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Medical labour force 2009

Highlights

This bulletin presents a summary of information on the medical practitioner labour force, based on estimates derived from the 2009 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Medical Labour Force Survey. This survey collected information on the demographic and employment characteristics of medical practitioners who were registered at the time of the survey. This survey was done annually until 2009 by state and territory health authorities, with the questionnaire administered by the medical registration boards (or councils) in each jurisdiction, usually in conjunction with the registration renewal process.

The main findings of the report are as follows:

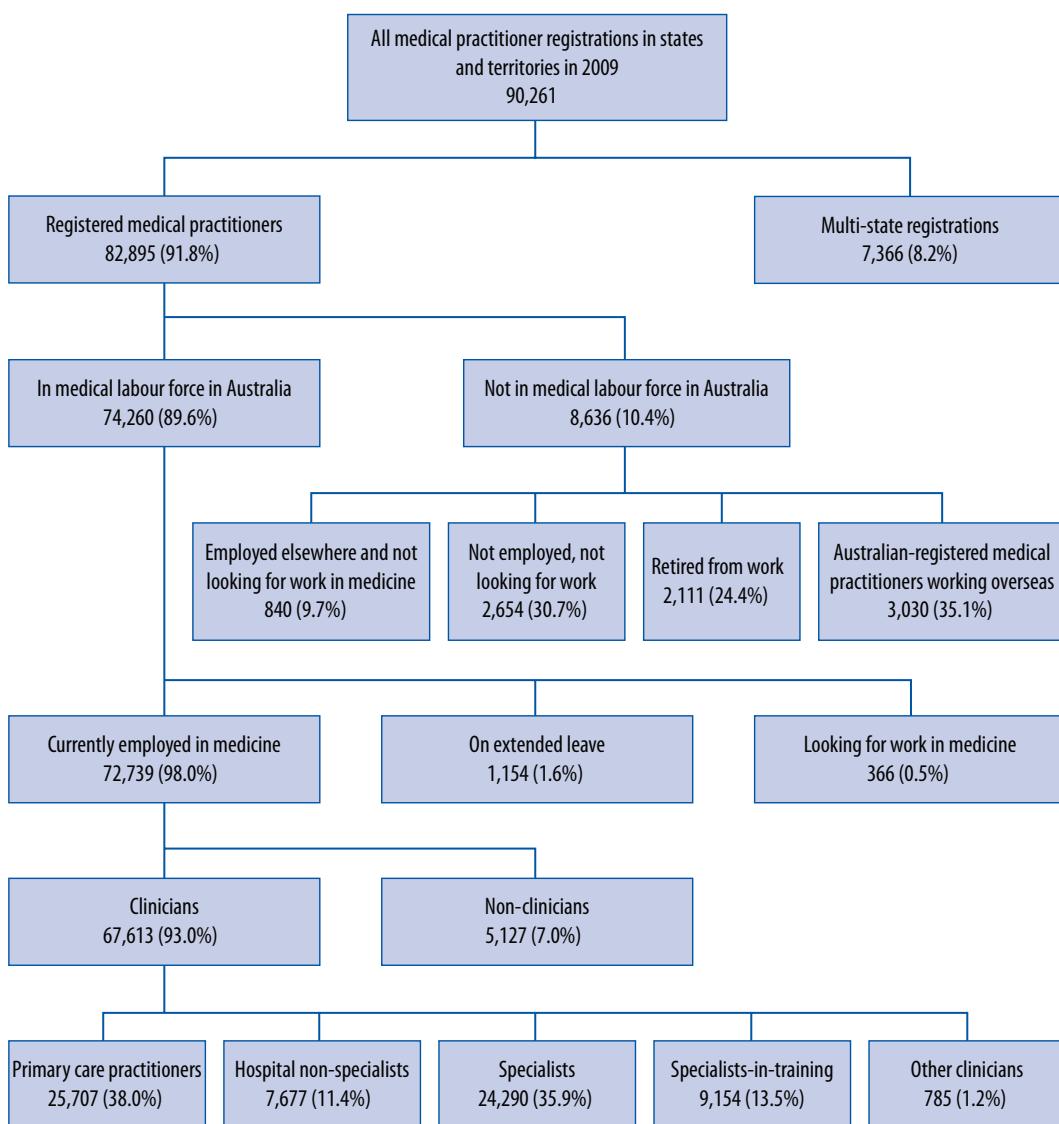
- In 2009, there were 82,895 registered medical practitioners. The number of registered practitioners increased by 22.1% between 2005 and 2009.
- The number of medical practitioners in the labour force (that is, employed in or looking for work in medicine in Australia) increased by 21.4% between 2005 and 2009, from 61,165 to 74,260.
- Between 2005 and 2009, the number of medical practitioners actually employed in medicine increased by 20.7%, from 60,252 to 72,739.
- The average weekly hours worked by employed medical practitioners decreased from 43.7 hours in 2005 to 42.2 hours in 2009.
- Despite a 3.4% decrease in average hours worked from 2005 to 2009, the overall supply of employed medical practitioners increased from 323 to 350 full-time equivalent medical practitioners (FTE) per 100,000 population (based on a 40-hour working week), due to an increase of 20.7% in employed medical practitioner numbers.

(highlights continued overleaf)

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- Regionally, medical practitioner supply ranged from 392 full-time equivalent medical practitioners per 100,000 population in *Major cities* to 206 full-time equivalent medical practitioners per 100,000 population in *Outer regional areas*.
- The average age of employed medical practitioners in 2009 was 45.6 years, which was comparable with 2005, at 45.1 years.
- Females continued to increase their share of the medical practitioner workforce, making up 35.7% of employed practitioners in 2009 (up from 32.9% in 2005). Among clinicians, in 2009, the female share varied between types of clinical practice, accounting for 47.2% of hospital non-specialists, compared with 25.4% of specialists.



Source: AIHW Medical Labour Force Survey 2009.

Figure 1: Registered medical practitioners, by labour force status, 2009

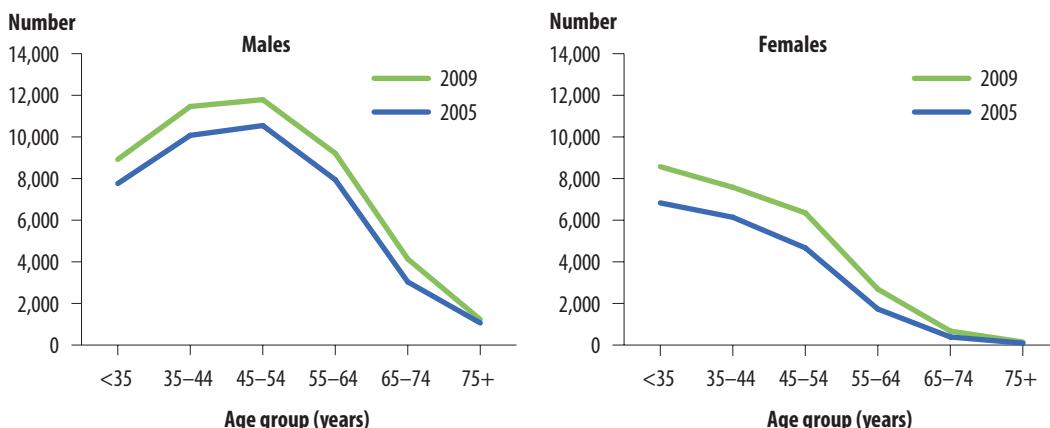
Demographic characteristics

In 2009, there were 82,895 registered medical practitioners, of which 72,739 (87.7%) were employed in medicine (Figure 1).

The average age of employed medical practitioners was 45.6 years—47.8 years for males and 41.5 years for females. Non-clinicians were, on average, slightly older than clinicians (49.6 years and 45.3 years, respectively) (Table 1).

Females comprised 35.7% of the employed medical labour force in 2009, up from 32.9% in 2005. They comprised nearly half (49.5%) of employed medical practitioners under the age of 35 years, and nearly a quarter (22.6%) of those aged 55–64 years.

About three quarters (74.5%) of employed medical practitioners were trained in Australia.



Sources: AIHW Medical Labour Force Survey 2005 and 2009.

Figure 2: Number of employed medical practitioners, by age group and sex, 2005 and 2009

Work characteristics

Most employed medical practitioners worked mainly as clinicians (67,613 or 93.0%) (Table 1). Of these, the largest proportion were primary care practitioners (primarily general practitioners) (38.0%), followed by specialists (35.9%), specialists-in-training (13.5%) and hospital non-specialists (11.4%).

The proportion of the clinical workforce comprising primary care practitioners has declined from 44.8% of the clinical workforce in 1999 to 38.0% in 2009. Over the same period specialists-in-training increased from 9.7% to 13.5%.

Of the non-clinical workforce, about one-third (29.7%) were administrators and one-quarter (25.8%) were researchers.

Clinicians worked an average of 42.5 hours per week, and non-clinicians 39.4 hours. Of clinicians, specialists-in-training reported the highest average hours per week (48.5 hours) and other clinicians the lowest (36.1 hours).

Table 1: Employed medical practitioners, selected characteristics 1999, 2005 and 2009

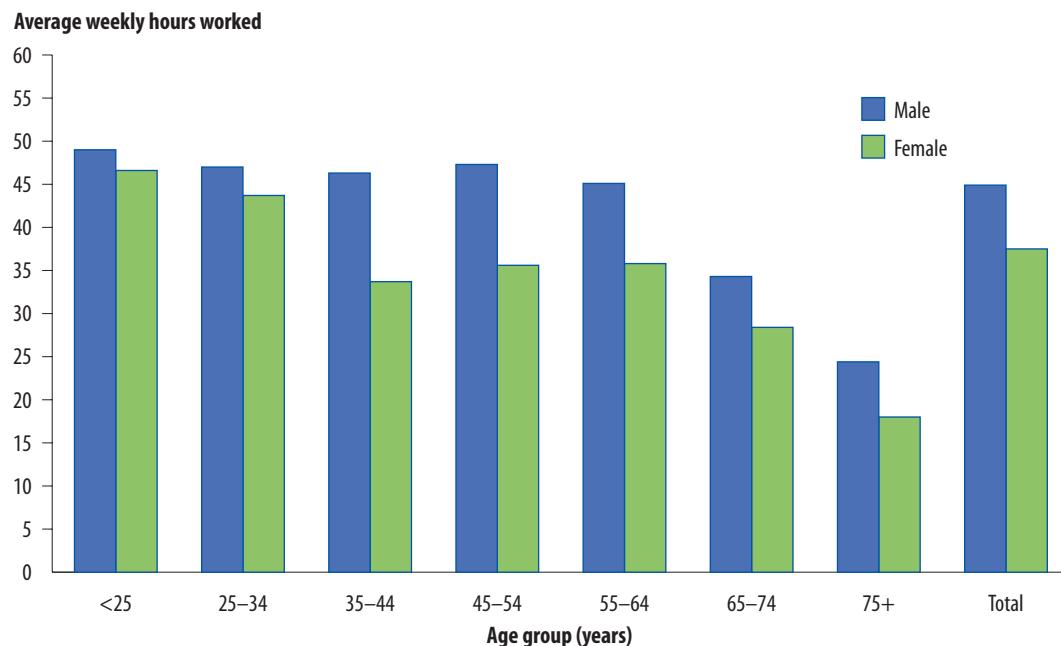
	Number	Percentage female	Average age (years)	Percentage aged 55 years or over	Average hours worked per week	FTE number ^(a)	FTE rate
1999							
Clinicians	45,999	28.7	45.8	24.2	45.8	52,669	278.3
Primary care practitioners	20,616	33.2	47.8	25.9	42.2	21,750	114.9
Hospital non-specialists	4,469	38.4	32.5	10.2	48.2	5,385	28.5
Specialists	16,459	18.5	50.0	31.0	48.0	19,751	104.4
Specialists-in-training	4,455	36.0	32.4	5.5	51.7	5,758	30.4
Non-clinicians	4,224	31.3	48.8	31.6	43.1	4,551	24.0
Total	50,223	28.9	46.0	24.9	45.6	57,254	302.5
2005							
Clinicians	56,084	32.9	44.9	23.2	43.9	61,552	301.8
Primary care practitioners	22,589	36.5	48.7	28.7	39.9	22,533	110.5
Hospital non-specialists	6,632	48.3	32.3	3.8	46.2	7,660	37.6
Specialists	19,943	20.9	49.2	31.5	45.7	22,785	111.7
Specialists-in-training	6,920	40.9	32.2	0.0	49.1	8,494	41.6
Non-clinicians	4,168	33.1	48.3	29.3	41.6	4,335	21.3
Total	60,252	32.9	45.1	23.6	43.7	65,825	322.8
2009							
Clinicians	67,613	35.8	45.3	24.2	42.5	71,839	327.3
Primary care practitioners	25,707	39.4	49.3	32.6	38.3	24,614	112.1
Hospital non-specialists	7,677	47.2	33.5	5.3	45.9	8,809	40.1
Specialists	24,290	25.4	49.3	30.1	43.7	26,537	120.9
Specialists-in-training	9,154	43.6	33.1	0.0	48.5	11,099	50.6
Other clinicians	785	39.9	45.6	28.2	36.1	708	3.2
Non-clinicians	5,126	34.7	49.6	34.0	39.4	5,049	23.0
Total	72,739	35.7	45.6	24.8	42.2	76,740	349.6

(a) FTE number and FTE rate (full-time equivalents per 100,000 population) are based on a standard full-time working week of 40 hours.

Sources: AIHW Medical Labour Force Survey 1999, 2005 and 2009.

Male medical practitioners worked an average of 44.9 hours per week, compared with 37.5 hours for female medical practitioners (Figure 3). This is primarily due to a larger proportion of female medical practitioners working part-time hours (38.5%) compared with males (16.7%) (part time is a working week of 35 or less hours). Medical practitioners worked similar average hours in each sector, with 34.4 hours worked in the private sector and 35.6 hours in the public sector.

The most common work setting for medical practitioners' main job was private rooms (33,232 or 45.7%) followed by acute care hospital (27,887 or 38.3%).



Source: AIHW Medical Labour Force Survey 2009.

Figure 3: Employed medical practitioners, average total weekly hours, by age group 2009

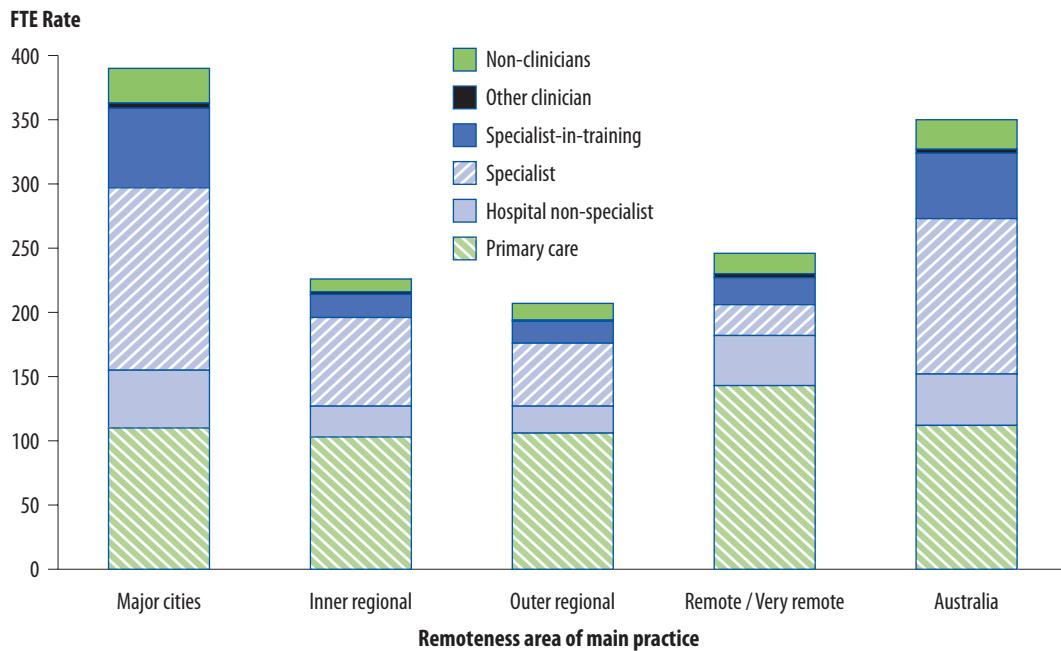
Regional distribution

Remoteness areas

The supply of employed medical practitioners was highest in *Major cities* (392 full-time equivalent medical practitioners per 100,000 population) (based on a 40-hour working week). The rate of employed medical practitioners per head of population was significantly lower in other remoteness areas, with *Outer regional* having the lowest rate (206 full-time equivalent medical practitioners per 100,000 population) (Figure 4). The number of clinical medical specialists decreased with increasing remoteness (142 FTE per 100,000 for *Major cities*; 24 FTE per 100,000 for *Remote/Very remote* areas).

Medical practitioners working in *Remote/Very remote* areas worked, on average, 3.2 hours per week more than the national average, with primary care practitioners working an average of 7.3 hours per week more than the national average (45.6 compared with 38.3 hours).

On average, medical practitioners working in *Remote/Very remote* areas were 3.4 years younger than the national average (42.2 years and 45.6 years, respectively).



(a) FTE rate (number of full-time equivalent medical practitioners per 100,000 population) is based on a standard full-time working week of 40 hours.
Source: AIHW Medical Labour Force Survey 2009.

Figure 4: Employed medical practitioners, FTE rate per 100,000 population^(a), by remoteness area and occupation

States and territories

The estimated supply of employed medical practitioners was highest in the Australian Capital Territory (509 full-time equivalent medical practitioners per 100,000 population) and the lowest in New South Wales (326 full-time equivalent medical practitioners per 100,000 population). Employed practitioners in the Australian Capital Territory worked the highest average hours per week (42.9 hours), and in Tasmania the lowest (39.6 hours). Comparisons between states and territories should be interpreted with caution, due to the relatively low response rates to the survey in some jurisdictions (see data sources section).

Employed practitioners were youngest, on average, in the Northern Territory (42.2 years) and oldest in Tasmania (49.5 years). The Northern Territory had the highest percentage of female employed medical practitioners (47.8%) compared with the national average of 35.7%.

Indigenous participation in the medical workforce

In 2009, there were 174 medical practitioners employed in medicine who identified themselves as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, representing about 0.2% of the employed practitioners for whom Indigenous status was provided. The Northern Territory had the highest proportion of Indigenous medical practitioners, at 1.3%.

Indigenous medical practitioners were, on average, 2.5 years younger than non-Indigenous practitioners (43.0 years and 45.5 years, respectively). A higher proportion of Indigenous practitioners were female than for non-Indigenous practitioners (38.7% and 35.8%, respectively).

Data sources

The source of these data is the AIHW Medical Labour Force Survey. This survey collected information on the demographic and employment characteristics of practitioners who were registered in Australia at the time of the survey. The survey was done annually until 2009 by state and territory health authorities, with the questionnaire administered by the registration boards (or councils) in each jurisdiction, usually in conjunction with the registration renewal process. Future reports will be based on the similar survey being run through the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, which is implementing the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme in partnership with the Medical Board of Australia.

The overall response rate to the 2009 survey was estimated to be 53.1%. The national rate has gradually declined over time, from the 81.3% response rate achieved in 1998. Estimates for some jurisdictions should be interpreted with caution, due to relatively low response rates to the survey and very large declines in the response rate between 2008 and 2009 for Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, as well as low response rates for particular age groups in Queensland.

For more information on the data collection method and other relevant data issues, see the explanatory notes section at: <www.aihw.gov.au/labourforce/index.cfm>. This site also contains supplementary data tables that contain the source data quoted in this bulletin.

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Unpublished Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated resident population data are used for the calculation of medical practitioner rates and full-time equivalent rates.

Further information

More detailed data about the medical labour force and other registered health professionals are available at: <www.aihw.gov.au/workforce/>.

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