

5 Reconciling supply and demand

Supply of and demand for dental visits are estimated via very different methods using different datasets and different time periods for establishing trends. Therefore it is unlikely that the estimates would be the same for a given point in time. The estimate of supply for 2005 (29.5 million visits), from a data baseline of 2003, was slightly higher than the demand estimate for the same year (28.2 million visits). It is not expected that such estimates would be similar because each is surrounded by a notional 'confidence interval' or level of uncertainty. Further, the projection inputs reflect the average annual inputs over the course of the projection and will not always match the actual inputs for each year of the projection. Hence, the projections illustrate trends over time and are not intended to forecast precise levels of supply or demand at given point in time.

The standard supply projection estimates that the number of visits supplied by the dental labour force will increase to 33.7 million by 2020. This is marginally higher than the estimated demand for dental visits under the 'no PCD growth' projection (33.6 million visits) but falls well short of the 'half PCD growth' projection which estimates demand increasing to 38.8 million visits by 2020. The gap between the standard supply projection and the 'half PCD growth' projection equates to an approximate shortfall of 1,800 dental providers in 2020 (based on current rates of supply) (Figure 18).

However, the standard supply projection can be conceived of as a very conservative projection which does not reflect the impact on supply if new schools are established or current high levels of successful ADC candidates were to continue. The impacts of these potential events are assessed in the following section (Section 6).

