The Labour Market for Nurses in South Australia  

June 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupations in cluster</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2541-11 Midwife</td>
<td>Regional Shortage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2544 Registered Nurse</td>
<td>No Shortage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4114-11 Enrolled Nurse</td>
<td>No Shortage</td>
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</tbody>
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Key issues

- Underlying demand for nursing services is steadily increasing as a result of the growth and ageing of the population.
- The proportion of nursing vacancies advertised and filled decreased from 90 per cent in 2016 to 80 per cent in 2017 and the ratio of suitable applicants per vacancy grew from 3.2 to 4.2 over the same period.
- There were no shortages of either enrolled nurses or registered nurses in South Australia. However, employers in regional areas have experienced difficulties recruiting midwives in comparison to metropolitan employers for three consecutive years.
- Demand for registered and enrolled nurses was steady over the past year as indicated by stable numbers of practising nurses in SA in 2017 compared with last year.
- Overall, the supply of nurses has increased.

Survey results

- In aggregate, the proportion of nursing vacancies advertised and filled decreased to 80 per cent this year compared with 90 per cent in 2016.
  - Since 2010, surveys have recorded the fill rate for nurses as between 80 and 90 per cent.
- The average number of applicants per vacancy decreased from 14.6 in 2016 to 13.1 in 2017.

Figure 1: Proportion of vacancies filled (%), average number of applicants and suitable applicants per vacancy (no.), Nurses, South Australia, 2007-08 to 2016-17

Source: Department of Employment, Survey of Employers who have Recently Advertised
• Notwithstanding the decrease in the ratio of applicants per vacancy, the ratio of suitable applicants per vacancy grew from 3.2 to 4.2 over the same period.

• Vacancies in regional areas were generally more difficult to fill than vacancies in the Adelaide metropolitan area. The proportion of regional nurse vacancies filled was 89 per cent compared with 70 per cent for Adelaide.

• Adelaide vacancies attracted a considerably higher average number of applicants (31.7) and suitable applicants (6.5) per vacancy compared to the applicant (3.0) and suitable (1.5) applicant numbers in regional areas.

• The labour markets for enrolled and registered nurses (both in Adelaide and in regional areas) were rated as not being in shortage. This represents no change on a year earlier.

• However, for the third successive year, employers in regional areas continued to experience difficulties in recruiting midwives whereas no significant difficulties were reported by Adelaide-based employers.

• Contacts from the metropolitan area noted reformation in the public sector occurring under Transforming SA Health had slowed recruitment while future staffing structures and rosters were settled.

**Figure 2: Proportion of vacancies filled (%), average number of applicants and suitable applicants per vacancy (no.), Nurses, South Australia, 2016-17**

- Applicants per vacancy - right axis
- Suitable applicants per vacancy - right axis
- Proportion of vacancies filled - left axis

- Registered Nurse: 18.6 applicants, 44% filled
- Midwife: 5.4 applicants, 1.8 suitable
- Enrolled Nurse: 11.2 applicants, 1.9 suitable

*Source: Department of Employment, Survey of Employers who have Recently Advertised.*

**Reasons applicants were unsuitable**

- The ratio of suitable applicants per vacancy was 4.2 in 2017 compared with 3.2 last year. This represents the highest ratio since at least 2007-08.

- Nonetheless, while there were enough suitable applicants to fill the majority of surveyed vacancies, a significant number of applicants were rejected by employers.

- All surveyed employers sought qualified nurses registered with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). The majority of applicants met this criterion.

- In aggregate, employers considered most applicants (around 70 per cent) to be unsuitable for employment and this was mainly because they lacked sufficient work experience, e.g. recent nurse graduates.
• Vacancies for midwives to work in regional areas often required dual registration as both a nurse and midwife but many applicants did not meet this criterion.

• Also, employers frequently sought applicants with experience relevant to their industry sector. For example, employers in acute, aged care, pediatric or mental health settings considered applicants unsuitable unless experience specific to those sectors could be demonstrated.

**Demand and supply trends**

• Overall demand for nurses was steady.

• Data from the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA)\(^1\) shows that the total number of practising SA nurses (including enrolled nurses, registered nurses and midwives) increased by 0.6 per cent over the year to December 2016.

• The Department of Employment’s Internet Vacancy Index shows that job vacancies for this group of occupations increased over the twelve months to May 2017\(^2\).

• Demographically the vast majority of nurses are female\(^3\).

• Longer term, the health and social assistance workforce is projected to expand\(^4\) with the growth and ageing of the population and rising demand for health services.

• Overall, the supply of nurses to the SA labour market has been stable.
  - The number of domestic students completing a bachelor degree\(^5\) in general nursing from SA universities decreased moderately in 2015.
  - The number of domestic students completing university midwifery qualifications in South Australia increased in 2015.
  - Pathways into enrolled nursing are available via numerous training providers, including TAFE SA and private Registered Training Organisations. The number of students in publicly funded training\(^6\) has increased significantly over the period 2008 to 2015.

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\(^2\) Department of Employment, Internet Vacancy Index Detailed Occupation Data – March 2006 onwards

\(^3\) Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Authority - Annual Report Summary 2015/16 – South Australia

\(^4\) Department of Employment, Labour Market Information Portal – Employment Projections

\(^5\) Department of Education and Training, Higher Education Statistics

\(^6\) NCVER, VOCSTATS. Only includes data from the publicly funded vocational education and training sector.