

Optometrists



Australian Government
Department of Health

2017 Factsheet

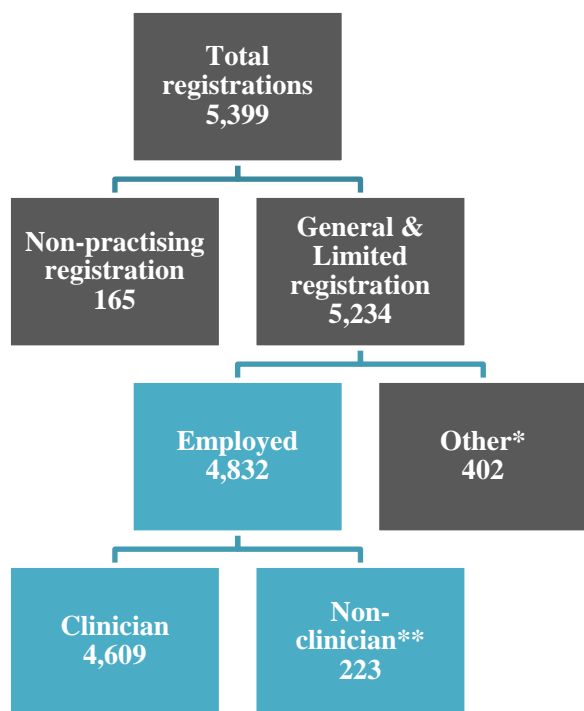
Optometrists are registered healthcare practitioners trained to diagnose vision problems, prescribe optical appliances, and treat a range of eye conditions.

To gain registration as an optometrist, practitioners must complete a five year undergraduate, a five year combined undergraduate/Masters (or 3.5 year accelerated program), or a four-year Master program of study approved by the Optometry Board of Australia.

The following analysis of the optometry workforce is drawn from the number of optometrists with general/limited registration who were employed (4,654 in 2017) unless otherwise stated.

Workforce

Figure 1: Optometry registrations, 2017



*'Other' includes: working but on long leave, working outside the profession, looking for work, overseas, and retired.

**'Non-clinician' includes roles reported by survey respondents that did not fit predefined survey categories.

The number of registered optometrists increased by 11.2% from 4,855 in 2014 to 5,399 in 2017 (average annual increase of 3.6%).

Table 1: Optometrists, 2014-2017

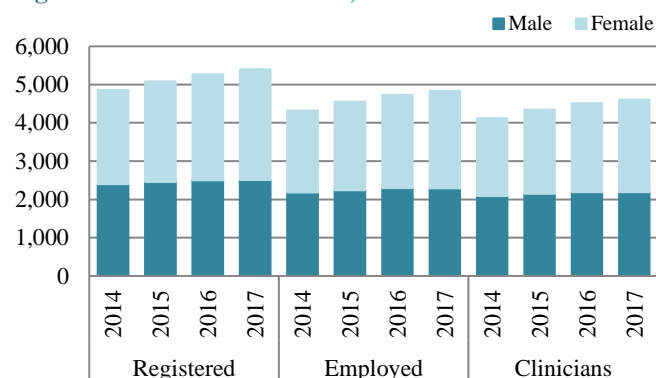
| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | Avg. annual growth |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------------------|
| Registered | 4,855 | 5,084 | 5,266 | 5,399 | 3.6% |
| Employed | 4,322 | 4,557 | 4,734 | 4,832 | 3.8% |
| Clinicians | 4,124 | 4,349 | 4,511 | 4,609 | 3.8% |

The number of employed optometrists ('workforce') increased by 3.8% from 4,322 to 4,832 over the same period (an average annual increase of 3.8%).

Demographics

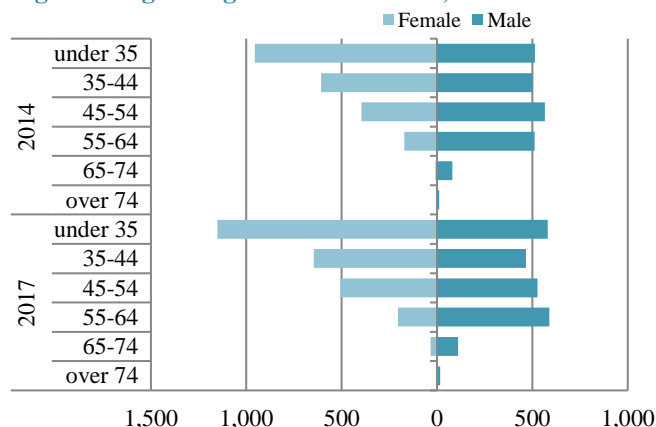
In 2017, female optometrists comprised 52.7% of the workforce; an increase from 49.5% in 2014.

Figure 2: Gender distribution, 2014-2017



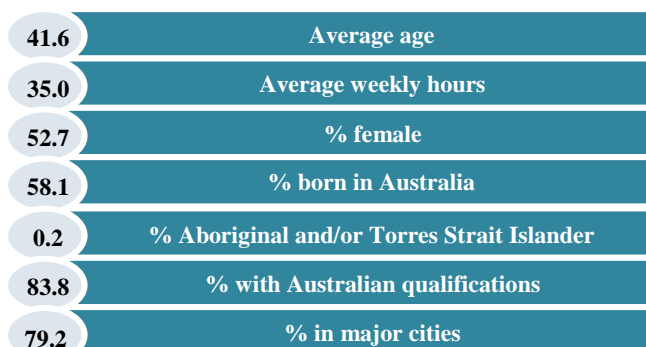
In 2017, the average age of the workforce was 41.6 years – remaining unchanged from 2014. Between 2014 and 2017, the proportion of males aged between 35 – 54 years decreased from 24.6% of the workforce to 20.6%.

Figure 3: Age and gender distribution, 2014 and 2017



Quick Facts - 2017

Figure 4: Summary, 2017



Replacement Rate

In 2017, there were 2.1 new registrants for every optometrist that did not renew their registration from 2016.

Hours Worked

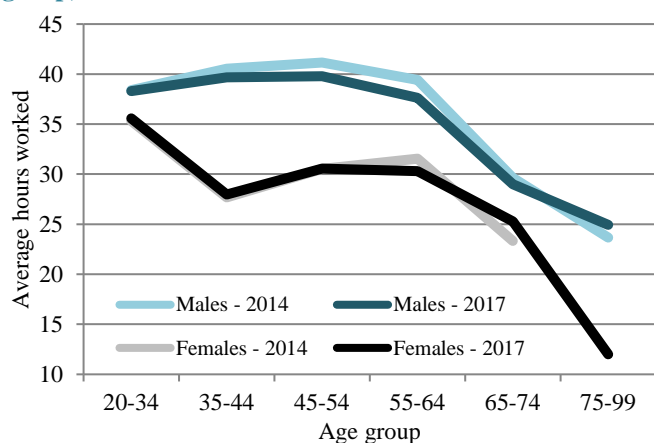
In 2017, optometrists worked an average of 35.0 hours per week in total, with an average of 2.9 hours per week in non-clinical roles.

Table 2: Average hours per week, 2014-2017

| Average hours worked | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Clinical | 32.6 | 32.4 | 32.2 | 32.1 |
| Non-clinical | 3.1 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 2.9 |
| Total | 35.7 | 35.4 | 35.1 | 35.0 |

In 2017, male optometrists worked an average of 38.2 hours per week, decreasing from 39.4 hours in 2014. Female optometrists worked an average of 32.1 hours per week, increasing from 31.9 hours in 2014. Males aged 45-54 worked the longest hours per week, at 39.8 hours on average.

Figure 5: Average hours per week by gender and age group, 2014 and 2017



Principal Role

In 2017, 94.5% of the optometrists worked as clinicians - remaining unchanged from 2014.

Table 3: Principal role, 2014 and 2017

| Principal role | 2014 | | 2017 | |
|---------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| | Headcount | % | Headcount | % |
| Clinician | 4,124 | 95.4 | 4,609 | 95.4 |
| Administrator | 63 | 1.5 | 61 | 1.3 |
| Teacher or educator | 63 | 1.5 | 68 | 1.4 |
| Researcher | 57 | 1.3 | 66 | 1.4 |
| Other | 15 | 0.3 | 28 | 0.6 |
| Total | 4,322 | 100 | 4,832 | 100 |

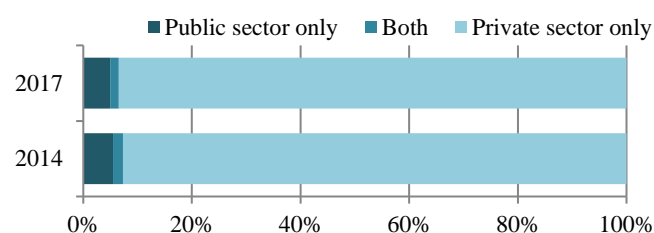
Endorsement

In 2017, 56.3% of optometrists held a scheduled medicines endorsement, an increase from 41.9% of the workforce in 2014.

Principal Work Sector

In 2017, 5.0% of the workforce reported that in their principal role, they worked only in the public sector - a decrease from 5.5% in 2014.

Figure 6: Sector in which clinical hours were worked, 2014 and 2017



Principal Work Setting

In 2017, 46.4% of optometrists worked in a Group private practice, an increase from 46.0% in 2014, and 30.9% worked in Solo private practice, a decrease from 33.4% in 2014.

In 2017, optometrists working in Solo private practice reported the highest average weekly hours (36.5) and those in Locum private practice reported the lowest average weekly hours (28.4).

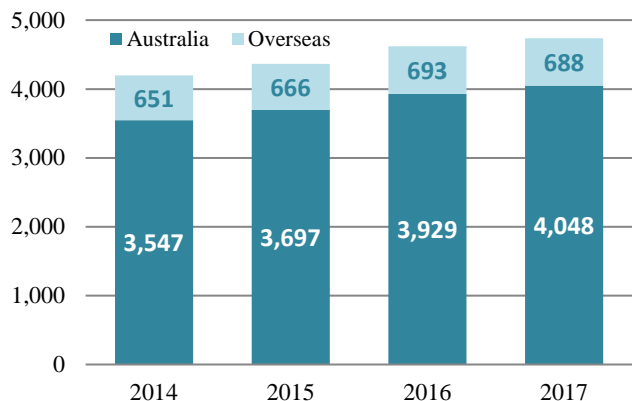
Table 4: Principal work setting, 2014 and 2017

| Principal work setting | 2014 | | 2017 | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|------------------|
| | Headcount | Avg. total hours | Headcount | Avg. total hours |
| Group private practice | 1,987 | 35.5 | 2,244 | 34.6 |
| Solo private practice | 1,442 | 37.5 | 1,494 | 36.5 |
| Locum private practice | 382 | 28.4 | 407 | 28.4 |
| Commercial/business service | 239 | 37.6 | 346 | 38.0 |
| Educational facility | 113 | 37.9 | 136 | 36.3 |
| Other | 62 | 35.1 | 88 | 36.0 |
| Community health care service | 41 | 34.9 | 54 | 34.7 |
| Aboriginal health service | 28 | 36.8 | 24 | 36.1 |
| Remaining work settings | 28 | 35.7 | 39 | 29.7 |
| Total | 4,322 | 35.7 | 4,832 | 35.0 |

Initial Qualification

The workforce survey asks optometrists where they obtained their initial qualification. In 2017, 83.8% of the workforce obtained their initial qualification in Australia and 14.2% obtained their initial qualification overseas.

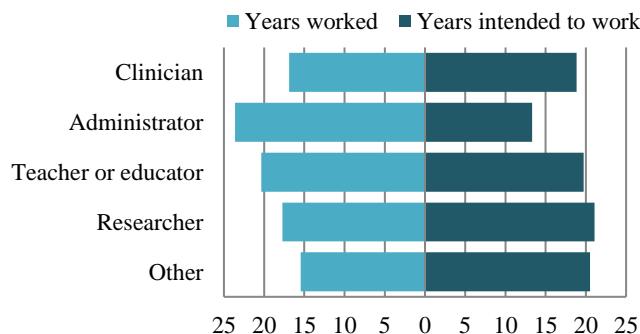
Figure 7: Initial qualification, 2014-2017



Working Intentions

In 2017, optometrists had, on average, worked 17 years in the profession and intended to work for another 19 years. In 2014, optometrists had worked 17 years on average and intended to work for another 18 years.

Figure 8: Workforce intentions by principal role, 2017



Distribution

State and Territory

In 2017, the jurisdictions with the highest rates of full-time equivalent optometrists per 100,000 population (FTE rate) were NSW, VIC and QLD. Between 2014 and 2017, the total FTE rate increased from 17.3 to 18.1 and SA had the largest FTE rate increase (1.9). The NT was the only jurisdiction with a decrease in FTE rate (0.7).

In 2017, optometrists in the NT worked the most hours per week on average (39.3 hours) and those in TAS worked the fewest (33.7 hours).

Table 5: Distribution by state/territory, 2017

| State / Territory | Headcount | Total FTE | Avg. total hours | ² FTE rate per 100,000 population |
|-------------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|--|
| NSW | 1,659 | 1,532.9 | 35.1 | 19.5 |
| VIC | 1,293 | 1,170.6 | 34.4 | 18.5 |
| QLD | 994 | 910.8 | 34.8 | 18.5 |
| SA | 294 | 283.1 | 36.6 | 16.4 |
| WA | 386 | 356.3 | 35.1 | 13.8 |
| TAS | 94 | 83.4 | 33.7 | 16.0 |
| ACT | 75 | 71.7 | 36.3 | 17.5 |
| NT | 35 | 36.2 | 39.3 | 14.7 |
| Total | 4,832 | 4,447.3 | 35.0 | 18.1 |

Note: 'Not stated/Unknown' responses are excluded from this table but are included in the total

Remoteness Area

In 2017, 94.2% of optometrists worked in either major cities or inner regional locations, compared to 93.8% in 2014.

Between 2014 and 2017, the largest shift in average hours worked was in remote areas, increasing from 38.3 hours per week in 2014 to 41.5 hours in 2017. However, due to a decrease in the number of optometrists in remote areas, the FTE rate decreased by 1.6.

Table 6: Distribution by remoteness area, 2017

| Remoteness Area | Headcount | Total FTE | Avg. total hours | ² FTE rate per 100,000 population |
|-----------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|--|
| Major cities | 3,828 | 3,490.1 | 34.7 | 19.7 |
| Inner regional | 724 | 680.9 | 35.7 | 15.5 |
| Outer regional | 247 | 241.4 | 37.1 | 11.8 |
| Remote | 20 | 21.8 | 41.5 | 7.5 |
| Very remote | 11 | 10.7 | 37.0 | 5.3 |
| Total | 4,832 | 4,447.3 | 35.0 | 18.1 |

Note: 'Not stated/Unknown' responses are excluded from this table but are included in the total.

Other Work Location Outside Major Cities

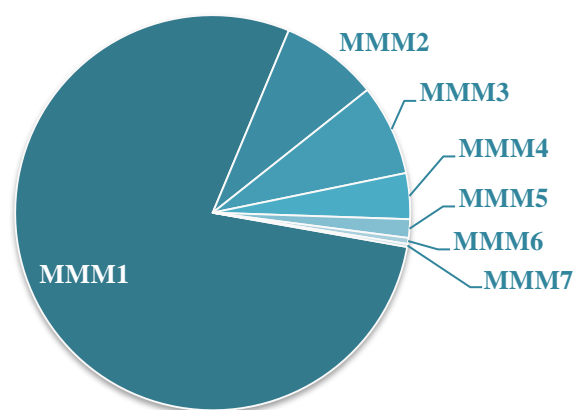
In 2017, 9.0% of optometrists reported that they had worked in a regional, rural or remote location, in addition to their principal job location. Of these respondents, 74.1% had worked in an inner regional or outer regional location, 8.3% had worked in a remote location, and 5.8% had worked in a very remote location in addition to their principal role in a major city.

Modified Monash Model

In 2017, the majority (78.5%) of FTE optometrists were located in a major city or a location considered as MMM1 under the Modified Monash Model (MMM) classification system, up from 77.8% in 2014. (See www.doctorconnect.gov.au for more information on the MMM.)

MMM3 locations had the highest FTE rate of optometrists (21.2), followed by MMM1 (19.9) FTE. The lowest FTE rate was in MMM5 locations (3.7)

Figure 9: FTE distribution by MMM location, 2017



Tele-Health

The workforce survey asks optometrists to report their hours practiced via tele-health in optometry in the previous year.

Note: Tele-health is the use of telecommunication techniques for the purpose of providing telemedicine, medical education, and health education over a distance.

A total of 126 optometrists (2.6%) provided a response to the Tele-Health question in 2017. On average, these respondents practiced via Tele-Health for 17.3 hours per week, with the majority (75.4%) of Tele-Health services provided by optometrists based in a major city.

Table 7: Tele-Health optometrists by remoteness location, 2017

| Major cities | Inner regional | Outer regional | Remote | Very remote |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|--------|-------------|
| 75.4% | 8.7% | 11.1% | 4.0% | 0.8% |

Note: The tele-health workforce remoteness location refers to the location of the Practitioner, not the location of the person receiving the service.

References

- 1) National Health Workforce Dataset (NHWDS): Allied Health Practitioners 2014-2017.
- 2) ABS - 3218.0 - Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2016-17, Released 31/08/18.

Notes

- 1) 'NP' denotes figures that are not published (supressed) for confidentiality reasons.
- 2) The 2013-2016 NHWDS have been revised due to an error in recoding the missing values for job role. As such the figures may not match those that were previously published.
- 3) FTE number measures the number of standard-hour workloads worked by employed health practitioners. The FTE number provides a useful measure of supply because it takes into account both the number of practitioners who are working and the hours that they work. FTE number is calculated based on the total hours worked in a 'standard working week'. The standard working week is assumed to be 38 hours, equivalent to 1 FTE for all practitioners with the exception of medical practitioners where it is assumed to be 40 hours.

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