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Dental prosthetist labour force in Australia, 2003



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This report provides information on the dental prosthetist labour force in Australia based on data from the 2003 national dental labour force collection.

Data collection

Data were collected from June 2003 through to December 2003. The collection was conducted in all states and territories with the exception of the Northern Territory, where prosthetists are not permitted to practise, and Western Australia (results for Western Australia are based on data from the 2002 collection).

Questionnaires were mailed to all registered prosthetists in tandem with registration renewal, except in New South Wales where a separate mail-out was conducted with one follow-up mailing.

An overall response rate of 66.1% was achieved. There were differences in the response rates achieved in each state/territory (Table 1).

Table 1: Response rates by state/territory, 2003

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	ACT	Total
Registered	409	292	143	35	107	53	18	950
Return to sender (RTS)	5	—	—	—	7	—	—	5
Respondents	242	209	93	27	50	47	7	625
Response rate % (adjusted for RTS)	59.9	71.6	65.0	77.1	50.0	88.7	38.9	66.1

Note: There was no WA collection in 2003; results are based on data from the 2002 collection.

It was assumed that non-respondents had the same characteristics as respondents; hence data were weighted up to the total number of registered prosthetists in each state/territory.

The questionnaire asked about demographic characteristics, practice status, practice characteristics at up to three locations, and hours worked. Prosthetists were also asked to estimate the number of dentures that they had completed and/or repaired in the past week.

Practice status

In 2003 there were a total of 1,057 registered prosthetists, the majority of whom, 878 (83.1%),

were currently practising. Twenty-three (2.2%) practised only in another state/territory (multiple registrations), 7 (0.7%) were either on extended leave or overseas, 26 (2.5%) were not currently working, 58 (5.5%) were working but not as a prosthetist and 64 (6.1%) were retired from regular work (Table 2).

Table 2: Registered practice status by state/territory, 2003

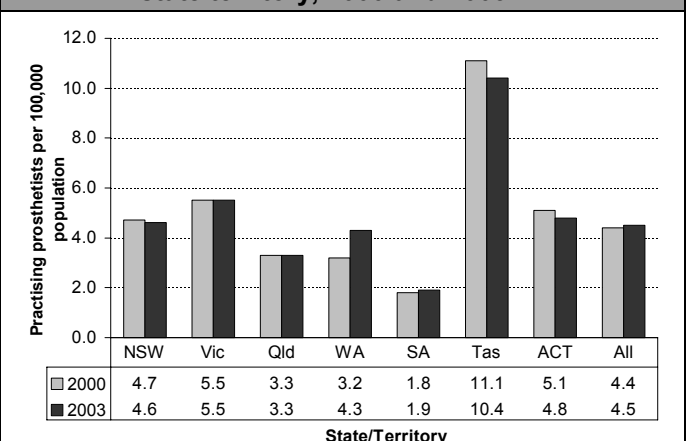
	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	Total
Working/mainly working in state/territory	308	268	125	84	29	50	15	878
Working in another state/territory	12	4	6	—	—	1	—	23
On 3+ months leave / overseas	2	—	5	—	—	1	—	7
Not working	19	6	—	2	—	—	—	26
Working but not in dental prosthetics	41	7	8	3	—	—	—	58
Retired from work	29	7	—	21	4	1	3	64
Total	409	292	143	107	35	53	18	1,057

Notes

- Not all columns/rows sum to total as weighted data have been rounded to whole numbers.
- There was no WA collection in 2003; results are based on data from the 2002 collection.

In the period 2000 to 2003 the estimated number of practising prosthetists increased by 5% from 836 to 878. Because this increase is similar to population growth, the rate of practising prosthetists per 100,000 population increased only marginally from 4.4 in 2000 to 4.5 in 2003 (Figure 1).

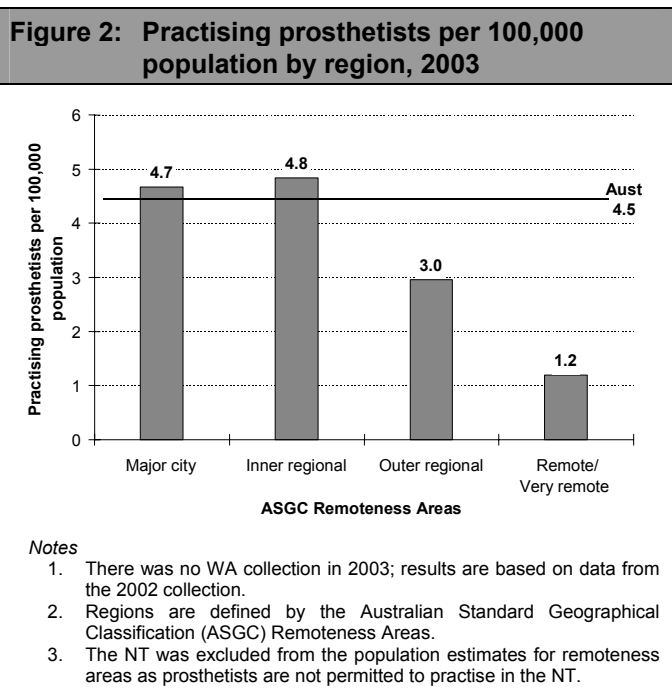
Figure 1: Practising rate per 100,000 population, state/territory, 2000 and 2003



Note: There was no WA collection in 2003; results are based on data from the 2002 collection.

Regional distribution

Practising prosthetists were distributed unevenly in proportion to the population across regions defined by remoteness. The highest rate of practising prosthetists per 100,000 population was in 'Inner regional' areas (4.8), which was four times higher than the lowest rate in 'Remote' or 'Very remote' areas (1.2) (Figure 2).



Demographic characteristics

In 2003 female prosthetists comprised 8.9% of the practising labour force (Table 3). There has been only a negligible increase (0.3%) in the percentage of female prosthetists since 2000 (8.6%).

Table 3: Practising prosthetists by age group and state/territory, 2003

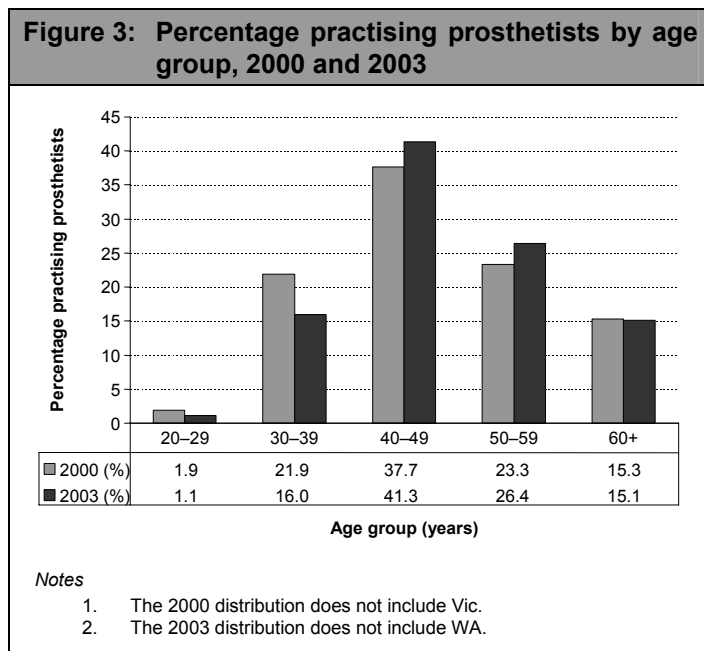
Age groups	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	Total
20-29	3	4	—	2	—	1	—	9
30-39	66	41	8	21	—	9	3	127
40-49	109	129	47	36	16	20	8	328
50-59	85	59	44	19	8	15	—	210
60+	44	35	26	6	5	5	5	120
Total	308	268	125	84	29	50	15	794
	Percentage female							
	11.0	7.8	5.2	12.8	—	18.2	—	8.9
	Average age (years)							
Male	49.0	48.6	52.1	45.3	52.3	48.5	52.7	49.5
Female	45.3	39.4	50.5	36.2	—	43.0	—	43.7
All	48.5	47.9	52.0	44.9	52.3	47.5	52.7	49.0

Notes

- There was no WA collection in 2003; results are based on data from the 2002 collection.
- Total does not include WA 2002 results.
- Not all columns/rows sum to total as data have been weighted and rounded to whole numbers.

The average age of prosthetists in the 2003 survey was 49.0 years (Table 3), compared with 47.4 in the year 2000.

The largest proportion of prosthetists was in the 40-49 years age group (41.3%). Since 2000 there has been a slight shift towards an older age distribution, as indicated by a decrease in the percentages of prosthetists in the two youngest age groups and an increase in the percentages in the 40-49 and 50-59 years age groups (Figure 3).



Practice characteristics

The majority (85.3%) of practising prosthetists were self-employed. Small percentages were employed in private practices (4.3%) or laboratories (2.2%) and 6.4% worked in a government clinic or laboratory (Table 4).

Table 4: Practising prosthetists, practice type by state/territory, 2003

Practice type	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	Aust	%
Self-employed	257	241	106	71	26	34	12	749	85.3
Employee – private practice	10	9	2	10	—	6	—	37	4.3
Employee – private laboratory	12	4	2	—	—	1	—	19	2.2
Government clinic/laboratory	17	11	15	—	3	7	3	56	6.4
Educational institution	5	3	—	2	—	—	—	10	1.2
Other	5	—	—	—	—	1	—	6	0.7
Total	308	268	125	84	29	50	15	878	100

Notes

- There was no WA collection in 2003; results are based on data from the 2002 collection.
- Not all columns/rows sum to total as data have been rounded to whole numbers.

Practice activity

Total hours usually worked per week were calculated by summing hours worked at all reported practice locations. The largest proportion (36.4%) of prosthetists worked for 40–49 hours per week. The average hours worked per week was 43.0. There was only slight variation by state/territory of the average hours worked per week. Nearly one-fifth (19.8%) of prosthetists worked part-time (Table 5).

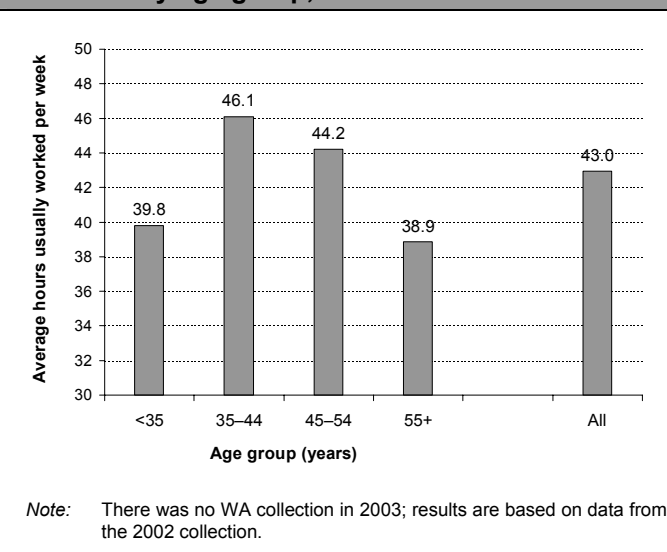
Table 5: Practising prosthetists, characteristics of work hours by state/territory, 2003

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	Total
Hour groups	Per cent							
>20	5.3	9.5	8.6	5.4	9.1	5.1	—	7.0
20–29	7.6	5.3	1.4	16.2	—	2.6	—	6.3
30–39	15.2	14.2	25.7	10.8	18.2	20.5	25.0	16.4
40–49	33.3	40.2	25.7	40.5	50.0	43.6	50.0	36.4
50–59	24.6	18.3	21.4	10.8	13.6	15.4	—	19.7
60+	14.0	12.4	17.1	16.2	9.1	12.8	25.0	14.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Average hours usually worked								
Hours	43.5	42.1	43.5	43.2	41.0	43.2	44.4	43.0
Working part-time (<35 hours/week)								
Per cent	19.9	21.3	20.0	21.6	18.2	12.8	—	19.8

Note: There was no WA collection in 2003; results are based on data from the 2002 collection.

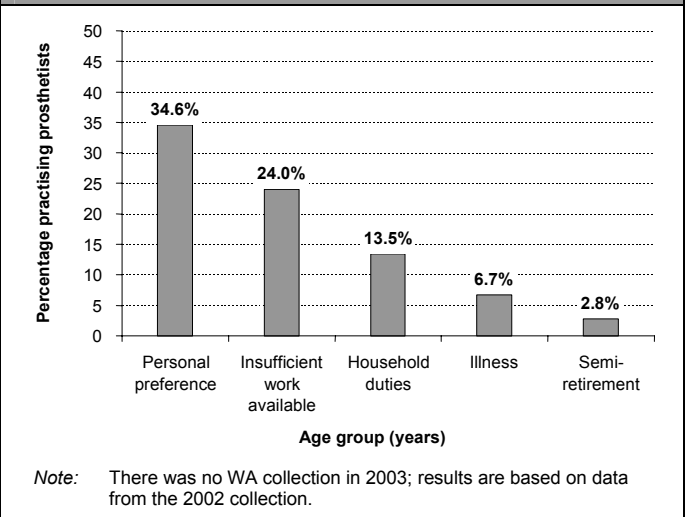
Average hours usually worked per week varied among age groups. The highest average (46.1 hours per week) was worked by prosthetists in the 35–44 years age group, while the 55+ years age group had the lowest average (38.9 hours per week) (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Average hours usually worked per week by age group, 2003



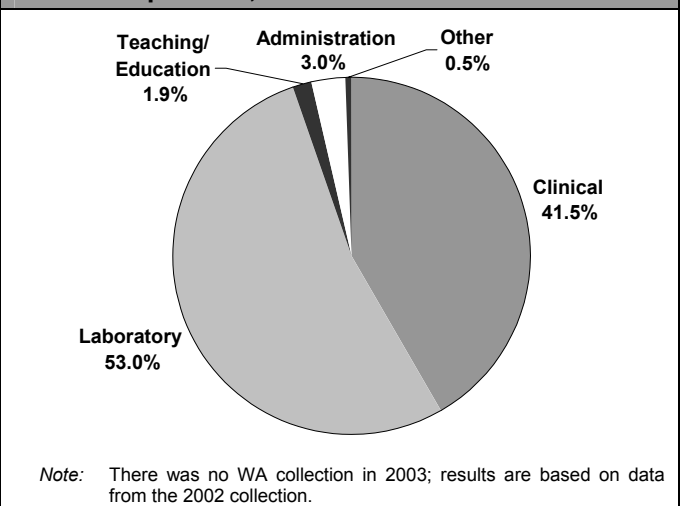
Prosthetists working part-time (less than 35 hours per week) were asked to indicate their major reasons for doing so. The most common reasons given were ‘personal preference’ (34.6%) and ‘insufficient work available’ (24.0%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Most common reasons for working part-time (less than 35 hours per week), 2003



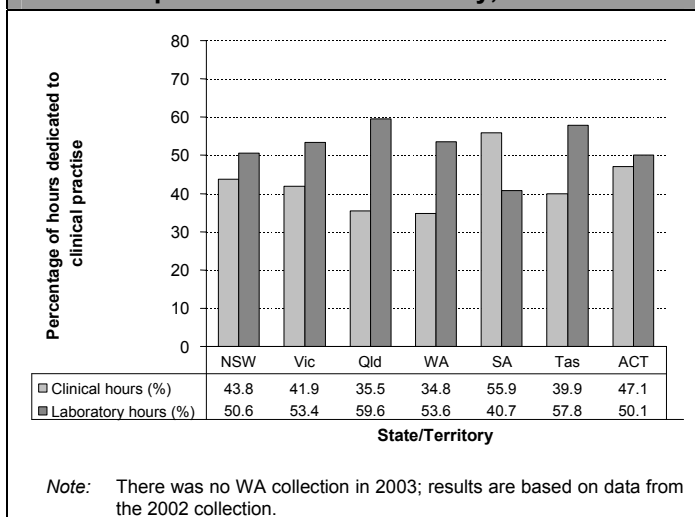
Hours dedicated to various areas of practice were totalled for all practice locations reported. Just over half (53.0%) of the hours worked were dedicated to laboratory practice, with 41.5% dedicated to clinical practice (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Percentage hours worked by area of practice, 2003



There was some variation among states/territories in the percentage of hours dedicated to clinical practice and laboratory practice. In all states/territories except South Australia, the percentage of hours dedicated to laboratory practice was greater than the percentage dedicated to clinical practice. In South Australia this trend was reversed with 55.9% of all hours dedicated to clinical practice and 40.7% to laboratory practice (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Percentage hours worked by area of practice and state/territory, 2003



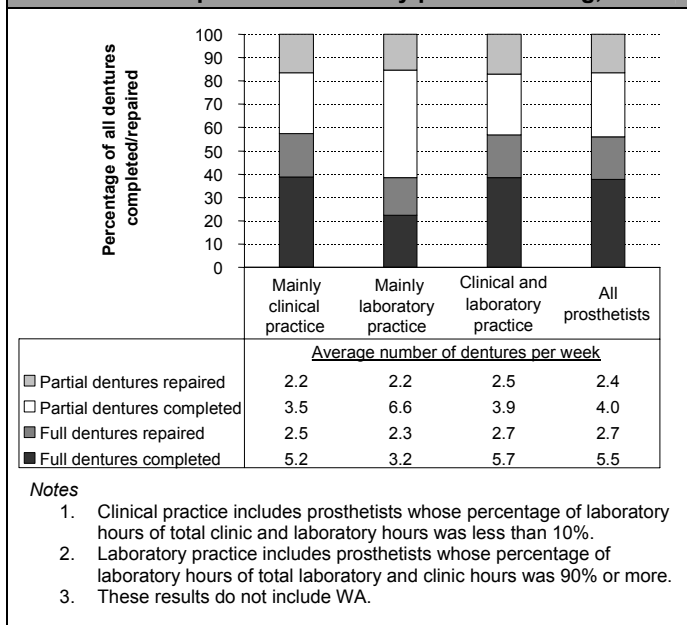
Production of dentures

Prosthetists were asked to estimate the number of dentures they had completed or repaired in the past week by denture type (full/partial). The numbers were totalled for all practice locations worked.

The completion of full dentures comprised more than one-third (37.6%, 5.5 dentures per week) of all services, followed by completion of partial dentures (27.5%, 4.0 per week), repair of full dentures (18.5%, 2.7 per week) and repair of partial dentures (16.8%, 2.4 per week) (Figure 8).

The average number of completed/repaired dentures by type varied by practice setting as working with partial denture patients is outside the legal scope of practise of clinical prosthetists in some states/territories (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Percentage completed/repaired and full/partial dentures by practice setting, 2003



Summary

- In 2003 there were 4.5 practising prosthetists per 100,000 population.
- Since the 2000 labour force collection there had been a 5.0% increase in the numbers of practising prosthetists from 836 to 878 in 2003.
- The practising rate varied by region. The highest rate (4.8) was in Inner Regional areas and the lowest (1.2) was in Remote /Very remote areas.
- The average age of prosthetists was 49.0 years.
- Female prosthetists comprised 8.9% of the practising labour force.
- The majority (85.3%) of practising prosthetists were self-employed.
- On average prosthetists worked 43.0 hours per week.
- Just over half (53.0%) of the hours worked were dedicated to laboratory practice.
- The completion of full dentures comprised more than one-third of all services provided by prosthetists (37.6%, 5.5 dentures per week).

Additional data sources

AIHW: Teusner DN & Spencer AJ 2003. Dental labour force, Australia 2000. Dental Statistics and Research Series no. 28, Cat. no. DEN 116. Canberra: AIHW.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 30/6/2003. Population estimates by age and sex, Australia, 2003, data cube: SuperTable, Cat. no. 3235.0.55.001, viewed 5 April 2005, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookupresponses/0fd1dba19a26a956ca256ec2007ea1d7?opendocument>>.

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The AIHW Dental Statistics and Research Unit (DSRU) is a collaborating unit of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, established in 1988 at The University of Adelaide and located in the Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health (ARCPQH), Dental School, The University of Adelaide. DSRU aims to improve the oral health of Australians through the collection, analysis and reporting of information on oral health and access to dental care, the practice of dentistry and the dental labour force in Australia.

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