



Medical labour force 2008

Highlights

This bulletin presents a summary of information on the medical practitioner labour force, based on estimates derived from the 2008 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Medical Labour Force Survey. This survey collects information on the demographic and employment characteristics of medical practitioners who were registered at the time of the survey. It is conducted annually by state and territory health authorities, with the questionnaire administered by the medical registration boards (or councils) in each jurisdiction, usually in conjunction with the registration renewal process. The main findings of the report are as follows:

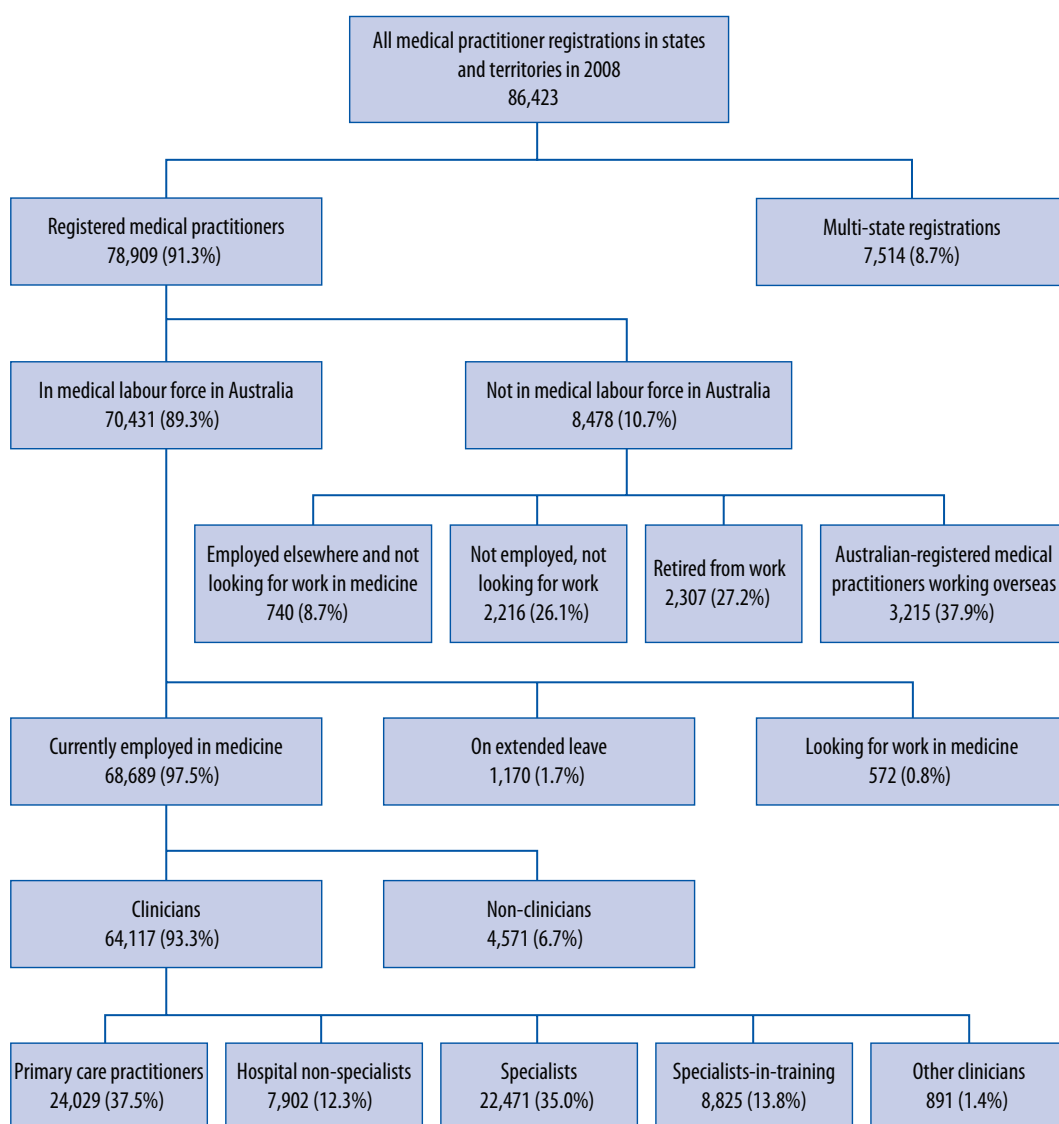
- ✦ In 2008, there were 78,909 registered medical practitioners. The number of practitioners increased by 20.5% between 2004 and 2008.
- ✦ The number of medical practitioners in the labour force (i.e. employed in or looking for work in medicine in Australia) increased by 19.4% between 2004 and 2008, from 59,004 to 70,431.
- ✦ Between 2004 and 2008, the number of medical practitioners actually employed in medicine increased by 18.0%, from 58,211 to 68,689.
- ✦ The average weekly hours worked by employed medical practitioners decreased from 44.0 hours in 2004 to 42.7 hours in 2008.
- ✦ Despite a 2.9% decrease in average hours worked from 2004 to 2008, the overall supply of employed medical practitioners increased from 318 to 341 full-time equivalents (FTE) per 100,000 population (based on a 40-hour working week), due to an increase of 18.0% in employed medical practitioner numbers.

(highlights continued overleaf)

Contents

Highlights.....	1
Demographic characteristics.....	3
Work characteristics.....	3
Regional distribution.....	5
Indigenous participation in the medical workforce.....	6
Data sources.....	7
Further information.....	7

- Regionally, medical practitioner supply ranged from 376 FTE per 100,000 population in *Major cities* to 187 FTE per 100,000 population in *Outer regional* areas.
- The average age of employed medical practitioners in 2008 was 45.6 years, which was comparable with 2004, at 45.5 years.
- Females continued to increase their share of the medical practitioner workforce, making up 35.0% of employed practitioners in 2008 (up from 32.4% in 2004). Among clinicians, in 2008, the female share varied between types of clinical practice, accounting for 49.3% of hospital non-specialists, compared with 23.6% of specialists.



Source: AIHW Medical Labour Force Survey 2008.

Figure 1: Registered medical practitioners by labour force status, 2008

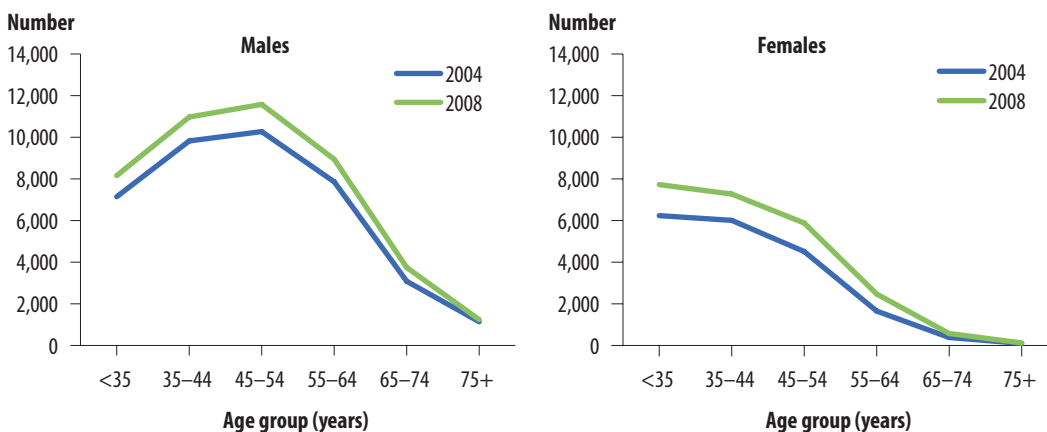
Demographic characteristics

In 2008, there were 78,909 registered medical practitioners, of which 68,689 (87.0%) were employed in medicine (Figure 1).

The average age of employed medical practitioners was 45.6 years—47.9 years for males and 41.5 years for females. Non-clinicians were, on average, slightly older than clinicians (50.8 and 45.3 years, respectively).

Females comprised 35.0% of the employed medical labour force in 2008, up from 32.4% in 2004. Females comprised nearly half (48.6%) of medical practitioners under the age of 35 years, and about one in five (21.6%) of medical practitioners aged 55–64 years.

About three-quarters (76.0%) of employed medical practitioners were trained in Australia.



Sources: AIHW Medical Labour Force Survey 2004 and 2008.

Figure 2: Employed medical practitioners: number by age group and sex, 2004 and 2008

Work characteristics

Most employed medical practitioners worked mainly as clinicians (64,117 or 93.3%) (Table 1). Of these, the largest proportion were primary care practitioners (primarily general practitioners) (37.5%), followed by specialists (35.0%), specialists-in-training (13.8%) and hospital non-specialists (12.3%). The proportion of the clinical workforce comprising primary care practitioners has declined from 45.7% of the clinical workforce in 1998 to 37.5% in 2008. Of the non-clinical workforce, about one-third (28.1%) were administrators and one-quarter (24.7%) were researchers.

Clinicians worked an average of 43.0 hours per week, and non-clinicians, 39.1 hours. Of clinicians, specialists-in-training reported the highest average hours per week (49.4 hours) and other clinicians the lowest (37.8 hours).

Table 1: Employed medical practitioners: selected characteristics 1998 to 2008

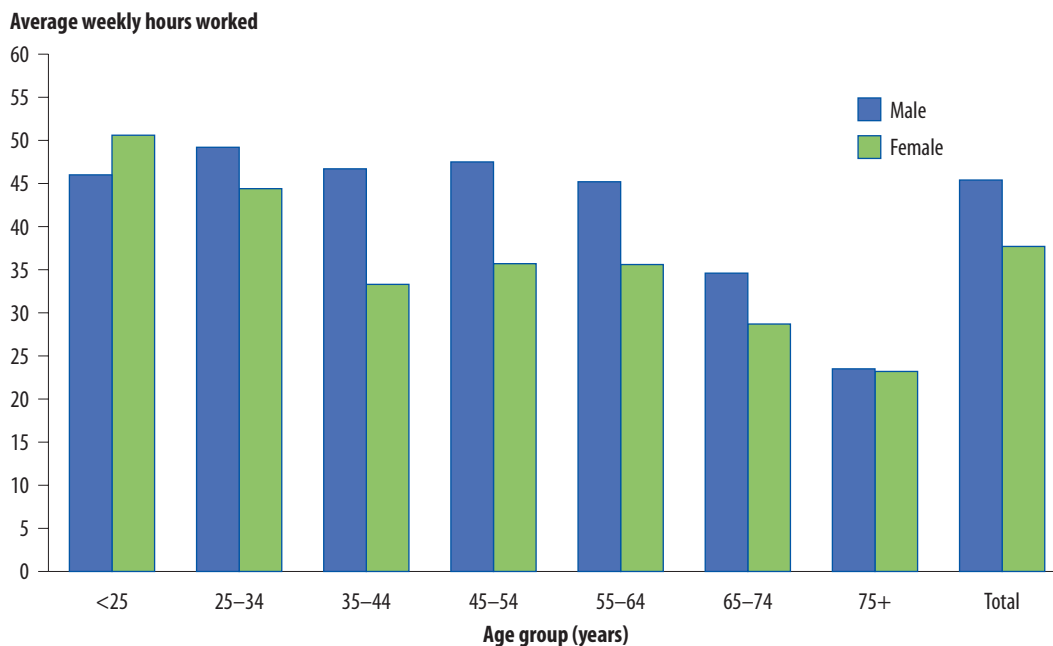
	Number	Percentage female	Average age	Percentage aged 55 years or over	Average hours worked per week	FTE number ^(a)	FTE rate
1998							
Clinicians	44,684	27.8	45.2	22.7	48.6	54,291	290.2
Primary care practitioners	20,429	32.5	47.1	24.0	45.0	22,983	122.8
Hospital non-specialists	4,172	38.9	31.5	7.5	50.5	5,267	28.1
Specialists	15,604	17.1	49.9	30.3	51.3	20,012	107.0
Specialists-in-training	4,479	33.4	32.1	4.4	54.0	6,047	32.3
Non-clinicians	4,233	30.7	48.4	30.2	43.4	4,593	24.5
Total	48,917	28.1	45.5	23.3	48.2	58,945	315.0
2004							
Clinicians	53,966	32.3	45.3	23.9	44.2	59,632	296.3
Primary care practitioners	22,011	36.5	49.0	29.1	40.4	22,231	110.5
Hospital non-specialists	6,202	45.4	32.7	3.7	46.3	7,179	35.7
Specialists	19,043	20.3	49.7	33.0	46.2	21,995	109.3
Specialists-in-training	6,710	40.9	32.4	0.0	49.1	8,237	40.9
Non-clinicians	4,245	33.7	48.5	30.5	41.3	4,394	21.8
Total	58,211	32.4	45.5	24.4	44.0	64,032	318.1
2008							
Clinicians	64,117	35.1	45.3	24.1	43.0	68,926	320.6
Primary care practitioners	24,029	38.4	49.9	32.9	38.6	23,188	107.9
Hospital non-specialists	7,902	49.3	33.0	4.9	47.1	9,305	43.3
Specialists	22,471	23.6	49.5	30.8	43.8	24,606	114.5
Specialists-in-training	8,825	41.8	33.1	0.0	49.4	10,899	50.7
Other clinicians	891	44.6	43.3	23.5	37.8	842	3.9
Non-clinicians	4,571	33.1	50.8	36.3	39.0	4,468	20.7
Total	68,689	35.0	45.6	24.9	42.7	73,326	341.1

(a) FTE and FTE rate (full-time equivalents per 100,000 population) is based on a standard full-time working week of 40 hours.

Sources: AIHW Medical Labour Force Survey 1998, 2004 and 2008.

Male medical practitioners worked an average of 45.4 hours per week, compared with 37.7 hours for female medical practitioners (Figure 3). This is primarily due to a larger proportion of female medical practitioners working part-time hours (38.3%) compared with males (15.9%). Medical practitioners worked similar average hours in each sector, with 35.2 hours worked in the private sector and 36.7 hours in the public sector.

The most common work setting for medical practitioners' main job was private rooms (30,435 or 44.3%) followed by acute care hospital (26,965 or 39.3%).



Source: AIHW Medical Labour Force Survey 2008.

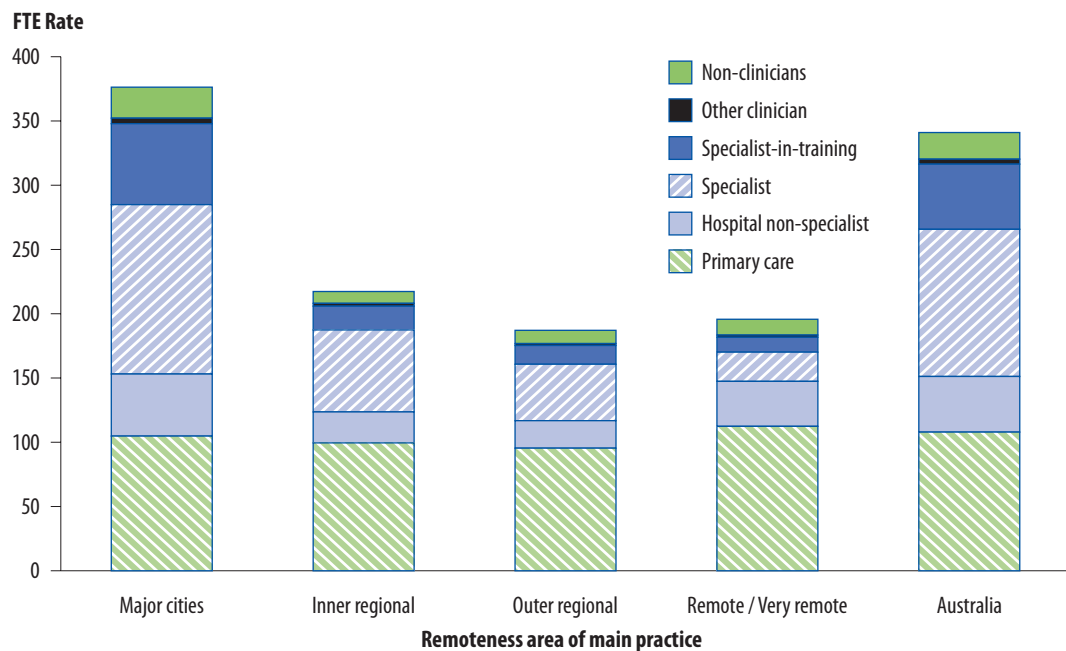
Figure 3: Employed medical practitioners: average total weekly hours by age group

Regional distribution

Remoteness Areas

The supply of employed medical practitioners was highest in *Major cities* (376 FTE per 100,000 population) (based on a 40-hour working week). The rate of employed medical practitioners per head of population was significantly lower in other Remoteness Areas, with *Outer regional* having the lowest rate (187 FTE per 100,000) (Figure 4). The number of clinical medical specialists decreased with increasing remoteness (132 FTE per 100,000 for *Major cities*; 23 FTE per 100,000 for *Remote/Very remote* areas).

Medical practitioners working in *Remote/Very remote* areas worked, on average, 3.1 hours per week more than the national average, with primary care practitioners working an average of 6.8 hours per week more than the national average (45.4 compared with 38.6 hours). On average, medical practitioners working in *Remote/Very remote* areas were about 1 year younger than the national average (44.8 years and 45.6 years, respectively).



Source: AIHW Medical Labour Force Survey 2008.

(a) FTE rate (FTE per 100,000 population) is based on a standard full-time working week of 40 hours.

Figure 4: Employed medical practitioners, FTE per 100,000 population^(a) by remoteness area and occupation

States and territories

The estimated supply of employed medical practitioners was highest in the Australian Capital Territory (566 FTE per 100,000) and the lowest in Tasmania (305 FTE per 100,000). Employed practitioners in the Northern Territory worked the highest average hours per week (43.7 hours), and Tasmania the lowest (40.5 hours). Comparisons between states and territories should be interpreted with caution due to the relatively low response rates to the survey in some jurisdictions (see data sources section).

Employed practitioners were youngest, on average, in the Australian Capital Territory (42.1 years) and oldest in Tasmania (49.1 years). The Northern Territory had the highest percentage of female employed medical practitioners (47.4%) compared with the national average of 35.0%.

Indigenous participation in the medical workforce

In 2008, there were 153 medical practitioners employed in medicine who identified themselves as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, representing about 0.2% of the employed practitioners for whom Indigenous status was provided. The Northern Territory had the highest proportion of Indigenous medical practitioners, at 1.2%.

Indigenous medical practitioners were, on average, about 3.5 years younger than non-Indigenous practitioners (42.1 years and 45.6 years, respectively). A higher proportion of Indigenous practitioners were female than for non-Indigenous practitioners (45.0% and 35.0%, respectively).

Data sources

The source of these data is the AIHW Medical Labour Force Survey. This survey collected information on the demographic and employment characteristics of practitioners who were registered in Australia at the time of the survey. It is conducted annually by state and territory health authorities, with the questionnaire administered by the registration boards (or councils) in each jurisdiction, usually in conjunction with the registration renewal process. The overall response rate to the 2008 survey was estimated to be 68.7%. The national rate has gradually declined over time, from the 81.3% response rate achieved in 1998. Estimates for some jurisdictions should be interpreted with caution due to the relatively low response rate to the survey.

For more information on the data collection method and other relevant data issues, see the explanatory notes section at <www.aihw.gov.au/labourforce/index.cfm>. This site also contains supplementary data tables that contain the source data quoted in this bulletin.

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Unpublished Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated resident population data are used for the calculation of medical practitioner rates and FTE rates.

Further information

If you would like more detailed data about the medical labour force and other registered health professionals, go to <www.aihw.gov.au/labourforce/index.cfm>.

bulletin 82

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This publication is part of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's bulletin series. A complete list of the Institute's publications is available from the Institute's website <www.aihw.gov.au>.

ISSN 1446-9820

ISBN 978-1-74249-065-6

Suggested citation

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010. Medical labour force 2008. Bulletin no. 82.
Cat. no. AUS 131. Canberra: AIHW.

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Published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare