

10 Medicare statistics

The Medicare Estimates and Statistics Section of the Department of Health and Aged Care provided Medicare data. More detailed statistics may be found at the Department's Internet site (<http://www.health.gov.au>), while a description of Medicare and further analysis of Medicare data are included *Australia's Health 1998* (AIHW 1998, pp 215–19).

The Medicare data presented in this chapter exclude the numbers for pathologists and diagnostic imagists. Medicare statistics understate the number of pathologists, since the data relate to claiming rather than rendering practitioners. Medicare statistics overstate the number of diagnostic imagists, since a significant number of practitioners have more than one active provider number. To the extent that some practitioners in the remaining specialties have more than one active provider number, there will be a slight overstatement of the number of practitioners. The main features of the Medicare data in this chapter are as follows.

- From 30 June 1997 to 30 June 1998 the estimated resident population of Australia increased by 1.2% from 18,524,155 to 18,750,982. During the same period:
 - Medicare providers increased by 0.4%;
 - medical practitioner Medicare providers increased by 0.3%;
 - VRGPs increased by 1.5%, offset by a decrease in OMPs of 8.9%, for an overall primary care provider decrease of 1.2%; and
 - recognised medical specialist Medicare providers increased by 2.8%.
- Between 1984–85 and 1997–98, the number of medical practitioners providing Medicare services increased by 50.7% from 25,974 to 39,138. The Australian population increased by 18.8% over the same period.
- Primary care providers, including VRGPs and OMPs, comprised 65.3% of medical practitioners in 1984–85 and, after rising to 66.0% in 1987–88, declined to 61.9% in 1997–98.
- The average number of services undertaken by each Medicare provider in 1997–98 was 3,287, increasing by 0.1% from the 1996–97 average.
- Over the period 1984–85 to 1997–98, Medicare medical practitioners per 100,000 population increased from 164.5 to 208.7 – an increase of 26.9%.
- Over the ten-year period 1988–89 to 1997–98, the average number of Medicare services per person in a year increased by 31.6% from 6.65 services to 8.75 services for males, and by 23.8% from 10.34 services to 12.80 services for females. Care should be exercised in interpreting this change. Much of the increase is a result of structural change in the Medical Benefits Schedule without accompanying change in patient services. For example, early in 1992 pathology 'patient episode initiation' items (to cover overheads with specimen collection) were added to the Medical Benefits Schedule and this resulted in an additional 15 million services with no change in the service to patients.

Table 39: Medicare providers^(a): peer group and specialty, Australia, 1990–91 to 1997–98

| Peer group/ specialty | 1990–91 | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 | 1995–96 | 1996–97 | 1997–98 |
|--|---------------|----------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| <i>General</i> | 22,152 | 22,746 | 23,088 | 23,587 | 24,206 | 24,376 | 24,526 | 24,230 |
| Vocationally registered GP | 7,471 | 10,744 | 14,826 | 16,280 | 17,341 | 17,711 | 18,078 | 18,353 |
| Other medical practitioner | 14,681 | 12,002 | 8,262 | 7,307 | 6,865 | 6,665 | 6,448 | 5,877 |
| Obstetrician/gynaecologist | 920 | 923 | 930 | 867 | 899 | 896 | 912 | 925 |
| IVF | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | 63 | 67 | 72 | 72 | 79 |
| <i>Surgeon</i> | 4,005 | 4,140 | 4,270 | 4,418 | 4,597 | 4,714 | 4,816 | 4,898 |
| Specialist | 3,289 | 3,355 | 3,433 | 3,479 | 3,586 | 3,598 | 3,641 | 3,703 |
| Non-specialist | 716 | 785 | 837 | 939 | 1,011 | 1,116 | 1,175 | 1,195 |
| <i>Anaesthetist</i> | 1,680 | 1,764 | 1,805 | 1,892 | 1,952 | 2,022 | 2,076 | 2,142 |
| Specialist | 1,589 | 1,652 | 1,702 | 1,781 | 1,814 | 1,859 | 1,900 | 1,956 |
| Non-specialist | 91 | 112 | 103 | 111 | 138 | 163 | 176 | 186 |
| Psychiatrist | 1,389 | 1,437 | 1,501 | 1,555 | 1,582 | 1,615 | 1,672 | 1,685 |
| Radiation oncology specialist | 100 | 106 | 104 | 113 | 119 | 130 | 131 | 141 |
| Dermatologist | 239 | 242 | 245 | 260 | 267 | 275 | 277 | 291 |
| Physician | 2,980 | 3,143 | 3,333 | 3,477 | 3,664 | 3,868 | 4,069 | 4,259 |
| Other medical | 286 | 271 | 298 | 356 | 382 | 438 | 485 | 488 |
| <i>Total medical practitioners^(a)</i> | 33,751 | 34,772 | 35,574 | 36,588 | 37,735 | 38,406 | 39,036 | 39,138 |
| Optometrist | 1,160 | ^(b) 2,287 | 2,356 | 2,424 | 2,500 | 2,576 | 2,621 | 2,722 |
| Dental/orthodontist | 339 | 382 | 382 | 409 | 420 | 409 | 457 | 425 |
| Total Medicare providers^(a) | 35,250 | 37,441 | 38,312 | 39,421 | 40,655 | 41,391 | 42,114 | 42,285 |
| (per cent change—year on year increase) | | | | | | | | |
| <i>General</i> | 2.3 | 2.7 | 1.5 | 2.2 | 2.6 | 0.7 | 0.6 | -1.2 |
| Vocationally registered GP | 45.7 | 43.8 | 38.0 | 9.8 | 6.5 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 1.5 |
| Other medical practitioner | -11.1 | -18.2 | -31.2 | -11.6 | -6.0 | -2.9 | -3.3 | -8.9 |
| Obstetrician/gynaecologist | 2.3 | 0.3 | 0.8 | -6.8 | 3.7 | -0.3 | 1.8 | 1.4 |
| IVF | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | 6.3 | 7.5 | 0.0 | 9.7 |
| <i>Surgeon</i> | 3.1 | 3.4 | 3.1 | 3.5 | 4.1 | 2.5 | 2.2 | 1.7 |
| Specialist | 2.1 | 2.0 | 2.3 | 1.3 | 3.1 | 0.3 | 1.2 | 1.7 |
| Non-specialist | 8.2 | 9.6 | 6.6 | 12.2 | 7.7 | 10.4 | 5.3 | 1.7 |
| <i>Anaesthetist</i> | 3.8 | 5.0 | 2.3 | 4.8 | 3.2 | 3.6 | 2.7 | 3.2 |
| Specialist | 3.6 | 4.0 | 3.0 | 4.6 | 1.9 | 2.5 | 2.2 | 2.9 |
| Non-specialist | 8.3 | 23.1 | -8.0 | 7.8 | 24.3 | 18.1 | 8.0 | 5.7 |
| Psychiatrist | 4.4 | 3.5 | 4.5 | 3.6 | 1.7 | 2.1 | 3.5 | 0.8 |
| Radiation oncology specialist | -2.0 | 6.0 | -1.9 | 8.7 | 5.3 | 9.2 | 0.8 | 7.6 |
| Dermatologist | 0.8 | 1.3 | 1.2 | 6.1 | 2.7 | 3.0 | 0.7 | 5.1 |
| Physician | 4.4 | 5.5 | 6.0 | 4.3 | 5.4 | 5.6 | 5.2 | 4.7 |
| Other medical | 16.3 | -5.2 | 10.0 | 19.5 | 7.3 | 14.7 | 10.7 | 0.6 |
| <i>Total medical practitioners^(a)</i> | 2.8 | 3.0 | 2.3 | 2.9 | 3.1 | 1.8 | 1.6 | 0.3 |
| Optometrist | 2.7 | ^(b) 97.2 | 3.0 | 2.9 | 3.1 | 3.0 | 1.7 | 3.9 |
| Dental/orthodontist | 6.3 | 12.7 | 0.0 | 7.1 | 2.7 | -2.6 | 11.7 | -7.0 |
| Total Medicare providers^(a) | 2.9 | 6.2 | -2.3 | 2.9 | 3.1 | 1.8 | 1.7 | 0.4 |

(a) Excludes diagnostic imagists and pathologists, as the number of practitioners is not accurately known.

(b) Prior to 1991–92, optometry services provided by a multi-practitioner practice may have been billed to Medicare under the provider number of the principal. From 1991–92, services were billed to the provider number of each practitioner.

Source: Medicare statistics, Department of Health and Aged Care.

Table 40: Average number of Medicare services per head of population: service type, Australia, 1989–90 to 1997–98

| Service type | 1989–90 | 1990–91 | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 | 1995–96 | 1996–97 | 1997–98 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| GP attendances | 4.99 | 4.91 | 5.08 | 5.27 | 5.41 | 5.45 | 5.58 | 5.53 | 5.50 |
| Specialist attendances | 0.84 | 0.86 | 0.89 | 0.92 | 0.94 | 0.97 | 0.99 | 0.98 | 0.97 |
| Obstetrics | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.07 | 0.09 | 0.08 |
| Anaesthetics | 0.08 | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.09 |
| Pathology—patient episode initiation | .. | .. | 0.25 | 0.72 | 0.77 | 0.83 | 0.88 | 0.91 | 0.93 |
| Pathology tests | 1.53 | 1.51 | 1.49 | 1.52 | 1.63 | 1.76 | 1.77 | 1.80 | 1.86 |
| Diagnostic imaging | 0.45 | 0.48 | 0.49 | 0.52 | 0.53 | 0.55 | 0.57 | 0.56 | 0.57 |
| Operations | 0.24 | 0.26 | 0.27 | 0.28 | 0.28 | 0.28 | 0.29 | 0.29 | 0.29 |
| Assist in operations | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Optometry | 0.14 | 0.15 | 0.16 | 0.17 | 0.18 | 0.18 | 0.19 | 0.20 | 0.20 |
| Radiotherapy and therapeutic nuclear medicine | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.03 |
| Other | 0.15 | 0.16 | 0.17 | 0.18 | 0.20 | 0.21 | 0.23 | 0.23 | 0.24 |
| Total | 8.48 | 8.48 | 8.95 | 9.74 | 10.09 | 10.40 | 10.70 | 10.73 | 10.78 |

Source: Medicare statistics, Department of Health and Aged Care.