

## Workforce information: Nursing and allied health professionals in rural and remote Western Australia



## Aspects of the nursing and allied health workforce 2012

### Building a profile of rural health professionals

In January 2012, Rural Health West commenced recruiting nursing and allied health professionals for primary health care organisations in rural and remote Western Australia.

The need was identified for a new database to support needs analysis and future health workforce planning.

The Nursing and Allied Health Expert Reference Group was established in February 2012 to provide expert advice to Rural Health West and support a coordinated approach to data collection, analysis and reporting about the nursing and allied health workforce in the rural and remote primary health care sector in Western Australia.

For the purposes of the database, the rural and remote primary health care sector has been very broadly identified to include all community-based organisations that provide health services, excluding hospital-based inpatient or outpatient services.

The expert reference group includes representatives from the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, Aged and Community Services Western Australia, Leading Aged Services Australia (WA), Chamber of Commerce Western Australia, Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health, Medicare Locals, Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) Western Operations, St John of God Health Care, Silver Chain, WA Country Health Service (WACHS), Western Australian General Practice Education and Training Limited and the Western Australian Practice Nurses Association.

### Data collection strategies 2012

Over time, Rural Health West and its partners are seeking to build a robust profile of both the size and characteristics of this primary health care workforce in rural and remote Western Australia to support future workforce planning.

Two data collection strategies were applied in this first year:

1. A census to build a profile about the size of the primary health care workforce at the census date of 30 June 2012.
2. The Nursing and Allied Health Rural Workforce Survey 2012.

### Census 2012

Rural Health West undertook a telephone survey of general practices, Medicare Locals, Divisions of General Practice/GP Networks, Aboriginal Medical Services, private allied health practitioners, residential aged care providers, the RFDS and Silver Chain to identify their current nursing and allied health workforce.

This telephone survey significantly under-reported the size of the workforce as the provision of information was voluntary and not all organisations chose to respond. Furthermore, not all organisations and employers were included in the census including the WACHS primary health care workforce, aged care community organisations and some rural dentists and pharmacists.

### Size of the workforce identified

Despite these limitations, the preliminary census did identify that the rural and remote nursing and allied health **primary health care workforce** is a major labour force whose actual size will be more rigorously determined through an ongoing annual census process. The 2012 part census identified:

- 481 primary and aged care organisations, ranging from large aged care providers to single private allied health providers, operating in rural and remote Western Australia.
- 1,395 nursing and allied health professionals working in the primary health care setting in rural and remote Western Australia at the census date of 30 June 2012. These health professionals came from 118 organisations who responded to the census.

## Health professional groups

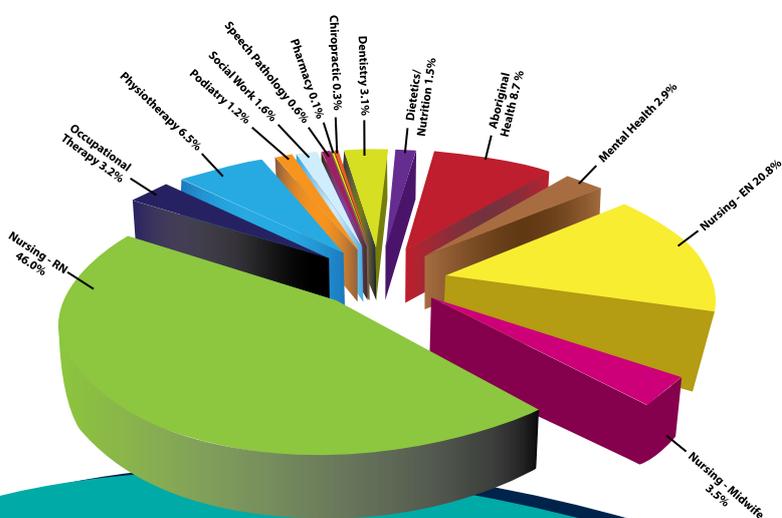
The largest health professional group identified was registered nurses (n=649) who made up 46% of the identified primary health care workforce. Other significant workforce groupings identified were enrolled nurses (n=293), Aboriginal health workers (n=123) and physiotherapists (n=91).

## Primary care survey 2012

The Nursing and Allied Health Rural Workforce Survey 2012 was mailed to individual health professionals as the initial step in developing a profile of the characteristics of the rural and remote primary health care workforce.

- 307 responses were received from individual health professionals.
- 137 (44.6%) registered nurses responded who also made up the largest professional group identified in the census.
- 36 Aboriginal Medical Service staff responded, representing 11.7% of total respondents.
- 31 aged care sector staff responded, representing 10.1% of total respondents.
- 96 general practice staff responded, representing 31.3% of respondents.

It is recognised that the survey results are not generalisable to the rural and remote primary health care workforce because of the low number of survey returns in this first year. Further, rural pharmacists, some private allied health professionals, aged care community services and WACHS primary health care staff were not surveyed. However, for the group who did complete the survey, the following profile is offered.



## Gender and age

Females comprised 82.7% of survey respondents.

Male	%	Female	%
53	17.3%	254	82.7%

The largest group of health professionals (108 respondents) were aged between 45 and 54 years of age, with the adjacent younger (35 to 44 years) and older cohorts (55 to 64 years) also being well represented. Overall, 75% (233) of respondents were aged between 35 and 64 years.

## Location

Utilising the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) Remoteness Area (RA) system, the majority of respondents were from RA2 and RA3 areas. RFDS staff based at Jandakot airport who service rural and remote Western Australia are recorded as RA1.

RA1(RFDS)	RA2	RA3	RA4	RA5
9	118	115	46	19
2.9%	38.4%	37.5%	15.0%	6.2%

## Working life of the primary care workforce

52.1% of respondents identified working full-time. The majority of male survey respondents (73.6%) reported working full-time whereas about the same number of female survey respondents worked full-time and part-time.

Working Life	Full-time	Part-time	Unknown
%	52.1%	41.4%	6.5%
Male	39	9	5
Female	121	118	15

Of the respondents who reported being in full-time work, the largest group (53.8%) worked between 35 to 39 hours per week. There were also a significant number of respondents who reported working 40 to 44 hours per week (31.3%).

For respondents working part-time, there were a significant number who reported working just under full-time hours at 30 to 34 hours per week (38.6%). The majority (60.4%) worked between 15 and 29 hours per week.