

## **Job growth and replacement needs in nursing occupations**

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This report contains information on job growth and replacement needs in various nursing occupations in Australia. The report was commissioned by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) to provide research support for the National Review of Nursing Education.

### *Historical employment patterns in nursing occupations, 1986 to 2001*

The changing pattern of employment by gender, age and hours worked in nursing occupations over the 1987-01 period are described in this report. Although there are lots of similarities in the employment trends across different occupations and across States and Territories, there are also significant differences.

The employment of Nursing Workers grew at an average annual rate of 0.8 per cent, which is half the rate for all occupations, to 249 000 in 2001. However not all States recorded a growth. In South Australia and Tasmania employment contracted while in Queensland the growth rate was 2.7 per cent per year.

Employment of Nursing Workers per 100 000 population, after initially increasing to about 1 400 in the second half of 1980s, has been steadily declining despite the ageing of the Australian population over this period. It currently stands at about 1 300 which is just below the level in 1987. The analysis at the State and Territory level show that the ratios varied widely across jurisdictions in the mid-1980s but have been converging ever since to levels for New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia for which they have remained relatively stable and close together.

Overall, Nursing Workers are older now than they were in 1987. The proportion aged 45 years and over increased by 17 percentage points between 1987 and 2001. In general, the age profiles across occupations are similar, apart from Nurse Managers and Directors of Nursing who have a much higher representation in the 45 and older age group and Registered Midwives who have a much lower proportion in this age group.

There has been a shift towards working shorter hours among Nursing Workers. Unlike for the labour force in general, in which the shift in hours has been from the *normal* full-time hours towards very short or very long hours, in the case of Nursing Workers the shift has been more from the *normal* full-time hours towards working 16-34 hours per week.

The changes in the relative proportions of Nursing Professionals, Enrolled Nurses and Personal Care and Nursing Assistants employed suggest the growth of the first group has been at the expense of the other two groups. However this pattern of substitution is not uniform across States and Territories. In New South Wales the substitution appears to be only between Nursing Professionals and Enrolled Nurses. In South Australia the shift has been away from Personal Care and Nursing Assistants and towards the other two groups, and in Queensland there has been hardly any change.

### *Projections of labour demand in nursing occupations, 2002 to 2006*

Aggregate gross replacement needs in nursing occupations are expected to be over 100 000 in the 2002-06 period, at an annual rate of 8.3 per cent. This is well below the 14.5 per cent rate for the economy as a whole because of the heavy bias towards

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professionals among nursing workers. Jobs in the professional occupations are generally of longer tenure and outflows to other occupations are lower. The rates vary across the different nursing occupations, with the rate for professionals, in general, lower than for the two non-professional category occupations.

Net replacement needs are estimated to be 22 000, or at an annual rate of 1.8 per cent, which is once again lower than the rate of 2.2 per cent for the economy as a whole. Surprisingly, the net replacement rate for Nursing Professionals is slightly higher than the rate for Personal Care and Nursing Assistants. A number of factors could explain this result, including the fact that the age profile of Nursing Professionals is expected to age further and recently there has been contraction in employment in the other group. The high net replacement rate for Directors of Nursing is mainly because of the older age profile of the group.

Employment growth forecasts are just under 5 000. The average annual growth rate of just 0.4 per cent is well below the growth rate of 1.5 per cent for the economy as a whole. Large growth is expected in the managerial nursing occupations and among Registered Midwives, but a contraction is expected among Enrolled Nurses and Personal Care and Nursing Assistants. The expected contraction in the last two occupations appear to run counter to anecdotal evidence of shortage, especially in the aged care sector.

Aggregate job openings are calculated to be 112 000. These include job openings for all who wish to enter or re-enter these occupations, and include jobs opening up as a result of, for example, an Enrolled Nurse changing occupation to become a Registered Nurse or a Registered Nurse being promoted to the occupation of a Nurse Manager. Of all job openings in nursing occupations, 68 per cent are expected for Nurse Professionals, 10 per cent for Enrolled Nurses and 22 per cent for Personal Care and Nursing Assistants. Less than one in ten job opening is a result of growth in nursing occupations.

Net job openings of 30 700 are expected at an annual rate of 2.5 per cent. They provide a measure of job openings for new entrants. The rates vary across nursing occupations with some of the highest rates for managerial occupations and Registered Midwives. The rates for Enrolled Nurses and Personal Care and Nursing Assistants are much lower than for other nursing occupations because the only job openings in these occupations are due to net replacement. Net replacement accounts for 84 per cent of all job openings for new entrants into nursing occupations, while in the economy as whole it accounts for only 64 per cent of all job openings.