

2007 GP Workforce Snapshot - Victoria

North East Victorian Division of General Practice

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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 sources¹ 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 towns within the North East Victorian Division of General Practice (NEVDGP).

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

Highlights²

- 94 GPs (98 full-time equivalent GPs) work principally within NEVDGP – which is 9% of the rural GP workforce
- The Division has approximately 8% of the rural Victorian population and has an estimated 1 GP per 1,128 residents
- GPs within the Division are ageing – the average age of GPs is 49.2 years (rural Victorian average is 49.5 years)
- The average length of time GPs within the Division have worked in their current practice is 12.6 years
- 28% of GPs within the Division hope to reduce their hours or retire within the next 5 years
- There are 28 practices within the Division of which 18% are solo practices

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 rural³ Victoria. Of these, 140 (11%) are registrars.

This section presents information on the demographics of the permanent GP workforce within NEVDGP. 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.

Nine percent (9%) of the rural Victorian GP workforce works principally in a location within NEVDGP, and the Division covers approximately 8% of the total rural Victorian population. The Division has an estimated 1 GP to every 1,128 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 duration⁴. 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 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 NEVDGP

	Headcount	FTE
North East Victorian DGP	94	98

Note: Victoria only (does not include NSW)

Table 2: Profile of rural GPs within NEVDGP (N=94)

RRMA		
3		
4	26	28%
5	68	72%
7		
Gender		
Males	65	69%
Females	29	31%
Age (years), mean*		
Males	50.7	
Females	45.8	
Overall	49.2	
*Missing age data for 3 GPs (1 male and 2 females)		
Country of qualification		
Australian graduates	81	86%
International graduates	13	14%

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.

The gender composition and average age of the GP workforce within NEVDGP is similar to that of the GP workforce across rural Victoria – where females comprise 30% of the workforce and the average age of GPs is 49.5 years.

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

Consistent with rural Victoria overall, the highest number of GPs is in the 45 to 54 year age group. The Division has a similar proportion of GPs in this age group as rural Victoria overall (41% and 44% respectively), and a similar proportion of GPs over the age of 55 (26% compared to 27% across rural Victoria).

It can be seen in Figure 1 that the relative proportion of males to females is higher in all age groups except for the youngest (25 - 34) age group.

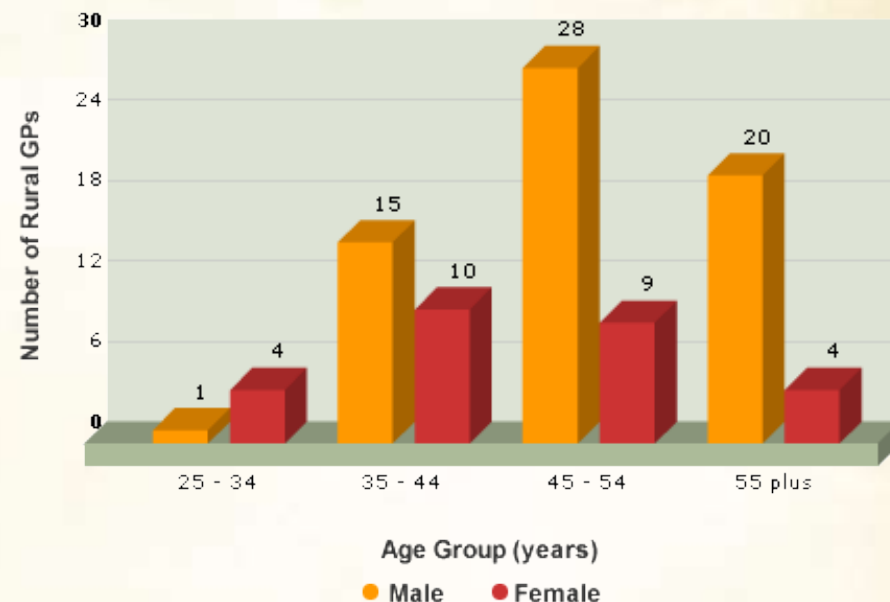
This is a pattern seen across rural Victoria, with male doctors predominating in older age groups and female doctors in the majority in the youngest age group - reflecting higher female intakes into Medical Schools over recent years⁵.

International Medical Graduates

There are proportionally fewer international medical graduates (IMGs) within NEVDGP compared to rural Victoria overall. IMGs comprise 19% of the workforce within the Division - compared to 34% of the total Victorian rural GP workforce.

The IMGs practising within the Division gained their basic medical qualification from 9 different countries - with the largest proportion trained in the United Kingdom (4%).

Figure 1: Composition of the rural GP workforce within NEVDGP by gender and age groups (N=91)



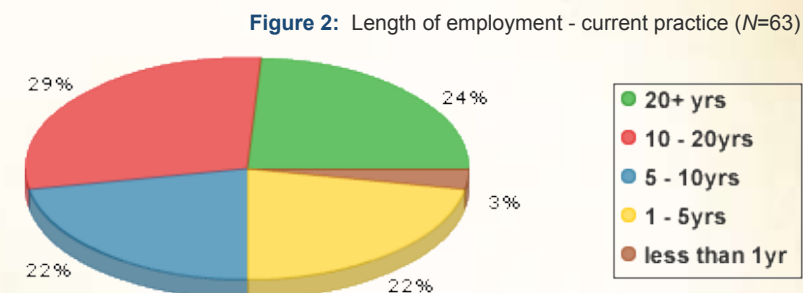
5) Females comprised 55.2% of domestic medical students in 2000, 57.3% in 2004 and 55.7% in 2006.
SOURCE: Medical Training Review Panel (2007) Eleventh report. Canberra: Department of Health and Ageing.

2007 GP survey results⁶

Length of employment

The average length of time GPs within NEVDGP have worked at their current practice is 12.6 years.

GPs have most commonly worked at their current practice for 10 to 20 years, followed by 20 or more years (Figure 2). This suggests quite stable patterns of GP availability within the Division.

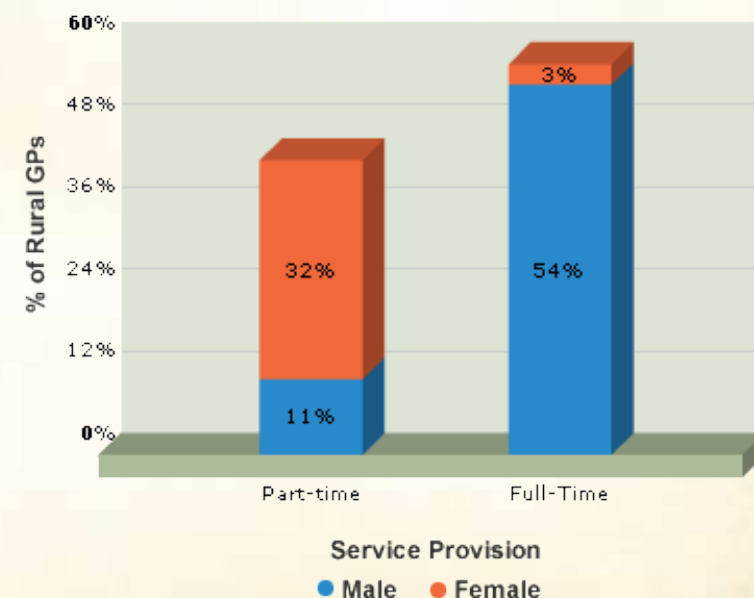


Full-time and part-time service provision

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)⁷. The data is presented in figure 3.

Within the Division 57% of GP respondents work full-time, and the majority (94%) of full-time practitioners are male. This compares to 65% full-time and 35% part-time for GPs across rural Victoria.

Figure 3: Full time and part-time service provision by gender (N=63)



6) This section presents information on GPs within NEVDGP who responded to the 2007 GP survey (N=63), excluding registrars

7) 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 GPs within NEVDGP is 43.5 hours (compared to 44.3 hours for GPs across rural Victoria). On average, male practitioners report working longer hours than female practitioners (50.0 hours compared to 31.4 hours respectively). 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

Ninety seven percent (97%) of GP respondents within NEVDGP have hospital Visiting Medical Officer (VMO) rights.

Procedural work

Just over half (52%) of GP respondents within NEVDGP regularly undertake procedural work. The majority (79%) 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

Seventy one percent (71%) of GPs within the Division report that they regularly provide emergency care, and 8% report that they regularly practise Aboriginal health.

Future intentions

When asked how long they intend to remain in their current location, GPs within NEVDGP predominately report a period greater than 5 years. Most commonly, GPs report a period of 5 to 10 years (43%) and 17% report a period of 10 or more years.

One-quarter (25%) of GPs respondents intend to remain in their current location for between 3 and 5 years, 9% for 1 to 3 years and 6% for less than 1 year.

Almost half (46%) of GP respondents hope to make changes to their workforce participation within the next 5 years. Forty three percent (43%) are not expecting to make any changes, while 11% of GPs are unsure.

Of those who hope to make changes, 36% want to reduce their hours and 24% hope to retire locally.

This information places a high need for aggressive recruitment strategies for this Division to ensure that those GPs either reducing their hours or retiring from practice are adequately replaced.

Practices

There are 28 GP practices within NEVDGP. Eighteen percent (18%) of these are solo practices (refer to Table 3).

Of the 94 GPs within the Division:

- 15% work principally in solo practice
- 29% work principally in a group practice with four or fewer (principally based) GPs
- 56% work principally in a group practice with five or more (principally based) GPs.

Within NEVDGP GPs also provide services to: 9 branch sites and 3 Community Health Centres.

Practice ownership

Respondents to the practice survey⁸ most commonly reported practice ownership as partnership (45%) or individual (30%).

Other health professionals

Two-thirds (67%) of practices report that they have allied health professionals working at the practice, and 90% report that they have a nurse working at the practice.

Sites with a practice nurse were asked to indicate which services the nurse provides. Responses are summarised in Table 4.

Table 3: Practice types

Division of General Practice	Group	Solo	Total
North East VDGP	23	5	28
% of total Victoria rural practices	11%	5%	9%

Table 4: Services provided by practice nurses (N=18)

Type of service	Practices with this service	%
Assistance with procedures	16	89%
Asthma education	7	39%
Diabetes education	10	56%
Extended consultations	6	33%
Immunisation	18	100%
Nutrition (dietary advice)	4	22%
Pathology	7	39%
Women's health	7	39%

8) A response to the practice survey was received from 20 rural GP practices within NEVDGP