

# Participation

Increasing participation in cervical screening is seen as the major challenge in reducing the number of women who present with cervical cancer, and ultimately the number of women who die from this disease. Women in the 20–69 years age group are actively targeted by a variety of recruitment initiatives. The recommended screening interval for women in the target age group 20–69 years who have ever been sexually active at any stage in their lives is 2 years. Pap smears may cease at the age of 70 years for women who have had two normal Pap smears within the last five years. Women over 70 years who have never had a Pap smear, or who request a Pap smear, should be screened.

To achieve uniformly high population coverage it is necessary to target particular subgroups, such as older women, Indigenous women and women from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Some women in the target population are unlikely to require screening, such as those who have had a total hysterectomy with their cervix removed, those who have never had sexual intercourse, and women with a previously diagnosed gynaecological cancer (this last group is monitored under a clinical arrangement) (Snider & Beauvais 1998).

The objective, measurement and usefulness of participation as an indicator is outlined below:

- The participation indicator measures the proportion of the target population covered by the cervical screening program.
- This indicator is important in assessing the contribution of the cervical screening program to changes in incidence and mortality. The indicator can also be used as a means of evaluating recruitment practices, particularly if participation rates are analysed by demographic characteristics.
- When this indicator is used in conjunction with others, it can be used to support debate relating to target groups and screening intervals.

## State-and Territory-specific issues

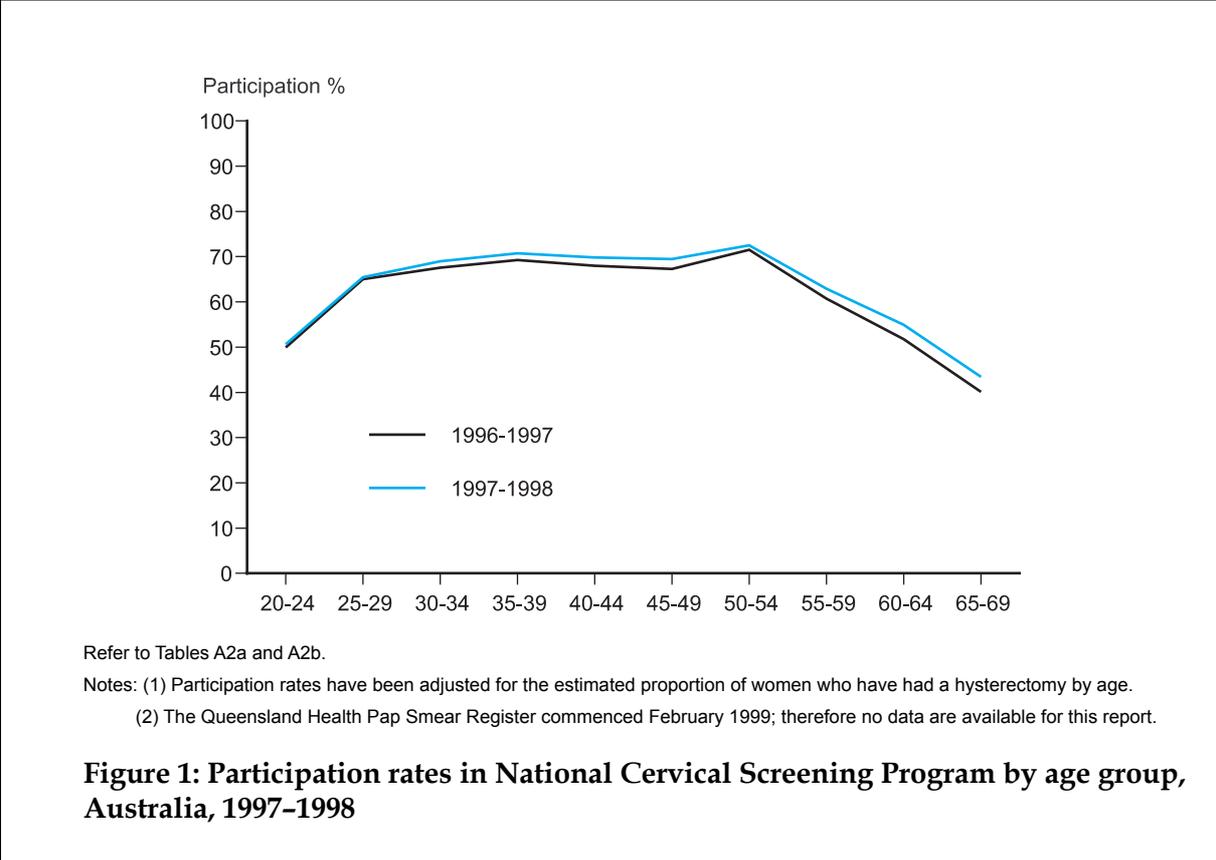
The Queensland Health Pap Smear Register did not begin operation until February 1999. Therefore, participation data are not included for this jurisdiction, and rates for the other States and Territories for this indicator have been calculated excluding the Queensland population for the respective years.

The NSW Pap Test Register recently identified that two laboratories in NSW had not been reporting Pap test data for women aged 70 years and over. The Register calculates that the number of NSW women aged 70 years and over who were screened in 1997-1998 is underestimated by approximately 10 per cent.

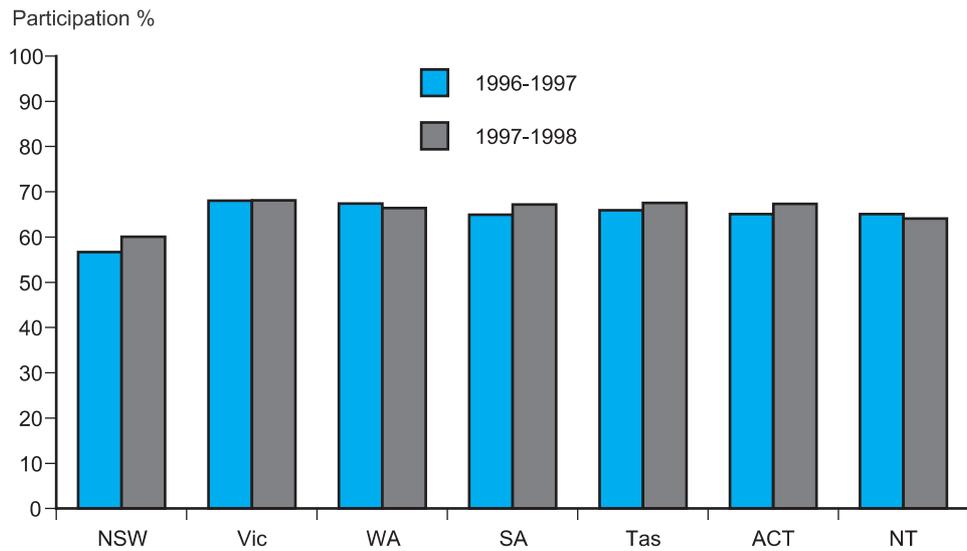
The Northern Territory screening participation rates in this report may differ from those published by the Northern Territory Pap Smear Register for the following reason. Although the female Aboriginal population in the Northern Territory in 1996 comprised 23% of the total female population aged 20–69 years, the Northern Territory Pap smear register excludes Aboriginal women from the denominator when adjusting for the percentage of women who have had a hysterectomy. The Northern Territory Cervical Screening program indicates that this is because there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that Aboriginal women have lower rates of hysterectomy. This report includes all women in the denominator in order to maintain national consistency.

# Indicator 1: Participation rate for cervical screening

Percentage of women screened in a 24-month period by 5-year age groups (20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65-69, 70-74, 75-79, 80-84, 85+) and for the target age group (20-69 years).



- The participation rate for cervical cancer screening (excluding Queensland) for the period January 1997 to December 1998 was 63.9% for the target population of women aged 20-69 years (Table A2b).
- During this period 2,721,650 women were screened in Australia for pre-cancerous changes to cervical cells. Of these 2,653,504 (97%) were in the target age group 20-69 years of age (Table A1b).
- There was considerable variation in the rate of participation of different age groups within the target age group, ranging from a peak of 72.5% participation in the 50-54 years age group to a low of 43.4% in the 65-69 years age group (Table A2b).
- There was a small but consistent increase in the participation rate in all 5-year age groups within the target age group between the two periods 1996-1997 (62.4%) and 1997-1998 (63.9%). This resulted in 90,396 more women being screened in the latter period. During the same period, participation of women in the 60-69 years age group had the largest increase of approximately 8% (Tables A1a to A2b)



Refer to Tables A2a and A2b.

Note: The Queensland Health Pap Smear Register commenced February 1999; therefore no data are available for this report.

**Figure 2: Participation in the National Cervical Screening Program by women aged 20-69 years, by State and Territory, 1996-1997 and 1997-1998**

- The participation rates are based on all women who were screened in that State or Territory. New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Northern Territory record Pap smears for a small number of women who live outside the State or Territory. Of these, South Australia had the highest proportion of registrations for interstate residents in 1997-1998 (1.4% of all Pap smears).
- There was considerable variation in the participation rates between States and Territories for women in the target age group 20-69 years, ranging from a high of 68.1% in Victoria to a low of 60.1% in New South Wales in 1997-1998 (Table A2b).
- The participation rate in most States and Territories increased between the two periods 1996-1997 and 1997-1998. New South Wales registered the largest percentage increase between the two periods (6.0%). Nationally, there was an increased participation rate of 2.4% (Tables A2a and A2b).