

## 4 The participating GPs

Part of the BEACH method involves the completion of a profile questionnaire by each GP participant (see Appendix 2). This questionnaire covers information about the GP and the major practice at which they are employed. Over the 10 years, the questions have occasionally been altered to improve the quality and clarity of the data collected, or to investigate topics not previously surveyed as they become relevant. Therefore, some characteristics have data over the full 10-year period, and some for shorter periods.

Since 1999–00 some trends have emerged in the characteristics of GP BEACH participants (Table 4.1). The most noticeable changes over the 10 years are listed below and some are presented in Figure 4.1. It should be noted, however, that in regard to the age and sex of GPs who participated in BEACH during 2008–09 (see section 3.2 in *General practice activity in Australia 2008–09*)<sup>1</sup>, the proportions reported in the 1998–99 to 2007–08 version of this report are more reliable indicators of changes over time for the GP and practice characteristics discussed below.<sup>50</sup>

- The feminisation of the general practice workforce is reflected in the growing proportion of GP participants who are female. The proportion of female participants increased from 30.4% in 1999–00 to 32.5% in 2008–09. This change reflects that apparent in the sample frame of all recognised GPs claiming more than 375 general practice Medicare items of service in the previous quarter in Australia, as provided each year by DoHA, from Medicare claims data.
- There was a considerable decrease in the proportion of GPs aged 35–44 years (from 32.4% in 1999–00 to 14.0% in 2008–09), and an increase in the proportion aged 55 years and over (from 26.7% in 1999–00 to 45.9% in 2008–09). Again, these changes reflect the differences observed in the sample frame from Medicare data.
- Reflecting the change in age distribution, the proportion of GPs working in general practice for fewer than 2 years decreased, from 0.7% in 1999–00 to 0.1% in 2008–09, and the proportion practising for 20 years and over increased, from 43.5% to 71.9%. There was also a decrease in the proportion working in general practice for 11–19 years, from 31.9% in 1999–00 to 19.3% in 2008–09.
- The proportion of GPs working fewer than six sessions per week increased considerably, and the proportion working 11 or more sessions per week decreased significantly. This was thought to partially reflect the larger proportion of female GPs working part-time in conjunction with motherhood. However, Charles et al. (2004) found that, while female GPs were much more likely than males to work fewer sessions, no significant change had occurred in the proportion of female GPs working part-time between 1999 and 2003. They found the proportion of males working fewer than six sessions per week rose from 6.1% in 1998–99 to 11.4% in 2002–03.<sup>51</sup> Between 1999–00 and 2008–09 there was also a significant increase in the proportion of GPs working 6–10 sessions per week, from 66.0% in 1999–00 to 78.0% in 2008–09. The proportion of GPs working 11 or more sessions per week almost halved, from 18.3% to 9.6% over this period.
- The proportion of participants in solo practice halved between 1999–00 and 2006–07, and the proportion in smaller practices of 2–4 GPs also decreased considerably. There was an associated significant increase in the proportion of GPs working in practices with five or more practitioners, from 35.8% in 1999–00 to 56.1% in 2006–07. From 2007–08, the

question was altered to capture full-time equivalent GPs at the practice, so data are no longer comparable for the question in its original format.

- The results for consultations in a language other than English reflect a change in question design. Between 1998–99 and 2000–01 GPs were asked only one question: ‘Do you conduct more than 50% of consultations in a language other than English?’ The question was removed for the following 2 years, but was replaced as the issue again became of interest. A new question was designed to collect more specific data. The recent results suggest that about one-quarter of participants provide some consultations in a language other than English, but few are doing so at more than 50% of their consultations. It would appear that, in the survey’s original format, those GPs who did consult in another language were keen to let that be known, and the ‘> 50%’ category was the only avenue available to them.
- There was no significant change over the decade in the proportions of Australian trained GPs compared with those who had graduated outside Australia. However, there was a significant change in the geographic distribution of country of graduation for those trained overseas.
- The proportion of GP participants holding Fellowship of the RACGP significantly increased, from 31.0% in 1999–00 to 39.7% in 2008–09.
- There was a significant reduction in the proportion of GPs who provide their own after-hours services, from 45.5% in 2000–01 to 28.9% in 2008–09, and those who provided after-hours services in cooperation with other practices, from 19.3% in 2000–01 to 15.1% in 2008–09.

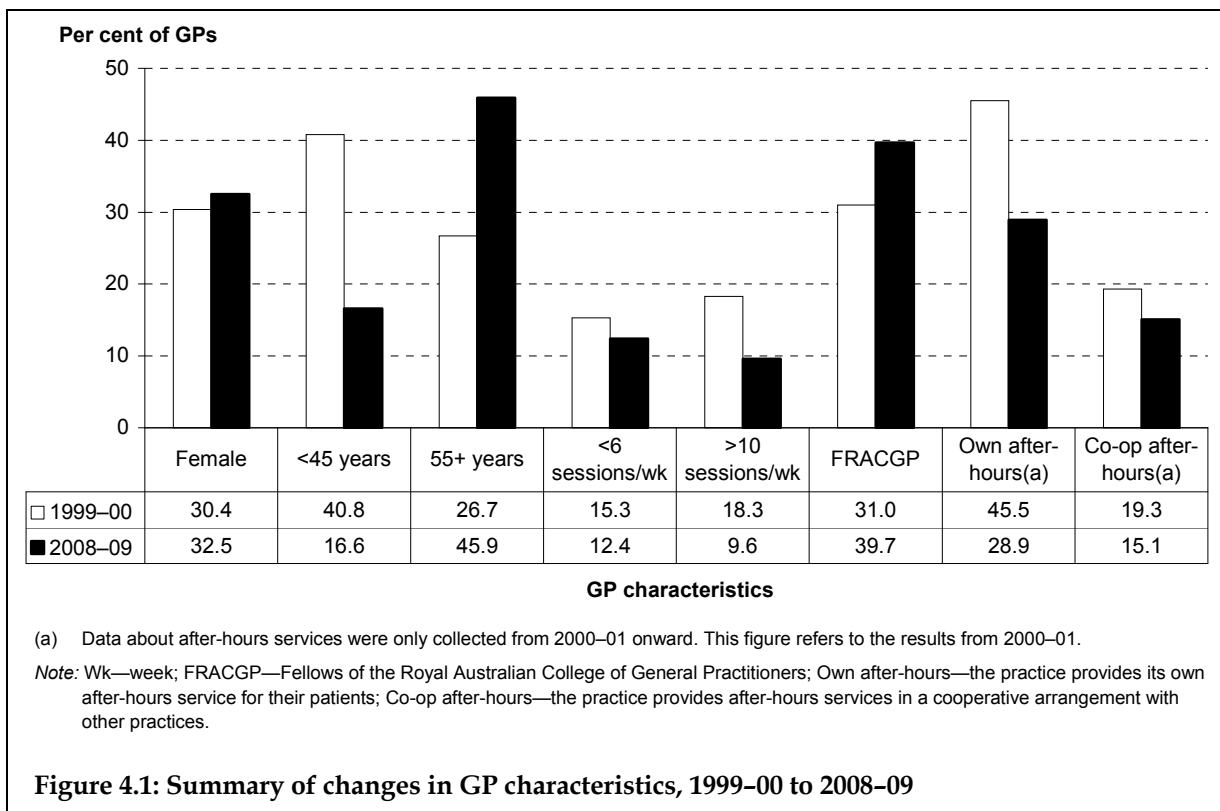


Table 4.1: GP characteristics, BEACH, 1999-00 to 2008-09

GP characteristic	Per cent of GPs <sup>(a)</sup>									
	1999-00 (n = 1,047)	2000-01 (n = 999)	2001-02 (n = 983)	2002-03 (n = 1,008)	2003-04 (n = 1,000)	2004-05 (n = 953)	2005-06 (n = 1,017)	2006-07 (n = 930)	2007-08 (n = 953)	2008-09 (n = 1,011)
Sex										
( $\chi^2 = 1.12, p = 0.289$ ) (missing n)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Male	69.6	68.4	64.2	64.8	67.3	67.9	62.8	65.9	63.2	67.5
Female	30.4	31.6	35.8	35.2	32.7	32.1	37.2	34.1	36.8	32.5
Age										
( $\chi^2 = 161.59, p < 0.001$ ) (missing n)	(4)	(9)	(1)	(0)	(1)	(1)	(18)	(11)	(8)	(4)
< 35 years	8.4	6.7	7.1	7.3	5.8	8.9	4.7	6.7	7.8	2.6
35-44 years	32.4	28.4	26.8	26.6	24.9	25.5	22.3	22.6	22.2	14.0
45-54 years	32.4	34.2	36.5	35.2	36.5	31.8	34.2	35.6	36.4	37.5
55+ years	26.7	29.7	29.5	30.9	32.7	33.6	38.7	35.0	33.5	45.9
Years in general practice										
( $\chi^2 = 174.41, p < 0.001$ ) (missing n)	(8)	(6)	(4)	(6)	(9)	(5)	(13)	(13)	(7)	(6)
< 2 years	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.6	1.3	0.4	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.1
2-5 years	8.0	6.4	7.2	7.5	5.3	10.3	4.9	7.9	9.9	3.4
6-10 years	15.9	13.7	13.4	13.5	10.7	12.6	12.1	11.1	12.9	5.7
11-19 years	31.9	29.9	28.4	28.0	28.1	25.4	24.0	23.4	20.6	19.3
20+ years	43.5	48.8	50.3	50.4	54.6	51.3	58.5	57.0	55.9	71.5
Currently in a general practice vocational training program										
( $\chi^2 = 1.44, p = 0.229$ )	2.2	2.5	2.5	2.9	4.4	3.5	2.6	2.9	2.8	1.5
Fellow of RACGP										
( $\chi^2 = 16.01, p < 0.001$ )	31.0	31.4	35.1	35.5	33.5	42.3	40.7	46.3	50.2	39.7

(continued)

**Table 4.1 (continued): GP characteristics, BEACH, 1999–00 to 2008–09**

GP characteristic	Per cent of GPs <sup>(a)</sup>									
	1999–00 (n = 1,047)	2000–01 (n = 999)	2001–02 (n = 983)	2002–03 (n = 1,008)	2003–04 (n = 1,000)	2004–05 (n = 953)	2005–06 (n = 1,017)	2006–07 (n = 930)	2007–08 (n = 953)	2008–09 (n = 1,011)
Sessions per week ( $\chi^2 = 40.7, p < 0.001$ ) (missing n)	(6)	(16)	(15)	(8)	(7)	(8)	(6)	(7)	(9)	(6)
< 6 per week	15.3	15.9	16.0	18.7	17.2	14.4	17.3	17.0	15.4	12.4
6–10 per week	66.0	66.3	67.8	67.9	68.2	71.2	70.7	73.3	73.9	78.0
11+ per week	18.3	16.2	14.8	13.4	13.6	11.4	12.0	9.6	10.9	9.6
Size of practice—Number of GPs ( $\chi^2 = 93.49, p < 0.001$ ) (missing n)	(5)	(28)	(4)	(8)	(10)	(6)	(9)	(6)		
Solo	18.1	19.3	15.3	13.7	10.6	12.2	13.1	8.2	NAV	NAV
2–4 GPs	46.1	38.6	39.7	38.4	37.8	36.4	35.2	35.7	NAV	NAV
5+ GPs	35.8	42.1	44.7	47.9	51.6	51.3	51.7	56.1	NAV	NAV
Size of practice—Full-time equivalents (missing n)	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	(23)	(8)
< 2	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	17.6	19.6
2–< 5 GPs	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	41.2	42.9
5–< 10 GPs	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	31.9	29.4
10+ GPs	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	9.2	8.1
Consultations in languages other than English <sup>(b)</sup> (missing n)	..	..	..	..	(6)	(1)	(10)	(0)	(4)	(3)
< 25%	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	17.8	21.7	21.0	18.1	20.4	17.5
25–50%	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	2.9	2.4	3.6	2.7	3.0	3.5
> 50%	10.6	13.5	NAV	NAV	2.4	3.4	3.4	2.9	3.6	1.5

(continued)

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GP characteristic	Per cent of GPs <sup>(a)</sup>									
	1999–00 (n = 1,047)	2000–01 (n = 999)	2001–02 (n = 983)	2002–03 (n = 1,008)	2003–04 (n = 1,000)	2004–05 (n = 953)	2005–06 (n = 1,017)	2006–07 (n = 930)	2007–08 (n = 953)	2008–09 (n = 1,011)
Place of graduation <sup>(c)</sup> ( $\chi^2 = 0.23$ , $p = 0.630$ ) (missing $n$ )	(2)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(1)	(1)	(6)	(1)	(3)	(2)
Australia	73.3	72.7	76.1	72.6	73.5	69.8	72.0	73.6	73.5	74.3
Overseas	26.7	27.3	23.9	27.4	26.5	30.2	28.0	26.4	26.8	25.7
United Kingdom	8.5	8.2	7.6	9.1	7.2	7.6	8.1	7.3	6.8	10.3
Asia	9.4	4.7	8.6	9.9	9.5	10.9	10.9	10.1	9.8	8.3
Europe	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.6	2.3	3.8	2.1	1.7	2.6	1.9
Africa	2.4	1.5	3.7	4.3	5.4	5.4	4.5	5.1	4.3	3.8
New Zealand	1.5	1.5	0.5	2.2	1.0	1.3	1.9	1.4	1.4	1.2
Other	2.8	9.5	1.6	0.9	1.0	1.3	0.6	0.8	0.5	0.3
Practice location by RRMA ( $\chi^2 = 9.94$ , $p = 0.127$ ) (missing $n$ )	(0)	(0)	(1)	(0)	(2)	(1)	(1)	(0)	(1)	(0)
Capital	65.2	68.1	69.3	64.7	62.4	64.9	69.1	63.9	67.8	66.8
Other metropolitan	7.4	6.9	8.1	8.5	6.4	6.7	6.8	7.3	7.0	10.0
Large rural	7.6	5.6	5.9	5.1	7.0	5.4	5.7	7.9	6.9	5.5
Small rural	6.2	5.6	4.9	7.7	7.0	6.9	6.0	5.4	4.7	6.1
Other rural	12.2	12.2	10.5	12.0	14.2	13.0	11.1	13.6	11.3	10.3
Remote central	0.4	1.0	0.5	0.6	0.9	1.3	0.5	1.0	0.7	0.4
Other remote, offshore	1.0	0.7	0.8	1.4	2.0	1.8	0.8	1.1	1.5	0.9

(continued)

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Practice location by ASGC ( $\chi^2 = 8.98, p = 0.061$ ) (missing n)	(0)	(1)	(0)	(0)	(2)	(2)	(0)	(0)	(1)	(0)
Major cities	68.6	70.9	71.4	69.4	65.4	67.6	72.1	66.3	72.2	73.4
Inner regional	20.3	18.9	17.3	19.1	21.8	20.1	18.8	22.7	17.4	18.0
Outer regional	9.7	8.4	10.1	9.3	10.1	10.1	7.8	9.4	8.6	7.2
Remote	1.2	1.4	0.9	1.6	1.6	1.5	0.8	1.3	1.3	0.9
Very remote	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.7	1.0	0.7	0.6	0.3	0.5	0.5
After-hours arrangements <sup>(d)</sup> ( $\chi^2 = 2.57, p = 0.108$ ) (missing n)	NAV	(0)	(0)	(10)	(5)	(8)	(14)	(3)	(6)	(6)
Practice does its own	NAV	45.5	41.6	42.8	43.6	35.9	34.6	34.6	33.2	28.9
Cooperative with other practices	NAV	19.3	19.4	16.7	20.0	16.2	15.7	15.5	11.3	15.1
Other than own/cooperative	NAV	39.5	44.0	45.2	59.6	50.1	52.6	52.1	55.6	57.4
Computer use at practice <sup>(e)</sup> ( $\chi^2 = 95.92, p < 0.001$ )	NAV	87.4	89.7	91.3	95.0	93.7	96.4	96.6	96.7	NAV
Computer use by individual GPs <sup>(f)</sup>	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	NAV	94.7

(a) Missing data removed.

(b) Data for all three groupings only available from 2003–04 onward.

(c)  $p = 0.630$ —no significant difference when comparing Australia with all overseas countries of GP origin;  $p < 0.001$ —significant difference in the distribution of overseas countries of GP origin.

(d) Multiple responses were allowed.

(e) Data refer to computer use at the major practice and may not reflect the use of computers by individual GPs.

(f) Data refer to computer use by individual GPs.

Note: RACGP—Royal Australian College of General Practitioners; NAV—not available; RRMA—Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas classification; ASGC—Australian Standard Geographical Classification.