

# Get to Know the Numbers Behind Your Dental Carrier's Network



Understanding **how** your dental carrier measures the size of its network – and knowing **how often** the carrier evaluates its numbers ensures you receive an accurate picture of the access provided to enrollees.

## Delta Dental of Illinois Leads the Industry

According to a recent independent study,<sup>1</sup> the Delta Dental PPO<sup>SM</sup> plan delivers the industry's best effective discount – averaging **21.1 percent** nationally – resulting in **more than \$3.9 billion in annual savings<sup>2</sup>** compared to dentists' average charges.

The size of our network plays a pivotal role in helping us deliver this industry-leading discount. In fact, Delta Dental of Illinois continues to offer access to the **largest network nationwide** with nearly 145,000 unique dentists.<sup>3</sup>

Carrier	Unique Participating Providers
Delta Dental Premier® / Delta Dental PPO <sup>SM</sup>	144,965 / 91,586
CIGNA Radius	103,105
MetLife PDP Plus	101,070
Guardian	90,787
Dental Network of America (DNoA)	89,235
March 2014 Independent NetMinder Data	

How we arrive at that number is as relevant as the number itself. ➡

<sup>1</sup> Ruark Consulting LLC's 2013 Dental PPO Network Study.

<sup>2</sup> Network savings based on group commercial and public sector claims. Does not include public entitlement, individual, HMO or orthodontic claims.

<sup>3</sup> March 2014 Independent NetMinder Data; based on Delta Dental Premier® network.

## Methods of Counting Dentists Differ

For example, if a single dentist splits his or her hours at two different practice locations, some carriers would count that dentist twice. Unless that dentist can be in two places at once, that's not a fair representation of access. Another common practice among larger dental chains is to count every dentist in every clinic of the chain, regardless of whether or not each dentist practices at every location.

These methods may help some dental carriers boost their network numbers, but they do nothing to deliver better access to their enrollees. When it comes to demonstrating network size, **Delta Dental of Illinois will always report unique individual dentists** along with other relevant comparable information that helps you make the most informed decision.



The **number of individual dentists** (also known as unique participating providers) in a network is a strong measure of access – and the best indicator of each enrollee's ability to find in-network care where and when he or she needs it.

## Count On Our Network Numbers

To ensure the integrity of our network numbers, Delta Dental of Illinois regularly validates and updates our figures. Our close relationships with our network dentists allow us to periodically check which ones are active, practicing professionals with current licenses. When dentists retire, reduce their workloads to fewer office locations or otherwise change their network status, we adjust our network numbers accordingly.



At Delta Dental of Illinois, we don't lease our networks. Our local provider relations staff **foster relationships directly with dentists**.

We also **rely on a trusted third-party resource** to compile participating provider data and analyze it objectively – scrubbing any duplicate entries within our network and other dental benefits carriers' networks.

All of these steps help **ensure the validity and credibility** of our network numbers – allowing us to give groups and enrollees a fair and accurate assessment of the access to dental care our network provides.

## Take a Second Look at Your Carrier's Counting Method

"How do you calculate the size of your network?" "How frequently are your network numbers updated?" The answers to these questions may determine the ultimate satisfaction you can expect for your enrollees, because these answers suggest how often enrollees will actually be able to seek services from their preferred dentists.

**If you're covered by Delta Dental of Illinois, you already know the answers. If you're with another dental carrier, it might be time to ask a few questions.**