

Overview

Overall number of nurses in 1999

The renewal of nurse registration and enrolments, conducted by state and territory registration boards, identified a total of 265,076 nurses in 1999. This comprised 212,026 registered nurses and 53,050 enrolled nurses. Allowing for multiple registrations (nurses who were registered or enrolled in more than one jurisdiction), the total number of nurses identified by the Nursing Labour Force Survey was 256,938, comprising 205,003 registered and 51,935 enrolled nurses respectively.

The majority of nurses (91.1% or 233,982), were in the nurse labour force. The remaining 8.9% (22,956) were either employed elsewhere and not looking for work in nursing (8,869), not employed and not looking for work in nursing (9,998), or overseas (4,088).

Of those in the nurse labour force, 1.5% (3,458) were on extended leave for a period greater than 3 months, and 2.5% (5,929) were looking for work in nursing. The remaining 96.0% (224,595) were employed in nursing. This group was composed of 89.1% (200,048) clinicians, 5.6% (12,499) administrators, 2.6% (5,928) teachers/educators and 0.8% (1,729) researchers (Figure 1). Over half of all employed nurses (54%) worked part time.

Composition of the nurse labour force

Nurses are classified into two broad categories: registered nurses, who make up the majority of all nurses, and enrolled nurses. The minimum educational requirement for a registered nurse is a 3-year degree from a tertiary institution or the equivalent from a recognised hospital-based program. The minimum educational requirement for an enrolled nurse is a 1-year diploma from a vocational education and training institution (VET) or equivalent from a recognised hospital-based program. Although the level of expertise varies within these groups, in general registered nurses perform more complex medical procedures and hold more responsibility than do enrolled nurses. For instance, in most jurisdictions, only registered nurses have the authority to administer medications.

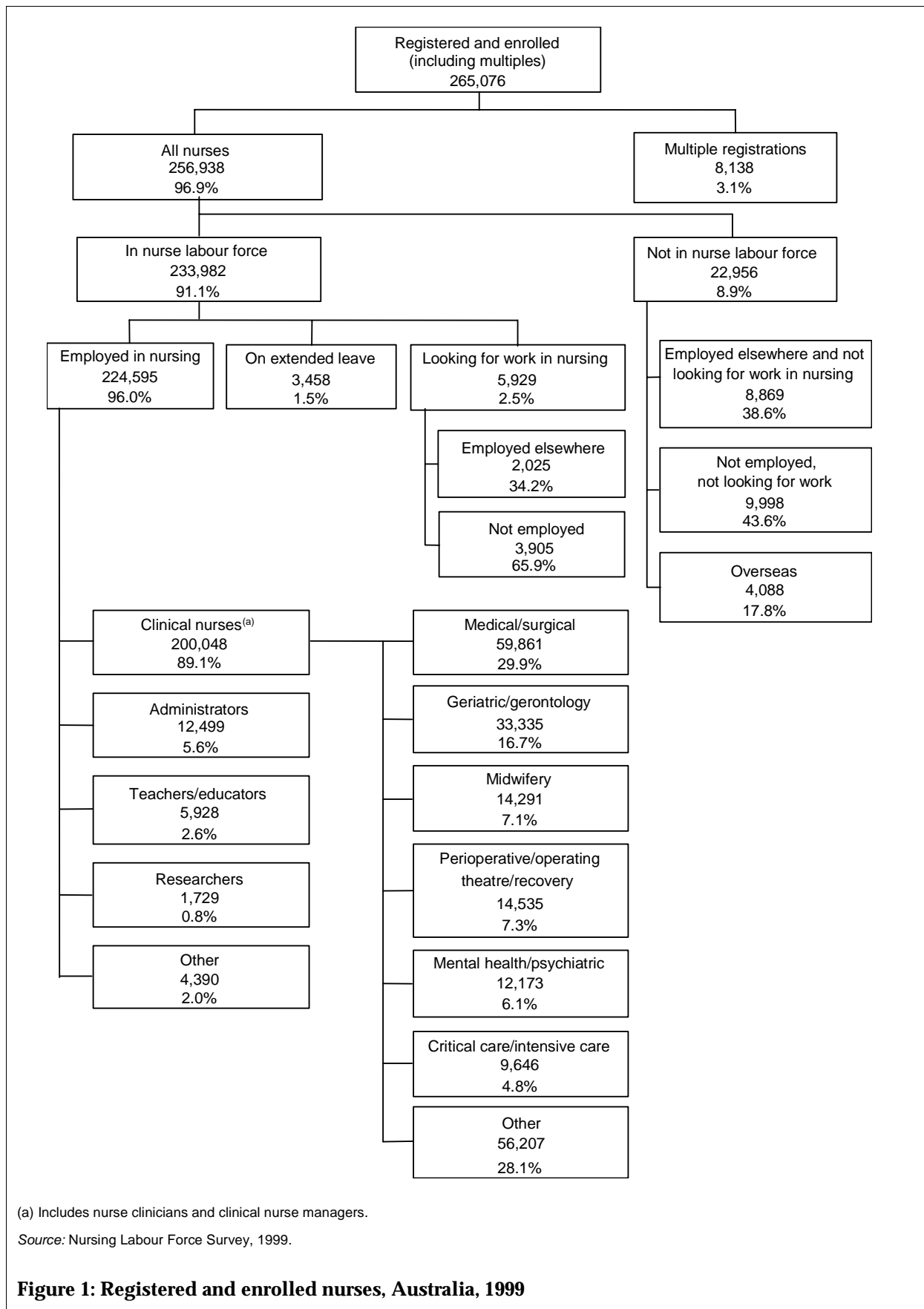


Figure 1: Registered and enrolled nurses, Australia, 1999

Registered nurses

Allowing for multiple registrations, there were 205,003 registered nurses in 1999, of whom 186,294 (90.9%) were in the nurse labour force. Of the 18,709 (9.1%) nurses not in the nurse labour force, 6,822 were employed elsewhere and not looking for work in nursing, 7,945 were not employed and not looking for work in nursing, and 3,942 were overseas (Figure 2).

In the nursing labour force, 2,925 (1.6%) were on extended leave for a period greater than 3 months. An additional 4,192 (2.3%) were looking for work in nursing, with the remaining 179,178 (96.2%) actively employed in nursing.

- This represents a 9.1% increase in the number of employed registered nurses from 1993 (Table C.35).

The majority (88.0%) of employed registered nurses in 1999 were clinical, which includes nurse clinicians and clinical nurse managers. Administrators made up 6.6%; teachers/educators made up 3.1%; and researchers made up 0.9%.

Since 1993 there were increases in the number of nurses across all categories. There was a 7.0% increase in the number of clinical nurses from 147,238 in 1993 to 157,613 in 1999; a 41.8% increase in administrators from 8,360 to 11,856, a 32.0% increase in teachers/educators from 4,174 to 5,510; and an increase in researchers from 626 to 1,619 (Table C.35).

Enrolled nurses

Allowing for multiple registrations, there were 51,935 enrolled nurses in 1999, of whom 47,688 (91.8%) were in the enrolled nurse labour force. The remaining 4,247 (8.2%) were not in the nurse labour force and were either overseas or not looking for work in nursing. Of those in the nursing labour force, 533 (1.1%) were on extended leave, 1,737 (3.6%) were looking for work in nursing, with the remaining 45,418 (95.2%) actively employed in nursing (Figure 3).

The majority (93.4%) of employed enrolled nurses in 1999 were clinical nurses. Administrators made up 1.4%, teachers/educators made up 0.9%, and researchers made up 0.2%. Since 1993, these proportions have increased slightly for all categories except for teachers/educators, which hovered between 0.5% and 0.9% (Table C.36).

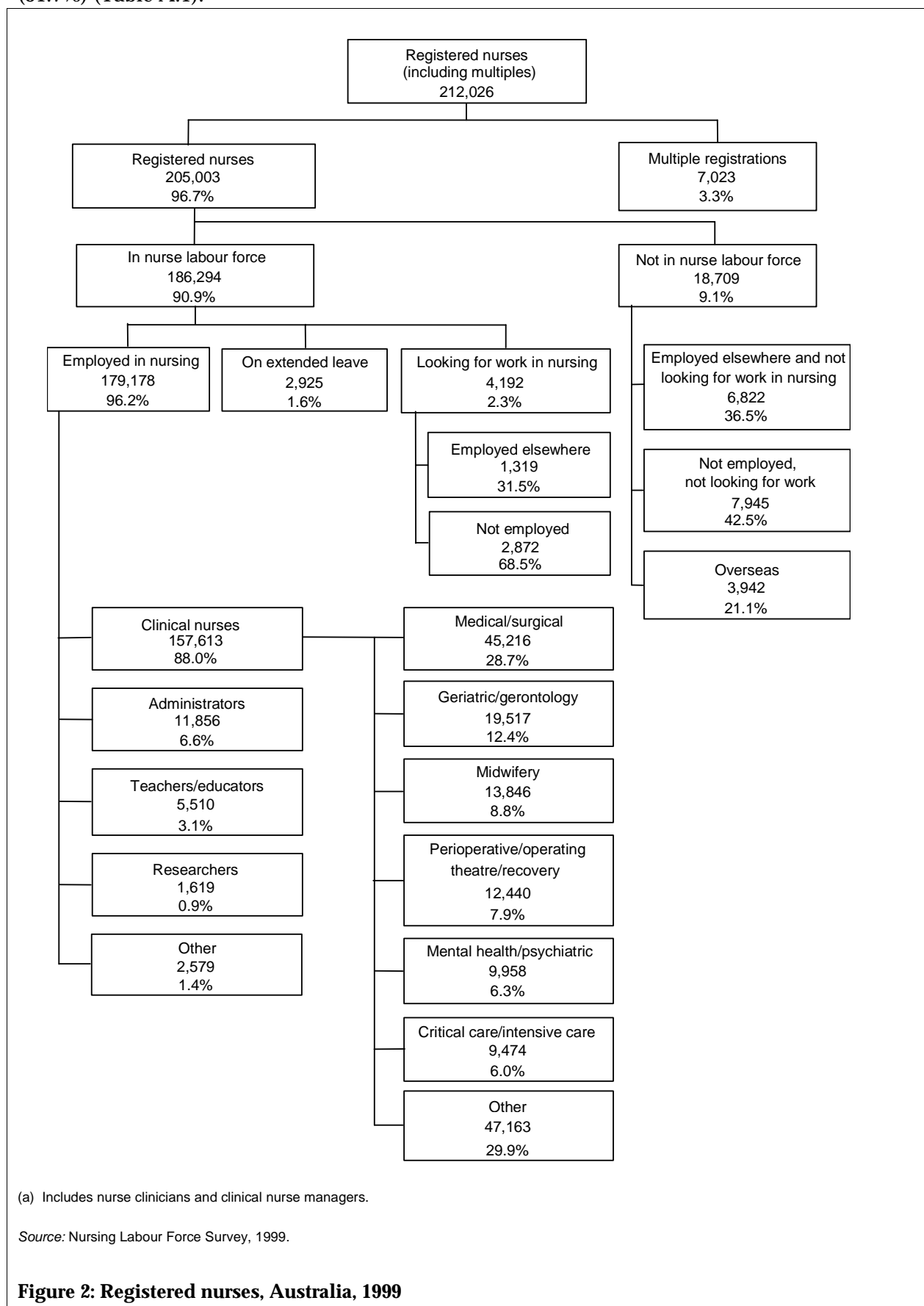
- The number of employed enrolled nurses fell from 52,444 in 1993 to 45,418 in 1999, representing a 13.4% reduction. The largest decrease was for clinician nurses, dropping from 48,499 in 1993 to 42,436 in 1999, a reduction of 12.5%. There was an increase in the number of administrators, from 178 to 643, as well as researchers, from 11 to 110 (Table C.36).

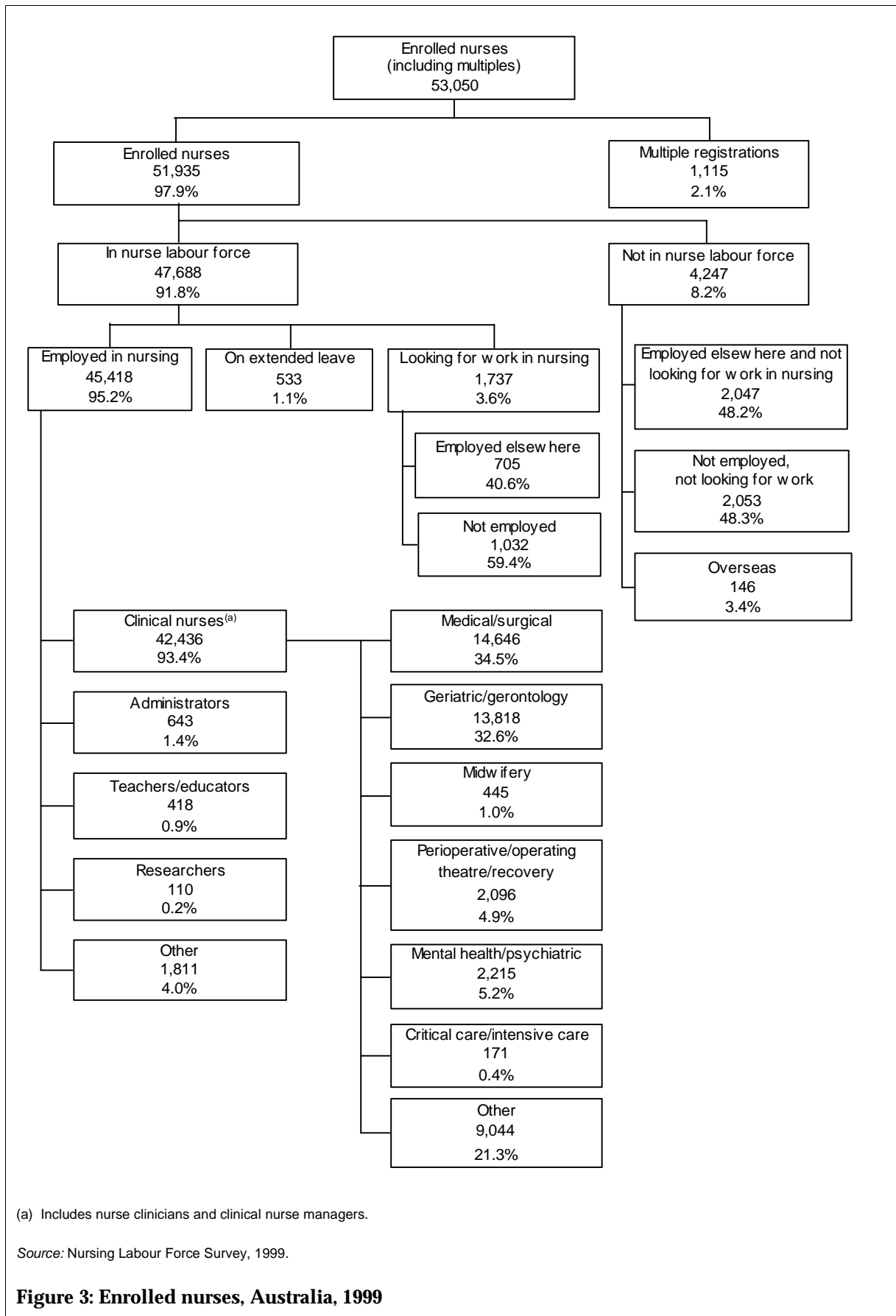
Movements since 1993

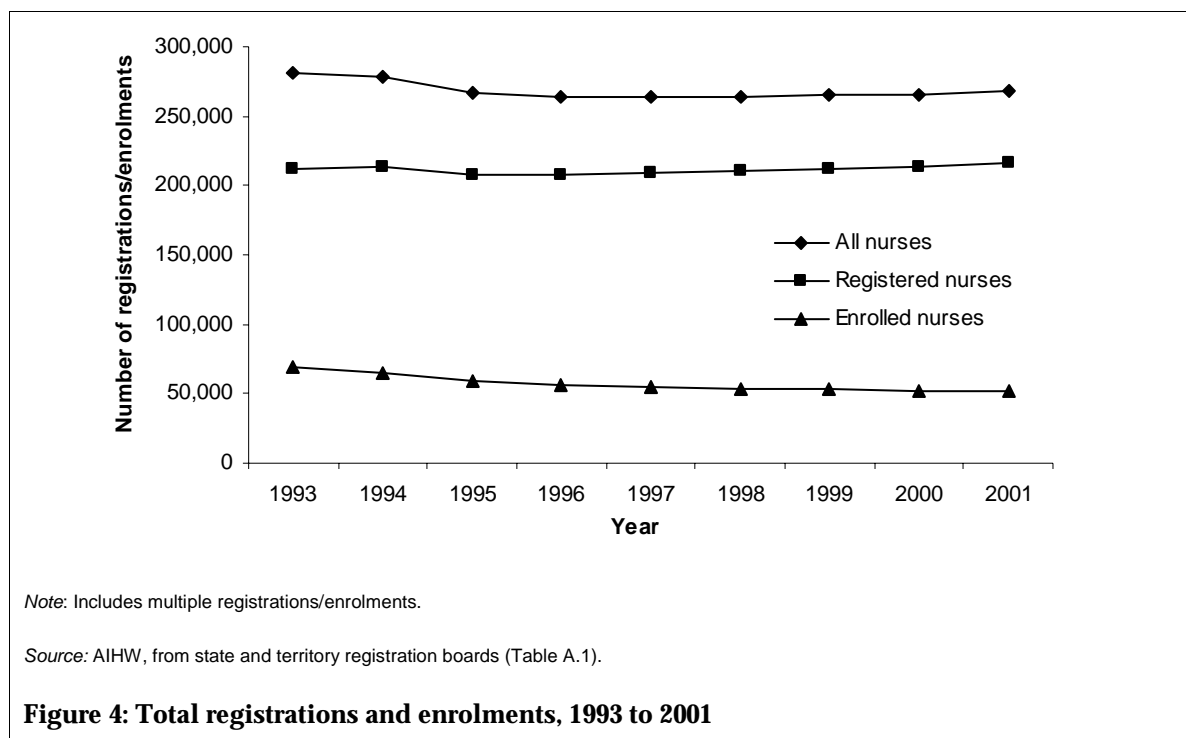
Movements in the number of registrations and enrolments

Since the first Nursing Labour Force Survey in 1993, the total number of registrations and enrolments (including multiple registrations/enrolments) declined from 281,455 to 263,448 in 1996, and then increased to 268,873 in 2001. Total registrations (including multiple registrations) dropped from 212,630 in 1993 to 207,038 in 1996, representing a 2.6% decrease. However, by 2001 total registrations (including multiple registrations) had recovered to above 1993 levels (216,473). Total enrolments (including multiple enrolments) decreased from 68,825 in 1993 to 52,400 in 2001, a 23.9% decrease (Figure 4). All jurisdictions, except the Northern Territory, experienced a decline in enrolments during this period. Victoria

experienced the greatest decline (35.9%) followed by Queensland (35.2%) and Tasmania (31.7%) (Table A.1).





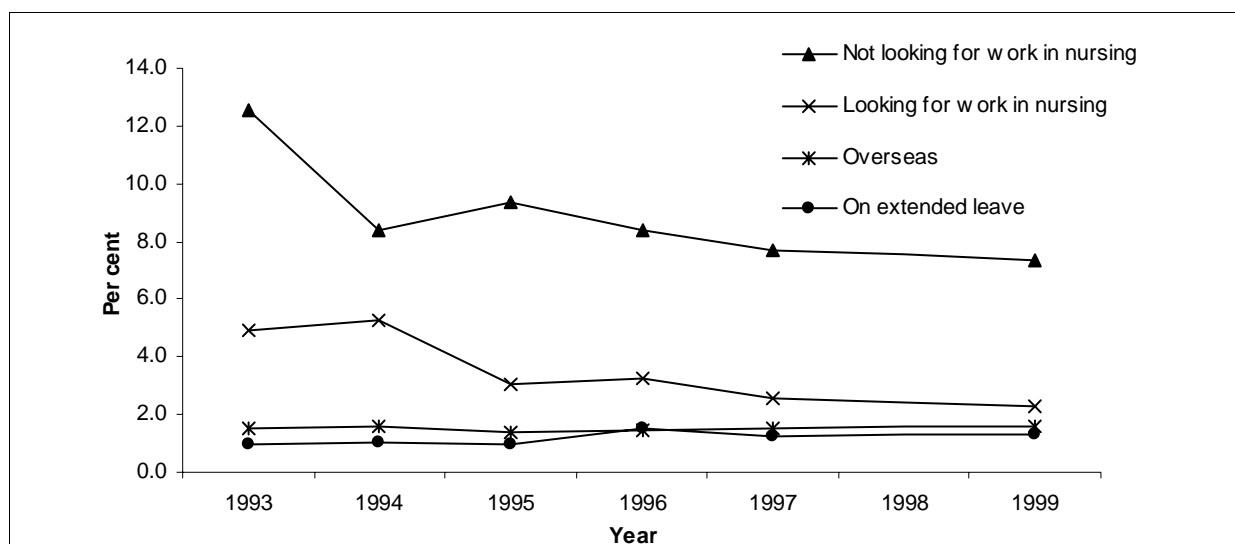


There are a number of factors that may have contributed to the decline in enrolled nurse numbers, some of which include salary and conditions, the option to upgrade qualifications from the certificate or advanced diploma (enrolled nurse) to a degree (registered nurse), and the reduction in the number of training courses for enrolled nurses (DEST 2001). There has also been an increasing tendency to employ unregulated health workers such as nurses' aides instead of enrolled nurses in areas such as aged care (see the chapter 'Aged care nursing').

Also, as a result of the 1993 Nurses Act, most jurisdictions require registered nurses to have practised at some time in the previous 5-year period in order to maintain their registration. This, as well as increasing fees, may have resulted in nurses deciding not to renew their registration (SCAC 2002). Figure 5 highlights this, showing that the proportion of nurses who renewed their registration/enrolment but who were not looking for work in nursing dropped from 12.5% in 1993 to 9.4% in 1995, and then to 7.3% in 1999.

The fall in the number of nurse enrolments between 1993 and 1999 is reflected in the decline in the number of employed enrolled nurses. According to the ABS Labour Force Survey, the number of employed enrolled nurses declined by 36.3% during this period (from 44,900 to 28,600) (see Table B.1).

Between 1993 and 1999 the proportion of nurses looking for work in nursing declined from 4.9% to 2.3% of the total number of registered and enrolled nurses. This suggests that nurses who were looking for work were more likely to find a job in 1999 than previously. It could also be indicative of a relative increase in nursing shortages. There has been very little change in the proportion of nurses going overseas or on extended leave (see Figure 5).



Note: The Nursing Labour Force Survey has been conducted biennially since 1997. Consequently, data from 1998 are not available.
Source: Table C.1.

Figure 5: Nurses not actively employed in the nursing labour force as a percentage of the total number of registered and enrolled nurses (excluding multiple registrations/enrolments), 1993 to 1999

Movements in the number of employed nurses between the 1997 and 1999 surveys

Between 1997 and 1999 the number of nurses employed in nursing increased by 1.1%, from 222,211 to 224,595. Victoria and Tasmania were the only jurisdictions to experience a decrease in the number of employed nurses during this period, with a decrease of 0.3% and 9.0% respectively (Table 2).

The total number of employed registered nurses increased from 175,937 in 1997 to 179,178 in 1999, a 1.8% increase. The number of employed registered nurses increased in all jurisdictions except Tasmania, where there was a 5.7% decrease, from 4,945 to 4,664. The total number of employed enrolled nurses decreased during the same period, from 46,274 to 45,418 (Table 2).

Table 2: Registered and enrolled nurses, state and territories, 1997 to 1999

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT ^(a)	Australia
1997									
Employed registered nurses	57,133	46,032	30,325	17,135	15,634	4,945	2,851	1,882	175,937
Employed enrolled nurses	12,827	15,609	6,488	4,576	4,831	1,069	533	341	46,274
Total employed nurses	69,960	61,641	36,813	21,711	20,465	6,014	3,384	2,223	222,211
Total registrations/enrolments	91,136	70,141	41,629	24,477	22,425	6,551	4,317	3,441	264,082
1999									
Employed registered nurses	57,749	46,295	31,195	18,034	15,983	4,664	2,856	2,401	179,178
Employed enrolled nurses	12,506	15,154	6,379	4,733	4,776	810	688	372	45,418
Total employed nurses	70,255	61,449	37,574	22,767	20,759	5,474	3,543	2,773	224,595
Total registrations/enrolments	91,515	68,923	42,407	25,309	22,337	5,863	4,438	4,284	265,076

(a) Estimates for enrolled and total nurses in the Northern Territory in 1999 are considered as being less reliable than those of the other jurisdictions (see explanatory notes).

Source: AIHW.