

13 Explanatory notes

Background

In 1990, the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC) commissioned the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to develop national health labour force statistics about the major registrable health professions. Data collections based on a national minimum data set were developed addressing the labour force planning needs of the health professions, government, service providers and educational institutions. In addition to nursing, published data from the collection are available for medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, podiatry and physiotherapy.

In 1997, the National Health Information Management Group of AHMAC reviewed national health labour information requirements and decided that future national collections would be conducted annually for medicine, biannually for nursing, and on a rolling three-year cycle for dentistry and several allied health occupations.

Scope and coverage

The scope of the national nursing labour force survey conducted in association with renewal of registration and enrolment is all nurses registered or enrolled with the nurses' board or nursing council in each State and Territory, and eligible to practise.

The coverage may exclude nurses who registered for the first time during the current year. These nurses may not be required to renew their registration at the standard renewal date if the initial registration in that State or Territory has occurred during the preceding 12 months.

Method

The main data in this publication were obtained from a nursing labour force survey conducted by each State and Territory nurses board on behalf of the Institute. Each State and Territory nurses board conducts an annual renewal of registrations and a survey questionnaire was sent to all nurses as part of the registration renewal process. Each State and Territory health authority forwarded a computer file of the survey data to the Institute for aggregation into a national dataset.

Nurse labour force survey response rate

Based on the total of the registrations in each State and Territory, the response rate to the survey was 79.3%. The response rate was 72% in New South Wales, 75% in Victoria, 85% in Queensland, 59% in Western Australia, 79% in South Australia, 50% in Tasmania, 40% in the Australian Capital Territory and 53% in the Northern Territory. However, complete data were not available for all responding nurses, either because not all survey questions were completed or because nurses board initial registration data were incomplete or not provided.

The overall response rate can only be estimated, and not determined with complete accuracy. It is known that at least some nurses who were registered in more than one State or Territory completed a questionnaire in just one State or Territory. The incidence of this occurrence cannot be ascertained because matching survey records among States and Territories is not possible.

Labour force estimates

Nurses may register in more than one State or Territory. In estimating the nursing labour force, it is therefore important to reduce as much as possible the consequent duplication in statistics.

The estimation of the number and characteristics of currently employed nurses in each State and Territory was based on the responses of those nurses employed solely or mainly in the State or Territory of registration. Nurses who were on leave for three months or more, although employed, were excluded from most tables of employed nurses because not all States and Territories collected data from nurses who were on leave.

It is assumed, for all estimates, that non-respondents to the survey had the same labour force characteristics as had respondents, and the survey data were scaled up to the registrations in each State and Territory by distributing the non-response numbers on the basis of this assumption. This process may overestimate the numbers of nurses in the labour force in each State and Territory if non-respondents are more likely to be those with multiple registration or those not in the nurse labour force. This survey error will be greater in the two Territories, which have a higher proportion of nurses registered in other jurisdictions, and lower proportions of nurses practising solely in the Territories.

Collection timing

The labour force survey is conducted by the nurses' registration board in each State and Territory in conjunction with the annual renewal of practice licences. Therefore, the timing of the survey depends on the licence renewal procedure that operates in each State and Territory. Nurses registering for the first time are not included in the survey at initial registration because they would generally have no previous nursing job for which details could be provided.

As the renewal of registration in New South Wales is due on the anniversary of initial registration, the survey is conducted throughout the calendar year.

South Australia has four renewal periods each year with about one-quarter of nurses registered in each period. The survey returns from each quarterly renewal period are accumulated for a calendar year.

The remaining States and Territories have annual renewals due by a fixed date. For Victoria, renewal is due by 31 December, Queensland is due by 30 June, Western Australia is due by 31 December, Tasmania is due by 31 August, the Australian Capital Territory is due by 1 April, and the Northern Territory is due by 30 June. The collection period in each State and Territory is shown schematically in the following table.

In this publication, survey data collected during 1996 were used, except for Tasmania and the Northern Territory. For Tasmania, the 1996 survey did not include the question about field of nursing. As this is an important question in terms of determining whether a nurse is working as a clinician or in some other field of nursing, it was decided to use 1995 data scaled to 1996 registration numbers. As the survey was not conducted the Northern Territory in 1996, the 1995 data have been scaled to the 1996 registration numbers.

Table 76: Nurse labour force survey: data collection period, States and Territories, 1996

State/Territory	Nov 95	Dec 95	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
New South Wales														
Victoria														
Queensland														
Western Australia														
South Australia														
Tasmania														
Australian Capital Territory														
Northern Territory														

Identification of registered and enrolled nurses

The 1996 survey questionnaire did not have a question that identified whether a nurse was on the register or the roll in each State and Territory because it was assumed that this would be readily available from the registering authority.

A means of positively identifying whether a respondent to the survey was on the register or the roll was provided for New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. For all other States and Territories, nurses were identified as registered or enrolled by the division in which they were registered (see table below). Nurses identified as being both registered and enrolled were defined as registered in the survey database.

Use of the register to classify nurses as either registered or enrolled differed from that used in previous years where job classification was used.

Table 77: Nurse labour force survey: method of classifying nurses as registered or enrolled, selected States and Territories, 1996

Classification	Victoria	Western Australia	South Australia	Australian Capital Territory
Enrolled	Enrolled (Div. 2) Mothercraft (Div. 5)	Enrolled Enrolled (comprehensive) Enrolled (mental health) Mothercraft Dental	Enrolled Mothercraft	Enrolled Mothercraft
Registered	Comprehensive (Div. 1) Psychiatric (Div. 3) Mental retardation (Div.4)	General Comprehensive Psychiatric Mental health Child health Midwifery Other	General Midwifery Infant Mental health Mental deficiency Other	General Midwifery Infant Mental health Other