



Nursing and midwifery labour force 2008

Highlights

This bulletin presents summary findings on the nursing and midwifery labour force based on data from the 2008 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Nursing and Midwifery Labour Force Survey. This survey collects information on the demographic and employment characteristics of nurses who were registered or enrolled 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 main findings of the report are as follows:

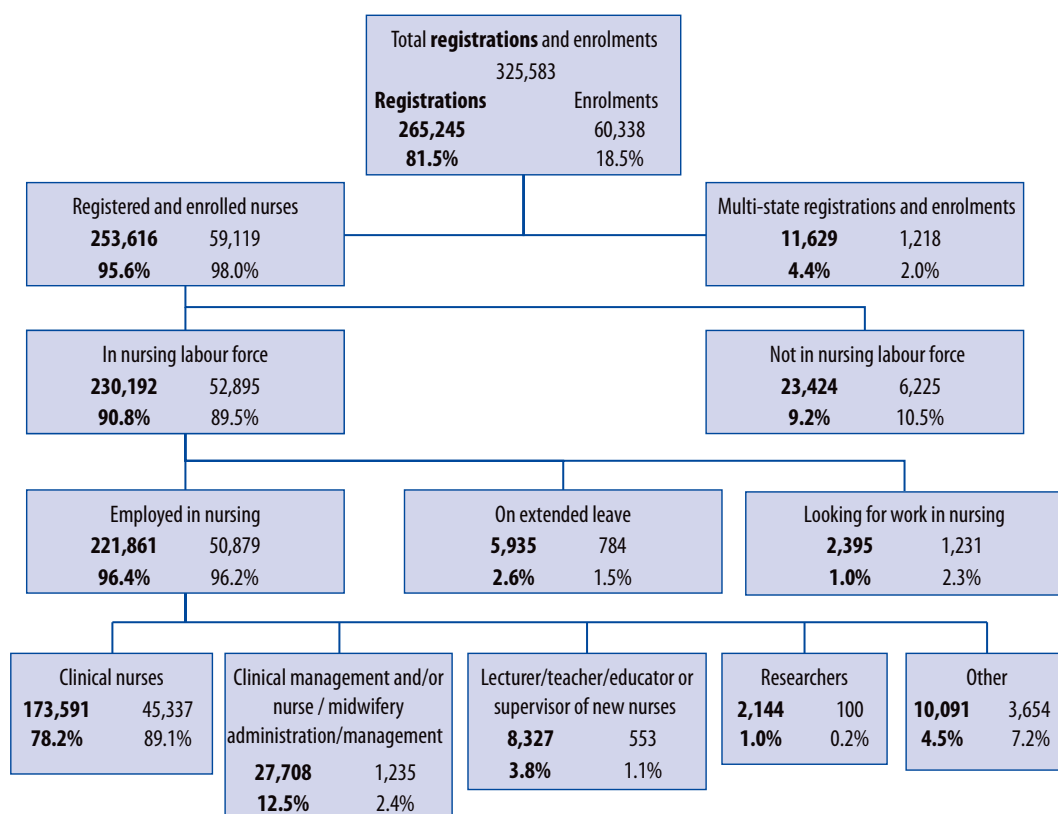
- ✦ In 2008, the total number of nurses identified by the Nursing and Midwifery Labour Force Survey (after adjusting for multiple registrations) was estimated to be 312,736, comprising 253,616 registered nurses and 59,119 enrolled nurses.
- ✦ The number of registered and enrolled nurses in the labour force (i.e. employed in or looking for work in nursing in Australia) increased by 11.6% between 2004 and 2008, from 253,592 to 283,087.
- ✦ Between 2004 and 2008, the number of nurses actually employed in nursing increased by 11.8%, from 243,916 to 272,741.
- ✦ The average weekly hours worked by employed nurses and midwives increased from 32.8 hours in 2004 to 33.4 hours in 2008. Over the same period, the proportion of nurses working part time (less than 35 hours per week) declined slightly from 49.6% to 47.9%.

(highlights continued overleaf)

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- Overall, nursing supply increased by 6.6% between 2004 and 2008, from 1,046 full-time equivalent (FTE) nurses per 100,000 population to 1,115 FTE nurses based on a 38-hour week. This was mainly a result of both an 11.8% increase in the number of employed nurses, and a 1.8% increase in the average hours they worked over this period.
- Nursing supply across regions ranged from 1,035 FTE nurses per 100,000 population in *Major cities* to 1,275 in *Very remote* areas.
- Between 2004 and 2008, the proportion of nurses aged 50 years and over increased from 29.7% to 34.9%. The average age of nurses increased from 43.3 years in 2004 to 44.1 years in 2008.
- Nursing continued to be a female dominated profession, with females comprising 90.6% of employed nurses in 2008 (down slightly from 91.3% in 2004).
- About one in seven nurses (14.9%) in 2008 indicated they obtained their first nursing qualification in a country outside of Australia.
- The overall response rate to the 2008 survey was estimated to be 46.6%; however, there was considerable variation in response rates across the states and territories.



Note: Numbers in bold print relate to registered nurses and plain to enrolled nurses. Nursing role is based on main nursing job.
Source: AIHW Nursing and Midwifery Labour Force Survey 2008.

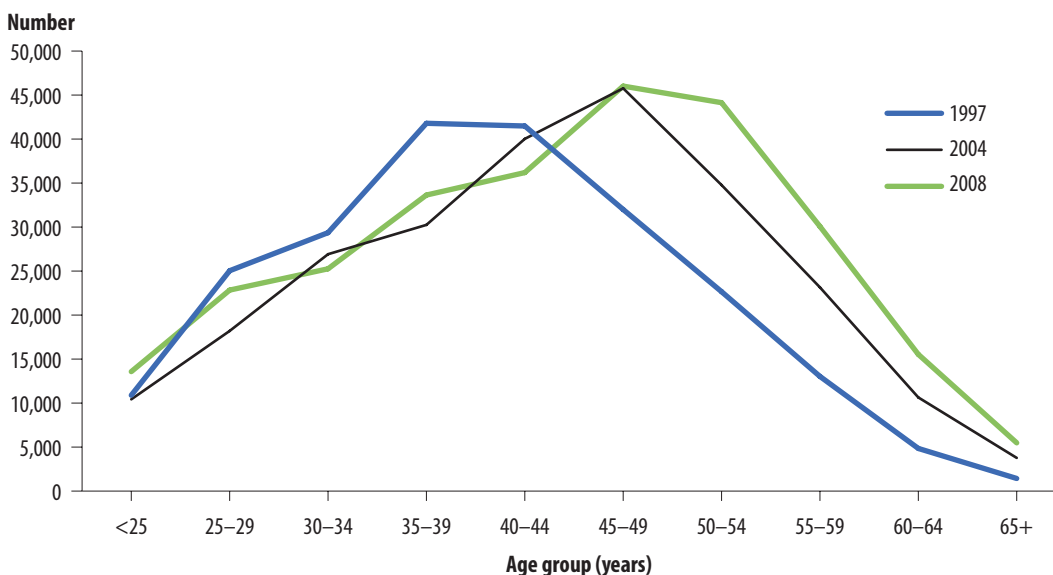
Figure 1: Registered and enrolled nurses by labour force status, 2008

Demographic characteristics

In 2008, there were 312,736 registered and enrolled nurses, of whom 87.2% were employed in nursing (Figure 1).

The average age of employed nurses was 44.1 years (43.0 years for males and 44.2 years for females). Non-clinicians were, on average, slightly older than clinicians (46.2 and 43.8 years, respectively) (Table 1). Nursing continued to be a female dominated profession with only 9.4% of nurses being male in 2008, slightly up from 8.7% in 2004.

In 2008 there were 37,649 employed registered and enrolled nurses (14.9% of those who answered the question) who reported they obtained their first qualification in a country outside of Australia.



Sources: AIHW Nursing and Midwifery Labour Force Survey, 1997, 2004 and 2008.

Figure 2: Registered and enrolled nurses: number by age, 1997, 2004 and 2008

Work characteristics

Most nurses (90.9% or 247,871) were employed mainly as clinicians. Clinicians were most likely to report working in medical and surgical areas (33.1%), followed by critical care (19.0%) and aged care (11.4%). Of the non-clinical workforce, about 35.7% reported working in lecturing, education and/or supervision of new nurses, and 9.0% reported working as researchers.

Clinicians worked an average of 33.3 hours per week and non-clinicians, 33.9 hours.

There were 2,728 direct entry midwives, and 52,286 other nurses were authorised as midwives.

Table 1: Employed registered and enrolled nurses: selected statistics by nursing field, 1997, 2004 and 2008

Field of nursing	Number	Average age	Percentage aged 50 years or over	Average hours worked per week	FTE number ^(a)	FTE rate
1998						
Clinician	197,634	39.9	17.8	30.2	157,067	848.2
Clinician	191,815	39.8	17.6	30.1	151,938	820.5
Nurse manager	5,819	42.8	23.2	35.0	5,360	28.9
Non-clinician	24,894	43.9	27.6	34.1	22,339	120.6
Administrator	12,711	45.3	32.0	36.2	12,109	65.4
Researcher	1,379	40.9	17.1	31.0	1,125	6.1
Teacher/educator	5,816	42.6	23.4	33.0	5,051	27.3
Other	4,988	42.8	24.1	31.0	4,069	22.0
Total	222,528	40.3	18.9	30.7	179,779	970.9
2004						
Clinician	217,942	43.0	28.9	32.4	185,824	923.2
Clinician	203,517	42.9	28.7	31.9	170,847	848.8
Clinical nurse manager	11,636	44.5	31.1	39.1	11,973	59.5
Supervisor of new nurses	2,789	43.5	31.7	36.1	2,650	13.2
Non-clinician	25,974	45.9	36.5	36.9	25,222	125.3
Administrator/manager	12,678	47.2	41.4	39.5	13,178	65.5
Lecturer/educator	4,790	43.9	28.5	36.0	4,538	22.5
Researcher	2,069	43.2	24.1	34.2	1,862	9.3
Other	6,437	45.8	36.7	33.2	5,624	27.9
Total	243,916	43.3	29.7	32.8	210,538	1,046.0
2008						
Clinician	247,871	43.8	34.4	33.3	217,213	1,010.4
Clinical management and or administration/management of clinical nurses	28,943	47.1	42.8	39.5	30,085	139.9
Clinical nursing	218,928	43.4	33.3	32.5	187,241	870.9
Non-clinician	24,869	46.2	40.0	33.9	22,186	103.2
Lecturing, education and or supervision of new nurses	8,880	44.8	33.5	36.3	8,483	39.5
Research	2,244	45.4	33.7	34.7	2,049	9.5
Other	13,745	47.3	45.2	32.3	11,683	54.3
Total	272,741	44.1	34.9	33.4	239,725	1,115.1

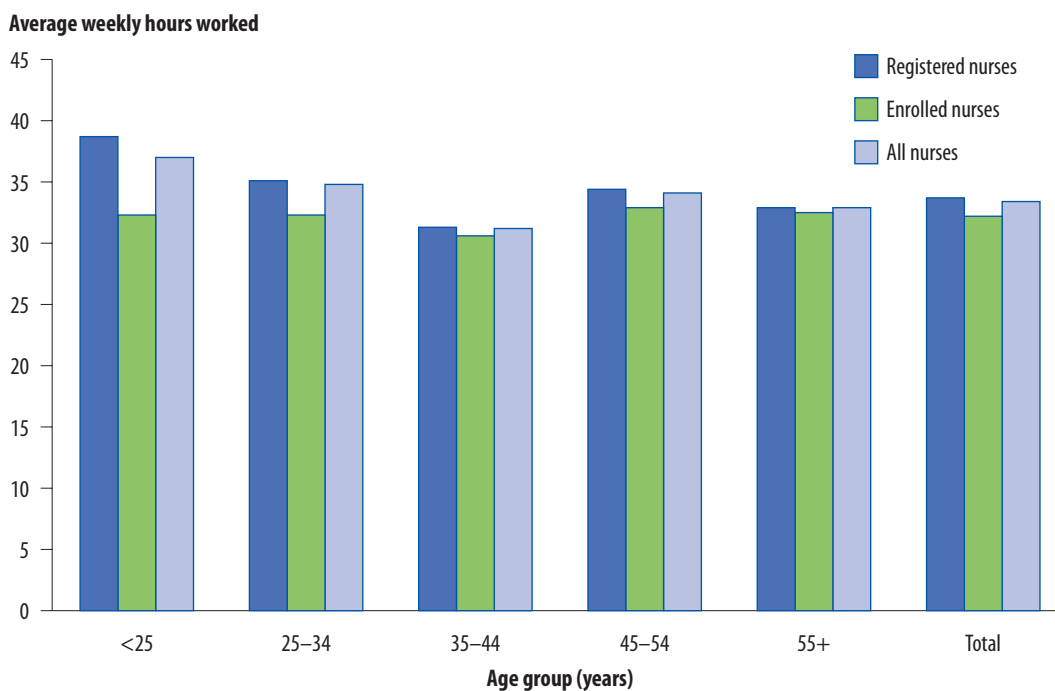
(a) Based on a 38-hour week, hours across all jobs.

Sources: AIHW Nursing and Midwifery Labour Force Survey, 1997, 2004 and 2008.

For their main job, nurses worked 32.8 hours on average in the public sector and 30.3 hours in the private sector. There were 30,805 nurses with a second job, and these nurses reported an average of 12.9 hours in the second job.

A majority of employed nurses (62.1%) reported working in a hospital (not including psychiatric/mental health hospitals). The next largest work setting for employed nurses was residential aged care centres (11.4%).

Registered nurses tended to work more hours than enrolled nurses (33.7 and 32.2 hours, respectively). Nurses aged less than 25 years worked the most hours and nurses aged 35–44 years, the fewest (37.0 and 31.2 hours, respectively).



Source: AIHW Nursing and Midwifery Labour Force Survey 2008.

Figure 3: Employed registered and enrolled nurses: average total weekly hours by age group

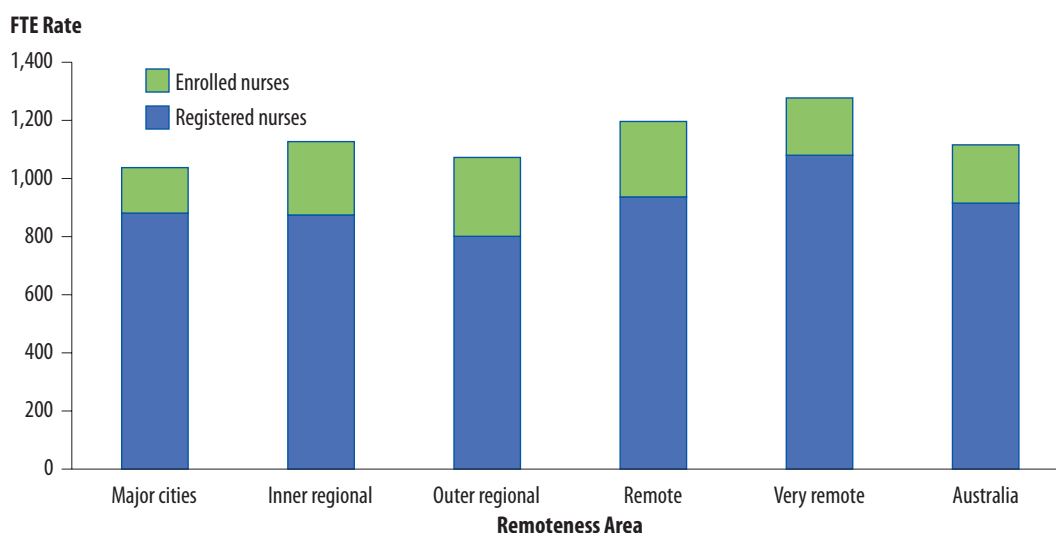
Regional distribution

Remoteness Areas

The Remoteness Area with the highest supply of employed nurses was *Very remote* areas, with a supply of 1,275 FTE per 100,000 population. The supply of employed nurses was lower in other Remoteness Areas, with *Major cities* having the lowest supply (1,035 FTE per 100,000 population).

Nurses working in *Very remote* and *Remote* areas worked, on average more than the national average (5.1 hours and 1.3 hours per week more than the national average, respectively).

On average, nurses working in *Inner regional* areas were 2.1 years older than those working in *Major cities* (45.5 and 43.4 years, respectively).



Note: Based on a 38-hour working week.
Sources: AIHW Nursing and Midwifery Labour Force Survey 2008; unpublished ABS data.

Figure 4: Employed registered and enrolled nurses, FTE per 100,000 population by Remoteness Area, 2008.

States and territories

The highest FTE rate of employed nurses across the states and territories was in the Northern Territory (1,827 FTE per 100,000 population), and the lowest in Queensland (1,014). Employed nurses in the Northern Territory also worked the highest average hours per week (38.0 hours), and Victoria, the lowest (32.1 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 nurses were youngest, on average, in the Northern Territory (42.6 years), and oldest in Tasmania (45.9 years). The Northern Territory had the highest percentage of male employed nurses (11.2%) compared with the national average of 9.4%.

Indigenous participation in the nursing workforce

In 2008, there were 1,598 employed nurses who identified themselves as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, representing about 0.6% of nurses for whom Indigenous status was provided. The Northern Territory had the highest proportion of Indigenous nurses, at 1.2%.

Indigenous nurses were, on average, about 2.4 years younger than non-Indigenous nurses (41.6 years and 44.0 years, respectively). A higher proportion of Indigenous nurses were male than for non-Indigenous nurses (14.4% and 9.4%, respectively).

Data sources

The source of these data is the AIHW Nursing and Midwifery Labour Force Survey. This survey collected information on the demographic and employment characteristics of nurses who were registered or enrolled 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 46.6%. The national rate has declined over time, from the 77.3% response rate achieved in 1997. Estimates for some jurisdictions for some years should be interpreted with caution, due to the relatively low response rate to the survey. The response rate in Victoria was affected by technical issues related to their online data collection, resulting in about 5,300 records being unable to be used. Victorian results are based on about 29,300 records (a response rate of 33.3%) coming from the paper-based data collection. Interpretation of responses for the Northern Territory is made difficult, due to the high turnover of nurses moving to and from that jurisdiction.

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 nursing and midwifery labour force and other registered health professionals go to <www.aihw.gov.au/labourforce/index.cfm>.

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