



In the EU/EEA since	2004
Population (2008)	2,270,894
GDP PPP per capita (2006)	€14,797
Currency	Latvian Lat (LVL)
	0.7 LVL = €1.00 (2008)
Main language	Latvian

Medical services thus provided are free for patients, through the Health Compulsory Insurance State Agency (HCISA). Oral healthcare for adults is funded through private practice. State funded healthcare is largely limited to the treatment of children and persons who are called up for military service.

Number of dentists:	1,457
Population to (active) dentist ratio:	1,655
Membership of Dental Chamber:	100%

There is a well developed use of specialists for advanced dental care, and the development of dental auxiliaries is also well developed and advanced.

Continuing education for dentists is mandatory

Date of last revision: 1st October 2008

Government and healthcare in Latvia

The Republic of Latvia, lies on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. With the Baltic Sea in the west, Latvia shares land borders with Estonia in the north, Russia and Belarus to the east and Lithuania to the south. Latvia comprises an area of 64,589 sq. km.

In 1991 Latvia regained its independence as a state. There was a brief period of independence between 1918 and 1940. The new Constitution of 1991 established the principles of the State, setting Latvia as a democratic parliamentary republic – with a unicameral 100 member Parliament (Saeima), President (elected by Parliament), Prime Minister and Council of Ministers. Parliamentary members have a 4-year term of office, elected on a general, direct and proportional basis. Latvia has four administrative regions – Kurzeme, Zemgale, Vidzeme and Latgale. There are 26 rural districts and 496 local municipalities and parishes. About 70% of the population resides in urban and 30% in rural areas.

The capital, Riga, is on the Northern shore, on the Gulf of Riga. About one third of the total population resides in Riga.

The Ministry of Health is responsible for health care by making a public procurement of medical services. The budget for healthcare is built on taxes and state investment. Parliament decides annually the amount of public funds to be spent on healthcare. The sums are divided among medical institutions by the Health Compulsory Insurance State Agency (HCISA), and its regional branches, which conclude contracts with them under the supervision of the Ministry of Health. Medical services thus provided are free for patients, while all the other medical services are receivable for a fee paid by an insurance company or the patient himself/ herself. Children under the age of 18 and those who are called up for military service, are exempt from charges.

	Year	Source
% GDP spent on health	5.9% 2007	LDA
% of this spent by governm't	68.6% 2007	LDA

Oral healthcare

In 1991, with independence, new knowledge and experience became available after 50 years of isolation, even in dentistry. Before independence, dental care in Latvia was provided free of charge to the whole population – state provision.

Subsequently, care for adults is privately financed and public finance through the Sickness Funds is for children up to the age of 18 (with the exception of orthodontic treatment). In 2007, the average cost per child was 19.98 LVL (€29) per year and covered approximately 56% of all children in Latvia. Orthodontic diagnostic and treatment planning is financed through the Sickness Funds, but treatment must be paid for by the patient (the child's parents).

Regional sickness insurance institutions, according to contracts, finance this service upon a mixed principle: Oral Health promotion and education according to the number of children (the capitation principle); Dental care, including professional dental hygiene is paid for according to the work done – the principle of "the estimation of manipulation", which is item of service fees.

Dental care is also state financed for adults who are victims of the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe (by government resolution ("Health care strategies in Latvia 1996"). The oral health care system for the Latvian population is administered under the Ministry of Health and Pauls Stradins' Clinical University Hospital (Pauls Stradins' CUH) Centre of Dentistry and Facial surgery (Centre of Dentistry), which plan, direct and monitor the oral health sector.

The Centre of Dentistry has set a common amount of services to be provided, which do not overlap with programmes provided for by insurance companies. The Centre of Dentistry has developed a common method of calculation of the full price for a service complying with the commonly approved medicinal technologies in dentistry. Taking into account available state financial resources and the limits of what the state can afford to pay, future necessary financial resources are calculated.

Direct patient payment forms a major part of the oral health care finance for the adult population. Private insurance is now more popular, but such policies are usually obtained by higher social classes. There is an agreement with the private insurance companies to follow criteria in accordance with recent technologies. This should assure high quality control in the insurance system in the future.

In 1994, in recognition of high caries levels, a National Preventive Programme in Dentistry was created in close cooperation with the Centre of Dentistry and WHO Collaborating Centre in Continuing Dental Education, in the Latvian Institute of Stomatology. During the period from 1994 to 1999, in cooperation with the Sickness Funds, local governments, school councils, dental and general medical staff, 22 local district Oral Health centres were established in Latvia. Assessment of effectiveness for preventive and curative work is based on regular accounting of oral health data in definite age groups, these are worked out "Evaluation criteria" and were introduced in 1998.

Prevention in Latvian dentistry is based on the principles of health promotion and education, developing whole population strategy.

Oral examinations would normally be undertaken every 12 months. It is not known what percentage of the population receive oral healthcare regularly (in a two-year period) but 56% of under-18s are known to visit a dentist at least once a year. As Latvia is a small but densely populated country, there is reported same problem with access to oral healthcare for patients.

	Year	Source
% GDP spent on oral health	0.24% 2007	LDA
% of OH expenditure private	70% 2007	LDA

Quality of Care

The competent authority which maintains dentists' registration and dental practice accreditation (every five years) is the State Agency of Health Statistics and Medical Technologies, in cooperation with Centre of Dentistry. Since 2001, this agency has been working in accordance with national regulations – with instructions regarding working space, units, and dental technologies, imposing minimum requirements standards for dental practice. A document of evidence based methods and technologies, was worked out in 2002 and was introduced from July 1st 2003, in all registered dental practices. This document is intended to motivate all dental staff to attend CPE courses.

The quality of work is evaluated by the HCQCI inspectors and experts of the dental associations. In the framework of evaluation, documentation and current clinical situation is analysed. Experts for the Professional Certification Commission are nominated by the associations.

Health data

	Year	Source
DMFT at age 12	3.20 2007	LDA
DMFT zero at age 12	23% 2007	LDA
Edentulous at age 65	No data	

"DMFT zero at age 12" refers to the number of 12 years old children with a zero DMFT. "Edentulous at age 65" refers to the numbers of over 64s with no natural teeth

Fluoridation

The level of fluoride in drinking water is low 0.2 – 0.5 mg/l. Fluoride-containing tablets dissemination programmes were functioning successfully in some regions of Latvia in during the fifteen years to 2008. However, currently only fluoride tablets are ordered for children at risk. There are different preventive programmes for children and teenagers, with the distribution of free fluoride toothpaste and toothbrushes.

Education, Training and Registration

Undergraduate Training

To enter dental school there are certain requirements:

- 1) the candidate must be a high school graduate,
- 2) gain a high school diploma with an examination grade in physics,
- 3) pass an entrance examination (with tests in chemistry, biology, and composition in Latvian),
- 4) there is competition among applicants.

Year of data:	2008
Number of schools	1
Student intake	35
Number of graduates	30
Percentage female	87%

There is one dental faculty, which is located in the Riga Stradiņš University and is publicly funded. The length of the undergraduate curriculum is 5 years. Since 1993 there was a new dental education programme for students and dental hygienists, which was worked out and introduced to comply with EU requirements.

Quality assurance for the dental school is provided by Faculty Council, chaired by the Dean (there is no external verification, although the school has been assessed within the EU's Dent-Ed Project).

Qualification and Vocational Training

Primary dental qualification

The primary degree which may be included in the register is: *zobārsts (dentist)*.

Vocational Training (VT)

Graduates can only register in Latvia when they have completed 24 months' salaried, supervised training, working full-time as a dentist under the supervision of an experienced dentist (part-time working takes longer). Following this the applicants must pass the test of professional certification. Trainees are known as "*Stagier*". Remuneration depends on the place of training, but it may not be less than the minimum wage set in the labour legislation.

Diplomas from other EU countries are recognised and EU/EEA qualified dentists do not have to undertake Vocational Training to register.

Registration

The register is administered by Pauls Stradiņš Clinical University Hospital Centre of Dentistry and Facial surgery. The Centre of Dentistry, by order of the Ministry of Health, is responsible and accomplishes (performs) the registration of dental personnel in the joint State Register of medical practitioners.

There is no fee for registration.

To register a dentist must have a recognised degree or diploma and have completed the 24 months supervised training (except graduate from other EU/EEA countries).

Language requirements

There is a formal requirement to have knowledge of Latvian at the highest level, in order to register. Non-Latvian dentists with an EU Diploma are recognised, but knowledge of the Latvian state language is also required. This is tested according to an opinion of the Municipal Language Commission.

In 1992 a mandatory requirement was introduced for all dentists and auxiliaries who had been registered in Latvia to have a new certification exam. During the period (1992 – 2003) 1,707 dentists (including 99 dental therapists) had passed this re-certification.

Further Postgraduate and Specialist Training

Continuing education

Since 2001 it has been a mandatory requirement for all registered dentists to complete a minimum of 250 hours of CPE every 5 years, whilst they practice. Auxiliary personnel have the same requirements only the number of credit hours may be different.

The Latvian Dental Association, working in collaboration with the Faculty and Institute of Stomatology at Riga Stradiņš University, the State Dental Centre, the Latvian Physicians' Society and the Latvian Dental Hygienists' Association, and representatives from industry organise professional education for all the dental team members. This cooperation promotes exchange of information in dental professional development, to improve technologies, dental care and dental education.

Specialist Training

Dentists have the right to apply for doctorate studies (by competition), which are completed by a successful defence of one's doctoral dissertation.

Training is provided within the Riga Stradiņš University's Faculty of Stomatology. In 2007 there were 15 dentists undertaking specialist training, 10 of whom were female. Trainee specialists are paid during training.

Education, Training and Registration

Dentists

Year of data:	2008
Total Registered	1,457
In active practice	1,372
Dentist to population ratio*	1,655
Percentage female	88%
Qualified overseas	63

* this refers to "active" dentists

There is no reported unemployment amongst dentists in Latvia.

Movement of dentists across borders

According to data from the Latvian Dental Association, since 1998 certificates for good practice have been issued to 2% of Latvian dentists. There is a small number of dentists not qualified in Latvia who practise there.

Specialists

In Latvia five other dental specialities are recognised, besides Oral Maxillo-facial Surgery.

Patients normally only attend specialists on referral from a primary practitioner.

Year of data:	2008
Orthodontists	73
Endodontists	31
Paedodontists	56
Periodontists	35
Prosthodontists	285
Oral Radiologists	
Oral Surgeons	75
OMFS	23

Auxiliaries

The system of use of dental auxiliaries is relatively well developed in Latvia and much oral health care is carried out by them.

Year of data:	2008
Hygienists	261
Technicians	923
Denturists	0
Assistants	1,722
Therapists	0
Other	0

Salaries are paid on the basis of contracts concluded with the employers. It is against the law to receive remuneration without a valid contract. There are no set amounts for limits set for private practice, subject only to the law on minimum wages.

Auxiliary personnel have similar requirements as dentists for continuing education - only the number of credit hours may be different.

Dental Hygienists

Training as a dental hygienist takes place at a special academical school at the Riga Stradiņš University. There is a competitive examination to gain entrance. Graduates of the school receive a diploma. The title is legally protected and there is a registerable qualification which dental hygienists must obtain before they can practice. Dental Hygienists are an integral part of the oral health care team. They work in the private sector and also in Public Health (Local 22 Oral Health Centres).

The register is held by the Centre of Dentistry.

Dental hygienists work in all services only under the prescribed instructions of a dentist.

Dental Therapists

Dental therapists in Latvia were trained until 1976 – they are providing basic oral health care for children. The procedures they can undertake include a full repertoire of preventive therapies, the restoration of primary (deciduous) and young permanent teeth with appropriate biomaterials, performance of pulpomies, placement of stainless steel crowns and extraction of primary (deciduous) teeth.

Dental therapists are permitted to work in the offices of dentists in the private sector – providing basic care for adults, but also under supervision of a dentist.

The register is held by the Centre of Dentistry.

Dental Technicians

Training as a dental technician takes place at Riga 1st Medical School under the supervision of Ministry of Education and Science. There is a competitive examination to gain entrance. On qualification they receive a diploma.

The title is legally protected and there is a registerable qualification which dental technicians must obtain before they can practice. A register is held by the Centre of Dentistry. Their duties are to prepare dental prosthetic and orthodontic appliances to the prescription of a dentist and they may not work independently.

Individual technicians are normally salaried and work in commercial laboratories which bill the dentist for work done.

Dental Chairside Assistants (Nurses)

Training as a dental assistant also takes place at Riga 1st Medical School, under the supervision of Ministry of Education and Science. There is a qualification and they may register with the Centre of Dentistry.

Practice in Latvia

A dental practice may be included in the structure in medical practices, hospitals and other institutions. Many dentists practice in more than one sphere of practice.

Year of data:	2008
General (private) practice	2,219
Public dental service	538
University	80
Hospital	
Armed Forces	16
General Practice as a proportion is	74%

Working in General Practice

Dentists practice in *individual dental practices* – by registering with the Latvian Doctors Society, as well as in *limited liability companies*, by registering with the State Enterprise Registry.

Dentists can choose to work in the state system, fully liberal private dentistry or both systems. The amount of work within the state system depends on the desires of the patient. If the treatment is carried out in the state system the dentist is paid fixed item of service fees.

During a first visit a patient receives a full diagnosis and explanation on further potentially necessary treatment modalities and expenses. If the patient agrees to all or chooses one of the variants recommended, a full treatment plan is signed by both parties during the same or the next visit.

All dentists, including those privately practising, have to obtain a professional's certificate. All equipment has to be tested to be in accordance with the compulsory requirements. Financial rules and the quality of work for all dentists, including privately practising dentists, are controlled by state institutions. The requirements are the same for all.

Offers of private insurance companies, along with state health insurance, are applicable to adults. The amount of accessible care depends on respective programmes. There is no insurance applicable only to dentistry.

Fee scales

The Centre of Dentistry sets the fees in the state system. Adult pay a pre-determined charge, which is 15% of the set treatment fee for the dentist, but persons in need of emergency care (especially when there is danger to life) are exempt from these charges.

There is no regulation of private fees, which are set by the dentist on the basis of demand. But in limited liability enterprises, or other organisations it is set by the employer, taking into account labour legislation on the minimum wage.

Joining or establishing a practice

There are no rules which limit the area of establishment or size of a dental practice, or the number of associated dentists or other staff working there. The state offers no assistance for establishing a new practice, and generally

dentists must take out commercial loans from a bank. When starting a new practice private dentists have to comply with regulations which provide for compulsory (minimum) rules on design, construction and equipment, including the number and size of rooms. The dentist is then responsible for attracting new patients to the practice.

Dentists may purchase an existing practice, together with its "list" of patients. General practices are usually sited in apartments and ex-government clinics.

Working in the Public Dental Service

State financed dentistry services in state owned facilities are provided for in two institutions – the Centre of Dentistry and Stradiņš University's Institute of Stomatology and are accessible to everybody. The service is mainly available to children, including children with pathologies, oral-maxillofacial surgery treatments and for any person who needs emergency health care. There are no treatment charges.

There is equipment for providing full domiciliary services in homes, so dentists offer pain relief at home and then undertake definitive treatment with the assistance of the regional social services in social or medical institutions.

There are regional oral health centres established and working. Their basic aims include extensive information, motivation in the mass media, school and kindergarten programme, including practical instructions for teeth cleaning. Also, they work out strategy for support and promotion of oral health in regions; organise preventive activities and analyse their effectiveness; and they analyse the fulfilment of municipally based programmes.

Working in Hospitals

There are 138 public or municipal hospitals and 2 private hospitals in Latvia. The Centre of Dentistry contains an oral-maxillofacial clinic, in which the professionals undertake consultations and medical help for all of the State and carry out the necessary treatment in the hospital. Regionally these specialists work in the two largest cities – Liepāja and Daugavpils.

Dental practice in hospitals also enhances accessibility for in-patients, but the amount of work and the payment rules are the same as for other dental practices.

Working in the University Dental Faculty

Dentists who work in the dental school are salaried employees of the university. They are allowed to combine their work in the faculty with part-time employment or private practice elsewhere.

The main academic title within the dental faculty is that of Professor. Other titles include Associate Professor, Assistant Professor (Docents) and Assistants (clinical instructors). There are no formal requirements for postgraduate training but senior teachers and professors will have completed a PhD, and most will also have received specialist clinical training.

Apart from these there are other regulations or restrictions for promotion. A Professor, as a salaried employee, would

be an elected person with a Doctoral degree and not less than 3 years' work experience in the position of Associate Professor. An Assoc. Professor, as a salaried employee could be an elected person with a Doctoral degree or a person with at least 10 years' practical work experience in the corresponding branch. A Professor and Assoc. Professor are elected by the Board of the Professors.

Assistants are elected by the Board of the Faculty. They can be elected persons with a Doctoral degree or a Masters degree, with 6 years' experience. Assistants without a

postgraduate degree can be elected twice in the time following their primary degree.

The quality of clinical care, teaching and research in dental faculties is assured through dentists working in teams under the direction of experienced teaching and academic staff. The complaints procedures are the same as those for dentists working in other settings.

Working in the Armed Forces

A handful of dentists work full time for the Armed Forces - half are female.

Professional Matters

Professional association and bodies

There is a single main national association, the *Latvian Dental Association*.

	Number	Year	Source
Latvian Dental Association	1,860	2008	FDI

The organisation is representative of dentists (only) and has an elected board and President. There is a central office with part-time staff.

The Dental Association, as well as other professional associations (for oral-maxillofacial surgeons, dental nurses, dental hygienists and dental technicians) undertakes the duties of:

- control and improvement of qualification of specialists,
- setting of professional criteria and certification,
- approval of the classification of criteria for service manipulations.

The Centre of Dentistry, which is appointed by the state, has the duties of:

- enforcement of dental care strategy,
- registration of medical persons,
- drafting of various legal acts and norms in dentistry,
- setting of medicinal technologies, criteria of manipulations and economical prognosis for a more efficient distribution of resources allocated for dental care,
- setting of the amount of public procurement.

The Minister of Health appoints the director of the Centre and the Latvian Dental Association has no role within it.

Ethics and Regulation

Ethical Code

The relationship between patients and dentists is based on a business relationship in the circumstances of competition. Although the dentist is liable for the method of treatment used and the result, the most important factor is the mutual trust between the patient and the dentist.

In accordance with legislation, a dentist has the right to refuse to treat a particular patient, except in cases where the patient's life is in danger.

Fitness to Practise/Disciplinary Matters

In cases of complaints, tests are performed by Health Care Quality Control Inspection (HCQCI) through the involvement of experts from the professional associations. Tests are conducted mainly in cases of complaints, which most of the time are connected with the collection of financial compensation. There is a certain procedure for protection of the rights of patients.

A person can turn to the HCQCI as an independent state institution, with claims according to the procedure for the review of claims. According to the procedure, documents are reviewed by both parties, involving patients' representatives and experts from the professional associations, who evaluate the factual situation. The claims are analysed on the basis of medical indications. In cases where the claim is unsound, the HCQCI provides a detailed explanation of the situation at hand and provides a justification for its decision. In cases when claim is sound, the HCQCI issues a conclusion on the violation, providing for a chance of settlement and elimination of faults. Claims are submitted to a court if no solution has been reached, or a court judgment is needed for financial compensation for the aggrieved party.

The professional organisation may assign the dentist to extra after-diploma training or, in special cases, may decide on revoking the professional's certificate. Dentists have the right to appeal to the Latvian Doctors' Society's Certification Commission.

Data Protection

There are both Personal Data Protection and Medical Treatment Laws. Latvia has adopted the EU Directives.

Advertising

Advertising is permitted, but comparison of skills against other dentists is not allowed. Dentists are permitted to use the post, press or telephone directories, without obtaining prior approval.

Dentists are allowed to promote their practices through websites but they are required to respect the usual rules of "legal, decent, honest and fair". The CED Code has not been adopted.

Insurance and professional indemnity

The law provides for compulsory civil liability insurance for practising dentists. Private commercial insurance companies provide this insurance, and guarantees compensation for an aggrieved patient.

This insurance does not cover dentists for working overseas.

Corporate Dentistry

Dentists in Latvia are permitted to incorporate their practices into limited liability companies. Non-dentists can fully or part- own these companies.

Tooth whitening

Tooth whitening is regulated under the Medical Devices legislation, so is undertaken by dentists. It is also performed by the dental hygienists, under the supervision of dentists and in accordance with their assignment.

Health and Safety at Work

Requirements are set by Ministry of Health. Dentists and their assistants must be vaccinated against Hepatitis B. Compliance with the requirements is controlled by the State Sanitary Inspections. There is compulsory use of means of protection at work such as facial masks, protective glasses and gloves, which are provided for by the state under regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers.

Ionising Radiation

Dentists' operations with radiation equipment are licensed. The licence must be renewed every three years. There is a State Register of radiation equipment, furthermore postgraduate training of competent dentists in the field of radiation protection is held annually. Operations with the radiation equipment are determined by the Law on Radiation Protection and are realised and controlled by the Radiation Protection Centre.

Hazardous waste

Operations with hazardous waste are determined by the Law of Hazardous Waste. The necessity (need) and installation of the amalgam separator are determined by the Regulations issued by the Cabinet regarding the adequacy of medical institutions. Dental practices must have an agreement with companies stating that they are authorized to collect these wastes.

Regulations for Health and Safety

<i>For</i>	<i>Administered by</i>
Ionising radiation	The State Radiation Security Center
Electrical installations	The head of the practice
Infection control	State Environmental Health Centre
Medical devices	Health Statistics and Medicinal Technologies Agency
Waste disposal	State Environmental Health Centre

Financial Matters

Retirement pensions and Healthcare

The age for retirement is set at 62 year for women and for men. The system of pensions in the country is the same for everybody and those working in the sphere of dentistry are no exception. There is no special age limit in dentistry. The amount of pension depends on social taxes paid and social funds accrued.

Taxes

Medical services have a tax exemption. Income tax is set at 24% from any and all types of income.

VAT/sales tax

VAT of 5 % is applied for all medical equipment, instruments and materials included.

Various Financial Comparators

Zurich = 100	Riga 2003	Riga 2008
Prices (excluding rent)	54.2	59.8
Prices (including rent)	49.9	56.1
Wage levels (net)	16.2	15.0
Domestic Purchasing Power	32.5	26.7

Source: UBS August 2003 and January 2008

Other Useful Information

<i>Main national association and Information Centre:</i>	<i>Competent Authority:</i>
Latvian Dental Association 20 Dzirciema Str LV-1007 Riga LATVIA Tel: +371 67455058 Fax: +371 67459948 Email: gzigurs@acad.latnet.lv Website: www.lza-zobi.lv	Center of dentistry and facial surgery of Pauls Stradinš clinical university hospital LV-1007 Riga LATVIA Tel: +371 67455584 Fax: +371 67459948 E-mail: vzc@latnet.lv Website: www.vzc.lv
<i>Major Specialist Association:</i>	<i>Main Professional Journal:</i>
Latvian Medical Association Tel: +371 6722 0661 Fax: +371 6722 0657 E-mail: lab@arstubiedriba.lv Website: www.arstubiedriba.lv/	Journal "Zobārstniecības raksti" Tel/Fax: +371 6745 5058 E-mail: gzigurs@acad.latnet.lv

Dental Schools:

<i>For dentists:</i>	<i>For hygienists:</i>
Ingrida Cema Riga Stradinš University Faculty of Stomatology 20 Dzirciema Street Riga LV - 1007 LATVIA Tel: + 371 67409136 Fax: + 371 6781 5323 E-mail: iicema@latnet.lv Website: www.rsu.lv www.st-inst.lv	Riga Stradinš University Academical School of Dental Hygienists LV-1007 Riga LATVIA Tel: +371 29227044 Fax: +371 6781 5323 E-mail: esenakola@latnet.lv Website: www.st-inst.lv
	<i>For technicians and assistants:</i>
	Riga 1 st medical college Tel: +371 6737 1147 E-mail: medskola@dtc.lv Website: www.rmkl.lv