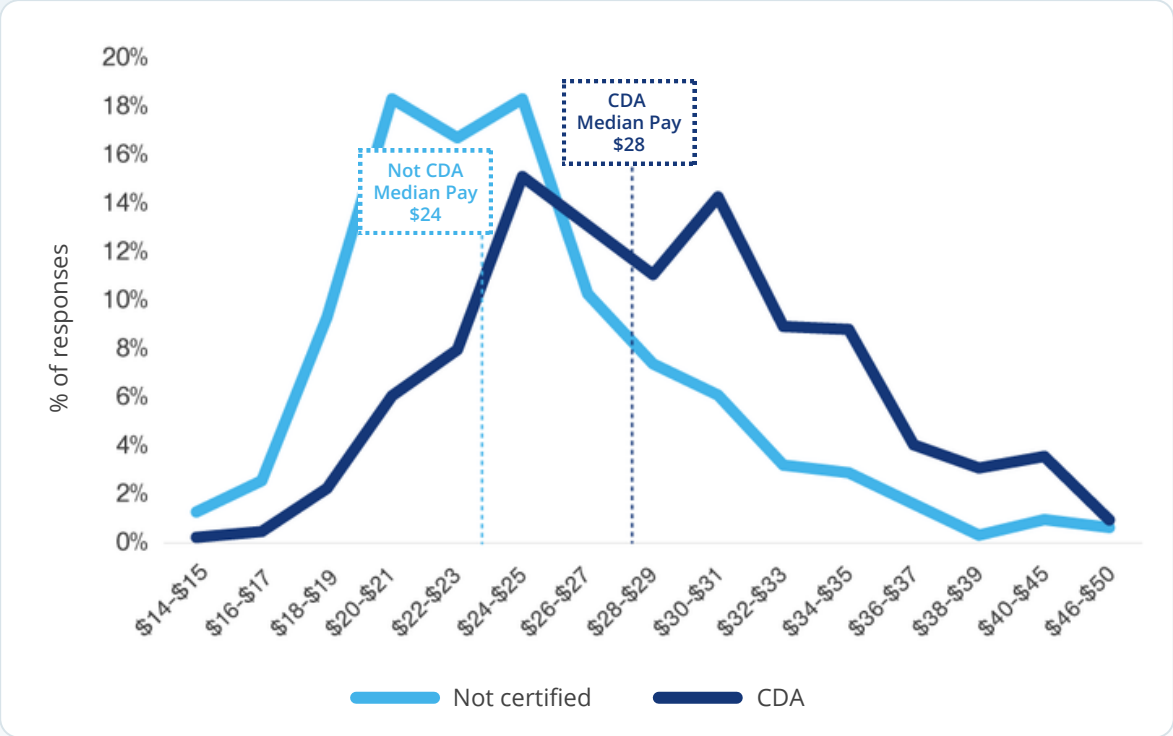
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Earning my DANB
certifications has been
not only a source of personal
pride but has also instilled an
understanding of and
belief in lifelong learning.
— Lois B., CDA, clinical lead



Range in Pay

While many factors — including location, practice type, and role — contribute to a broad range in pay, CDAs consistently earn a higher median hourly wage.



Pay and Experience

CDA certification is associated with higher wages. An entry-level dental assistant who is certified could earn **up to \$4,000 more per year** than one who is not certified.



Pay and Role

Restorative dental assistants

Dental assistants who perform restorative functions have higher earnings.



Certified Dental Assistant (CDA)

- Performs restorative functions: **\$28.93 per hour**
- Doesn't perform restorative functions: \$28 per hour

Not certified

- Performs restorative functions: **\$24 per hour**
- Doesn't perform restorative functions: \$23.50 per hour

Lead dental assistants

Lead dental assistants earn **\$2-\$3 more per hour** than assistants who are not leads.



Certified Dental Assistant (CDA)

- Lead assistant: **\$30 per hour**
- Not lead: \$27 per hour



Not certified

- Lead assistant: **\$25 per hour**
- Not lead: \$23 per hour



Confidence and Pay

Professional confidence — which grows as dental assistants earn certification and gain experience — is tied to higher pay.*

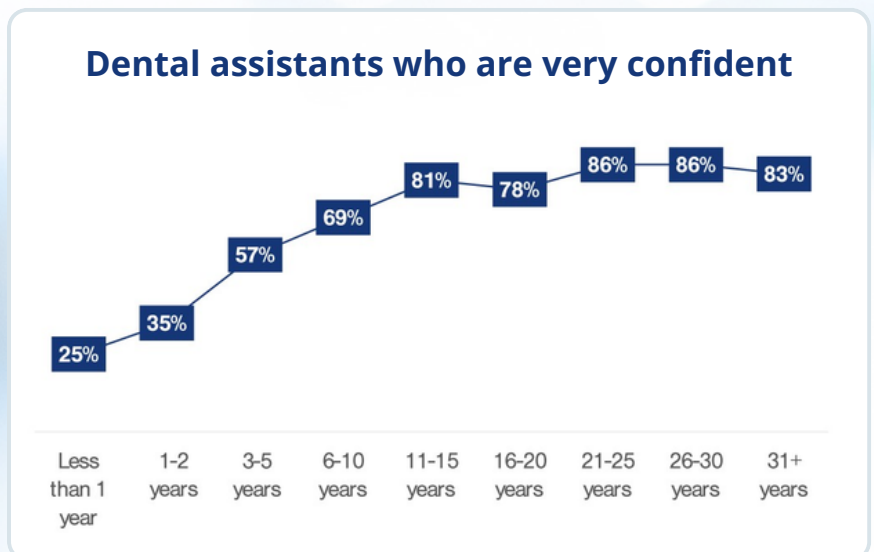


Certified Dental Assistants (CDAs) have more confidence.

76% CDAs Very confident

48% Not certified Very confident

Dental assistants who are very confident



*Results combined for certified and not certified dental assistants.

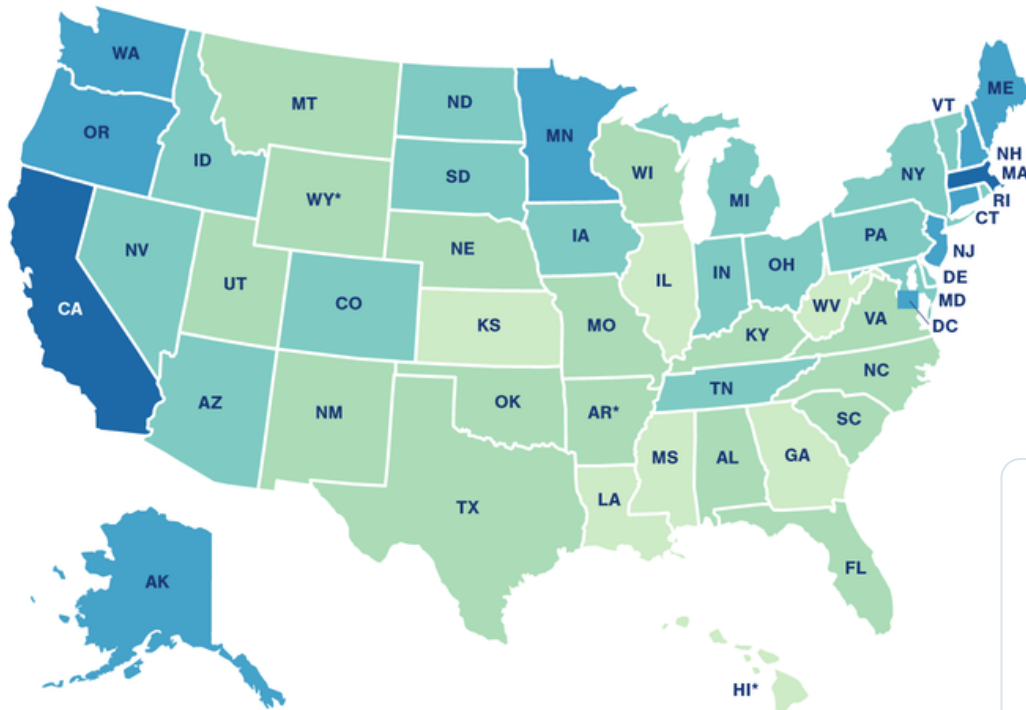
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Patients respect a well-trained dental assistant, and being an assistant for 16 years, it has been fun to get to know my patients and community.

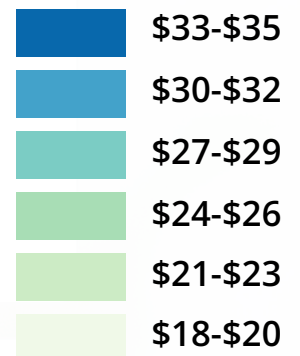
— Makenna J., CDA

HOURLY PAY BY STATE

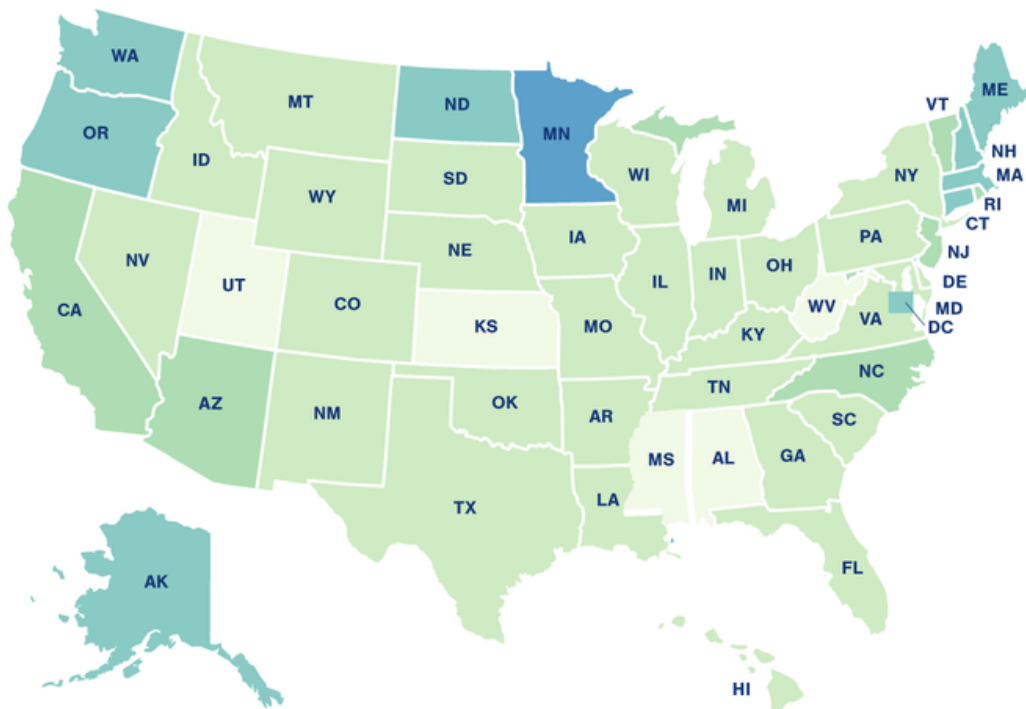
Certified Dental Assistant



*Figure for this state based on DANB's 2024 data



Not Certified**



**Figures from 2025 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics for all dental assistants



“

Knowing your worth in this field and knowing the importance of your position matters. The right fit and the right team will change how you view your career in the long run.

— Mary S., CDA



Workplace

Workplace factors most important to dental assistants



Salary



Work/life balance



Feeling part of a team

About **1 in 5** dental assistants changed jobs within the last year. The top reasons were:



Feeling underappreciated



Difficult team dynamics



Better pay



Dental Assistant Raises

46% Received a raise within the last 12 months

64% Received a raise between 1-3%



Desired Pay

What should dental assistants be paid?

On average, a **\$4 increase** (about 15%) is what dental assistants say would be a fair wage.

MEDIAN PAY

\$28 DANB CDA

\$24 Not certified

DESIRED PAY

\$32 DANB CDA

\$28 Not certified

About the survey

DANB's 2026 Dental Assistants Salary and Satisfaction Survey was conducted in April 2026. The findings in this report are based on a 3% total response rate from survey invitations sent to over 50,000 dental assistants. Researchers consider this response rate sufficient to generalize the results to the dental assistant population. Salary figures are reported as median hourly wages, without including the dollar value of any employee benefits. DANB has conducted a salary survey every two years since 2004. The consistency of data over these years supports the conclusion that these results are representative of the population.