

Public Wants Dentists to Prove Practical Hand Skills Before Getting Licensed

New survey reveals strong public support for thorough dental licensing standards

ALEXANDRIA, VA (February 5, 2025) — A new national survey reveals most Americans oppose removing the hand skills test currently required by most states for dental professionals. The poll, commissioned by the American Association of Dental Boards (AADB), shows strong public support for maintaining the highest standards in dental licensing. A hand skills examination requirement is excluded from pending legislation that would change dental licensure requirements in some states.

Hand skills examinations require dentists and dental hygienists to demonstrate their ability to perform surgical procedures safely and effectively in a clinical setting in addition to a written test. This test ensures qualified dental professionals possess not only the clinical knowledge but also the practical hand skills capability to provide the highest level of dental care.

The survey of 1,863 registered U.S. voters, fielded from December 30, 2024, to January 9, 2025, found that **82% of Americans agree hand skills examinations are necessary to assess a dentist's ability to perform procedures safely**. The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.28 percentage points.

"Most people appear to want dentists to demonstrate their practical skills," said Peter Mitchell, Chief insight Officer of Marketing for Change Co, which has conducted polling around a number of oral health topics. "Two thirds of those we polled opposed efforts to exempt dentists from hand skills testing."

The survey shows strong public opposition to change and support for maintaining high standards in dental licensing:

- 83% agree that dental professionals should meet state-specific continuing education requirements
- 69% agree that current licensing standards should not be reduced
- 65% oppose allowing dentists licensed under weaker standards in other states to practice in their state

The American Association of Dental Boards (AADB) is following proposed changes to dental licensure requirements across the country. With membership consisting of boards of dentistry from many states, they have [proposed a licensure compact](#) aimed at increasing portability while maintaining the highest level of standards.

"This survey confirms patients want to know that their dentists and dental hygienists can actually perform procedures competently and safely," said Arthur Chen-Shu Jee, DMD, President of the Board of Directors of AADB. "The hand skills test provides that assurance. Removing this safeguard allows untested dentists to practice, risking patient care. As we consider changes to licensing, we must remember these vital exams directly impact patient safety and public trust in our profession."

About the American Association of Dental Boards (AADB)

Since its chartering by the U.S. Congress in 1896, the AADB has been the leading voice in protecting the dental public. It speaks on behalf of state dental boards from almost every state, and brings over a century of experience to public health. AADB's membership is comprised of boards of dentistry, advanced education boards, present and past members of those boards, board administrators, board attorneys, educators, practitioners, and other oral health stakeholders. Learn more at aadbdentalboards.org.

About Marketing for Change

Marketing for Change is a research and creative agency propelled by behavioral science with staff hubs in Denver, Orlando and Alexandria, VA just outside Washington, DC. M4C designs and implements campaigns and creates online platforms that change what people do, leveraging the power of social psychology, neuroscience and behavioral economics. M4C's research has shown foundations, state and federal agencies, insurers and large nonprofits what forces to leverage to create change in the arenas of public health, healthcare, sustainability and culture change. Learn more at marketingforchange.com.

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