

Photo courtesy Leesa Thomas.

Workforce analysis: rural general practitioners in Western Australia



Profile of the general practice workforce 2014

Reporting general practice trends

Rural Health West conducts an annual survey of general practitioners (GPs) working in an Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) Remoteness Area (RA) 2 to 5 location in Western Australia at the annual census date of 30 November.

Overall, 67.1% of the rural and remote general practice workforce responded to the 2014 survey. This high response rate, together with ongoing data collection strategies, means that Rural Health West offers contemporary valid data about trends in the rural general practice workforce to support workforce policy and planning.

This is the fifth year that Rural Health West has published fact sheets about the general practice workforce in rural and remote Western Australia. This current fact sheet builds on the earlier annual snapshots and reports on the 2014 local and national data¹, where available, for the same period.

The 2014 survey results are set out in the Minimum Data Set Report and Workforce Analysis Update 2014 which is available on the website at www.ruralhealthwest.com.au/workforcedata.

More rural GPs

At 30 November 2014 there were 836 GPs, including GP registrars, working in rural and remote Western Australia (RA 2 to RA 5) locations. This was an increase of 49 or 6.2% compared to November 2013 (787 GPs) and a growth of 24.6% since November 2010 (671 GPs) when these fact sheets were first produced. Rural Health West contributed to the increase in 2014 through its recruitment of 43 new doctors to work 'in the bush'. These 836 GPs represented 9.7% of the national reported workforce at 30 November 2014. GP registrars (additional 14) accounted for 28.6% of the growth in GP numbers. Fly in/fly out (FIFO) GP numbers nearly doubled between 2012 (46) and 2013 (81) but only increased by one in 2014.

The majority of GPs (579 or 69.2%) worked in RA2 and RA3 locations and just over one third (308 or 36.8%) of the GP workforce resided in the WA Country Health Service Southwest region.

Age and gender

The average age of all GPs in rural and remote Western Australia at 30 November 2014 was 47.5 years. This was a decrease of 0.9 years since November 2012 and reflects the beginning of a declining average age trend attributable to ongoing increases in the number of GP registrars, who form a younger cohort. The average age was also below the national average age of 49.7 years. The proportion of GPs aged 55+ years continued to decline; being 26.9% of the workforce in 2014, compared to 29% in 2013, 30% in 2012 and 27% in 2011.

There were more male than female GPs in each age group apart from the 25-34 years age group where there were more females, which was a similar pattern to previous years. Historically, there have been more males than females in the 35-44 year age group; however in 2014, the distribution was virtually equal which could be attributed to the increase in WAGPET female registrars in this age cohort. The female workforce increased by 46 compared to 2013 to record the highest to date actual number (335) and proportional representation in the workforce (40.1%). This was marginally below the national proportion of the female GP workforce in RA 2 to RA 5 (40.4%).

GPs aged 25-34	126	15.1%
GPs aged 35-54	485	58.0%
GPs aged 55+	225	26.9%
Men (all age groups)	501	59.9%
Women (all age groups)	335	40.1%

Remoteness and hours worked

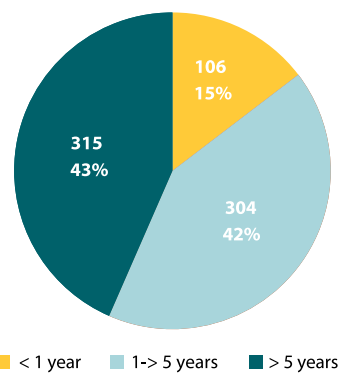
At 30 November 2014, the self-reported average clinical workload was 41.0 hours per week, a reduction of 0.3 hours per week compared to November 2013 but higher than the 34.4 average GP clinical hours per week reported nationally at November 2014. The average number of hours worked per week in Western Australia has continued to trend downwards, decreasing by 5.4 hours overall since 2006.

Remoteness Category	Hours per week worked
ASGC-RA 2	37.8
ASGC-RA 3	41.4
ASGC-RA 4	43.1
ASGC-RA 5	48.6

74.4% of GPs self-reported working full time in rural and remote Western Australia in 2014 compared to 69.2% nationally.

Length of stay

The average length of stay in the current practice (excluding GP registrars) was 7.7 years in 2014 which was 0.4 years higher than in 2013. Nationally, the average length of stay in 2014 was 7.3 years. GPs employed for less than 1 year decreased 1% from 2013, while GPs employed for between 1 and 5 years remained the same percentage while the actual number of GPs in this group increased by 9. GPs employed for more than 5 years increased by 1% and 23 doctors compared to 2013. The overall percentage of long stay GPs (> 5 years) has increased from 37% in 2007 to 43% in 2014.



Where general practitioners trained

54.7% (457) of the rural and remote general practice workforce in Western Australia in 2014 completed their basic medical qualification overseas. This compared 52.6% in 2013, 51.8% in 2012, 52.5% in 2011 and 53.4% in 2010.

The largest proportion of International Medical Graduates gained their basic medical qualification from the United Kingdom (23.6%), followed by South Africa (17.1%) and India (12%). These figures and patterns are consistent with the previous reporting periods.

GP proceduralists

There were 187 GP proceduralists recorded at November 2014 practising a mix of obstetrics, anaesthetics and general surgery, the same number as at November 2013. Obstetrics remained the most widely practised procedural area.

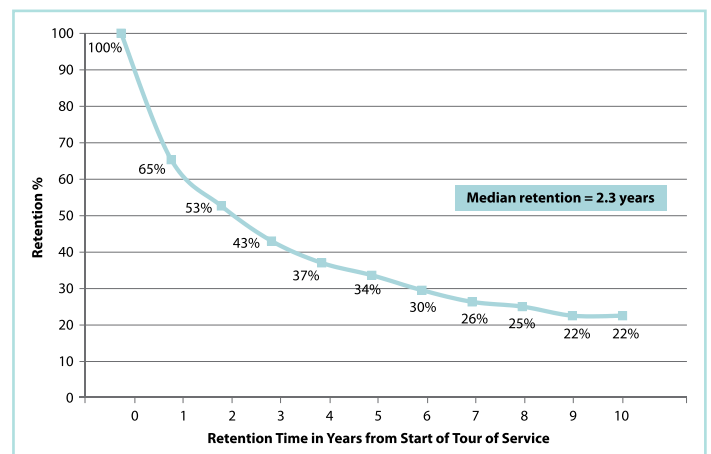
Procedural area	N 2011	N 2012	N 2013	N 2014
Anaesthetics	95	108	102	102
Obstetrics	115	121	108	108
Surgery	29	33	26	33

GP proceduralists represented 22.4% of the overall rural and remote general practice workforce in 2014, compared to 23.8% in 2013, 27.3% in 2012 and 25.9% in 2011. These rates remain considerably higher than the national average of 9.8% in 2014, 10.6% in 2013, 12.6% in 2012 and 12.2% in 2011 for known proceduralists.

Overseas trained GP proceduralists comprised 34.8% of the procedural workforce in 2014, an increase of 0.6% since 2013. This procedural workforce has grown from 8.8% in 2002.

GP survival analysis

In early 2015 Rural Health West undertook a linked workforce study utilising its longitudinal GP data. The overall objective was to identify the survival (retention) rates of all general practitioners who commenced working in the Western Australian rural and remote primary health care sector (RA 2 to 5) in the decade 2004-2013. Results indicated a median retention time over the study period of 2.3 years and that 22.5% of the overall workforce was retained for the full decade of the study.



Other fact sheets

- Growing the future general practice workforce 2014
- General practice workforce in Aboriginal Medical Services 2014
- Profile of the female general practice workforce 2014
- Profile of the GP proceduralist workforce 2014

¹ National data sourced from the *Medical Practice in Rural and Remote Australia: National Minimum Data Set (MDS) Report as at November 2014*.

