

1 Overview

Registrations and enrolments

- There were 267,535 registrations and enrolments of nurses in Australia in 1995. Excluding multiple registrations and enrolments, 231,163 nurses (89.2%) were in the nursing labour force and 27,996 (10.8%) not in the nursing labour force.
- Nurse registrations and enrolments fell by 5.6% from 281,452 in 1993 to 265,753 in 1997. The 20.1% decrease of 13,864 in nurse enrolments was much greater than the 0.9% fall of 1,838 in nurse registrations.

Employed nurses

- There were 223,260 employed nurses in 1995, including 2,594 nurses on leave for three months or more.
- Excluding the nurses on extended leave, there were 171,774 registered nurses (64.2%) and 48,892 enrolled nurses (35.8%).
- 88.7% of employed nurses worked in their main job as clinicians, 4.5% as administrators, 2.1% as teachers or educators, 0.4% as researchers and the remaining 4.2% in other nursing occupations.

Nurses not employed in nursing and looking for work in nursing

- 7,902 persons eligible to practise nursing were not employed in nursing and were looking for work in nursing. This represented 3.4% of the nursing labour force.
- 2,447 of these nurses were employed in non-nursing jobs and 5,456 were unemployed.

Nurses not in the labour force

- There were 3,675 Australian registered and enrolled nurses working overseas in 1995.
- In addition to Australian nurses working overseas, there were 24,321 registered and enrolled nurses in Australia in 1995 who were not working in nursing and who were not looking for work in nursing. These included 10,501 employed in an occupation other than nursing and 13,820 who were not employed.

Geographic distribution

- The geographic distribution of employed nurses in 1995 was similar to that of the population – 61.6% worked in a capital city in their main job, 7.6% in other metropolitan centres, 28.1% in rural areas, and the remaining 2.7% in remote areas.
- A higher proportion of enrolled nurses (41.9%) worked in rural and remote areas in their main job than did registered nurses (27.6%).

Employment in the public sector

- Just over two thirds of nurses were employed in the public sector in 1995 – 69.3% of registered nurses and 67.1% of enrolled nurses.

- There were 103,933 nurses employed in public hospitals, representing 47.0% of the total nurse workforce.

Nurse productivity improvement

- There were 77,600 full-time-equivalent nurses in public and repatriation hospitals (other than psychiatric hospitals) in 1985–86, and the inpatient workload was 2.5 million inpatient separations during that year. In 1995–96, there were one per cent fewer nurses, 76,800, and these had an inpatient workload of 3.6 million inpatient separations. Thus, during the 10-year period, average inpatient separations per full-time-equivalent nurse per year increased by 48.7%; at the same time, average occupied bed days per full-time-equivalent nurse declined by 6.5% from 217.6 to 203.5. Reasons for the improvement in productivity included a 37% reduction in average patient stay; an older, more experienced and more highly trained nurse workforce; and, to a small extent, devolution of some functions to nurse assistants and personal care assistants.

Trends in nursing employment

- Nurse registrations declined by 0.9% between 1993 and 1997 and nurse enrolments fell by 20.1%. However numbers of full-time-equivalent employed nurses per 100,000 population nationally were unchanged from 1993 to 1995.
- Enrolled nurses declined from 24.0% of employed nurses in 1989 to 15.6% to 1997. The main falls in enrolled nurse employment from 1993 to 1995 occurred in private hospitals and public and private nursing homes.
- 41.0% of registered nurses worked part-time in 1997, up from 37.8% in 1989, but below a peak of 42.9% in 1995. Similarly, for enrolled nurses, part-time employment declined from 53.6% in 1994 to 51.9% in 1997.
- Public sector nurse employment fell from 70.7% in 1993 to 69.3% in 1995, mainly reflecting changes in nurse employment arising from a 2,197 reduction in public nursing beds and a 3,252 increase in private nursing home beds between 1992 and 1996.
- Nurse employment appears to have increased by 28.7% between 1993 and 1995 in community health centres, and by 40.9% in private medical rooms.

Nurse migration

- 1,166 foreign citizen nurses permanently migrated to Australia in 1995–96, and a further 250 arrived on temporary visas to take up employment contracts. In the same year, 819 overseas-trained nurses were assessed by the Australian Nursing Council as eligible to practise in Australia.
- 633 Australian nurses permanently migrated from Australia in 1995–96 and a further 1,281 Australian nurses left Australia to undertake temporary employment in other countries. The most popular destinations were the Middle East and the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Nurse education

- The number of Australian permanent resident students commencing basic nursing training at Australian universities decreased from a high of 9,347 in 1991 to 7,552 in 1997. The numbers of students completing basic nurse training declined from a peak of 6,626 in 1993 to 5,841 in 1996.