



CENSUS

of Tasmanian General Practitioners

May 2008

2008 RESULTS
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Foreword

On 9 May 2005, the Tasmanian Divisions of General Practice launched the first statewide census of the State's general practitioners (GP). Since then, the census has continued to be run on an annual basis to allow the analysis of consistent trend data over time and for the expansion of the dataset to include additional fields of particular interest to the current policy and planning priorities.

The census provides more accurate information than has been possible in the past and will support future GP workforce planning and needs assessments. The GP census data enables both an accurate reflection of the demographics and distribution of the current Tasmanian GP workforce as well as the time spent in direct patient care. This consistent and high level statewide information places Tasmania at the forefront of Australian GP workforce planning.

Every GP in Tasmania was asked to participate in the census either online (where an email address was available) or via a printed form. Where information had been previously gathered, forms were pre-filled with information held by Divisions of General Practice so as to minimise the time required to complete the form as previously completed fields required verification only.

This report presents the key characteristics of the Tasmanian GP workforce during 2008 including GP numbers, gender, age and workforce participation, and influences on GP demand from the GP Census including, where appropriate, comparative data from the earlier census conducted in 2005. Demographic factors that may influence the demand for GP services continue to be mapped against the GP census data and this will allow planners to consider broader supply side issues.

Executive Summary

- During Census Week 2008, there were 537 GPs practising in Tasmania representing a decrease of 8 GPs in Tasmania since Census Week 2007 when 545 GPs were reported.
- There has been a general restoration in workforce participation over the four years from 2005 to 2008. The average number of sessions practiced in 2008 was 7.1 which is the same as that recorded in 2005.
- Despite the decrease in the number of GPs since 2007, the estimated Full Time Equivalent (FTE) GPs in the State have increased to 380.1 FTEs compared with 357.0 FTEs in 2005. This increase is attributed to an increase in GP registrars in 2008 along with a significant increase in the participation rate of female GPs, particularly in the South of the State.
- Of the 537 practising GPs in Tasmania during Census Week 2008, 311 or 57.9% were male and 226 or 42.1% were female. The proportion of female GPs has increased incrementally over each of the four Census years.
- Tasmania's GP workforce continued to become proportionally older – with 30% over the age of 55 years in 2008 compared with 26% in 2005.
- The average age of Tasmanian GPs during Census Week 2008 was 49.9 years compared with 49.7 years in 2007, and 49.2 years in 2005. The highest proportion of GPs was in the 45 - 54 years age group, as was the case in previous years.
- There were 236 practice nurses reported to be employed by 101 general practices throughout Tasmania in May 2008. This represents an increase of 10 practice nurses statewide since 2007.
- The FTE practice nurse to FTE GP ratio statewide was approximately 1:3 across the State. In broad terms this suggests that there was approximately one practice nurse for every 3 FTE GPs.

Southern Region

The Southern region of Tasmania covers the 62 telephone area from Dover in the South to Oatlands in the Southern Midlands.

- During Census Week 2008, there were 307 GPs practising in Southern Tasmania representing a decrease of 6 GPs since Census Week 2007.
- Of the 307 practising GPs in Southern Tasmania, 169 or 55% were male and 138 or 45% were female. Since Census 2005, there has been an increase in the number and proportion of female GPs in the region (131 to 138 and 44.3% to 45.0%). The Southern region continued to have the highest proportion of female GPs compared with the other two regions in the State.
- The average age of Southern Tasmanian GPs in 2008 was 49.7 years increasing from 48.7 years in 2005. This is slightly lower than the statewide average age of 49.9 years. The highest proportion of GPs in the Southern region remained in the 45 - 54 years age group (95 GPs).
- The average number of 3.5-hour sessions practiced by Southern Tasmanian GPs in direct patient care during Census Week 2008 was 6.8, increasing significantly from 6.4 sessions in 2007. GPs in the Southern region continued to practice, on average, slightly fewer sessions per week than the statewide average of 7.1 sessions and fewer per week than GPs in the North (7.2) and North West regions (7.7).
- 51% of practices in the Southern region employed at least one practice nurse. This compared with 70% in the North West and 67% in the North.
- The estimated number of Full Time Equivalent GPs in the Southern region has increased quite significantly from 186.3 FTEs in 2005 to 209.3 FTEs in 2008. This suggests a general increase in workforce participation over the past four Census years with a particular increase in the 12 months from May 2007 to May 2008. This latest increase is particularly attributable to an increase in workforce participation by female GPs in the Southern Region.

Northern Region

The Northern region of Tasmania covers the 63 telephone area from Ross in the Northern Midlands to Flinders Island.

- During Census Week 2008, there were 131 GPs practising in Northern Tasmania representing a decrease of five GPs since Census Week 2007.
- Of the 131 practising GPs in Northern Tasmania, 78 or 59.5% were male and 53 or 40.5% were female. The proportion of male to female was unchanged from Census 2007.
- GPs in the North of the State continued to be the oldest. The average age of Northern Tasmanian GPs in 2008 was 51.5 years reflecting an increase from Census 2007 when the average age was 50.5 years. This continues to be above the statewide average age of 49.9 years. The highest proportion of GPs in the Northern region remained in the 45 - 54 years age group.
- The average number of 3.5-hour sessions practiced by Northern Tasmanian GPs in direct patient care during Census Week 2007 was 7.2 restoring participation to the level recorded in 2005. In 2008 GPs in the Northern region practices, on average, comparable sessions to the statewide average of 7.1 sessions per week.
- The estimated Full Time Equivalent GPs in the Northern region slightly increased from 94.5 FTEs in 2005 to 94.7 FTEs in 2008. However, this also reflects a marginal fall in FTEs from Census 2007 when 95.5 FTEs were recorded.
- 67% of practices in the North employed at least one practice nurse. This compared with 70% in the North West and 51% in the South.

North West Region

The North West region of Tasmania covers the 64 telephone area from the West Coast to King Island.

- During Census Week 2007, there were 99 practising GPs in North West Tasmania representing a decrease of three GPs since Census Week 2005. There was an increase of three GPs in the region since Census 2007 when 96 GPs were recorded. This is partly attributable to the increased number of GP registrars placed in North West teaching practices during 2008.
- Of the 99 GPs practising in North West Tasmania, 63 (63.6%) were male and 36 (36.4%) were female. Since Census 2005, there has been an increase in the number and proportion of female GPs practising in the region (31 to 36) and a decrease in the number of male GPs (70 to 63). The North West region continued to have the highest proportion of male GPs (63.6%) compared with the other two regions of the State.
- The average age of North West Tasmanian GPs in 2008 was 48.4 years, having decreased from 48.7 years in 2005, and also having decreased since Census 2007 when the average age was 49.1 years. North West GPs continue to be younger than the statewide average age of 49.9 years. The highest proportion of GPs in the North West region remained in the 45 - 54 years age group.
- The average number of 3.5-hour sessions practiced by North West Tasmanian GPs in direct patient care during Census Week 2008 was 7.7, and remained the same as in 2007. GPs in the North West region continued to practice considerably more sessions per week than the statewide average of 7.1 although participation is increasing statewide.
- The estimated Full Time Equivalent GPs in the North West region increased from 71.8 in 2007 to 76.1 FTEs in 2008 restoring the numbers to almost equivalent to the 76.2 FTEs reported in 2005. This increase is partly attributable to the increased number of GP registrars placed in North West teaching practices during 2008.
- 70% of practices in the North West employed at least one practice nurse. This compared with 67% in the North and 51% in the South.

Introduction

The aim of this report is to provide data to support the investigation of the relationship between a range of GP characteristics and workforce participation. It is expected that future demand for health care services will increase pressures on general practice as Australia's population ages coupled with a situation of tightening labour supply. Workforce shortages in general practice have been acknowledged by increased intakes of medical students Australia wide, and the particular problems for rural recruitment and retention have resulted in new rural scholarship programs.

Matters that affect both supply and demand need to be considered in workforce planning. Workforce participation trends are an important factor on the supply side, and factors known to be contributing to reduction in the average hours worked by GPs are workforce ageing, a desire for a better balanced lifestyle and an increased feminisation of the workforce [3]. Measures of the demographic characteristics of GPs, such as age, gender, and hours spent in direct patient care provide an information base that allows an analysis of workforce participation and are therefore presented in this report.

1. Number of General Practitioners

During Census Week 2008, there were 537 practising GPs in Tasmania representing a decrease of eight (8) practising GPs in the past 12 months.

In the past four Census years from 2005 to 2008, there has been a net increase of 6 (1.1%) GPs statewide: +11 (3.7%) GPs in the South, -3 (-2.2%) GPs in the North and -2 (-2%) GPs in the North West. These figures are well below the anticipated number of 22 new workforce entrants per year from 2002 to 2006 which were assumed in workforce modelling of Tasmanian GPs [4] (pp. 486).

The number of additional GPs is below the suggested numbers that Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee (AMWAC) proposed that were needed in Tasmania in order to meet future workforce needs (pp. 409) [4] and it is therefore likely that Tasmanians are now experiencing even relatively greater workforce shortages than in 2001 despite a small increase in GP numbers. The regional distribution of GPs is shown in Table 1-1 and Figure 1.1 below.

Table 1-1: Number of Tasmanian GPs by Region

YEAR/REGION		2001	2003	2005	2006	2007	2008	Change: 2005 to 2008
South	No.	295	289	296	310	313	307	11
	%	57.8%	55.7%	55.7%	57.3%	57.4%	57.2%	3.72%
North	No.	123	133	134	135	136	131	-3
	%	24.1%	25.6%	25.2%	25.0%	25.0%	24.4%	-2.24%
North West	No.	92	97	101	96	96	99	-2
	%	18.0%	18.7%	19.0%	17.7%	17.6%	18.4%	-1.98%
Total Tasmania	No.	510	519	531	541	545	537	6
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100%	1.13%

Source: Tasmania GP Census, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008; and Tasmanian Division Statewide GP Database 2001, 2003 [7, 8].

Figure 1.1: Number of Tasmanian GPs by Region, 2001 to 2008

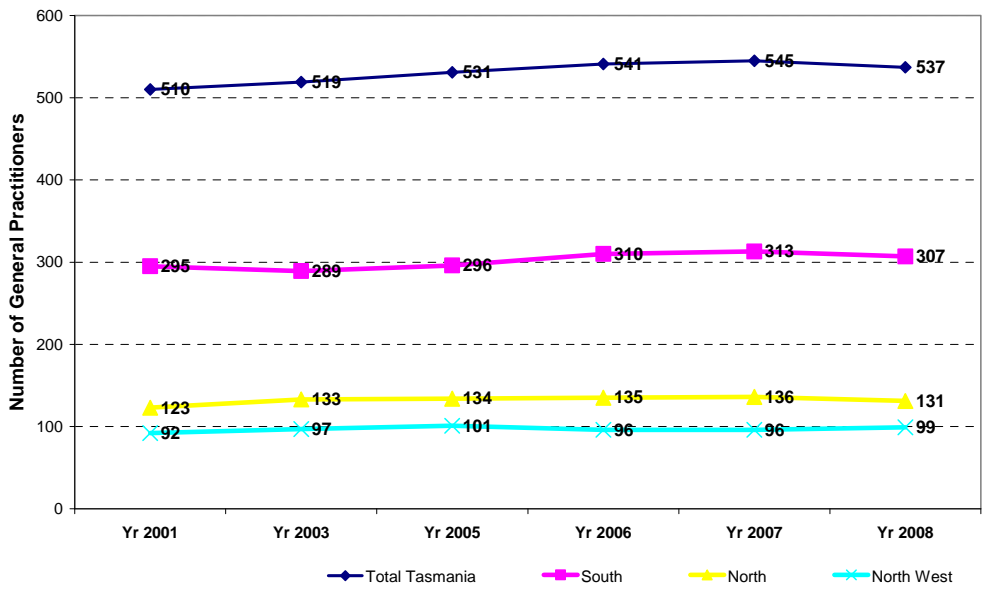
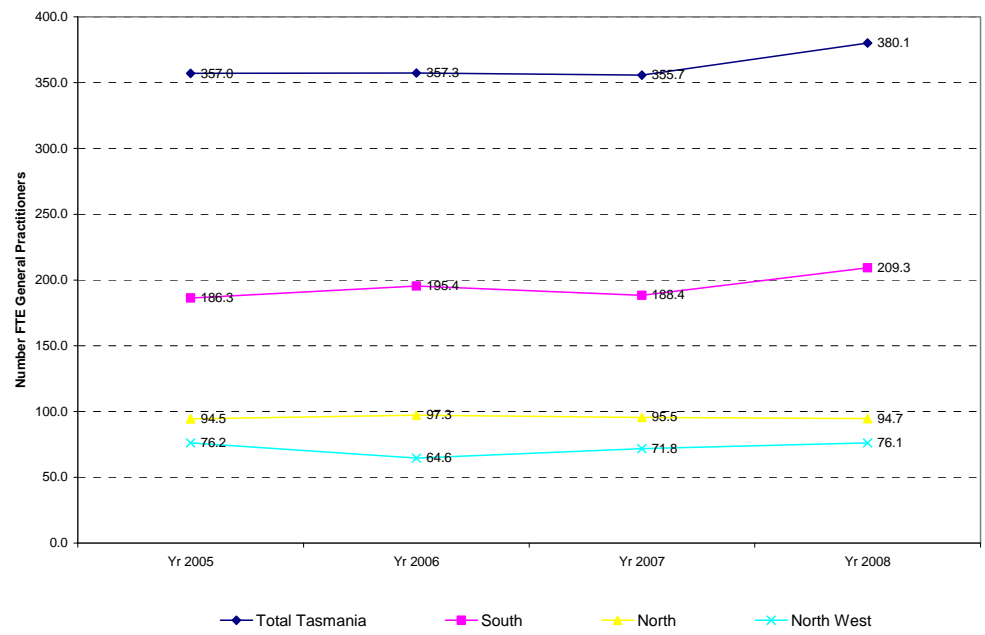


Figure 1.2: Number of Full Time Equivalent Tasmanian GPs by Region, 2005 to 2008



2. Gender of Tasmania's General Practitioners

Of the 537 practising GPs in Tasmania in Census Week 2007, 310 (57.7%) were male and 227 (42.3%) were female.

Across the State over the past four years since the 2005 Census, there has been a reduction of five male practising GPs while eleven female practising GPs joined the workforce.

Changes in the three regions within the State have varied during the 2001 – 2008 period although the variance in male/female ratio remaining small except for the North West region where the proportion of female GPs has increased.

Overall, the regional differences in male to female ratios reflect the higher proportion of male GPs (69.5% in 2002) working in rural areas nationally [4]. These trends and distributions are shown in Table 2-1 with the change in the proportion of males and females shown for each region.

Table 2-1: Gender of Tasmanian GPs by Region

REGION	Year	Male				Female			
		2005	2006	2007	2008	2005	2006	2007	2008
South	No	165	168	174	169	131	142	139	138
	%	55.7%	54.2%	55.6%	55.0%	44.3%	45.8%	44.4%	45.0%
North	No	80	84	82	78	54	51	54	53
	%	59.7%	62.2%	60.3%	59.5%	40.3%	37.8%	39.7%	40.5%
North West	No	70	62	61	63	31	34	35	36
	%	69.3%	64.6%	63.5%	63.6%	30.7%	35.4%	36.5%	36.4%
Total Tasmania	No.	315	314	317	310	216	227	228	227
	%	59.3%	57.9%	58.2%	57.7%	40.7%	42.1%	41.8%	42.3%

Source: Tasmania GP Census, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008.

3. Age of Tasmania's General Practitioners

3.1 Statewide

The average age of Tasmanian GPs has been increasing. In 2008, the average age was 49.9 years compared with 49.2 years in 2005¹. The national average age of GPs in 2002 was 48.6 years with 61% of GPs aged 35 - 54 [4].

In comparison to Census Week 2005, there was a drop in the number and proportion of Tasmanian GPs in the less than 35 years and 45 - 54 years age groups. Accompanying this drop, there was a corresponding increase in the number of GPs in the 35 - 44 years. The trend for decreasing number of GPs aged under 35 years has been evident since 1991 when it is estimated that GPs in this age group made up 22.3% of the GP population [8].

Statewide, the highest number of GPs remained in the 45 - 54 years age group (see Table 3-1) although there was a drop of 3.1% (4 GPs) in this age range since the 2007 Census.

The ageing of Tasmania's GP workforce has been evident in the increase in size of the 65 years and over age group in past Census periods. In 2008 there was, however, a reduction of 9 GPs in this group suggesting retirements had occurred.

Of the GPs who responded to the question about their age, 32 (6.0%) indicated that they were aged 65 years and over which is beyond what is traditionally considered to be the retirement age. This compares to 30 (5.6%) indicating they were aged 65 years and over in 2005.

The distribution of Tasmanian GPs among the various age groups over the three census years since 2005 is shown in Table 3-1 and Figure 3.1.

Table 3-1: Age Distribution of Tasmanian GPs, 2005 - 2008

Age Group	2005		2007		2008		Change from 2005 to 2008	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Less than 35 Years	31	5.8%	28	5.1%	26	4.8%	-2	-1%
35 - 44 Years	119	22.4%	138	25.3%	142	26.4%	4	4%
45 - 54 Years	192	36.2%	182	33.4%	178	33.1%	-4	-3.1%
55 - 64 Years	110	20.7%	123	22.6%	127	23.6%	4	-3.1%
65 Years and Over	30	5.6%	41	7.5%	32	6.0%	-9	0.4%
Age Not Specified	49	9.2%	33	6.1%	32	6.0%	-1	-3.2%
Total Statewide	531	100.0%	545	100.00%	537	100.00%	-8	
Average Age (Statewide)	49.2 years		49.7 years		49.9 years		0.7 years	

Source: Tasmania GP Census 2005, 2007, and 2008.

1. This average age calculation does not include GPs who declined to provide their age or who have incomplete details.

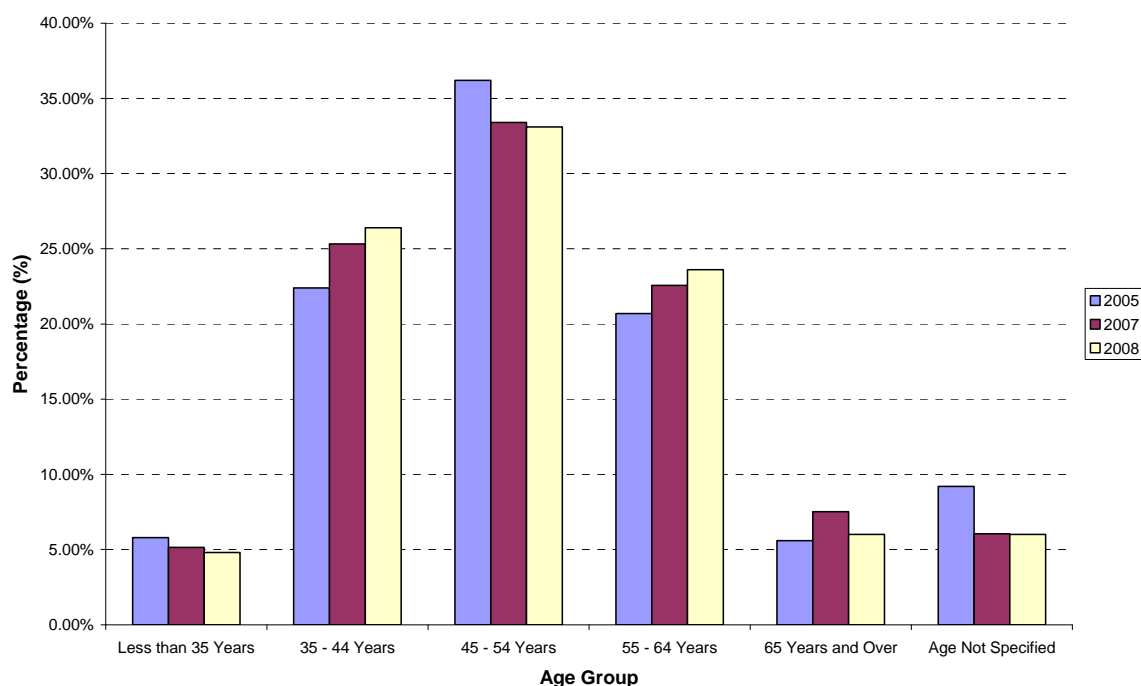


Figure 3.1: Age Distribution of Tasmanian GPs, 2005 - 2008

During Census Week 2008, there were more female GPs than male GPs in the first two younger age groups and higher proportions of male GPs in the other age groups (see Table 3-2) across the State. These higher proportions of female GPs in the two younger age groups were consistent with the increasing participation of females in the medical workforce [4].

The distribution of Tasmanian GPs among the various age groups by gender in the past three census years is shown in Table 3-2.

Table 3-2: Tasmanian GPs by Age Group and Gender 2005 - 2008

Age Group	Male	Female	Total 2008		Total 2005	Total 2007	Change No. 2005 to 2008
	No.	No.	No.	%	No.	No.	No.
Less than 35 Years	10	16	26	4.8%	31	28	-5
35 - 44 Years	62	80	142	26.4%	119	138	23
45 - 54 Years	108	70	178	33.1%	192	182	-14
55 - 64 Years	86	41	127	23.6%	110	123	17
65 Years and Over	27	5	32	6.0%	30	41	2
Age Not Specified	18	14	32	6.0%	49	33	-17
Total Statewide	311	226	537	100.00%	531	545	5
Average Age (Statewide)	49.9 years				49.2 years	49.7 years	0.7 year

Source: Tasmania GP Census 2005 – 2008.

4. Workforce Participation

The following information relates to the number of 3.5-hour sessions that GPs indicated that they spent consulting with patients (including patient notes, referrals, home visits and hospital work) during the census weeks in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008.

4.1. By GP numbers

The average statewide number of 3.5-hour sessions per week during the 2008 Census Week was 7.1 and is reflective of a significant increase since 2007 when the average was 6.8 sessions. This constitutes a significant reversal in the trend of recent years and is broadly attributable an increase in the workforce participation of female GPs in the Southern region. (see Table 4-1 and Figure 4.1).

Table 4-1: Estimated Time GPs Spent Consulting with Patients, 2005 - 2008

Number of 3.5-hour Sessions per week ⁽¹⁾	2005		2006		2007		2008		Change from 2005 to 2008	
	No.	%	No.	No	%	%	No	%	No.	%
10 or more	117	22.0%	97	17.9%	99	18.2%	117	21.8%	0	0.0%
9	83	15.6%	91	16.8%	89	16.3%	85	15.8%	2	2.4%
8	88	16.6%	93	17.2%	94	17.2%	85	15.8%	-3	-3.4%
7	33	6.2%	38	7.0%	35	6.4%	43	8.0%	10	30.3%
6	47	8.9%	50	9.2%	46	8.4%	39	7.3%	-8	-17.0%
5	40	7.5%	42	7.8%	41	7.5%	33	6.1%	-7	-17.5%
4	35	6.6%	35	6.5%	37	6.8%	37	6.9%	2	5.7%
3	22	4.1%	22	4.1%	28	5.1%	26	4.8%	4	18.2%
2	14	2.6%	28	5.2%	24	4.4%	19	3.5%	5	35.7%
1	2	0.4%	5	0.9%	8	1.5%	1	0.2%	-1	-50.0%
0	25	4.7%	23	4.3%	21	3.9%	19	3.7%	-6	-24.0%
N/A ⁽²⁾	25	4.7%	17	3.1%	23	4.2%	33	6.1%	8 ⁽³⁾	32.0%
	531	100.0%	541	100.0%	545	100.0%	537	100.0%	6	1.1%
Average Number of Sessions*	7.1		6.8		6.8		7.1		0.0	

Source: Tasmania GP Census 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008 [2, 9, 10].

(1) This is the GP's own estimate of the amount of time spent in consulting with patients during Census Week.

(2) Not Applicable includes those GPs who were either on leave or not performing a patient consultation role during Census Week 2005, 2006, & 2007.

(3) Not Applicable for Census 2008 refers to those GPs who did not report the number of sessions that they undertook in performance of a patient consultation role during the Census week.

* Average number of sessions is calculated excluding those GPs on leave or not performing a patient consultation role during Census Week

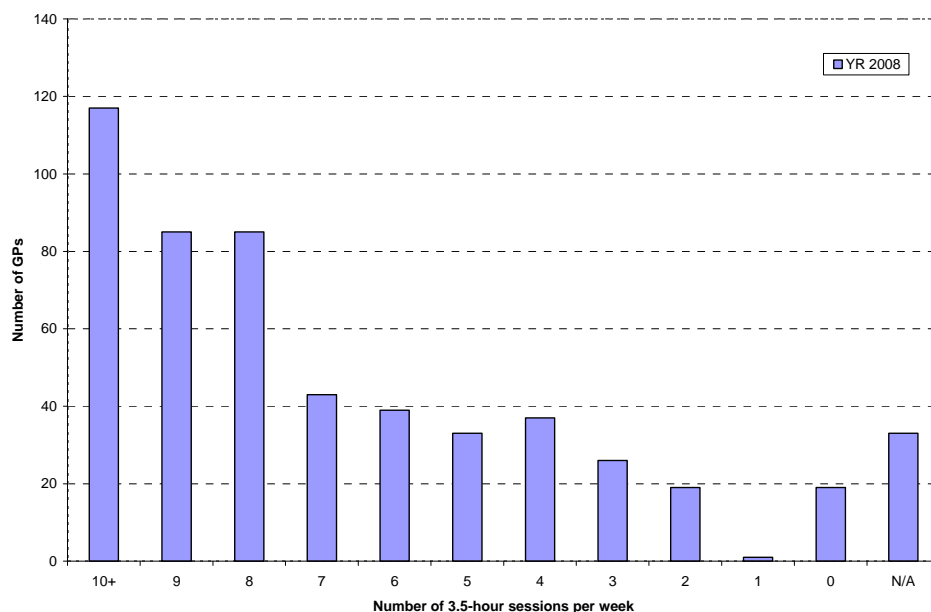


Figure 4.1: Tasmanian GPs by Number of Sessions per Week, 2008

4.2. By gender

Male GPs continued to make up a significantly greater proportion of GPs practicing eight or more sessions per week although the number of females working eight or more sessions has increased significantly. Table 4-2 and Figure 4.2 below indicate the number of sessions by gender in 2008. Among the 287 GPs practicing eight sessions or more per week (53% of the workforce), 203 were male and 84 were female. The average number of sessions per week for female GPs in Tasmania was 6.2 compared with 5.8 in Census 2007. This suggests a significant increase in female workforce participation over previous Census years.

Table 4-2: Estimated Time Spent Consulting with Patients by Gender 2008

Number of 3.5-hour Sessions per Week ⁽¹⁾	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
10+	91	77.8%	26	22.2%	117	100.0%
9	61	71.8%	24	28.2%	85	100.0%
8	51	60.0%	34	40.0%	85	100.0%
7	20	46.5%	23	53.5%	43	100.0%
6	16	41.0%	23	59.0%	39	100.0%
5	11	33.3%	22	66.7%	33	100.0%
4	12	32.4%	25	67.6%	37	100.0%
3	9	34.6%	17	65.4%	26	100.0%
2	9	47.4%	10	52.6%	19	100.0%
1	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	1	100.0%
0	9	47.4%	10	52.6%	19	100.0%
Not Applicable ⁽²⁾	21	63.6%	12	36.4%	33	100.0%
Total Statewide	310	57.7%	227	42.3%	537	100%
Average (Statewide)	7.8 Male		6.2 Female		7.1 All	

Source: Tasmania GP Census 2008.

(1) This is the GP's own estimate of the amount of time spent in consulting with patients during Census Week.

(2) Not Applicable for Census 2008 refers to those GPs who did not report the number of sessions that they undertook in performance of a patient consultation role during the Census week. This change from previous Census periods reflects a change in the FTE estimation methodology.

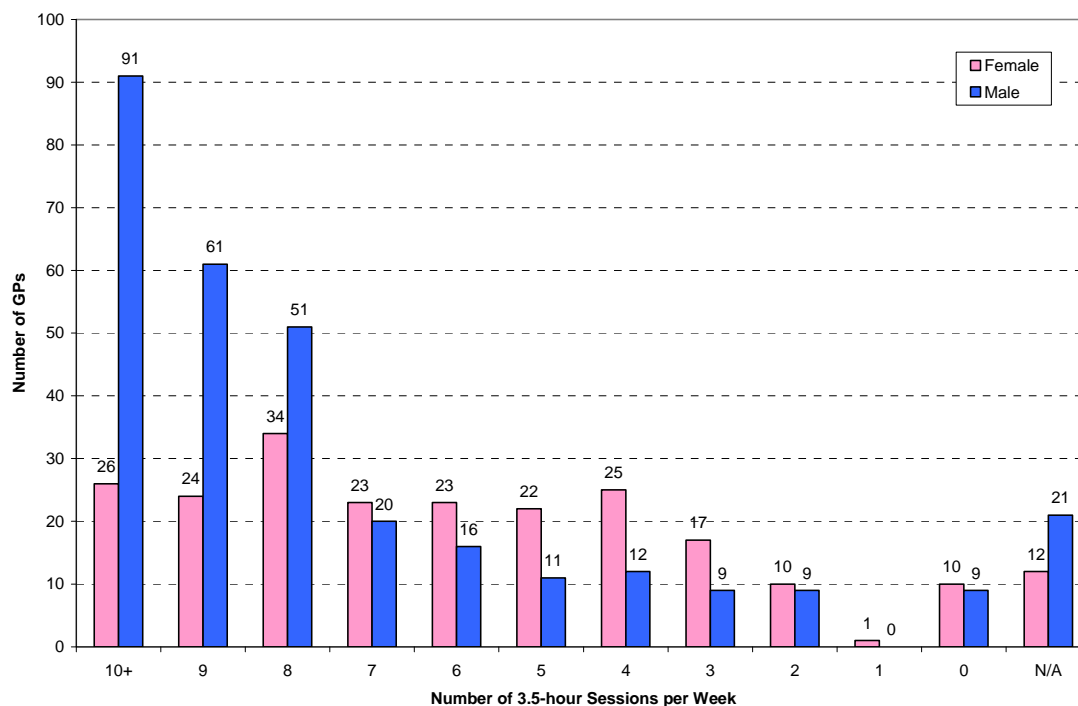


Figure 4.2: Estimated Time Tasmanian GPs Spent Consulting with Patients by Gender 2008

Table 4-3: Tasmanian GPs by Gender and Number of Sessions during Census Week, 2005 - 2008

Number of 3.5- hour Sessions per Week ⁽¹⁾	2005		2006		2007		2008	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
10 or more	103	14	77	20	81	18	91	26
9	62	21	66	24	68	21	61	24
8	54	34	58	35	66	28	51	34
7	19	14	19	18	16	19	20	23
6	17	30	18	32	13	33	16	23
5	12	28	16	26	13	28	11	22
4	12	23	13	23	12	25	12	25
3	3	19	4	18	10	18	9	17
2	7	7	14	14	13	11	9	10
1	1	1	1	4	6	2	0	1
0	11	14	13	10	8	13	9	10
Not Applicable ⁽²⁾	14	11	13	5	11	12	21 ⁽³⁾	12 ⁽³⁾
Total	315	216	312	229	317	228	310	227
Average Number of Sessions* (Statewide)	7.1		6.8		6.8		7.1	

Source: Tasmania GP Census 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 [2, 9, 10].

(1) This is the GP's own estimate of the amount of time spent in consulting with patients during Census Week.

(2) Not Applicable includes those GPs who were either on leave or not performing a patient consultation role during Census Week.

(3) Not Applicable for Census 2008 refers to those GPs who did not report the number of sessions that they undertook in performance of a patient consultation role during the Census week. This change from previous census periods reflects a change in the FTE estimation methodology.

4.3. By age group

The average number of sessions per week by age group of GPs 2005 to 2007 is shown in Table 4-4. The highest workforce participation rate is among the 45 - 54 and 55 - 64 years age groups. Over the past three years, there has been an increase in the average number of 3.5-hour sessions for GPs in the 35 - 44 years age group from 5.0 to 6.4 sessions per week, and a reduction in the 65 years and over age group from 7.4 to 5.9 sessions per week (see Table 4-4).

Table 4-4: Average Number of Sessions per Week by Age Group of Tasmanian GPs, 2005 - 2008

Age Group	2005	2006	2007	2008	Change 2005 to 2008
Less than 35 years	6.1	5.7	6.4	7.0	0.9
35-44 years	5	5.2	6.4	6.5	1.5
45-54 years	6.6	6.2	7.2	7.5	0.9
55-64 years	7.4	7.5	7.3	7.6	0.2
65 years and over	7.4	6.6	5.9	5.9	-1.5
Age not specified	7.7	5.6	6.0	6.6	-1.1
Average Number of Sessions per Week (Statewide)	7.1	6.8	6.8	7.1	- (no change)

Source: Tasmania GP Census 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008.

4.4. By region

At regional level in 2008, in the Southern and Northern regions, the average numbers of sessions per week spent on direct patient care by age group of GPs are indicated in Table 4-5, with the highest workforce participation being among the 45 - 54 years and 55- 64 years age groups. In the North West, the 55-64 years age group now has the highest proportion of average number of sessions per week by age group.

Table 4.5: Average Number of 3.5-hour Sessions per Week by Age Group and by Region, 2005 - 2008

Age Group	2005	2006	2007	2008	Change 2005 to 2008
SOUTH					
Less than 35 years	5.0	4.8	5.5	6.3	1.3
35-44 years	6.3	5.8	5.8	6.2	-0.1
45-54 years	6.9	7.2	7.0	7.5	0.6
55-64 years	7.4	7.1	7.0	7.1	-0.3
65 years and over	6.5	6.1	6.0	5.8	-0.7
Age not specified	7.3	6.8	4.8	6.5	-0.8
Average Number of Sessions (South)	6.7	6.6	6.4	6.8	0.1
NORTH					
Less than 35 years	4.8	6.0	6.4	7.3	2.5
35-44 years	5.4	6.9	7.0	6.0	0.6
45-54 years	7.8	7.8	7.2	7.6	-0.2
55-64 years	7.7	6.9	7.7	8.0	0.3
65 years and over	5.6	6.7	6.2	6.3	0.7
Age not specified	8.3	8.3	5.0	5.0	-3.3
Average Number of Sessions (North)	7.2	7.3	7.1	7.2	0

Table 4.6 continued

NORTH WEST					
Less than 35 years	8.5	9.0	9.3	7.7	-0.8
35-44 years	8.2	6.8	7.9	7.7	-0.5
45-54 years	8.6	8.5	7.8	7.4	-1.2
55-64 years	7.3	6.1	7.8	8.8	1.5
65 years and over	5	2.8	4.8	5.0	0
Age not specified	7.5	6.1	7.8	7.3	-0.2
Average Number of Sessions (North West)	7.9	6.9	7.7	7.7	-0.2
Average Number of Sessions (Statewide)	7.1	6.8	6.8	7.1	0

Source: Tasmania GP Census 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008.

5. Full Time Equivalent GPs

Table 5-1 shows the numbers (headcount) of GPs in each region within the State compared with the numbers of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) GPs in each region.

FTE GPs are calculated on the basis of the number of sessions they reported to have practiced during Census week.

Table 5-1: Tasmanian GP Numbers: Headcount and Full Time Equivalent GPs, 2005 – 2008

Region	Number of GPs				FTE GPs ⁽¹⁾			
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2005	2006	2007	2008
South	296	310	313	307	186.3	195.4	188.4	209.3
North	134	135	136	131	94.5	97.3	95.5	94.7
North West	101	96	96	99	76.2	64.6	71.8	76.1
Total Tasmania	531	541	545	537	357	357.3	355.7	380.1

Source: Tasmania GP Census 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008.

6. Distribution of GPs by Local Government Area

6.1. Number of people sharing one general practitioner

This section focuses on GP workforce distribution by Local Government Areas (LGAs). Table 6.1 and Figure 6.1 show that during Census Week 2008, Tasmania had a relative undersupply of GPs (112.3 GPs per 100,000 people compared with the Australian GPs distribution rate of 126.6 GPs per 100,000 population).

It is important to note that GP numbers can change quite rapidly and this is particularly the case when data is examined at a Local Government Area level. The loss or gain of one GP to a LGA can have a significant impact of the estimate of GP availability per 100,000 population. It is also common for people to see a GP outside the LGA in which they live. For these reasons, care should be taken in drawing conclusions about individual GP availability at the LGA level – particularly small LGAs.

Several Tasmanian Local Government Areas appeared to have an oversupply or undersupply of GP services in comparison to the nationwide average (126.6) as indicated in Table 6.1.

Table 6-1: Number of GPs and Estimated Full Time Equivalent GPs per 100,000 Population by LGA, 2008

Local Government Area	Estimated Population 2006	GP Numbers 2008	GPs per 100,000 population	Estimated FTE GPs	Estimated FTE GPs per 100,000 population
Break O'Day	6071	5	82.4	4.3	70.8
Dorset	7,001	6	85.7	4.0	57.1
Flinders	864	2	231.5	2.0	231.5
George Town	6,527	7	107.2	5.3	81.2
Launceston	62,218	71	114.1	53.4	85.8
Meander Valley	18,353	12	65.4	9.3	50.7
Northern Midlands	12,091	11	91.0	6.6	54.6
West Tamar	20,814	15	72.1	9.0	43.2
Total North LGAs	138128	129	93.4	93.9	68.0
Burnie	19,057	16	84.0	12.4	65.1
Central Coast	20,663	19	92.0	13.3	64.4
Circular Head	7,952	5	62.9	4.5	56.6
Devonport	24,011	21	87.5	16.8	69.8
Kentish	5,762	4	69.4	3.2	55.5
King Island	1,639	2	122.0	2.0	122.0
Latrobe	8630	14	162.2	9.7	112.1
Waratah/Wynyard	13,411	12	89.5	9.2	68.6
West Coast	5,006	5	99.9	3.4	67.9
Total North West LGAs	106131	98	92.3	74.4	70.1

Table 6-1 Continued

Brighton	14,122	11	77.9	8.8	62.3
Clarence	49,637	54	108.8	35.7	72.0
Derwent Valley	9,479	8	84.4	6.1	64.4
Central Highlands	2,242	1	44.6	0.7	31.2
Glenorchy	43,413	48	110.6	32.6	75.2
Hobart	47,700	120	251.6	84.7	177.5
Huon Valley	14,001	17	121.4	11.2	80.0
Kingborough	30,840	31	100.5	19.4	62.8
Glamorgan/Spring Bay	4189	5	119.4	2.0	47.7
Sorell	11,925	9	75.5	6.3	52.8
Southern Midlands	5,668	2	35.3	2.0	35.3
Tasman	2,238	2	89.4	1.1	49.2
Total South LGAs	231,265	308	133.2	210.6	91.1
Total Tasmania LGAs	475,524	535	112.5	379.0	79.7
Total Australia (2006)	19,855,288	25,146	126.6	14789	74.5

Source: Data derived from Tasmanian GP Census 2008 and 2006 Census of Population and Housing, Australia Bureau of Statistics 2006, Australian General Practice Statistics. Note that 2 GPs were not able to be assigned to a specific LGA- 1 GP in the North West and 1 GP in the North.

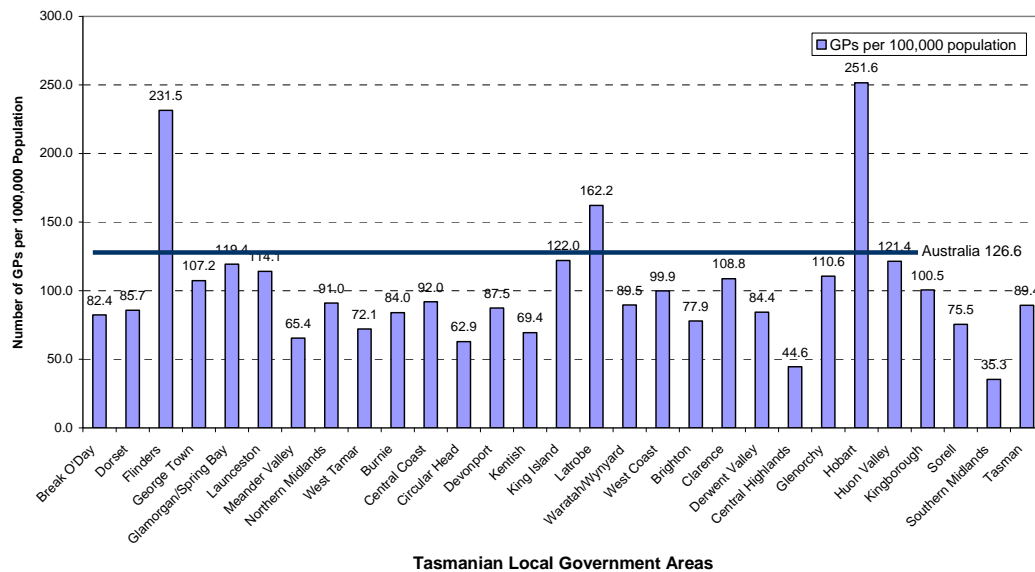
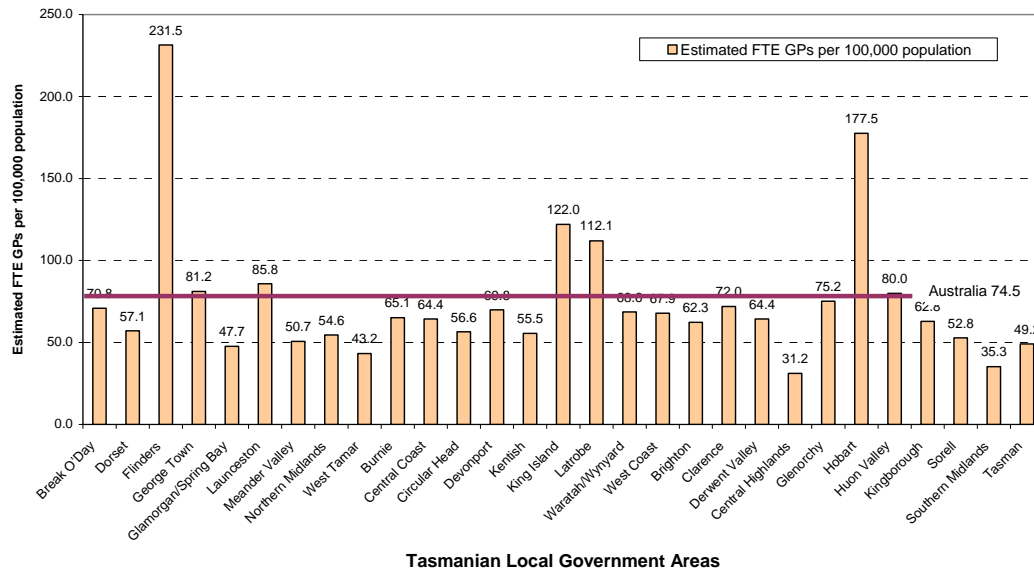


Figure 6.1: Number of GPs per 100,000 Population by Tasmania Local Government Area, 2008

6.2. Supply of GP services for the Tasmanian population (FTE GPs over Tasmanian Population)

There are several Tasmanian Local Government Areas which appeared to have a greater or smaller supply of GP services in comparison to the nationwide average.

Figure 6.2: Estimated Full Time Equivalent GPs per 100,000 population by Tasmanian LGA, 2008



7. Practice Nurses

There were 236 practice nurses employed by 101 practices throughout Tasmania in May 2008. This represents an increase of 10 practice nurses statewide since the 2007 Census. The FTE practice nurse to GP FTE ratio statewide is 0.29. In broad terms this suggests that there is one FTE practice nurse for every three GP FTEs.

During Census week 2008 the Northern region had the highest utilisation of practice nurses with an FTE practice nurse to FTE GP ratio of 0.41. The North West was lower at 0.29 despite the rural practice nurse incentive program. However, the quarterly volume of MBS Practice Nurse items in the North West for the corresponding period suggests that a broader range of services are provided by practice nurses in the North West region. The FTE practice nurse to FTE GP ratio in the South was 0.24.

Table 7 -1: Number of Tasmanian Practice Nurses by Region

		2008
South	No. of Practices	90
	No. of Practice Nurses	107
	No. of practices with Nurses	46
	% of Practices with Nurses	51%
North	No. of Practices	54
	No. of Practice Nurses	83
	No. of practices with Nurses	36
	% of Practices with Nurses	67%
North West	No. of Practices	27
	No. of Practice Nurses	46
	No. of practices with Nurses	19
	% of Practices with Nurses	70%
Total Tasmania	No. of Practices	171
	No. of Practice Nurses	236
	% of Practices with Nurses	59%

Source: Tasmania GP Census, 2008.

Table 7 -2: Number of Full Time Equivalent Tasmanian Practice Nurses by Region

		2008
South	No. of Practices	90
	No. of FTE Practice Nurses	49.3
	No. of Practice Nurses	107
	Average Working Hours per week	18
North	No. of Practices	54
	No. of FTE Practice Nurses	39.3
	No. of Practices Nurses	83
	Average Working Hours per week	19
North West	No. of Practices	27
	No. of FTE Practice Nurses	21.8
	No. of Practice Nurses	46
	Average Working Hours per week	19
Total Tasmania	No. of Practices	171
	No. of FTE Practice Nurses	110.4
	Average Working Hours per week	18.7

Source: Tasmania GP Census, 2008- Practice Nurse FTEs based on a 40 hour full time working week.

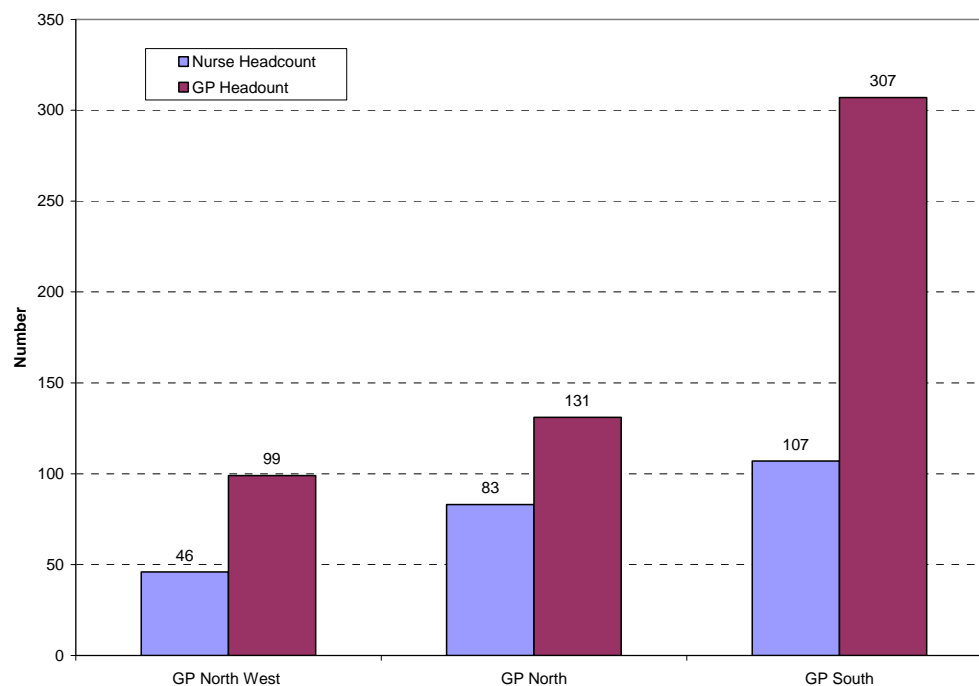
Table 7-3: Ratio of Practice Nurses to GPs, 2008

Census 2008	No. of Practice Nurses	No of GPs	Ratio Nurses to GPs	FTE Practice Nurses	FTE GPs	Ratio FTE Nurses to FTE GPs
South	107	307	0.35	49.3	209.3	0.24
North	83	131	0.63	39.3	94.7	0.41
North West	46	99	0.46	21.8	76.1	0.29
Total Tasmania	236	537	0.44	110.4	380.1	0.29

Source: Tasmania GP Census, 2008- Practice Nurse FTEs based on a 40 hour full time working week.

Practice Nurse Activity by Region

Figure 7.1: Number of GPs to Practice Nurses by Region, Census 2008



Figures 7.1 to 7.4 illustrate the scope of clinical activities undertaken by practice nurses across the three Tasmanian regions during Census week 2008. Differences exist between the regions in the way the Practice Nurse role is utilised.

Table 7.4 offers the following insights in regards to the clinical activities assigned to practice nurses. Note that percentage calculations exclude practices that did not employ nurses during the Census week.

- 90% of practices employing nurses in Tasmania involved them in the delivery of the MBS Immunisation Item.
- Nurses in the North have a significantly lower involvement in the immunisation item than the statewide average – 78% compared with 90% statewide.
- Nurses in the North have a significantly lower involvement in wound care than the statewide average – 83% compared with 92% statewide
- Nurses in the South have a significantly lower involvement in the preparation of the annual diabetes cycle item when compared with the other regions.
- Nurses in the North West appear to have a significantly higher level of involvement in pap smears than the other regions.
- Nurses in the South have a significantly lower involvement in aged health assessments than the other regions.
- Nurses in the North West have a significantly lower level of involvement in care planning than the other regions
- Nurses in all regions have a major role in waiting room triage - all are over 80%.
- Nurse in the North West have the highest level of involvement in the provision of MBS Practice Nurse items (see Table 8.5)

Table 7-4: Regional Practice Nurse Activity- proportion of practices providing named clinical services via practice nurses.

Census 2008	MBS Item Immunisation	MBS Wound Care Item	Asthma cycle	Diabetes cycle	Patient education - diabetes	Patient education - asthma	Pap smear	Patient education - diet	Aged Health Assessments	Indigenous Health Assessments	Care Planning	Waiting room triage
Statewide	90%	92%	40%	57%	64%	50%	26%	44%	68%	12%	52%	84%
North West	95%	100%	37%	63%	74%	53%	42%	32%	74%	16%	37%	84%
North	78%	83%	42%	64%	56%	44%	22%	39%	81%	11%	50%	81%
South	98%	93%	39%	50%	67%	52%	22%	52%	57%	11%	61%	87%

Figure 7.2: Practice Nurse Activity for the Northern Region, Census 2008

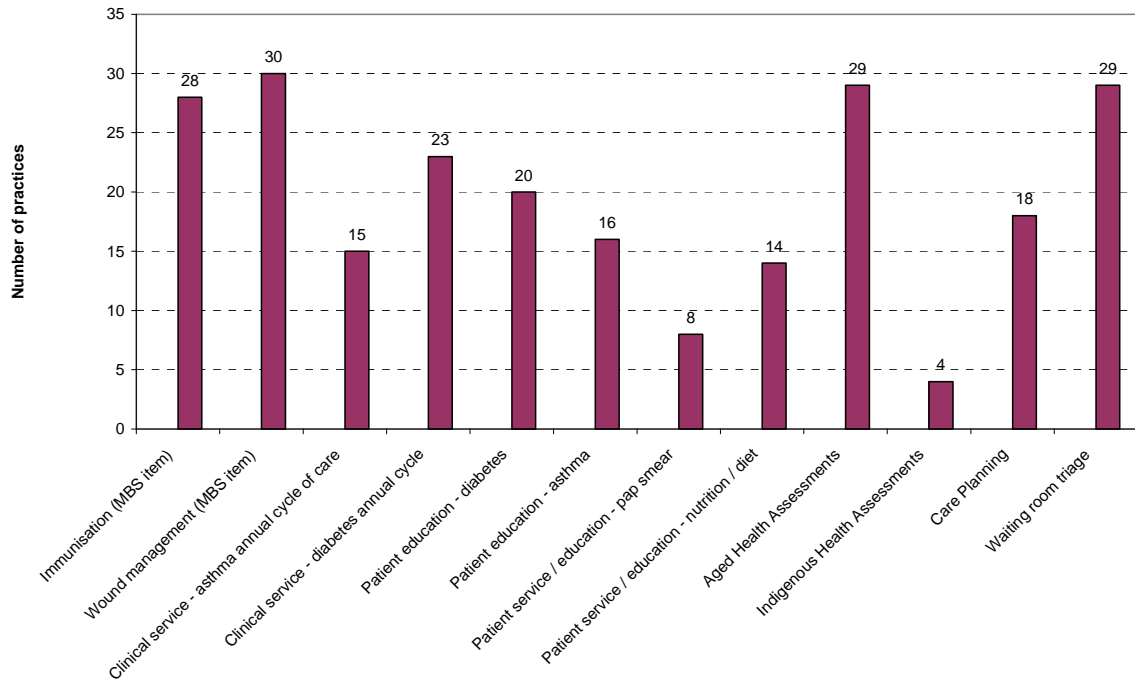


Figure 7.3: Practice Nurse Activity for the North West Region, Census, 2008.

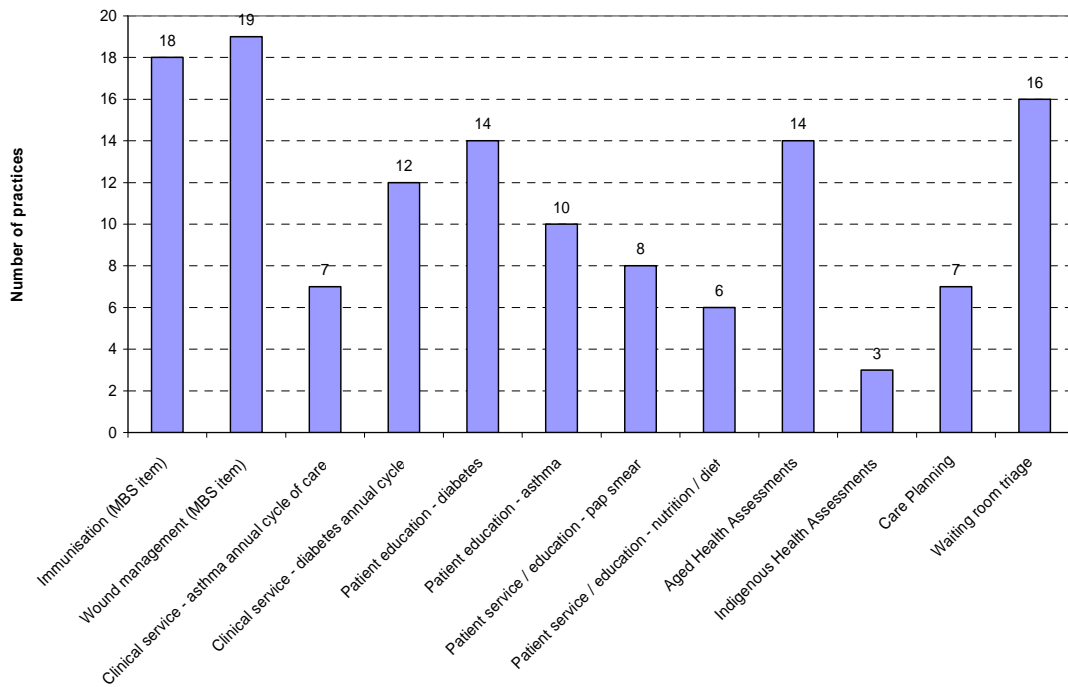
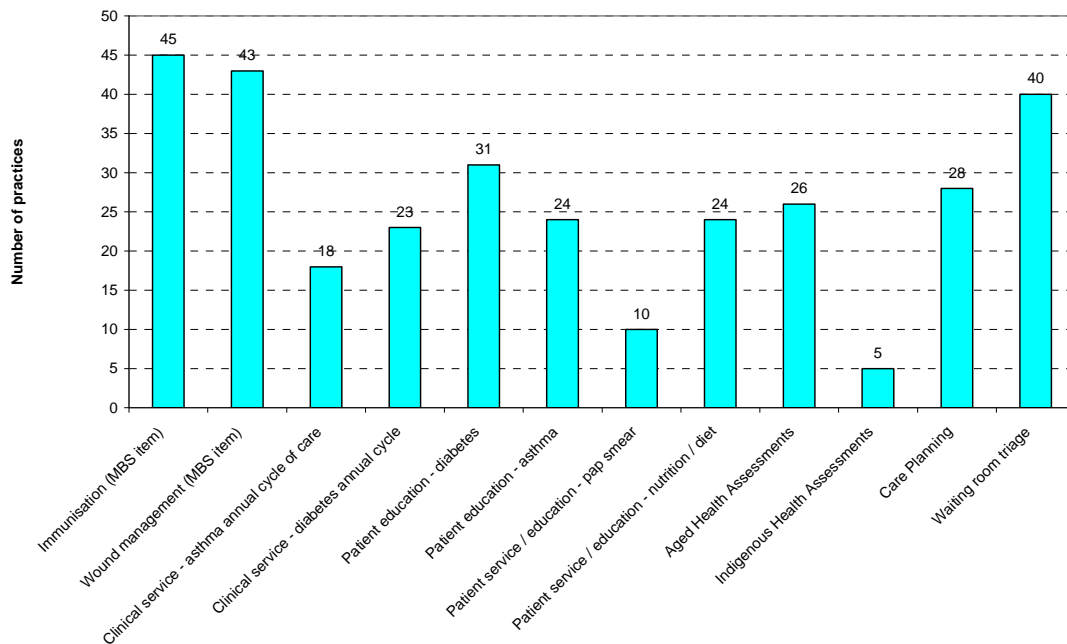


Figure 7.4: Practice Nurse Activity for the Southern Region, Census 2008



8. Conclusion

The 2008 Tasmanian General Practice Census provides timely information about the Tasmanian GP workforce. The GP information for 2008, along with census information from 2005, 2006 and 2007 has shown that Tasmania’s GP workforce is becoming proportionally older though most Tasmanian GPs are aged between 45 and 54.

While there is a high proportion of male GPs in the workforce, there has been an increasing feminisation of the workforce in the North and North West regions in Tasmania. Female GPs have a younger age profile than male GPs and practice proportionally fewer sessions than male GPs although 2008 data suggests that female participation is increasing, particularly in the Southern region. There is, however, a trend of decreasing participation from the male GP workforce, more noticeably in the younger age groups. These influences will need to inform workforce modelling.

There is an uneven distribution of the Tasmanian GP workforce, with a larger proportion of GPs in the urban areas and a smaller proportion in the rural areas. GPs in the rural and remote areas are also likely to practice on average more sessions than their counterparts in the metropolitan areas. As increasingly more GPs are reaching retirement age, new strategies may be necessary to increase the supply of GP services.

Census administration and approach

A census approach is chosen to provide maximum power for comparisons by utilising the entire Tasmanian GP population, and to use a clear and recent reference period for the survey to minimise the potential for recall bias.

The online survey tool was developed in 2003 by representatives from the Tasmanian divisions of general practice and the University of Tasmania, with input from staff and GPs within each division. The survey collected basic demographic data and the number of 3.5-hour sessions worked in direct patient care in the Census Week (normally during a week free of public or school holidays in 2008). GP workforce participation refers to the amount of time GPs spend providing direct patient care. For this report, workforce participation is also measured as either “eight or more sessions per week” or “less than eight sessions per week” – a distinction chosen to reflect the fact that GPs working 8 or more sessions in direct patient care are considered to have a full-time general practice workload.

General Practice Tasmania Limited emailed a link to the online survey to all GPs known to be practising in Tasmania, according to the database held by each Tasmanian division. The link was sent on the Monday after the Census Week, aiming to maximise the accuracy of GPs’ recall. Non responders were sent a further email a week later. General practitioners without an email address and non responders were sent a paper based survey. Non responders were followed up by a series of reminder letters with follow-up phone calls as necessary.

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