

# Nursing in Australia

**N**ursing in Australia offers a challenging, rewarding and interesting career. Nurses are at the frontline of the provision of health care and provide an important and valuable service to the community.

Nursing requires a combination of skills and knowledge to provide physical, mental and emotional care to people who are trying to: improve their health; prevent illness and disability; respond to events such as childbirth; or recover their health following an illness or disability. Nurses also support people who are dying, and their families.

Nurses have a comprehensive understanding of anatomy and physiology. They have advanced communication skills for education and counselling purposes. They are able to provide physical and emotional comfort to people during critical life events. They also use sophisticated clinical decision making skills to assess a person's health care needs and implement appropriate nursing care.

Nurses work together with the person requiring nursing care, their families and friends, and other health care workers such as doctors, physiotherapists, pharmacists and social workers. Nurses also provide leadership to other nurses, other health care workers and within multidisciplinary teams, working collaboratively with other team members.

Nurses work in many different settings including private and public hospitals; day surgery facilities; aged care facilities; disability services; the defence forces; prisons; detention centres; the community - including primary health care services and general medical practice; and, industry settings.



## Demographics

In 2001 there were 236,562 nurses employed in Australia. Of these, 189,674 were registered nurses (80%) and 46,888 were enrolled nurses (20%).

The majority of nurses work in acute care hospitals (63.7%); with 14.6% working in residential aged care and 6.6% in community care. Of all licensed nurses, 91.6% are women 8.4% are men.

In Australia in 2001, there were 1024 nurses for every 100,000 people. Nurses are the largest group of health care providers and make up 44% of the health workforce.

Reference:  
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2003. *Nursing Labour Force 2002*. Canberra

## Nurses promote healthier lifestyles and care for you by:

- > looking after you before and after surgery;
- > ensuring your health care needs are met if you have a medical problem such as pneumonia or asthma;
- > looking after sick babies and children;
- > providing immediate care after accidents;
- > administering immunisations and other medicines;
- > working in schools ensuring healthy outcomes for children;
- > visiting at home when bathing, dressings and other support is required;
- > providing care to older Australians;
- > working with people recovering from mental illness; and,
- > providing information and support.

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## Nursing Education

Since 1993, all registered nurses complete a Bachelor degree in the higher education (university) sector. Enrolled nurses complete a Certificate IV or Diploma course in the vocational education sector, such as a TAFE college. Courses are also available to enable enrolled nurses to articulate into undergraduate courses leading to registration as a nurse.

Following completion of their course, registered nurses usually commence employment as part of a graduate transition program. This provides opportunities for nurses to work in several different areas for a few months to familiarise themselves with the world of work.

Nurses use this period to put their knowledge and skills into practice. They are also able to experience some of the diverse areas of nursing practice and make a choice about their preferred career pathway.

During their university education nurses undertake clinical placements in a range of settings, such as intensive care, working with children, aged care, mental health and in the community.

## Nursing Practice

In Australia, nurses are licensed to practise by nurse regulatory authorities established under State or Territory legislation. Australia has two levels of licensed nurse - registered nurses and enrolled nurses. Additionally, assistants in nursing and other unlicensed health care assistants support nursing work.

Nurses work in major cities and rural towns, as well as in the more isolated areas of Australia, including with Indigenous Australian communities.

Nursing provides employment opportunities both nationally and internationally. Because there is a shortage of nurses in Australia, nursing skills are in great demand.

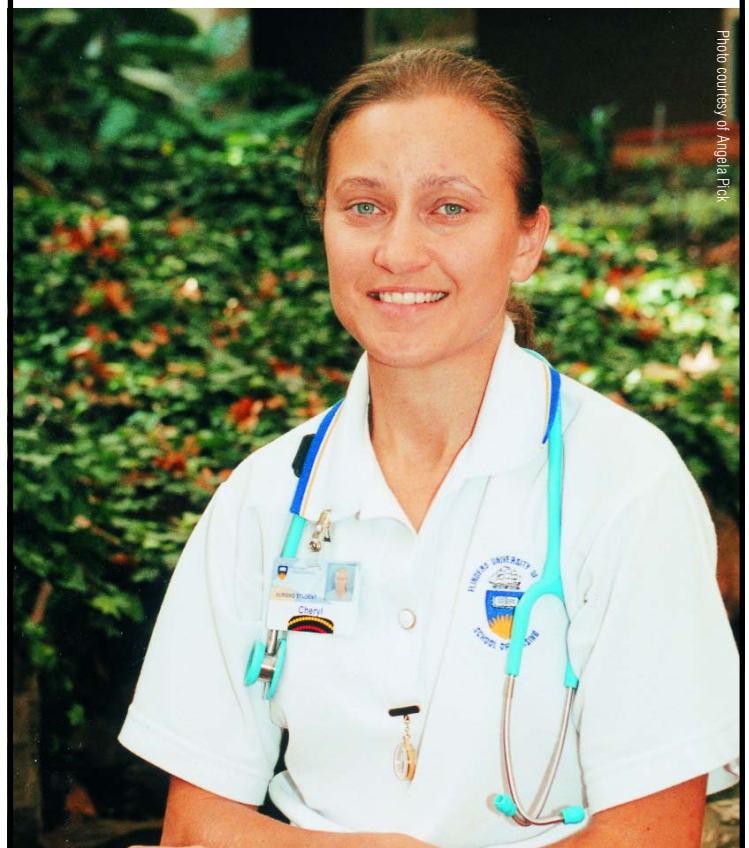
Nurses are highly regarded by the general community, being voted the most ethical and honest of all occupations for every year they have been included in the annual Morgan Poll.

Because most nurses are employees, awards and agreements usually determine nurses' salaries. These have been above average over the past few years.

The introduction of university-based nursing education has led to Australia having a very well educated and highly skilled nursing workforce.



The poorer health outcomes of indigenous people in Australia pose a challenge to the nursing profession. Nursing plays an important role in addressing the health needs of indigenous Australians.



## Nursing Specialisation

There are many areas of specialisation available to nurses, such as mental health, community, critical care, emergency care, aged care, paediatrics, orthopaedics, neurology, rehabilitation, generalist medical and surgical and many more. Postgraduate education is usually available for nurses wishing to specialise in a particular area of clinical nursing practice.

Post enrolment courses are also available for enrolled nurses seeking to obtain additional skills in particular areas of nursing practice.

Professors of Nursing have been appointed in some hospitals and other health facilities. They provide leadership in specialty areas and help nurses undertake important research that improves the quality of care.

For more information about nursing in Australia visit the following websites:

- > [www.anc.org.au](http://www.anc.org.au)
- > [www.rcna.org.au](http://www.rcna.org.au)
- > [www.anf.org.au](http://www.anf.org.au)
- > [www.indiginet.com.au/catsin/](http://www.indiginet.com.au/catsin/)

There are many areas of specialisation available to nurses. Aged care nursing is a growing specialisation.



Photo Mark Munro courtesy of the Australian Nursing Federation Victorian Branch

## Advanced Nursing Practice and Nurse Practitioners

Nurses working in both specialist and generalist areas develop skills and knowledge that allow them to work at a more advanced level, for example as nurse practitioners.

A nurse practitioner is a registered nurse educated and skilled to practise in an advanced clinical nursing role. They are authorised to practice as nurse practitioners by the nurse regulatory authorities and legislation provides them with the authority to prescribe some medicines and initiate some investigations, as part of a multidisciplinary health care team.

## Midwifery

Most midwives in Australia are registered nurses who have completed a postgraduate course in midwifery and have been authorised by the nurse regulatory authorities to practice midwifery. Midwifery is care provided to women and families throughout the birthing process from conception to early parenting. Several universities in Australia have also commenced undergraduate midwifery courses. However, graduates from those programs are limited to practising in the area of midwifery only.

The nurse practitioner role is new in Australia. Nurse practitioners work at an advanced level in a variety of settings - from remote areas to inner city emergency departments.



Photo Robert Pearce - Sydney Morning Herald

# NURSING IN AUSTRALIA

## International Nurses' Day

International Nurses' Day (IND) is celebrated every year on 12 May. The International Council of Nurses chose this date in 1965 because it is the anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth. IND is an opportunity for nurses to celebrate nursing and for the community to acknowledge the important role nurses play in health care. The nursing profession also uses IND to raise health issues of concern to nurses.

Florence Nightingale has been an important symbol of nursing since the 19th century as a result of her influence during the Crimean War. Following the war, Ms Nightingale, with strong public support, developed nursing so it was a respectable profession for women. The Nightingale model of nursing education spread as the graduates of the first school at St Thomas' Hospital in London, travelled throughout the world.

Lucy Osborne brought the Nightingale model to Australia when she established the first school of nursing at Sydney Hospital in 1868.

## Nursing as a career

There are several websites that can provide information about undertaking nursing as a career.

### Victoria

<http://nursing.health.vic.gov.au>

### New South Wales

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/nursing>

### South Australia

<http://www.nursingsa.com>

### Western Australia

<http://www.nursing.health.wa.gov.au>

### Queensland

<http://www.thinknursing.com>

### Tasmania

<http://www.nursing.dhhs.tas.gov.au>

### Australian Capital Territory

<http://www.health.act.gov.au/c/health>

### Northern Territory

<http://www.nt.gov.au/health>

International Nurses Day is an opportunity for nurses to celebrate nursing.

Women and men from all sections of the community are encouraged to take up nursing as a career.



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Prepared by the Australian Peak Nursing Forum (APNF). The APNF is a consortium of peak nursing organisations, including the Australian Nursing Council, the Australian Nursing Federation, the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery (Australia and New Zealand), the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Royal College of Nursing, Australia. The Forum was formed to provide leadership for nurses at a national and international level and to work together on issues of national importance to the nursing profession.