

The Future of Dentistry: Why Businesses Should Offer Virtual Dental Care Benefits

A Whitepaper by Delta Dental of Washington

Executive Summary

The rapid evolution of digital health solutions is reshaping how employees access dental care. Virtual dentistry is an innovative, cost-effective way for businesses to offer dental benefits while increasing accessibility and convenience for employees. Delta Dental of Washington now offers virtual dentistry as part of our employer-sponsored benefits packages—helping employers enhance employee health, productivity, and retention.



Introduction

Meeting the Needs of a Changing Workforce

The post-pandemic healthcare landscape has been permanently altered by new technology and a new generation of workers re-entering office spaces. This shift has led to evolving demands for health benefits among the U.S. labor force. Businesses, both small and large, must adapt to these expectations to remain competitive in talent acquisition and retention.

To address these needs, Delta Dental of Washington now offers [Virtual Dental Care](#) through a partnership with [Dentistry.one](#), allowing employers to enhance their benefits packages with convenient, high-quality dental care options at no additional cost and with seamless integration to existing benefits packages.

What is Virtual Dental Care?

Virtual dental care encompasses a range of telehealth services that provide professional consultations, screenings, and referrals through digital platforms. This model complements traditional in-person care by making dental health more accessible, particularly for employees balancing work-life commitments or residing in remote areas.

Why Virtual Dental Care?

Accessing the right care at the right time can be challenging—and dental care is no exception. From scheduling constraints to transportation issues and anxiety about in-person visits, many patients face barriers that delay or prevent necessary treatment. Virtual dental care helps reduce these barriers and enhances the patient experience in several ways:



Lowering the barrier to entry: Virtual consultations offer a convenient, low-stakes way for new patients to begin care or for returning patients to reconnect with their provider—without the need for an initial office visit.



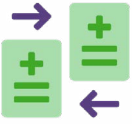
Improving care-seeking behavior: Patients are more likely to seek advice or consultations when they know it can be done from the comfort of home. The Pandemic made this very clear, with people seeking medical care online more than ever by 2020. But, since [insurance claims for telehealth remained above pre-pandemic levels by 2021](#), it goes to show that people not only like having the convenience of seeking medical advice from home, they expect it. This means fewer skipped questions, fewer delays in care, and earlier intervention.



Freeing up in-person capacity: By handling needs that don't require an in-person appointment—such as follow-ups, minor concerns, or screenings—virtual care helps providers keep their schedules open for patients who need in-office treatment.



Avoiding emergency visits: For many people, the emergency room is their only source of care – even for dental emergencies. Virtual dentistry can help preserve emergency resources by connecting people to dental care solutions outside the emergency room, before they even become emergencies.



Enhancing continuity of care: Integrated virtual platforms allow providers to share documents, offer post-visit guidance, and determine whether an in-person follow-up visit is necessary. This improves care coordination and allows patients to [move more quickly through the waiting room](#) and avoid unnecessary travel and time away from work or family.

The Changing Workforce Landscape & the Rise of Virtual Healthcare

The Rise of Telehealth

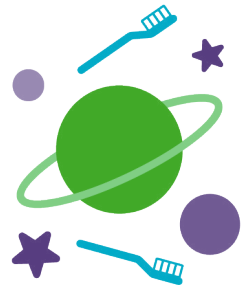
The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of telehealth, and while the initial spike has leveled off, virtual healthcare remains more widely used than before. [According to McKinsey](#), virtual health utilization has stabilized at 13%-17% across medical specialties.

Virtual healthcare is no longer just a solution for rural communities; [it is expected to become a standard mode of care for employees everywhere](#). With employees returning to in-office work, squeezing in healthcare appointments has become a challenge, making virtual care an increasingly valuable benefit. [A survey by KFF](#) found that 28% of businesses consider telemedicine a vital component of their benefits strategy.

How Dentistry is Following Suit

Virtual care is not just for the doctor's office, the pandemic also acted as a catalyst for the dental industry to improve its virtual offerings. Research supports that virtual dentistry enhances comprehensive patient care by supplementing in-person visits. [A CareQuest study](#) found that among 3,562 patients who had a virtual dentistry visit, 97% followed up with an in-person appointment, often leading to restorative care, diagnostic services, or oral surgery.

For employers, this means that offering virtual dental care can help employees maintain consistent oral health, leading to long-term cost savings and fewer work absences.



Over 243million work or school hours lost by adults in the U.S, annually due to oral health problems. If you stacked one toothbrush for every lost hour, you'd reach the International Space Station—over 100 times.



Up to 50% of health-related productivity issues could be attributed to oral health.

How Virtual Dental Care Enhances a Company's Benefits Package

Increased Access to Care

Virtual dental care eliminates barriers to treatment by providing convenient access to dental professionals, regardless of an employee's location. This is beneficial to employees no matter their work style, from remote to in-office, to rural workers and workers with demanding schedules. It also provides a comfortable alternative for employees who experience dental anxiety, allowing them to seek guidance and preliminary consultations without the stress of an in-office visit.

For businesses, offering virtual dentistry ensures that all employees—whether working in-office or remotely—have equal access to preventive and routine dental care, leading to better overall health outcomes.

How Different Employee Demographics Benefit:



Remote workers gain access to dental consultations without the need to travel or take time off work, ensuring consistent care regardless of location.



Busy professionals with demanding schedules can schedule virtual dental visits at their convenience, avoiding long wait times and reducing time away from work.



Rural employees receive access to high-quality dental care without the challenge of finding nearby providers, overcoming geographic barriers to treatment.



International Employees can get more culturally appropriate care in a lower-barrier introduction to the U.S. healthcare system that doesn't require potentially confusing or intimidating office visits.

Lower Costs for Employers and Employees

By addressing dental concerns before they escalate into major issues, virtual dentistry reduces the likelihood of expensive emergency visits and procedures.

According to the NIH, "Teledentistry ... has digitally supplemented existing healthcare personnel in emergency facilities. Timely virtual visits helped stop the progression of dental caries and reduce the number of emergency visits which was essential in reducing the burden on already-overloaded healthcare systems."

Early diagnosis through virtual consultations allows for timely intervention, minimizing costs associated with untreated dental problems. Additionally, virtual visits help eliminate unnecessary office appointments, saving employees both time and money by reducing travel expenses and time away from work.

Employers benefit from lower healthcare costs overall, as preventive care and early intervention lead to reduced claims for costly dental procedures.



up to 27% of work absenteeism could be attributed to oral health problems.



An estimated \$45 billion in economic losses per year due to lost productivity time. That's like shutting down the entire workforce of Washington State for nearly 2 months.

Improved Employee Productivity and Well-being

In the U.S., adults lose over 243 million work or school hours annually due to oral health problems. This lost productivity time translates to an estimated \$45 billion in economic losses per year, [according to the CareQuest Institute for Oral Health](#).

[In a study published by the NIH](#), it was estimated that up to 27% of work absenteeism could be attributed to oral health problems. But even when employees show up to work, they may not be at their best if they are battling tooth pain or other oral issues. That same study estimated that up to 50% of health-related productivity issues could be attributed to oral health.

Virtual dental care minimizes disruptions by providing employees with access to consultations and follow-up care without requiring extensive time off work.

Early intervention for dental issues helps prevent complications that could result in pain, infections, or the need for prolonged treatments, ensuring employees remain focused and engaged in their roles. When employees have access to convenient and proactive dental care, they are more likely to maintain their oral health, contributing to their overall well-being and job satisfaction.

Competitive Edge in Talent Acquisition & Retention

The modern workforce values flexibility, accessibility, and comprehensive health benefits. By incorporating virtual dental care into their benefits package, businesses can demonstrate a commitment to employee wellness and stand out in a competitive job market.

Companies that prioritize innovative benefits, like virtual dentistry, attract top talent and foster employee loyalty. This not only enhances recruitment efforts but also reduces turnover costs, as employees are more likely to stay with an employer that invests in their health and well-being.



97% of virtual-first patients followed up with an in-person appointment.

How Delta Dental of Washington Supports Businesses with Virtual Dentistry

- **Delta Dental of Washington makes it easy for businesses to embrace virtual dental care by integrating it directly into their existing dental benefit packages.** Through a new partnership with Dentistry.One, Washington's largest dental insurer now provides virtual dentistry as a seamless extension of its group plans. More than 4 million DDWA members can access a "virtual-first" dental platform that offers live video consultations with licensed dentists, AI-powered oral health screenings (SmileScan™), photo-based evaluations, and coordinated in-person follow-ups for emergencies – all as part of their regular coverage. For employers, this means they can offer cutting-edge oral healthcare without adding any extra cost or complexity. Virtual dental visits are simply covered under the same plan benefits, with no separate contracts or fees, so there's zero disruption to existing plan structures.
- **Implementing this virtual care benefit is fast and straightforward for companies.** Delta Dental handles the heavy lifting, allowing organizations to roll out virtual dentistry with minimal effort. The virtual experience is well-supported from start to finish, which helps employees (and by extension their employers) get the most from this benefit. Shortly after each virtual appointment, a **care advisor** (a dental hygiene expert from Dentistry.One's team) follows up to assist the patient. This support can help schedule any needed in-person visits or answer questions about coverage.
- **Such proactive engagement not only streamlines the patient experience but also improves health outcomes.** Dr. Derek Weigand, a dentist at Dentistry.One, explained, "Through our virtual consultations, we can identify potential oral health issues before they become serious, offer immediate triage, and coordinate in-person care when necessary. For populations like diabetic patients or expectant mothers, this proactive approach can be truly life-changing." ([Source: Inside Dentistry](#))



28% of businesses consider telemedicine a vital component of their benefits strategy.

Conclusion: The Future of Employee Dental Benefits

Virtual dentistry is here to stay. Companies that incorporate digital health solutions into their benefits will stay ahead in employee satisfaction and retention. Adopting Delta Dental of Washington's virtual dentistry program, businesses can deliver a modern, patient-centered benefit that works in the best interests of both the team and the employer – all with no added cost and virtually no implementation hurdles. Now, more than ever, with Delta Dental of Washington, businesses can offer cutting-edge dental care solutions at no additional cost.

Learn more about [Virtual Dental Care](#) and download our informational flyer today.