

# 2007 GP Workforce Snapshot - Victoria

*Eastern Ranges GP Association*

*Introduction*

*Rural GP workforce profile*

*2007 GP survey results*

*Practices*



# Introduction

The Rural Workforce Agency Victoria (RWAV) collects information on the rural GP workforce to assist with the recruitment and retention of GPs in rural practices.

Information is collected on an ongoing basis from several sources<sup>1</sup> including RWAV's annual survey of GPs and practices. Our GP and practice survey is distributed in September to all GPs and practices in Victoria within the boundaries of the rural Divisions of General Practice.

This report contains information on the demographics and workforce participation of the rural GP workforce and the composition of medical practices in rural towns within the Eastern Ranges GP Association (ERGPA).

RWAV would like to thank the rural Divisions of General Practice for their continued support and assistance with the GP and practice survey.

## Highlights<sup>2</sup>

- 21 rural GPs (22 full-time equivalent GPs) work principally within the Division – which is 2% of the rural GP workforce
- The Division has approximately 2% of the rural Victorian population and has an estimated 1 GP per 1,233 rural residents
- Rural GPs within the Division are ageing – the average age of GPs is 52.3 years (rural Victorian average is 49.5 years)
- The average length of time rural GPs within the Division have worked in their current practice is 11.7 years
- 38% of rural GPs within the Division hope to make changes to their workforce participation within the next 5 years
- There are 10 rural practices within the Division of which 30% are solo practices

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1) Data sources include the Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria online list of medical practitioners, Divisions of General Practice, contact with practitioners and other medical practice staff, RWAV's annual telephone survey of practices and RWAV's annual mail survey of GPs and practices.

2) The information in this report was current as at 30 November 2007.

# Rural GP workforce profile

There are 1,220 GPs practising in rural<sup>3</sup> Victoria. Of these, 140 (11%) are registrars.

This section presents information on the demographics of the permanent rural GP workforce within ERGPA. As the placement terms of GP registrars are short term – typically ranging from six to twelve months, they are not part of the permanent workforce and thus have not been included in this section.

Two percent (2%) of the rural Victorian GP workforce works principally in a location within ERGPA, and the Division covers approximately 2% of the total rural Victorian population. There is an estimated 1 GP to every 1,233 rural residents.

The number of rural GPs (headcount and full-time equivalent - FTE) within the Division is presented in Table 1.

FTE values were created based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition of full-time work - which is 35 or more hours per week. For GPs this would equate to 9 or more sessions per week of 3.9 hours in duration . Please note that the FTE calculation is based on clinical hours worked in GP practices only, not total hours worked in all settings.

A profile of the rural GP workforce within the Division, by Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Area (RRMA), gender, age and country of qualification, is presented in Table 2.

**Table 1:** Headcount and FTE of rural GPs within ERGPA

	Headcount	FTE
Eastern Ranges GPA	21	22

**Note:** Rural only (excludes RRMA 1)

**Table 2:** Profile of the rural GP within ERGPA (N=21)

<b>RRMA</b>		
3		
4		
5	21	100%
7		
<b>Gender</b>		
Males	16	76%
Females	5	24%
<b>Age (years), mean*</b>		
Males	53.1	
Females	49.8	
Overall	52.3	
<b>Country of qualification</b>		
Australian graduates	12	57%
International graduates	9	43%

3) Defined as Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Area (RRMA) three to seven classified locations.

4) Consistent with this, the average session length reported by GPs in RWAVs 2007 GP survey is 3.9 hours.

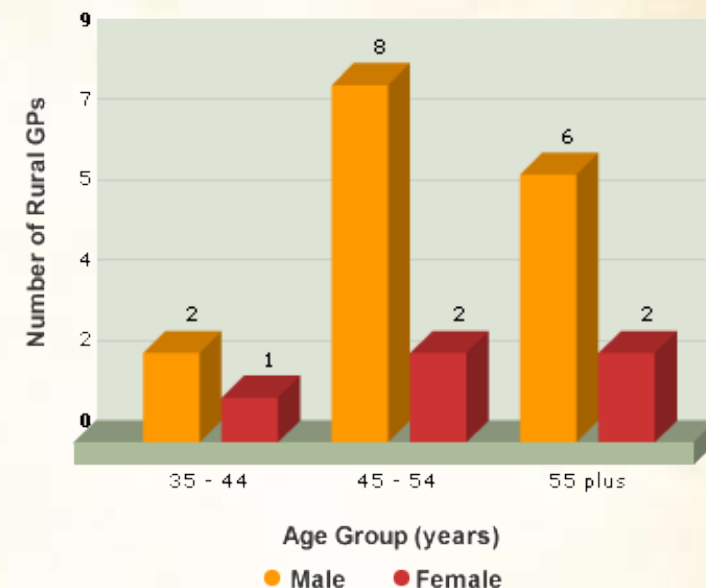
Females comprise almost one-quarter (24%) of the rural workforce within ERGPA, which is a lower proportion of female GPs compared to rural Victoria overall (where females comprise 30% of the GP workforce).

Consistent with rural Victoria overall, female GPs within the Division are, on average, younger than their male counterparts. However, the average age of rural GPs within the Division is almost 3 years older compared to rural Victoria overall (where the average age of GPs is 49.5 years).

The distribution of male and female GPs within the Division across age groups is displayed in Figure 1.

Within the Division the highest number of GPs is in the 45 to 54 year age group. This is consistent with rural Victoria overall, however, proportionally the Division has more rural GPs in this age group. Almost half (48%) of rural GPs within the Division are aged 45 –54 years, compared to 44% across rural Victoria. The Division also has a higher proportion of GPs aged over 55 compared to rural Victoria overall (38% compared to 27% respectively).

Figure 1: Composition of the rural GP workforce within ERGPA by gender and age groups (N=21)



## International Medical Graduates

There are proportionally more international medical graduates (IMGs) within ERGPA compared to rural Victoria overall. Forty three percent (43%) of rural GPs within the Division gained their basic medical qualification overseas – compared to 34% of GPs across rural Victoria.

The IMGs within the Division gained their basic medical qualification from 6 different countries - with the largest proportion trained in Sri Lanka (14%).

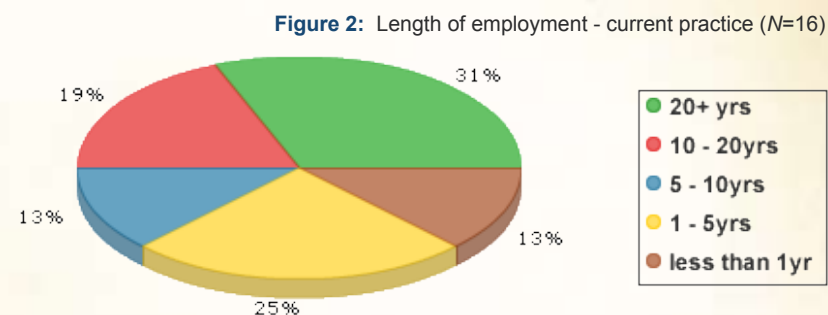
# 2007 GP survey results<sup>5</sup>

## Length of employment

The average length of time GPs within ERGPA have worked at their current practice is 11.7 years.

Length of employment for GPs within the Division is presented in Figure 2.

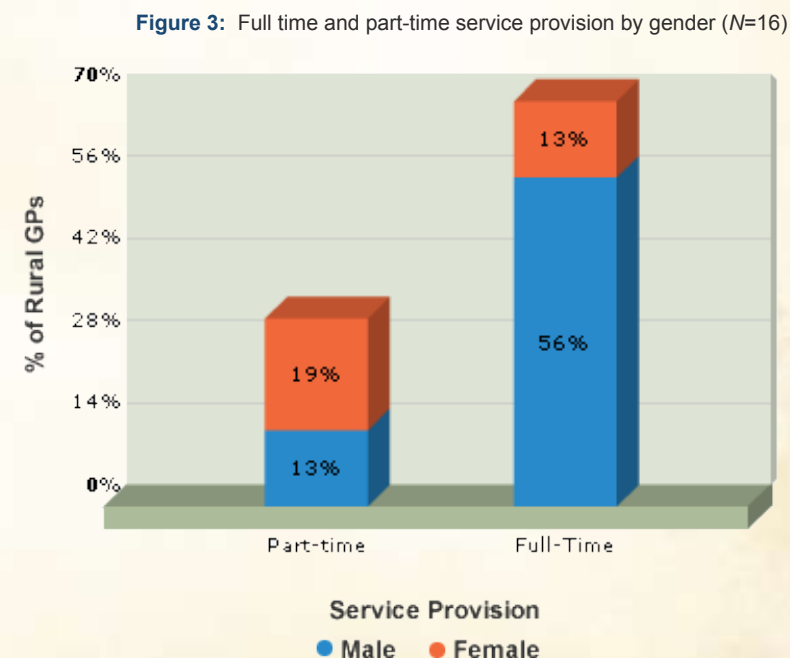
Half (50%) of GP respondents have worked at their current practice for more than 10 years. Most commonly, GPs have worked at their current practice for 20 or more years (31%) - suggesting quite stable patterns of GP availability within the Divisions rural locations.



## Full-time and part-time service provision

ABS definitions of full-time work (35 or more hours per week) and part-time work (less than 35 hours per week) were used to estimate service provision, based on weekly clinical GP hours (self-reported)<sup>6</sup>. The data is presented in figure 3.

Within the Division, over two-thirds (69%) of GP respondents work full-time, and the majority (82%) of full-time practitioners are male. This compares to 65% full-time and 35% part-time for GPs across rural Victoria.



5) This section presents information on GPs within ERGPA who responded to the 2007 GP survey (N=16), excluding registrars

6) Based on clinical hours worked in practices and not total hours worked i.e. does not include time spent in other settings (e.g. hospitals) or performing other roles (e.g. teaching).

## Hours worked

The average total hours worked per week by rural GPs within ERGPA is 44.4 hours (which is consistent with the average of 44.3 hours for GPs across rural Victoria). Total hours includes: clinical GP work, routine hospital work, teaching and supervising, GP representative work, travelling between practices and any other medical roles and activities, but does not include on call work.

## Hospital VMO rights

Half (50%) of GP respondents within the Division have hospital Visiting Medical Officer (VMO) rights.

## Procedural work

Nineteen percent (19%) of GP respondents within the Division regularly undertake procedural work. All are male. This includes: anaesthetics - regional and general, obstetrics - normal deliveries, lower segment caesarean section (LSCS) and non-LSCS, and operative surgery.

## Emergency care and Aboriginal health

Over two-thirds (69%) of GPs within the Division report that they regularly provide emergency care, and 31% report that they regularly practise Aboriginal health.

## Future intentions

When asked how long they intend to remain in their current location, over half (56%) of rural GPs within ERGPA report a period greater than 5 years. Almost one-third (31%) of GPs report a period of 5 to 10 years and one-quarter (25%) report 10 or more years.

Forty four percent (44%) of GPs within the Division intend to remain in their current location for less than 5 years.

Thirty eight percent (38%) of GP respondents hope to make changes to their workforce participation within the next 5 years. An equal proportion of GPs are not expecting to make any changes, while the remaining 24% are unsure.

# Practices

There are 10 rural GP practices within ERGPA. Almost one-third (30%) are solo practices (refer to Table 3).

Of the 21 rural GPs within the Division:

- 14% work principally in solo practice
- 24% work principally in a group practice with four or fewer (principally based) GPs
- 62% work principally in a group practice with five or more (principally based) GPs.

Table 3: Practice types

Division of General Practice	Group	Solo	Total
Eastern Ranges GPA	7	3	10
% of total Victoria rural practices	3%	3%	3%

## Practice ownership

Respondents to the practice survey<sup>7</sup> most commonly reported practice ownership as individual (43%) or partnership (29%).

## Other health professionals

Forty three percent (43%) of rural practices report that they have allied health professionals working at the practice, and 57% report that they have a nurse working at the practice.

<sup>7</sup>) A response to the practice survey was received from 7 rural GP practices within ERGPA