

## A snapshot of nursing in Australia

### Who are Nurses?

Nurses form the largest component of the healthcare workforce, providing health care to people across their lifespan. They work independently or as collaborative members of a health care team in settings which include hospitals, mental health facilities, rural and remote nursing posts, Indigenous communities, schools, prisons, residential aged care facilities, the armed forces, universities, TAFE colleges, statutory authorities, general practice offices, businesses, professional organisations and people's homes.

Nurses provide professional and holistic care, working to promote good health, prevent illness, and provide care for the ill, disabled and dying. Nurses also work in non-clinical roles to educate undergraduate and newly graduated nurses, conduct research into nursing and health related issues; and participate in developing health policy and systems of health care management. Nursing is a regulated profession. By law, before nurses may practise, they must be registered or enrolled by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA).

### The Nursing Profession in Australia

Australia has two levels of regulated nurse - registered nurses and enrolled nurses. Registered nurses working at an advanced level and holding a recognised post-graduate qualification may be eligible to seek endorsement as a nurse practitioner. See also: [A Snapshot of Nurse Practitioners](#).

The four titles protected by legislation are: 'registered nurse', 'enrolled nurse', 'registered midwife' and 'nurse practitioner'. These titles may only be used when permitted by the NMBA. Another group of health care worker, assistants in nursing

(AINs), also deliver aspects of nursing care. Assistants in nursing do not yet have consistent educational preparation or competency standards and they are not regulated by the NMBA. The ANF supports the regulation of AINs. There are 73,800 AINs in Australia, who are mostly employed in aged care.

### Nursing Education

Registered nurses must complete a three year bachelor degree at university before they are eligible to register with the NMBA. They undertake a period of post-registration graduate support in a health or aged care setting. Usually this transition period is 12 months. They may also undertake post-graduate study to specialise in one of many clinical practice areas.

Enrolled nurses are educated in the vocational education and training (VET) sector for one year to eighteen months to Diploma level, before being qualified to enrol with the NMBA. They may also undertake additional study to work at a more advanced level. The Diploma qualification enables enrolled nurses to administer some medicines to patients.

In July 2010, nursing registration was transferred from the

### Nursing Registration

states and territories to a new national body, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Board (NMBA). The NMBA is part of the Australian Health Practitioners Registration Agency and is responsible for the registration of registered and enrolled nurses. Information and registration standards are available from the NMBA website at:

<http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au>



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### Facts about the Nursing Workforce

With a combined total of 283,577, registered and enrolled nurses comprise the largest occupational group in the health workforce at 62.7%. The health workforce also includes doctors, dentists, physiotherapists, pharmacists, occupational therapists, podiatrists and other allied health professions.

A census of the nursing workforce is conducted every two years. The most recent figures were released in 2012 and cover the year 2011:

Registered Nurses	232,045
Enrolled Nurses	51,532

In 2008, there were 23,424 (9.2%) registered nurses and 6,225 (10.5%) enrolled nurses not employed in the nursing profession. There are a range of reasons nurses choose not to work in the profession. These reasons include, but are not limited to, parental leave and periods of extended travel/work overseas.

### Nursing Trends and Demographics

Females continue to make up the largest proportion of the nursing labour force. The proportion in 2007 was 90.4% and in 2011 it was 90.1%.

There are 198,103 nurses working in major cities, 78,955 in regional areas and 6,334 nurses in remote or very remote areas.

The average age of nurses is increasing. The average age of employed nurses in 2011 was 44.5 years, up from 43.7 years in 2007. The proportion of nurses aged over 50 is 38.6%.

There are 2,212 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and 624 nurse practitioners.

In 2010, 7,708 Australians completed RN undergraduate training and 3,938 completed EN vocational training.

Nurses worked an average of 32.8 hours per week in 2011. This is down from 33.3 hours worked in 2007. 49% of registered nurses and 60.4% of enrolled nurses work part-time, that is, under 35 hours per week.

### Where do Nurses Work?

Most nurses work in an area of [clinical practice](#). Clinical practice areas broadly include:

Medical and surgical, aged care, critical care, perioperative, men's health, emergency, general practice, women's health, community health, mental health, family and child health, rehabilitation and disability, drug and alcohol, rural and remote health and occupational health and safety.

Those working in [non-clinical](#) practice areas may work in state and territory health departments, the national regulatory body, professional and industrial bodies, universities, TAFE colleges, hospitals and other health and aged care settings.

These non-clinical practice roles include:

Management and administration, education, research, policy development and analysis, professional advice, advocacy and regulation.

#### Sources

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2012). Nursing and Midwifery Workforce 2011. Canberra: AIHW.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2012). Australia's Health 2012. Canberra: AIHW, 2012.