



DENTAL BENEFITS: A BRIDGE TO ORAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

Dental benefits utilization, especially for preventive services, contributes to better oral health and overall wellness, and helps reduce future dental care costs.



INTRODUCTION

Healthy teeth are important to working Americans, and most enjoy good oral health, keeping their natural teeth throughout their lives. Yet, many adults have a limited understanding of oral health and its relationship to overall well-being.

Good oral health goes beyond simply a nice smile. For example, much has been published about the linkage between oral health, emotional health and overall wellness. Research shows that healthy teeth and gums are important to self-esteem and can help prevent certain health risks associated with gum disease and poor oral hygiene. Furthermore, regular dental exams can help with early detection of potentially serious medical conditions.

Our mouths can exhibit symptoms related to more than 120 non-dental diseases, including diabetes and heart disease. According to the Academy of General Dentistry, more than 90% of systemic diseases produce oral signs and symptoms.¹

Maintaining good oral health can be beneficial in:



MANAGING DIABETES: Periodontal infections contribute to problems with glycemic control, thus compromising the health of diabetic patients²



LOWERING RISK OF HEART DISEASE: Individuals with periodontal disease are **1.5 times** more likely to develop coronary heart disease²

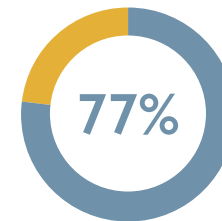


CONTRIBUTING TO A HEALTHY PREGNANCY: Toxins generated by a mother's periodontal bacteria may reach the general circulation and harm the fetus²

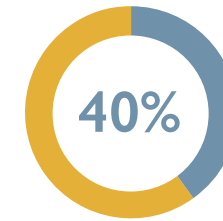
The regularity of preventive dental care, of course, is closely tied to better oral health. Individuals who consistently receive periodic dental cleanings and exams report better oral health. They also report better overall health and emotional wellness.

Cost is the most common barrier to obtaining regular dental care, but having quality dental coverage via the workplace can help mitigate the cost of dental services for workers and their families. And those with access to dental benefits through their employer are twice as likely to regularly visit the dentist.

PERCENT WHO VISIT THE DENTIST AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR



Have dental benefits at work



Have no dental coverage

Regular dental exams and preventive care not only contribute to better oral health and overall well-being, but can also help reduce the likelihood and cost of major services.³

GROUPS WITH RELATIVELY HIGH PREVENTIVE CARE UTILIZATION SPEND LESS ON DENTAL CLAIMS

-16%



EMPLOYER GROUPS WITH CONSISTENTLY HIGHER SPENDING ON PREVENTIVE CARE SPENT LESS FOR MAJOR SERVICES AND HAD 16% LOWER COMBINED DENTAL CLAIMS COSTS

¹ Importance of Oral Health to Overall Health,"Academy of General Dentistry, 2012

² colgateprofessional.com/patient-education/articles/why-a-healthy-mouth-is-good-for-your-body

³ Major services include fillings, crowns, root canals and oral surgery.

Unless otherwise noted, source for all statistics cited is The Guardian Workplace Benefits Study: Fifth Annual, 2017.

GOOD ORAL HEALTH IS IMPORTANT TO MOST WORKING AMERICANS...AND IT BEGINS AT THE DENTIST

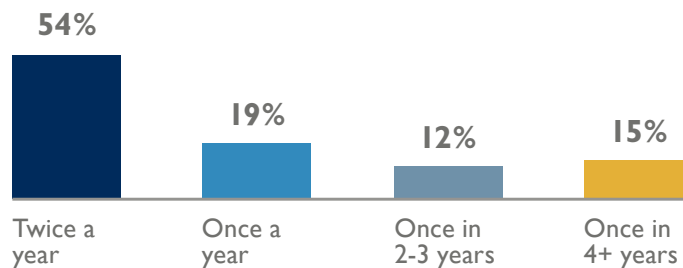
Two-thirds of U.S. adults consider oral health to be a high priority.¹ But for many, oral health simply means being pain-free or having a nice smile. Based on this narrow definition, it's not surprising that nearly 8 in 10 believe their oral health is "Good" or better, and more than 4 in 10 report "Excellent" or "Very Good" oral health.

PERCEIVED ORAL HEALTH OF WORKING AMERICANS SELF-REPORTED



Nearly 3 in 4 working adults report visiting the dentist at least once a year for cleanings and exams, while just over half go to the dentist twice a year for preventive care. Yet, more than 1 in 4 fail to go to the dentist even once a year, despite the fact that a majority have dental coverage that includes at least one annual preventive visit.

FREQUENCY OF DENTAL VISITS



NEARLY 50 MILLION WORKING ADULTS HAVE NOT BEEN TO THE DENTIST IN AT LEAST TWO YEARS

Adults earning at least \$150,000 annually in household income and Baby Boomers are among the most likely to visit a dentist twice a year. Also, women, those employed by larger companies and those who live in urban or suburban areas tend to more regularly visit the dentist.

Millennials are among the least likely to go to the dentist two times a year, although more than 75% of them have some form of dental coverage.

PERCENTAGE VISITING A DENTIST TWICE A YEAR DIFFERENCES BY WORKFORCE SUBGROUPS

Higher HH Income (\$150K+)	72%	Lower HH Income (\$25K-\$49K)	36%
Baby Boomers	66%	Millennials	40%
Women	59%	Men	49%
Work for Larger Firms (1,000+ employees)	58%	Work for Smaller Firms (<50 employees)	45%
Suburban/Urban	56%	Rural	39%

LOWER INCOME ADULTS IN RURAL AREAS RECEIVE LESS PREVENTIVE CARE AND ARE MORE LIKELY TO REPORT "FAIR/POOR" ORAL HEALTH




¹dentistryiq.com/articles/survey-shows-americans-value-oral-health-but-knowledge-gap-remains

ADULTS WHO VISIT THE DENTIST MORE OFTEN REPORT BETTER ORAL HEALTH AND OVERALL WELL-BEING

Our mouths are inherently linked to our physical and emotional wellness. For example, research suggests that cardiovascular disease and stroke may be linked to inflammation and infections caused by oral bacteria. And more than 20% of adults experience anxiety or avoid smiling due to the condition of their teeth, which can contribute to a negative self-image and lower self-confidence.¹

As might be expected, those who visit the dentist more regularly for preventive care, or at least annually, have a more positive self-perception of their oral health. And those who receive two cleanings/exams per year self-report the highest levels of oral health, as well as physical and emotional health.

WELL-BEING BY DENTAL VISIT FREQUENCY PERCENT REPORTING “EXCELLENT” OR “VERY GOOD”

	 Oral	 Physical	 Emotional
VISIT DENTIST TWICE A YEAR	58%	42%	52%
VISIT DENTIST LESS THAN TWICE A YEAR	20%	25%	35%

TWO DENTAL EXAMS PER YEAR ARE SIMPLY PART OF A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE FOR SOME ADULTS

Being proactive about one’s oral health and keeping up with regular dental visits may be reflective of certain personality types — e.g., those who are more health-conscious or risk-averse, in general.

One-third of working Americans get two dental cleanings and a physical exam each year. But an even smaller segment of adults (9%) also reports positive behaviors with regard to fitness and nutrition. Not only do they keep up with dental checkups and physical exams, but they also eat a healthier diet, get sufficient exercise and maintain an appropriate weight.

HEALTH BEHAVIORS BY DENTAL VISIT FREQUENCY PERCENT SELF-REPORTING “EXCELLENT/VERY GOOD”

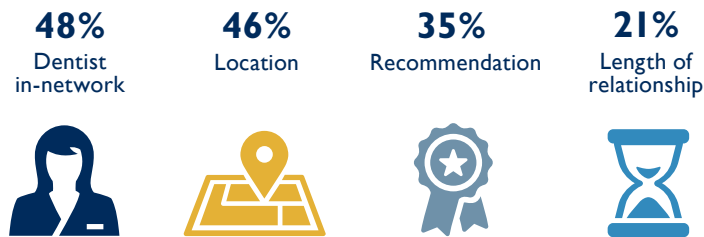
	TWICE A YEAR	LESS THAN ONCE A YEAR
REGULAR PHYSICAL EXAMS	55%	18%
EATING HEALTHY	31%	14%
GETTING ENOUGH EXERCISE	28%	19%
MAINTAINING A HEALTHY WEIGHT	30%	21%

¹dentistryiq.com/articles/survey-shows-americans-value-oral-health-but-knowledge-gap-remains

PATIENT LOYALTY TO DENTISTS IS STRONG AND LEADS TO MORE REGULAR CARE AND BETTER ORAL HEALTH

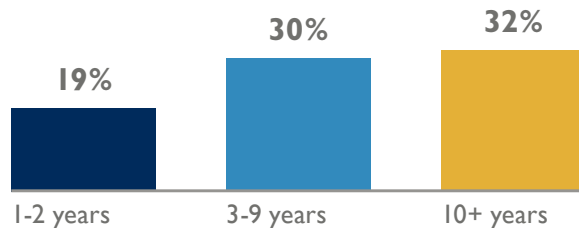
When it comes to selecting a dentist, it's not all about location, although proximity is a top criterion. Equally important for nearly half of working Americans is a cost consideration — whether the dentist participates in the managed care network available through their employer.

KEY FACTORS IN SELECTING A DENTIST



Over 60% of working Americans have been going to the same dentist for at least three years, and about nine years on average. Naturally, tenure with the same dentist increases with age (Baby Boomers average 12 years vs. Millennials at seven years).

YEARS WITH CURRENT DENTIST



ONE-THIRD OF ADULTS HAVE BEEN SEEING THE SAME DENTIST FOR AT LEAST 10 YEARS

Adults who have been receiving care from the same dentist for 10 years or more are the most likely to go for two exams per year (71%). They also are more likely to report their oral health as “Excellent” or “Very Good.”

The length of patient-dentist relationships corresponds with household income and tenure with the same employer. Workers with household income of at least \$75,000 and those with greater than 10 years at their current employer are among the most likely to have longstanding dentist relationships of 10 years or more.

FAMILIARITY BREEDS CONTENT AND MORE PREVENTIVE CARE

FREQUENCY OF VISITS AND SELF-REPORTED ORAL HEALTH

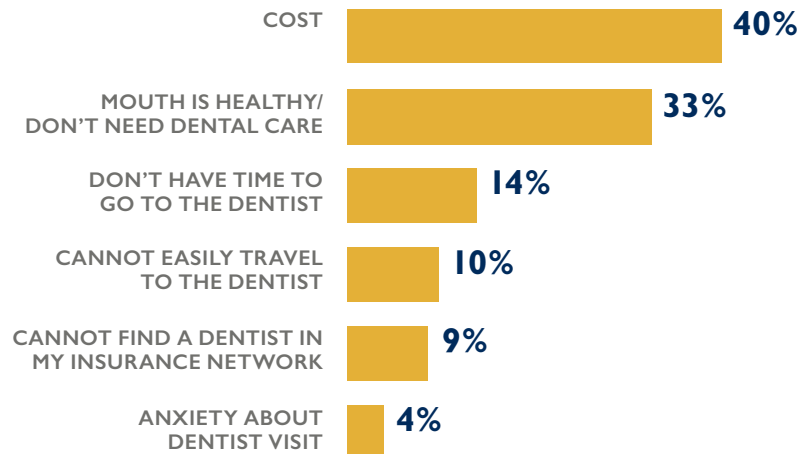
	LENGTH OF CURRENT DENTIST RELATIONSHIP		
	1-2 YEARS	3-9 YEARS	10+ YEARS
VISIT DENTIST TWICE A YEAR	54%	62%	71%
EXCELLENT/VERY GOOD ORAL HEALTH	38%	50%	58%

COST IS A BARRIER TO MORE FREQUENT DENTAL CARE

Almost half of adults (4 in 10) report the perceived high cost of dental services as the primary reason they choose not to see a dentist. Cost is the top reason for infrequent dental care across all age groups, however, the degree of concern about cost varies by household income. Over half (53%) of those with household income of less than \$50,000 mention cost as their main reason for infrequent dental visits.

A lack of perceived need for preventive care is another key deterrent for more regular visits. More than half of adults believe they don't need care or don't have time to visit the dentist.

REASONS FOR INFREQUENT DENTIST VISITS¹



DESPITE PATIENT LOYALTY, 4 IN 10 WOULD SWITCH DENTISTS FOR 20% LOWER OUT-OF-POCKET COSTS

Cost pressures can lead individuals to either seek lower cost services or avoid dental care altogether. About 1 in 5 adults would be willing to switch dentists to reduce their out-of-pocket costs by 10%. But willingness to switch dentists nearly doubles to 4 in 10 in exchange for a 20% reduction in out-of-pocket costs.

LIKELIHOOD TO CONSIDER SWITCHING DENTISTS FOR A REDUCTION IN OUT-OF-POCKET COSTS



Adults who visit the dentist less than once a year and have shorter tenure with their current dentist are the most receptive to switching dentists to lower their out-of-pocket dental costs. And they are much more likely to consider switching dentists to achieve any level of savings (i.e., 10%, 15% or 20% reduction).

LIKELIHOOD TO CONSIDER SWITCHING DENTISTS BY FREQUENCY OF DENTAL VISITS

REDUCTION IN COST	TWICE A YEAR	LESS THAN ONCE A YEAR	NET DIFFERENCE
10%	16%	31%	+15
15%	19%	40%	+21
20%	31%	59%	+28

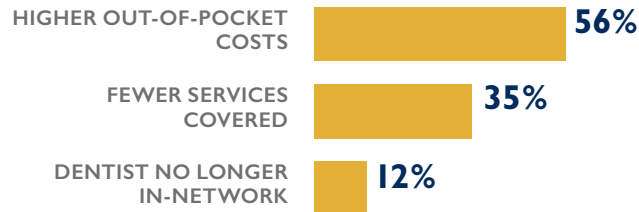
¹ ADA Health Policy Institute analysis of Harris Poll survey data collected April 2015

HIGHER OUT-OF-POCKET COSTS AND REDUCED BENEFITS HAVE LED TO CHANGES IN ADULT DENTAL CARE BEHAVIOR

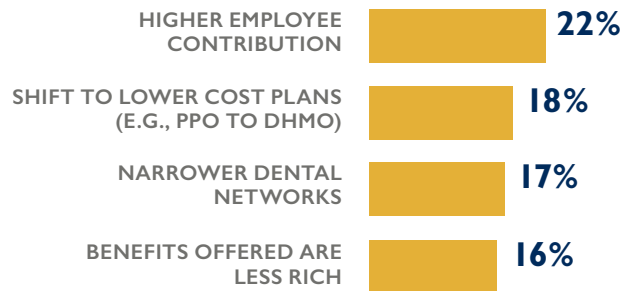
A quarter of working Americans (1 in 4) report that their dental benefits have changed in the past five years. Paying a greater share of the cost in the form of higher deductibles is the most common change, cited by more than 50%.

CHANGES TO DENTAL BENEFITS PLANS IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

AMONG WORKERS WITH CHANGES:



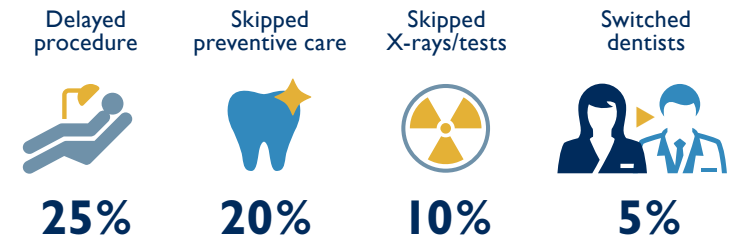
AMONG EMPLOYERS:



Workers who experience higher costs due to changes in their dental benefits are more likely to avoid using dental care services. Of those, more than 40% have delayed recommended procedures, skipped exams, X-rays and tests, or switched dentists in the past year as a result of higher out-of-pocket costs.

4 IN 10 ADULTS SKIP OR DELAY DENTAL CARE WHEN THEIR OUT-OF-POCKET COSTS RISE

CHANGES IN DENTAL CARE BEHAVIOR DUE TO CHANGES IN DENTAL BENEFITS



Among the 25% of adults reporting changes to their company's dental benefits, those most likely to alter their dental care behavior in response to higher out-of-pocket costs are workers in small firms, lower-income households and younger Millennials.

LIKELIHOOD OF CHANGING DENTAL CARE BEHAVIOR DIFFERENCES BY WORKFORCE SUBGROUPS

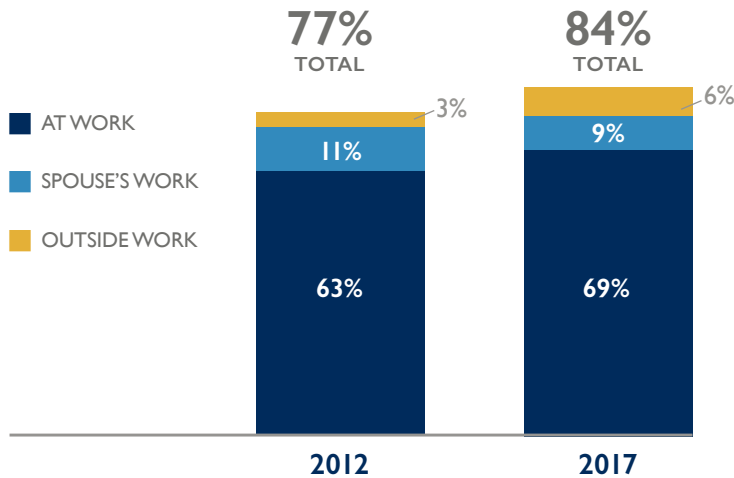
Work at smaller firm (5-24 employees)	57%	Work at larger firm (500+ employees)	32%
Lower HH income (less than \$75K+)	52%	Higher HH income (less than \$150K)	31%
Younger Millennials (age 22-29)	51%	Younger Gen X (age 38-45)	36%

ADULTS WITH DENTAL BENEFITS ARE MORE LIKELY TO RECEIVE PREVENTIVE CARE AND REPORT BETTER ORAL HEALTH

More than 8 in 10 working adults have some form of dental coverage, up from 77% in 2012. A majority of that coverage is provided through employer-sponsored dental plans, which increased to 69% from 63%. In addition, the percent of U.S. adults who purchased dental insurance outside the workplace (from a health care exchange or direct from an insurance company) doubled to 6% from 3% five years ago.

Young Millennials (age 22-29) are the most likely to have purchased dental coverage outside the workplace (13%) and least likely to have it available through their employer (57%).

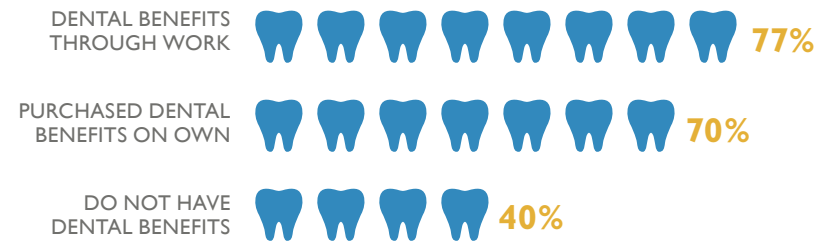
WORKING AMERICANS WITH DENTAL COVERAGE



WORKING AMERICANS WITH DENTAL BENEFITS ARE TWICE AS LIKELY TO RECEIVE PREVENTIVE CARE

Access to dental coverage encourages the use of preventive services. More than 7 in 10 working adults with dental coverage visit the dentist at least once a year compared to just 40% of those with no coverage.

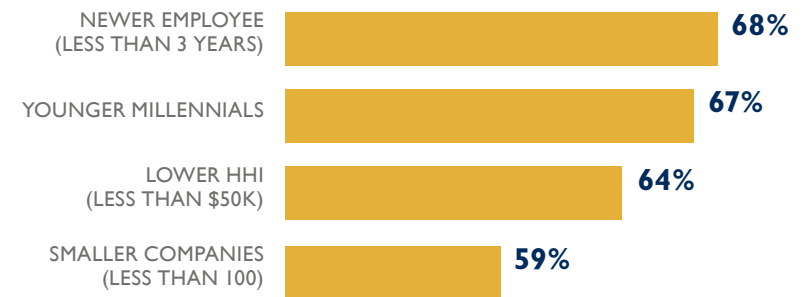
VISIT DENTIST AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR



Despite the wider availability of group dental benefits and individual dental insurance, certain segments of the workforce are less likely to have access to dental coverage, including: young Millennials, recent hires, lower-income households and those working for smaller firms.

WORKERS LEAST LIKELY TO HAVE DENTAL COVERAGE

PERCENTAGE WITH DENTAL BENEFITS



REGULAR PREVENTIVE CARE CONTRIBUTES TO BETTER ORAL HEALTH AND LOWER DENTAL CLAIM COSTS

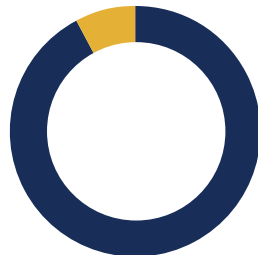
Working Americans who use their dental benefits for regular preventive care are more likely to self-report better oral health. They also should require less major services because they are receiving regular cleanings and exams. Therefore, their dental care costs over time should be lower compared to those not visiting a dentist once per year.

Guardian tested this hypothesis by analyzing dental claims data from 2011 to 2017. Employer groups were categorized based on the utilization of preventive and major services within their companies.

Preliminary findings indicate that groups with relatively high preventive utilization spent an average of \$12.55 per member per month (PMPM) over the six-year period, and \$.98 PMPM on major services in year seven. Employers with relatively low preventive utilization spent an average of \$9.04 PMPM on preventive services over six years and \$7.07 PMPM on major claims in year seven.

DENTAL CLAIMS COSTS: GROUPS WITH HIGH VS. LOW PREVENTIVE UTILIZATION¹

HIGH PREVENTIVE UTILIZATION GROUPS



Major claims, \$0.98
Preventive claims, \$12.55
TOTAL SPEND \$13.53

LOW PREVENTIVE UTILIZATION GROUPS



Major claims, \$7.07
Preventive claims, \$9.04
TOTAL SPEND \$16.11

EMPLOYER GROUPS WITH RELATIVELY HIGH PREVENTIVE UTILIZATION HAD LOWER TOTAL DENTAL CLAIMS COSTS

Groups spending more PMPM on preventive care (39%) spent less on major restorative claims (-86%) and experienced a savings of 16% on total preventive and major claims costs compared to groups with low preventive utilization.

DENTAL CLAIMS COSTS: EMPLOYERS WITH HIGH VS. LOW PREVENTIVE UTILIZATION¹

EMPLOYER GROUPS WITH HIGH PREVENTIVE UTILIZATION SPENT MORE ON PREVENTIVE CARE OVER SIX YEARS...



+39%

BUT THEY SPENT LESS ON MAJOR DENTAL SERVICES...



-86%

AND HAD LOWER COMBINED DENTAL CLAIM COSTS (PREVENTIVE PLUS MAJOR)



-16%

¹ Guardian Dental Claims Analysis: Preventive – Major Utilization Ratios, October 2017

STEPS TO INCREASE PLAN MEMBER USE OF PREVENTIVE SERVICES

Given the positive impact of preventive care on oral health and overall wellness, employers should seek ways to help drive greater utilization of regular cleanings and exams for employees and their families.



MEET INDUSTRY STANDARDS FOR PREVENTIVE CARE BENEFITS

- Cover preventive services at 100% (vs. 80% or 90%)
- Include a minimum of two cleanings per year
- Consider adding a third cleaning, especially if there is a high incidence of basic/major claims, or an older or high-risk population.



EXPAND YOUR PLAN'S DEFINITION OF PREVENTIVE SERVICES

- Exclude preventive services from being counted toward the plan's annual maximum
- Waive the deductible for preventive services, especially for in-network services



INCENTIVIZE USE OF IN-NETWORK PROVIDERS

- Identify dentists most utilized by employees to minimize disruption, manage costs and increase use of preventive services
- Build plan member confidence in the quality of care (in-network providers are required to be certified and credentialed)
- Enhance in-network benefits (e.g., an extra cleaning for those who need it and exclude preventive care from plan maximum)
- Streamline claim submission and payment process for the plan member (e.g., less paper work, no balance billing)



ENHANCE PLAN MEMBER COMMUNICATION

- Encourage use of risk assessment tools so that employees and their dentists can better understand their risk for dental disease
- Distribute periodic reminders that preventive care services are covered and indicate the level of benefits provided
- Explain the importance of preventive services in improving oral health and reducing out-of-pocket costs
- Educate employees about the relationship between oral health and overall wellness

APPENDIX

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The 5th Annual Workplace Benefits Study was fielded in the Spring of 2017 and consisted of two online surveys: one among benefits decision-makers (employers) and another among working Americans (employees), allowing us to explore benefits issues from both perspectives.

The study was conducted for Guardian by Zeldis Research, an independent market research firm located in Ewing, NJ.

EMPLOYER SURVEY OVERVIEW

Employer results are based on a national online survey of 2,000 employee benefits decision-makers. Respondents include business executives, business owners, human resources professionals and financial management professionals. The survey covers all industries and is nationally representative of U.S. businesses with at least five full-time employees.

Data shown in this report have been weighted to reflect the actual proportion of U.S. businesses by company size based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The margin of error at the 95% confidence level is +/- 2.3%.

EMPLOYEE SURVEY OVERVIEW

Employee results are based on a survey conducted among 1,700 employees age 22 or older, who work full-time for a company with at least five employees.

This year's study included a sample of 300 part-time permanent and contract, non-permanent workers. Results for part-time/contract workers are not included in the full-time employee data and are not reflected in the total 2017 results when comparing to prior years, unless otherwise noted.

The survey sample is nationally representative of U.S. workers at companies of at least five full-time employees. Data shown in this report have been collected in a way to reflect the actual proportion of U.S. workers by gender, region, race, ethnicity, education level, household income, age and employer size based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau. The margin of error is +/- 2.3% at the 95% confidence level.



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