



2.3 Who is in the health workforce?

The health workforce in Australia is large and diverse, covering many occupations. These include health practitioners registered by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) (Box 2.3.1) as well as other health professionals and health support workers.

Registered health practitioners

Box 2.3.1: Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency and the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme

The AHPRA regulates Australia's health practitioners in partnership with the National Registration Boards. The current list of registered health professions are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practice, Chinese Medicine, Chiropractic, Dental, Medical, Medical Radiation Practice, Nursing and Midwifery, Occupational Therapy, Optometry, Osteopathy, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Podiatry and Psychology. The AHPRA intends to start registering Paramedics by the end of 2018 (AHPRA 2017).

See Chapter 2.1 'How does Australia's health system work?' for more information on health workforce registration.

Source: AHPRA 2017.

The National Health Workforce Dataset shows that nurses and midwives are the largest group in the registered health workforce—with almost 370,000 registered and more than 315,000 employed in 2016 (Table 2.3.1).

Table 2.3.1: Key workforce statistics and full-time equivalent (FTE) rates for selected health professions

	Nurses and midwives	Medical practitioners	Psychologists	Physiotherapists	Dentists
Registered	369,790 in 2016 ↑ 7.4% from 344,190 in 2013	101,070 in 2016 ↑ 10.5% from 91,472 in 2013	29,163 in 2016 ↑ 9.1% from 26,725 in 2013	29,591 in 2016 ↑ 15.8% from 25,545 in 2013	16,549 in 2016 ↑ 6.9% from 15,479 in 2013
Employed	315,137 in 2016 ↑ 6.8% from 295,177 in 2013	91,341 in 2016 ↑ 10.8% from 82,408 in 2013	25,213 in 2016 ↑ 9.2% from 23,089 in 2013	24,255 in 2016 ↑ 15.2% from 21,052 in 2013	14,634 in 2016 ↑ 8.4% from 14,634 in 2013
FTE per 100,000 people	1,145 in 2016 ↓ 0.9% from 1,155 in 2013	400 in 2016 ↑ 4.7% from 382 in 2013	89 in 2016 ↑ 3.5% from 86 in 2013	92 in 2016 ↑ 10.8% from 83 in 2013	58 in 2016 ↑ 3.6% from 56 in 2013
Percentage that are women	89% in 2016 about the same as in 2013—90%	41% in 2016 ↑ from 39% in 2013	79% in 2016 ↑ from 77% in 2013	66% in 2016 ↓ from 68% in 2013	41% in 2016 ↑ from 38% in 2013

Source: Department of Health National Health Workforce Dataset 2013 and 2016.



In FTE terms, there were 1,145 FTE nurses and midwives, and 400 FTE medical practitioners for every 100,000 people in 2016. The number of FTEs for other professions was much lower, with 89 psychologists, 92 physiotherapists and 58 dentists for every 100,000 people.

In 2015, Australia had more doctors (3.5) and registered nurses (11.5) per 1,000 people than Canada (2.7 and 9.9, respectively), the United Kingdom (2.8 and 7.9) and New Zealand (3.0 and 10.3) (OECD 2017a, 2017b).

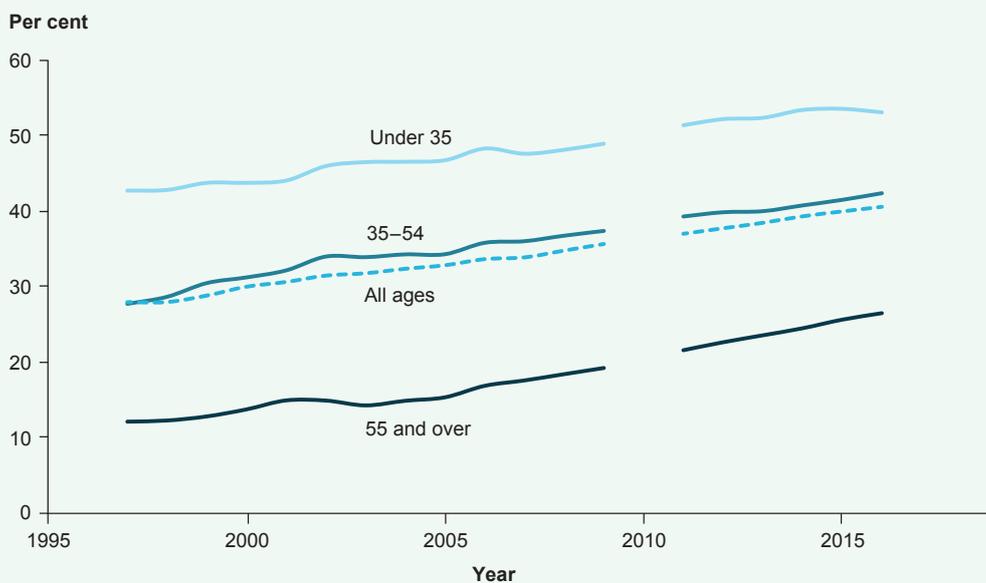
The age profile of nurses and midwives is changing

The age group profile of nurses and midwives is changing: the size of the middle age group is decreasing while younger and older age groups are growing. From 2013 to 2016, the number of employed nurses and midwives aged 20–34 increased by 15,500, or 19%. The size of the group aged 35–54 fell by 3,500 or 2.1%, and the group aged 55 and over grew by 11,000, or 15%.

More women are becoming medical practitioners

A larger proportion of medical practitioners entering the workforce are women. In 1997, 43% of employed medical practitioners under the age of 35 were women. This has grown to around 53% since 2014 (Figure 2.3.1). In 2016, 31% of employed medical specialists were women, up from 16% in 1997.

Figure 2.3.1: Proportion of employed medical practitioners who are women, by age, 1997–2016



Sources: AIHW Medical Labour Force Survey: 1997 to 2009; AIHW National Health Workforce Dataset: 2011 and 2012; Department of Health National Health Workforce Dataset: 2013 to 2016.



Even though the trend is towards more women in the health workforce, medical practitioners (and dentists) still have a relatively low proportion of women compared with other health practitioners. In 2016, women represented 41% of medical practitioners (and dentists) (Table 2.3.1).

Australia has many overseas-trained registered health professionals

Migrant/overseas-trained health workers form a substantial part of the health workforce in Australia. For example, in 2016, 33% of medical practitioners employed in Australia received their initial qualification overseas. They make up 31% of employed medical practitioners in *Major cities* and 41% of employed medical practitioners in rural and remote areas of Australia.

Health workers and professions not registered

Many people employed in the health sector work in occupations that are not registered by the AHPRA, but they play an important role in delivering health services. These occupations include clerical workers, health information managers, welfare professionals, service workers, cleaners and gardeners.

In the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016 Census of Population and Housing (the Census), more than 800,000 people reported working in the health services industry. Between 2011 and 2016, the number of people employed in health services grew from 674,000 to 801,000 (ABS 2017).

Among the health industry occupations (other than AHPRA registered professions) identified in the 2016 Census, the largest groups were 69,000 receptionists, 25,000 nursing support and personal care workers, 21,000 medical technicians, 21,000 dental assistants, 17,000 general clerks and 13,000 ambulance officers and paramedics. There were also 9,000 kitchen hands and 10,000 commercial cleaners, most of whom worked in hospitals.

What is missing from the picture?

The AHPRA does not register all health professionals. There is thus little information on those professions not required to register. This includes, for example, dietitians, speech therapists, sonographers, audiologists and social workers.

Where do I go for more information?

More information on registered health professions is available at the AHPRA at <www.ahpra.gov.au> and workforce data are available via the Department of Health website at <hwd.health.gov.au>.

Workforce data are sourced from the National Health Workforce Dataset—Australian Government Department of Health. The workforce data used in this publication were provided by the AHPRA.



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