

## 2.3 Who is in the health workforce?



Health practitioners include medical practitioners, nurses and midwives, and allied health professionals such as dental practitioners, psychologists and optometrists.

Nurses and midwives are the largest group in the health workforce, with 290,144 nurses and midwives employed in 2012 (Table 2.1). The number of full-time equivalent nurses and midwives employed for every 100,000 people is almost 3 times that of the next largest profession, medical practitioners. In 2012, there were 1,124 full-time equivalent nurses and midwives employed for every 100,000 people. There were 374 medical practitioners and, in other examples, 85 psychologists and 15 podiatrists.

**Table 2.1: Employed health practitioners 2012**

Practitioner type	FTE rate <sup>(a)</sup>	Number
Nurses and midwives	1,124	290,144
Medical practitioners	374	79,653
Pharmacists	89	21,331
Psychologists	85	22,404
Physiotherapists	80	20,081
Dental practitioners (includes allied)	74	17,583
Medical radiation practitioners	47	7,806
Occupational therapists	45	7,231
Optometrists	17	4,066
Chiropractors	16	4,029
Podiatrists	15	3,491
Chinese medicine practitioners	13	3,580
Osteopaths	6	1,543
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners	1	233

(a) FTE rate is the full-time equivalent number of employed per 100,000 population.

Full-time equivalent number is based on a 38-hour week except for medical practitioners where it is based on a 40-hour week.

Source: National Health Workforce Data Set 2012.

The number of nurses and midwives and medical practitioners has increased significantly in the last few years. For example, the number of full-time equivalent medical practitioners employed rose by 16% from 2008 to 2012 and the number of nurses and midwives rose by 7% (see Chapter 9 'Indicators of Australia's health'). In part this reflects an increase in the availability of training places for people studying in the relevant fields. For example, the number of domestic commencements in medicine increased between 2007 and 2012 by 18.6% (DoHA 2012, 2013). For every 1,000 people employed in Australia (ABS 2014), there were 35 medical practitioners and nurses and midwives employed in 2008. This increased to 36 in 2012.

More broadly, between the 2006 and 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics Censuses, the number of people employed in the health care and social assistance industry increased from 956,150 to 1,167,633 (22.1%). This rise was similar to that between 2001 and 2006 (Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2: Number of people employed in the health care and social assistance industry<sup>(a)</sup>**

Year	Males	Females	Persons
2001	169,673	623,718	793,391
2006	204,501	751,649	956,150
<b>2011</b>	<b>245,315</b>	<b>922,318</b>	<b>1,167,633</b>

(a) Based on the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) 2006, Revision 1 released in 2008. Data for 2001 and 2006 have been concorded.

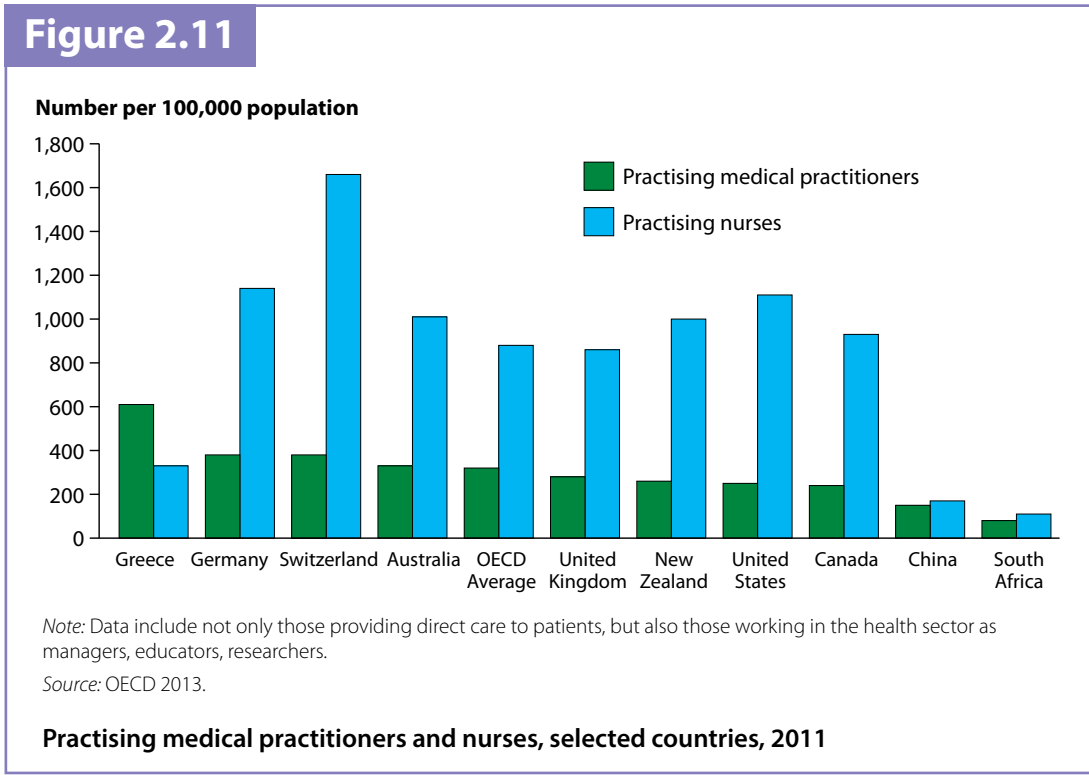
Source: ABS 2012.

## International comparisons

Australia has a similar number of practising medical practitioners per capita as the OECD average and a higher per capita number of practising nurses (Figure 2.11). International comparisons are affected by different regional distributions, scopes of practice and by different hours worked in the various countries.

## Geographic distribution

- The concentration of health professionals in *Major cities* is greater than that for the broader population (Figure 2.12).
- The exception is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners, where the full-time equivalent rate of employed practitioners is greatest in *Remote* and *Very remote* areas.



**What is missing from the picture?**

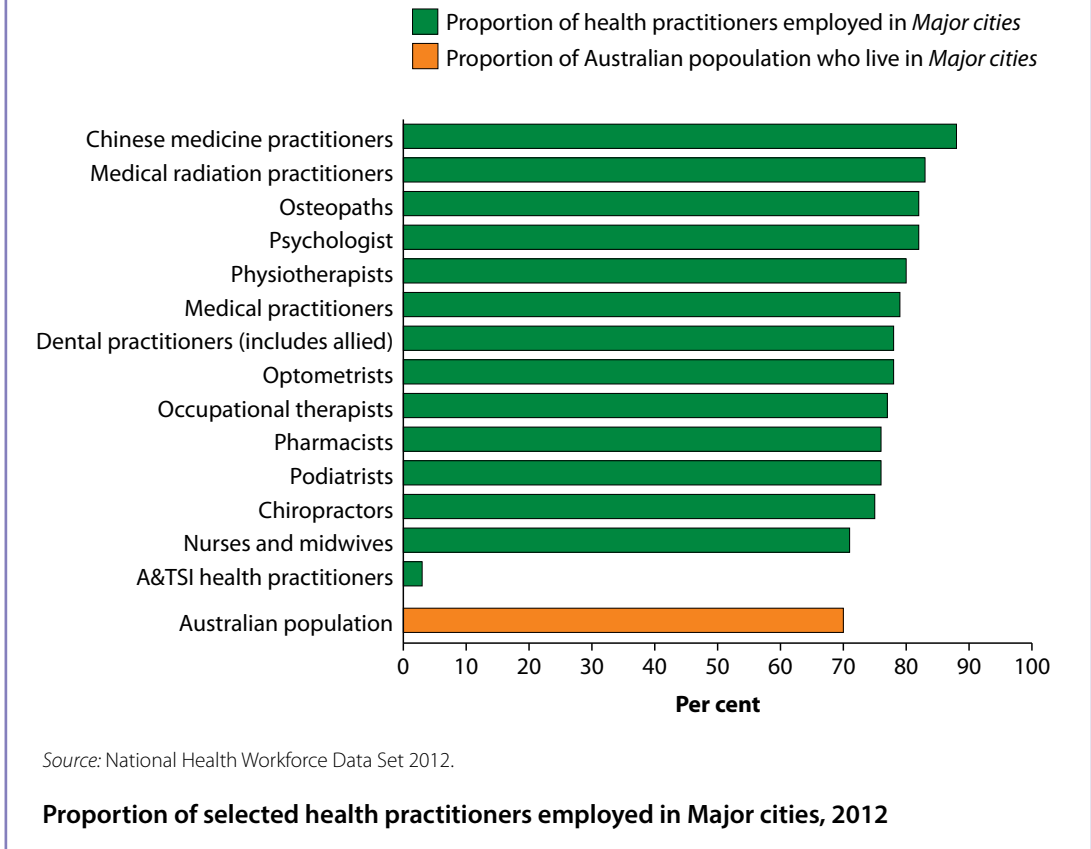
The data presented here do not account for the demand for health care or consider changes in the productivity of the workforce. In the future, longitudinal data from the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, introduced in 2010, may enable a better understanding of the movement of different types of health professionals between work areas and geographical areas.

**Where do I go for more information?**

More information on the health workforce is available in the following AIHW reports, which are available for free download: [Allied health workforce 2012](#), [Dental workforce 2012](#), [Medical workforce 2012](#), and [Nursing and midwifery workforce 2012](#).



**Figure 2.12**



**References**

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