

State/territory comparisons

Currently in Australia, state and territory health departments are responsible for the planning and delivery of public health services including public hospitals, public health and the regulation of health workers in both public and private sectors. As noted by the 2002 Senate Community Affairs Committee Report on the Inquiry into Nursing, current strategies of workforce planning are based on 'ad hoc' responses by States and Territories, often without reference to other jurisdictions. As there is no national level of nurse workforce planning, one of the recommendations made by the Senate inquiry included the development of a national nursing workforce strategy (SCAC 2002).

To develop a national strategy it is important to have an understanding of how the characteristics of nurses vary across jurisdictions. This section presents the characteristics of employed registered and enrolled nurses across jurisdictions. These include the total number of nurses in each jurisdiction, age and sex distribution and total hours worked (for further state/territory analyses see the chapters 'Patterns of Employment' and 'Supply of Nurses').

In 1999 there were 224,595 employed nurses in Australia, an increase of 3.6% from 1993. Jurisdictions reporting an overall increase were New South Wales (6.9%), Queensland (3.6%), Western Australia (11.5%) and the Australian Capital Territory (11.9%). Tasmania had the greatest percentage decrease in the number of nurses (11.9%) between 1993 and 1999 (Table 5).

The national increase was due to an increase in the number of registered nurses. Nationally, there was a 9.1% increase in the number of registered nurses between 1993 and 1999. South Australia and Tasmania were the only states where there was a decrease in the number of registered nurses. Data for the Northern Territory is not considered reliable, partly because of the transient nature of the nursing labour force in this jurisdiction, especially during peak tourist seasons. No clear explanation could be found for the apparent large increase in the number of registered nurses in the Northern Territory (50.4%).

Table 5: Employed registered and enrolled nurses, states and territories, 1993 and 1999

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT ^(a)	Australia
1993									
Registered nurses	53,599	41,222	28,393	15,411	16,245	5,172	2,614	1,596	164,252
Enrolled nurses	12,150	19,848	7,864	5,011	5,732	1,038	552	249	52,444
<i>Total</i>	<i>65,749</i>	<i>61,070</i>	<i>36,257</i>	<i>20,422</i>	<i>21,977</i>	<i>6,210</i>	<i>3,166</i>	<i>1,845</i>	<i>216,696</i>
Nurses per 100,000 ^(b)	1,096	1,368	1,164	1,218	1,502	1,317	1,059	1,090	1,227
1999									
Registered nurses	57,749	46,295	31,195	18,034	15,983	4,664	2,856	2,401	179,178
Enrolled nurses	12,506	15,154	6,379	4,733	4,776	810	688	372	45,418
<i>Total</i>	<i>70,255</i>	<i>61,449</i>	<i>37,574</i>	<i>22,767</i>	<i>20,759</i>	<i>5,474</i>	<i>3,543</i>	<i>2,773</i>	<i>224,595</i>
Nurses per 100,000 ^(b)	1,093	1,297	1,062	1,217	1,389	1,163	1,143	1,429	1,179
Percentage change between 1993 and 1999									
Registered nurses	7.7	12.3	9.9	17.0	-1.6	-9.8	9.2	50.4	9.1
Enrolled nurses	2.9	-23.6	-18.9	-5.5	-16.7	-22.0	24.6	n.p.	-13.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>6.9</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>3.6</i>	<i>11.5</i>	<i>-5.5</i>	<i>-11.9</i>	<i>11.9</i>	<i>n.p.</i>	<i>3.6</i>

(a) Estimates for enrolled and total nurses in the Northern Territory in 1999 are considered less reliable than those of the other jurisdictions (see explanatory notes). Consequently, the percentage change between 1993 and 1999 has not been published.

(b) Represents a headcount per 100,000 population. For full-time equivalent nurses, see Table 22.

Source: AIHW.

Age

The age profile of nurses varied across jurisdictions. Overall, they tended to be older in the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania and Western Australia than in the other states/territories. The proportion of nurses aged between 25 and 34 years was lowest in the Australian Capital Territory (14.6%) and Tasmania (16.5%), and highest in the Northern Territory (29.9%) and Queensland (24.0%). Conversely, the proportion of nurses aged between 45 and 54 years of age was highest in the Australian Capital Territory (34.7%) and Tasmania (31.9%), with the Northern Territory having the lowest (22.4%) (Table 6).

The average age of employed nurses in 1999 was 41.6 years, ranging from 41.2 in Victoria to 43.9 in the Australian Capital Territory. For registered nurses, the average across Australia was 41.4 years, ranging from 40.9 in Victoria to 44.0 in the Australian Capital Territory. The average age for enrolled nurses was lower than that of registered nurses, with an overall average age of 41.3 years, ranging from 39.3 in New South Wales to 43.6 in both Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory (Tables 6, C.7, C.8).

Table 6: Age distribution of all employed nurses, states and territories, 1999

Age (years)	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
	(Per cent)								
< 25	5.3	3.8	4.5	2.9	4.3	2.4	1.1	3.3	4.3
25–34	23.6	23.6	24.0	20.4	21.8	16.5	14.6	29.9	22.9
35–44	35.9	34.7	33.7	35.3	38.8	39.0	36.7	37.9	35.5
45–54	25.6	28.2	26.7	29.3	27.3	31.9	34.7	22.4	27.3
55+	9.6	9.7	11.1	12.0	7.9	10.2	12.9	6.5	10.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Average age</i>	<i>41.7</i>	<i>41.2</i>	<i>41.3</i>	<i>42.3</i>	<i>41.4</i>	<i>42.6</i>	<i>43.9</i>	<i>41.3</i>	<i>41.6</i>

Source: AIHW.

The nurse labour force is ageing in all jurisdictions except the Northern Territory. Figure 8 shows that the proportion of nurses in the 45–54 year age group increased between 1993 and 1999 across all jurisdictions except the Northern Territory. There was also a noticeable decrease in the proportion of younger nurses (less than 35 years of age) across all jurisdictions except the Northern Territory, where there was a noticeable increase.

Sex

In 1999, 7.9% of all employed nurses were male, ranging from 4.6% in the Australian Capital Territory to 9.0% in New South Wales. The proportion was higher for registered nurses (8.2%), with the Australian Capital Territory having the lowest proportion (4.6%) and both South Australia and the Northern Territory having the highest (9.9%). For enrolled nurses, the proportion who were male was lower (6.8%), ranging from 4.0% in Western Australia to 8.3% in New South Wales (Table 7).

Table 7: Proportion of male nurses, states and territories, 1999

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Enrolled nurses	8.3	6.3	8.2	4.0	5.4	7.5	4.5	7.4	6.8
Registered nurses	9.2	7.0	8.5	6.9	9.9	7.3	4.6	9.9	8.2
All nurses	9.0	6.8	8.5	6.3	8.9	7.4	4.6	9.5	7.9

Source: AIHW.

