



National Practice Nurse Workforce Survey Report 2007





AGPN is the largest representative voice for general practice in Australia. It is the peak national body of the divisions of general practice, comprising 119 divisions across Australia, as well as the eight state-based organisations. Approximately 95 per cent of GPs are members of a local division of general practice.

Australian General Practice Network
PO Box 4308
MANUKA ACT 2603

Telephone: (02) 6228 0800
Facsimile: (02) 6228 0899
Email: agpnreception@agpn.com.au
Web: www.agpn.com.au

AGPN acknowledges the financial support of the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

Acknowledgements

The survey instrument and survey report were prepared by Julie Porritt Principal Adviser, Nursing in General Practice with advice from Piazza Consulting. Statistical analysis of the survey reports was performed by Piazza Consulting Limited.

AGPN would like to acknowledge the state-based organisations (SBOs) for their support in circulating the survey instrument to their member divisions.

Thanks are extended to the divisions of general practice, the general practice staff and the practice nurses, for their valuable time given to complete the survey instrument.

List of abbreviations

ADGP	Australian Divisions of General Practice
AGPN	Australian General Practice Network
AHW	Aboriginal Health Worker
ANF	Australian Nursing Federation (or a state branch)
APNA	Australian Practice Nurses Association
Division	Division of General Practice
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GP	General practitioner
PIP	Practice Incentives Program
PN	Practice Nurse
PN PIP	Practice Nurse Practice Incentive Program
RCNA	Royal College of Nursing Australia
RRMA	Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas
SBO	State-based organisation
SD	Standard deviation
URL	Universal Resource Locator; internet address

National Practice Nurse Workforce Survey 2007

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
List of abbreviations	4
1. Executive Summary	7
Main findings	8
2. Introduction	9
3. Method	11
3.1 Survey questionnaire	11
3.2 Population and distribution method	11
3.3 Impact of methodological change.....	11
3.4 Statistical Clearing House approval	12
3.5 Data quality and statistical analysis.....	12
4. Scope.....	13
5. Nursing in general practice survey response	14
5.1 Division	14
5.2 Practices.....	14
5.3 General practitioners.....	15
5.4 Practice Nurses	16
6. Synopsis of key findings.....	18
6.1 Estimate of number of practice nurses employed in Australia (headcount).....	18
6.2 Number of practices employing a practice nurse	18
6.3 GP: PN ratio	19
6.4 Practice data	19
6.5 Practice nurse data	21
7. Detailed overview	22
7.1 General practice data	22
7.1 Number of general practices.....	22
7.1.2 Number of practice nurses employed	22
7.1.3 Other nursing services.....	23
7.1.4 Aboriginal Health Workers.....	23
7.2 Practice nurse data	24
7.2.1 Composition.....	24
7.2.2 Hours worked.....	25
7.2.3 Length of service of nurses in practice	25
7.2.4 Patterns of employment.....	26
7.2.5 Membership of professional nursing organisation	27
7.2.6 Post graduate qualifications in nursing	28

8. Closing remarks	30
Appendix 1.....	31
Email to Division	31
Instructions for Division Executive Officers.....	31
Instructions for Practice Managers (or Management Delegates).....	32
Instructions for Individual Practice Nurses	32
Survey Instrument	33

List of tables

<i>Table 1.0: Number of practices returning surveys by state.</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Table 2.0: RRMA survey response breakdown.</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Table 3.0: Number of nurses in responding general practice by state.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Table 4.0: Number of responding practice nurses by RRMA category.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Table 5.0: Estimates of number of practice nurses by state.</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Table 6.0: Practices employing a PN by state.</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Table 7.0: Practices registered for PIP.</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Table 8.0: Practices eligible for practice nurse PIP.</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Table 9.0: Registered and enrolled practice nurses by state.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Table 10.0: Number of practices responding.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Table 11.0: Number of practice nurses employed in responding practices.</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Table 12.0: Number of practices obtaining contract or sessional nursing services.</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Table 13.0: Number of contract or sessional hours.</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Table 14.0: Number of Aboriginal Health Workers employed.</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Table 15.0: Age distribution of nurses in general practice.</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Table 16.0: Length of service for nurses responding to the 2007 survey.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Table 17.0: Number of practice nurses working in another nursing position.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Table 18.0: Membership of practice nurses to professional nursing organisations.</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Table 19.0: Numbers of nurses reporting post-graduate qualifications.</i>	<i>28</i>

List of figures

<i>Figure 1.0: Percentage of responses by RRMA in sample: 2005 and 2007.</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Figure 2.0: RRMA distribution of practice nurses.</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Figure 3.0: Average number of nurses per practice.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Figure 4.0: Age distribution of registered and enrolled nurses in general practice.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Figure 5.0: Nurse membership of a professional nursing organisation.</i>	<i>27</i>

1. Executive Summary

The Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) 2003 National Practice Nurse Survey Report provided the first comprehensive national compilation of information and statistics regarding general practice nurses in the field.

The survey was repeated in 2005 and again in 2007.

In response to division requests to decrease the burden of respondents, AGPN engaged Piazza Consulting to establish a web-based survey methodology to conduct the 2007 survey. This has resulted in higher, and more complete divisional response rates. As divisional data are used for most national estimates this year's data provides a more accurate estimation.

Complete reports have provided a more accurate assessment of nationwide nursing in general practice. Figures from the divisions and their member general practices have been obtained in substantially less time than previous surveys

Responses from practices and nurses were down on previous years. This may be attributed to the changed methodology and also the timing of the survey which is reported to have corresponded with a period of high work load for practices. Despite this, this year's response rate has provided reliable estimates for both practice and nurse data.

The main findings of the survey are outlined on the following page.

Main findings

- The estimated number of practice nurses in 2007 was 7824, compared with 4924 in 2005. This represents a 59% increase over two years.
- It is estimated that on average 58% of general practices employ one or more practice nurses. This is an increase of 1% from 2005 (n75) over two years.
- In practices that employ a nurse the current GP to PN ratio is 2.3:1 (headcount) corresponding to a 3.4:1 ratio, full-time equivalent (FTE). From 2005 figures, this represents a decrease in headcount ratio of 7.6% meaning more practice nurses per general practitioners. However an increase in FTE ratio of 3.6% from 2005 figures suggests a decrease in practice nurse hours compared to general practitioners hours.
- 79.2% of all practice nurses are registered nurses with 15.3% reporting that they are enrolled nurses (5.5% of practice nurses provided no answer on this question.)
- 41% of the practice nurse population is aged between 40 and 49 years with 78% over 40 years of age. These findings are consistent with perceptions of an ageing nurse workforce.
- The 2007 survey is the first to assess the number of Aboriginal Health Workers employed in general practice. Results from the 2007 survey indicate that nationwide, 20 Aboriginal Health Workers are employed in the 622 practices that responded.
- In 2007, 75.5 % of surveyed nurses worked part-time. Although the workforce is still predominately part-time when compared with 2005 (82.1%) and 2003 (87%) a clear trend is emerging that nurses have increasingly been employed in full-time (24.5%) work over the past 4 years.
- 30.7% of the nursing workforce is employed in another nursing position reflecting the predominately part-time nature of the industry.
- The number of practices that employ only one nurse has fallen by 11.74% from 2005 and the number of practices employing 5 or more practice nurses has increased by 23.4%.
- Of those practices responding who currently employ a practice nurse 60% are rural, remote and metropolitan areas RRMA 3-7 and 40% are in RRMA 1-2.

2. Introduction

The Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) is the peak national body for the Divisions Network which comprises 119 Divisions of General Practice and eight state-based organisations (SBOs) across Australia. Through the Network, AGPN has contact with the majority of general practices and GPs as well as with many other health professionals and the health system. Approximately 95 per cent of GPs are members of a local division.

Nurses have been employed in Australian general practices for a number of decades. Over the last five years however, there has been an even greater focus on the valuable and diverse roles that nurses can play in supporting GPs in the provision of primary care services.

Australian Government policy has been a significant driver for the employment of more nurses in general practice over this period, and for the development of the clinical role for the nurse particularly in the management of chronic disease. The aims for the government's Nursing in General Practice Initiative are to support the effective employment of practice nurses to:

- relieve workforce pressure in general practice
- improve the prevention and management of chronic disease
- improve access to, and the quality and integration of, patient care¹.

To achieve these aims the Australian Government has made a significant financial commitment to practice nursing providing funding of \$104.3 million for the years 2001-02 to 2004-05, and continuing the funding with \$129.9 million for the four years to 2008-09. The majority of the funding is provided through the Practice Incentives Program (PIP) to support practices in rural areas and other areas of need to employ practice nurses. In addition, government funding of \$140.3 million over the four years to 2006-07 and continuing to 2010-11 was provided to support practices in urban areas of workforce shortage to employ practice nurses.

There has also been a range of other Australian Government initiatives aimed at increased utilisation of practice nursing services, such as:

- MBS Items for practice nurses to provide immunisation, wound care, Pap smears, antenatal checks and chronic disease management on behalf of a general practitioner
- practice nurse scholarships for education and training
- facilitating access for training and support for nurses in regional and rural areas to be points of referral for people experiencing domestic violence.

AGPN is contracted by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing to provide national leadership and coordination for the Nursing in General Practice Program (NiGP).

¹ Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, 2005. Guidelines for the Divisions Network Nursing in General Practice Program. Draft for comment. Version 0.2.

The aim of the program is to work with the state-based organisations to achieve the following national initiatives:

- building the capacity of Divisions of General Practice to deliver support services for nursing in general practice, in particular to recruit and retain practice nurses in general practice
- brokering, coordinating and funding education and professional development opportunities for nurses in general practice in collaboration with Divisions of General Practice in each state and territory.

The Principal Adviser, Nursing in General Practice provides coordination and leadership for the Nursing in General Practice Program.

In late 2003 AGPN (formerly ADGP), with the assistance of divisions, undertook the first national survey of practice nurses in order to collect comprehensive national and state/territory data on the nursing in general practice workforce in Australia. Prior to 2003 no such comprehensive, national data was available on this specific branch of the nursing profession. The survey was repeated in 2005 which enabled comparisons of the data collected.

In 2007 AGPN repeated the PN Workforce Survey with an additional question to collect data on the number of Aboriginal Health Workers employed in general practice. Additional questions were added to the Practice Nurse Survey collecting comments relating to formal training and factors influencing retention in the nursing in general practice workforce. Findings in the 2007 Survey have been compared to the 2005 report.

3. Method

3.1 Survey questionnaire

The survey instrument, developed by AGPN, which was previously used in the 2003 and 2005 surveys, was again used with minor changes. The survey was approved by the Australian Government Statistical Clearing House. In response to division requests to decrease the burden of the 2005 survey, AGPN engaged Piazza Consulting to establish a web-based survey methodology to conduct the 2007 survey. The online survey instrument consisted of three parts:

- a division survey
- a practice survey
- a nurse survey.

A hardcopy of the Survey instrument can be found at Appendix 1.

3.2 Population and distribution method

The target population for the survey was the 119 divisions and all general practices in Australia which employed practice nurses. The survey web-address (URL) was emailed to each division who undertook the responsibility for forwarding the survey to each general practice. Each general practice was then responsible for forwarding the survey to their practice nurses. A paper-based option for responses was also available for practices and nurses with limited access to the internet; completed surveys were posted back to AGPN. In order to protect the confidentiality of respondents a secure site was used for the survey. The period over which the data was collected was September and October 2007. Late returns were followed up, either by email or directly by telephone by AGPN staff. These follow-up communications had a strong positive effect on increasing response rates, resulting in a 100% divisional response rate.

3.3 Impact of methodological change

The methodological change from paper-based to web-based survey design has resulted in higher and more complete divisional response rates. This has served to provide a more accurate assessment of nationwide nursing practice figures, and has been obtained with substantially less financial and time burden on divisions. Data collection via the web-based survey was found to be exceptionally fast, with divisions taking on average 4.68 minutes, practices 5.37 minutes, and nurses 4.71 minutes to complete the survey instrument.

While the overall response rate was high enough to provide highly reliable results, the number of responses received in the 2007 survey from practices and individual nurses was lower than received in previous surveys. In previous surveys, divisions were responsible for collecting completed surveys to forward to AGPN. Due to the web-based data collection, divisions had less involvement and had less feedback regarding their general practices', and nurse's response

rates. This lower traceability of response progress back to divisions may have contributed to lower response rates, as the divisions were unable to target follow up with non responders. A second reason offered by some representatives of SBOs was that the period of data collection coincided with a busy period of work activity for practices and nurses alike.

Suggestions for methodological changes to future surveys may be to incorporate an online feedback tool for divisions to receive an updated practice response rate figure, as well as an examination of the most convenient sampling period for practices.

3.4 Statistical Clearing House approval

The survey was approved for use by the Australian Government Statistical Clearing House, approval number 01725—02.

3.5 Data quality and statistical analysis

Paper-based responses were subsequently entered into the online survey. Data from all responses were entered into Microsoft Excel 2007. Data was checked for anomalous entry errors and corrected where errors were present. Cleaned data was analysed using SPSS 15.0 for Windows.

4. Scope

The survey instrument used was originally developed to provide a quantitative snapshot of the practice nurse workforce.

Although measurement was made of the number of hours worked by part-time nurses and doctors, no measurement was made of the true number of hours (or number of sessions) worked by full-time nurses or doctors. The part-time estimates gained were used to create full-time equivalent (FTE) values; based on a 38 hour working week for full-time practice nurse and 9 or more sessions per week for full time GPs. A suggestion for future surveys is to assess actual full-time working hours.

Although the present method of FTE assessment is similar to previous years, this methodology may be improved with assessment of actual full-time work load. With this small change in survey design, a more complete perspective of the workload of the healthcare workforce may be realised.

5. Nursing in general practice survey response

5.1 Division

Responses were initially received from 113 divisions. The remaining 6 divisions' responses were made available from data provided by AGPN. The overall response rate was 100% (119) with of 95% (113) divisions completing full responses to the survey. An improvement on the 2005 survey in which 92% (104) of divisions responded with 79% (94) providing full responses. This increase represents continual progression in response rates over time with divisional response in 2003 at 70% (84 divisions).

5.2 Practices

The estimates from the divisions place the number of general practices to be around 7471 general practices. This figure is consistent with the most recent data obtainable which estimated the number of practices to be 7525.²

The total number of practices which returned the survey in 2007 was 632. A state by state breakdown is provided in Table 1.0.

Table 1.0: Number of practices returning surveys by state.

State								
NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	TOTAL
156	172	104	42	95	23	16	24	632

This level of response from individual practices is lower then was received in 2005 (1682), this is thought to be due to methodological change and timing of survey administration, see page 10 for further details.

The geographic distribution of practices responding to the survey was given by Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Classification (RRMA) and are detailed in Table 2.0.

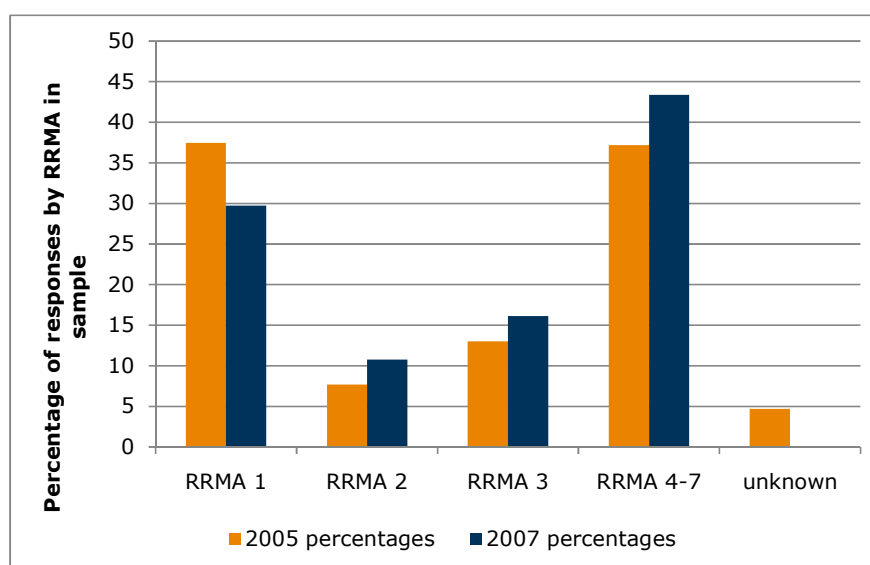
² Report of the 2005-2006 Annual Survey of Divisions of General Practice, Primary Health Care research and Information Service 2007

Table 2.0: RRMA survey response breakdown.

RRMA	Number	Percent
1	188	29.75
2	68	10.76
3	102	16.14
4	79	12.50
5	127	20.09
6	22	3.48
7	46	7.28
Total	632	100.00

A comparison distribution of respondents by RRMA category from 2005 and 2007 surveys is provided below in Figure 1.0.

Figure 1.0: Percentage of responses by RRMA in sample: 2005 and 2007.



5.3 General practitioners

The total number of GPs (headcount) on which this analysis was conducted is 2832 which in full-time equivalent (FTE) is comparable to 2658 full-time GPs. FTE is defined as it was defined in the previous (2005) survey, as working nine or more sessions per week. The mean number of GPs (headcount) per practice was 4.48 (Standard Deviation (S.D.) = 5.03), representing a 4% increase from 2005 figures. Corresponding mean number of FTE GPs per practice was 4.21 (S.D. = 2.3) indicating an increase of mean FTE GPs per practice over the past two years of 34.1%.³

³ 2005 data: Mean GP Headcount per practice = 4.31 (S.D. = 3.2), Mean number of FTE GPs per practice = 3.14 (S.D. = 2.38)

5.4 Practice Nurses

The total number of PNs (headcount) on which this analysis was conducted is 1225 which in full-time equivalent (FTE) is comparable to 777.2 Full-time PNs. FTE is defined as it was defined in the previous (2005) survey, as working 38 hours or more per week. The mean number of PNs (headcount) per practice was 1.94 (S.D. =2.42), and corresponding mean number of FTE PNs per practice was 1.23 (S.D. =0.84). For mean number of PNs per practice this represents an increase of 11.5% from 2005 figures.⁴ Similarly for FTE the 2007 figures represent an increase of 29.5%.

Table 3.0: Number of nurses in responding general practice by state.

State	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	Total
Number of Nurses in Practice	326	387	241	116	181	55	49	50	1405

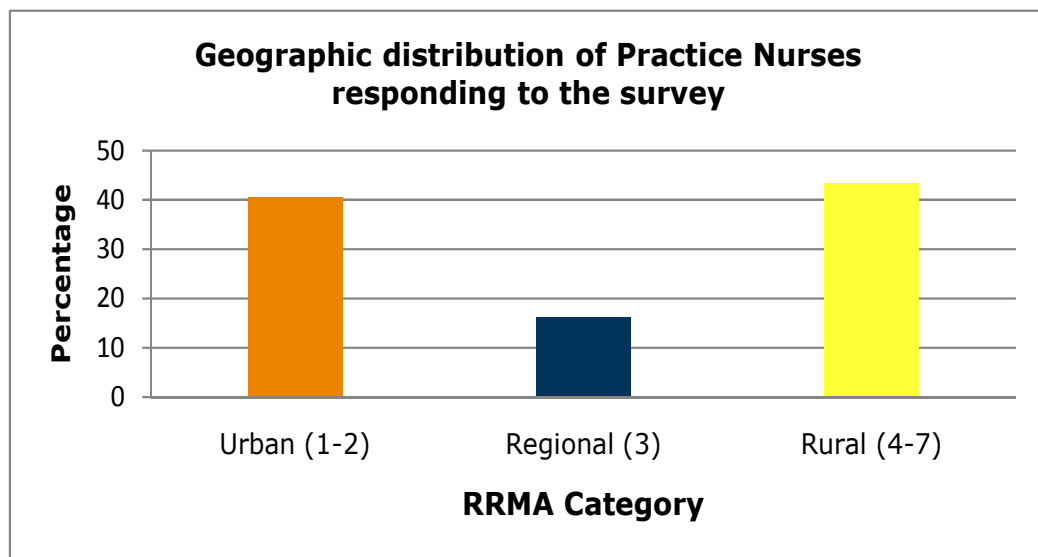
Table 4.0: Number of responding practice nurses by RRMA category.⁵

RRMA	No. PNs Employed	Percentage %
1	188	29.75
2	68	10.76
3	102	16.14
4	79	12.50
5	127	20.09
6	22	3.48
7	46	7.28
Total	632	100

⁴ 2005 data: Mean PN Headcount per practice = 1.74 (S.D. =1.66), Mean number of FTE PNs per practice = 0.95 (S.D. = 0.93)

⁵ Calculations based upon practice data information regarding number of nurses employed and RRMA Classification

Figure 2.0: RRMA distribution of practice nurses.



6. Synopsis of key findings

6.1 Estimate of number of practice nurses employed in Australia (headcount)

The overall estimate of number of practice nurses (headcount), employed in Australia at the time of the survey is approximately 7824. This estimate is made from the 7728 nurses reported from the responding divisions plus the additional data provided by AGPN on the remaining 6 non responding divisions. Division estimates of the number of nurses employed per state is provided in Table 5.0.

Table 5.0: Estimates of number of practice nurses by state.

Overall estimate of number of practice nurses			
State	2005 estimates	2007 estimates	% Change from 2005
NSW	1157	2010	42.4
VIC	1515	1926	21.3
QLD	1112	1707	34.9
SA	203	663	69.4
WA	722	895	19.3
TAS	126	266	52.6
NT	59	186	68.3
ACT	30	75	60.0
Total	4924	7728	63.7

6.2 Number of practices employing a practice nurse

Of the 632 practices whose responses were analysed, 90.3% (569) employ one or more practice nurses. From divisional estimates, of the 7471 estimated practices, on average 57.5% practices are thought to employ a practice nurse.

A breakdown of estimated number of general practices employing a nurse by state is provided in Table 6.0.

Table 6.0: Practices employing a PN by state.

State	Practices employing a practice nurse	Total number of practices	Percentage of practices employing a practice nurse
NSW	1065	2829	37.7
VIC	905	1874	48.3
QLD	799	1260	63.4
SA	295	593	49.8
WA	402	561	71.6
TAS	109	165	66.1
NT	68	88	77.3
ACT	46	101	45.5
National average	461.13	933.88	57.5
Total	3689	7471	

6.3 GP: PN ratio

Analysis of the 2007 data suggests a current GP: PN ratio of 2.31 GPs to 1 PN (headcount) this has fallen 7.6% from the 2005 report⁶. The corresponding FTE ratio is 3.42 FTE GPs: 1 FTE PN which has risen by 3.64%.

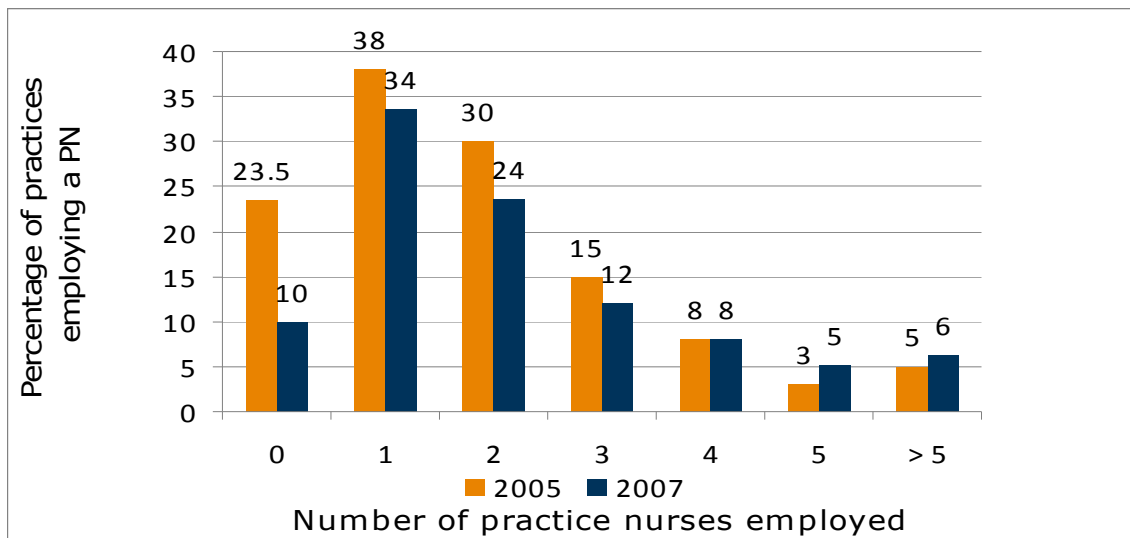
6.4 Practice data

Of the 632 practices that responded to the survey 33.54% employ only one nurse, this figure is lower than was observed in 2005 by 11.74%. Although the number of practices which are found to employ 5 or more practice nurses (comprising 6.17% of responding practices) has increased by 23.4%. Of the practices which responded to the 2007 survey, 90.3% were found to employ one or more practice nurse.

⁶ GP:PN ratio observed in 2006 2.5:1, FTE ratio was 3.3:1

The average number of nurses employed per practice is provided in Figure 3.0 below.

Figure 3.0: Average number of nurses per practice.



Analysis of practice data reveals the majority of practices are registered for the PIP. The majority are also eligible for the PIP practice nurse incentives; however there remain a significant proportion of practices which report they are unsure whether their general practice is eligible for a PIP practice nurse incentive.

Table 7.0: Practices registered for PIP.

Registered for PIP	Number	Percent
Yes	578.00	91.46
No	38.00	6.01
Unsure	16.00	2.53
Total	632.00	100.00

Table 8.0: Practices eligible for practice nurse PIP.

Eligible for PN PIP	Number	Percent
Yes	452.00	71.52
No	96.00	15.19
Unsure	84.00	13.29
Total	632.00	100.00

6.5 Practice nurse data

Data from 2007 indicates the majority of practice nurses report being registered nurses (79.2%), a small number of nurses provided no answer to this question (5.5%) and the remainder (15.3%) comprised of enrolled nurses. These results are similar to those found in the 2006 report which found 82% of nurses to be registered nurses and the remaining (18%) enrolled nurses. This pattern of results is also similar to 2003 data.⁷ Table 9.0 presents a nurse category breakdown by state.

Table 9.0: Registered and enrolled practice nurses by state.

Nurse status	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	Total
Registered	262 (84.5%)	304 (86.1%)	116 (73.4%)	75 (72.1%)	133 (68.9%)	21 (58.3%)	26 (76.5%)	33 (97.1%)	970 (79.4%)
Enrolled	22 (7.1%)	49 (13.9%)	29 (18.3%)	22 (21.2%)	46 (23.8)	11 (30.6%)	6 (17.7%)	0 (0%)	185 (15.1%)
No answer	26 (8.4%)	0 (0%)	13 (8.3%)	7 (6.7%)	14 (7.3%)	4 (11.1%)	2 (5.8%)	1 (2.9%)	67 (5.5%)
Total	310	353	158	104	193	36	34	34	1222

Very few males are found in the nursing workforce with male respondents comprising 1.4% of our survey population. This has decreased since 2005 by 0.6%.

⁷ 2003 data registered nurses (84%), enrolled nurses (16%).

7. Detailed overview

7.1 General practice data

7.1 Number of general practices

Table 10.0: Number of practices responding.

	2005	2007
NSW	289	156
VIC	559	172
QLD	366	104
SA	114	42
WA	225	95
TAS	73	23
NT	26	16
ACT	30	24
TOTAL	1682	632

7.1.2 Number of practice nurses employed

Table 11.0: Number of practice nurses employed in responding practices.

	2005	2007
NSW	561	326
VIC	836	387
QLD	691	241
SA	191	116
WA	455	181
TAS	126	55
NT	42	49
ACT	32	50
TOTAL	2934	1,405⁸

⁸ Total number of practice nurses employed from practice responses

7.1.3 Other nursing services

Some practices receive nursing services on a contract or sessional basis from an external source. This may be in addition or an alternative to direct employment of a nurse for the practice.

59 (9.3%) of the practice respondents receive nursing services on this basis, this figure is relatively unchanged from the 2005 figure of 183 (10.9%).

For practices who obtained additional nursing services the most common source was a division of general practice (26) or private contractor (22).

Table 12.0: Number of practices obtaining contract or sessional nursing services.

State	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	Total
Division of general practice	9	6	6	2	1	2	0	0	26
Area health service	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Private contractor	6	4	6	1	0	3	1	1	22
Other	1	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	5
Total no. practices obtaining at least 1 contract or sessional nurse	19	15	12	3	3	5	1	1	59

Table 13.0: Number of contract or sessional hours.

State	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	Total
Division of general practice	48	25	1	20	0	5	0	4	103
Area health service	3	3	5	2	0	1	0	0	14
Private contractor	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other hours	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total hours per weeks	52	29	8	22	0	6	0	4	121

7.1.4 Aboriginal Health Workers

The 2007 survey is the first to assess the number of Aboriginal Health Workers employed in practice nursing. Results from the 2007 survey indicate that nationwide 20 Aboriginal Health Workers are employed in the 632 practices that have responded. A state by state break down is provided in Table 14.0. Overall Aboriginal health workers comprise 1.4% of the practice nursing workforce (1405) reported from practice responses.

Table 14.0: Number of Aboriginal Health Workers employed.

State	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	Total
Aboriginal Health Workers employed	7	4	3	1	3	0	2	0	20

7.2 Practice nurse data

7.2.1 Composition

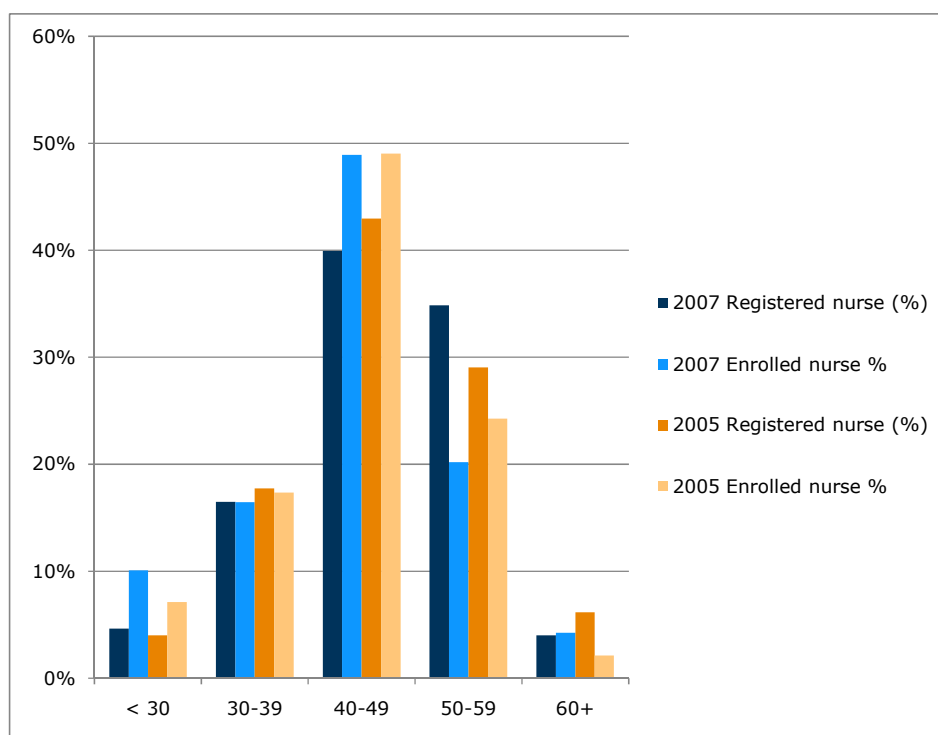
Age

Consistent with the nursing profession overall, findings indicate that the majority (78%) of current practice nurses are over the age of 40. This is unchanged since 2005. Table 15.0 below provides a breakdown of the age group and percentage of registered and enrolled nurses.

Table 15.0: Age distribution of registered and enrolled nurses in general practice.

Age group	2007		2005	
	Registered nurse (%)	Enrolled nurse %	Registered nurse (%)	Enrolled nurse %
< 30	5%	10%	4.02%	7.14%
30-39	17%	16%	17.77%	17.38%
40-49	40%	49%	42.97%	49.05%
50-59	35%	20%	29.06%	24.29%
60+	4%	4%	6.18%	2.14%

Figure 4.0: Age distribution of registered and enrolled nurses in general practice⁹.



Sex

The majority (98.6%) of practice nurses were female. Males comprise 1.4% of practice nurses.

7.2.2 Hours worked

In 2007, 75.5 % of surveyed nurses worked part-time, although the workforce is still predominately part-time when compared to 2005 (82.1%) and 2003 (87%) a clear trend is emerging for nurses to be increasingly employed in full-time (24.5%) work over the past 4 years.

7.2.3 Length of service of nurses in practice

The findings from the 2007 study indicate a reduction in the number of practice nurses with less than 1 year experience (20.13%) of 7.1% from 2005 levels (21.67%). The 2007 findings indicate that the majority (59.74%) of practice nurses have between 2-10 years of experience. Table 16.0 below outlines the length of service for those nurses who responded to the 2007 survey.

⁹ Totals for 2007 exclude 'No Answer' response approximately 5.5% of data.

Table 16.0: Length of service for nurses responding to the 2007 survey.

Length of PN service	Number	Percent
0-1 Years	245	20.13
2-5 Years	489	40.18
6-10 Years	238	19.56
11-20 Years	169	13.89
20+ Years	76	6.24
Total	1217	100

7.2.4 Patterns of employment

Similar to the 2005 results of 32.4%, the 2007 study's findings indicate 30.7% of practice nurses are employed in at least one other nursing job. As in the 2005 survey this is attributed to the largely part-time nature of the positions available in general practice. The reduction of 5.25% from 2005 levels can be attributed to the trend to move towards more full-time practice nurses.

Table 17.0: Number of practice nurses working in another nursing position.

State	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	Total
Public hospital	46	58	22	13	15	3	2	0	159
Private hospital	10	12	11	2	3	3	1	1	43
Aged care facility	9	18	3	2	3	3	0	0	38
Another general practice	18	11	6	9	8	3	0	1	56
Other organisation ¹⁰	20	26	19	8	33	2	4	0	112
Total number nurses employed in 1 or more other organisation(s) ¹¹	99	123	47	33	46	14	7	4	373
Total number of practice nurse responses	310	354	158	104	193	36	34	34	1223

¹⁰ The most commonly reported nursing positions in 'other organisations' were other private firm (12), nursing agency (11), other division of practice (8), community health (3) and local government (3).

¹¹ Discrepancy due to unspecified other organisation

7.2.5 Membership of professional nursing organisation

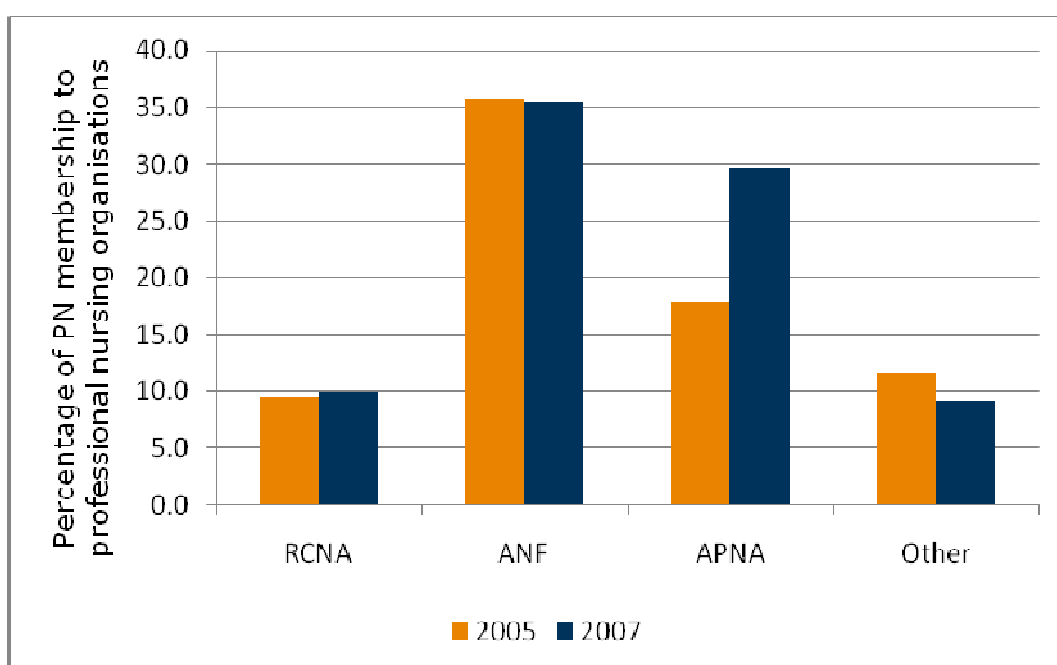
Table 18.0: Membership of practice nurses to professional nursing organisations.

	Total	Percent	% Change from 2005
Member of Professional Nursing Organisation	768	62.7	2.1
Royal College of Nursing Australia	122	10.0	0.4
The College of Nursing (NSW)	51	4.2	0.8
Australian Nursing Federation (or a state branch)	435	35.5	-0.2
Australian Practice Nurses Association	363	29.6	11.7
Association of Australian Rural Nurses	6	29.6	29.2
Australian Diabetes Educators Association	33	2.7	1.1
Other organisation	112	9.1	-2.5

In 2007 62.7% of practice nurses reported membership in a Professional Nursing Organisation this represents a 2.1% increase from 2005 reports.¹²

As in previous surveys the most frequently reported membership was that of the Australian Nursing Federation, however large increases in memberships of Australian Practice Nurse Association have been observed in 2007.

Figure 5.0: Nurse membership of a professional nursing organisation.



¹² 2005 60.6% of PNs were found to be members of a Professional Nursing Organisation. 43% reported in 2003.

7.2.6 Post graduate qualifications in nursing

62.3% of practice nurses reported an additional graduate nursing qualification this is an increase of 17.8% from 2005 levels. The most frequently reported qualifications included:

- Accredited Nurse Immuniser (27.3%)
- Midwifery (20%)
- Women's Health Nurse (11.1%)
- Asthma Educator (7.2%).

Table 19.0: Numbers of nurses reporting post-graduate qualifications.

	Number	Percent
Accredited Nurse Immuniser	334	27.27
Other	292	23.84
Midwifery	244	19.92
Women's Health Nurse	136	11.10
Asthma Educator	88	7.18
Emergency Nursing	81	6.61
Diabetes Educator	56	4.57
Intensive Care Nursing	56	4.57
Total number of nurses with at least 1 additional qualification	745	60.82

7.2.7 Additional comments

Nurses surveyed were given the option of including additional comments on two questions. The first was regarding the formal training they are currently undertaking. The second was regarding positive or negative factors that influence practice nurse retention in the nursing in general practice workforce.

Of the 1225 practice nurses surveyed 551 made comments on the first question, the majority of comments (412) were regarding qualifications currently being pursued by the practice nurse. The most commonly cited qualifications being pursued were immunisation (52), post graduate certificate in practice nursing (17), diabetes education (16) and sexual and reproductive health (including Pap smears) (16). A number of nurses (23) commented on the support they receive from their local division for ongoing education and training. Comments were also made about the difficulty of accessing education in the local area and the difficulty of being released from the practice to attend education sessions. Others commented on the support they received from their employing practice to attend training.

Of the 1225 practice nurses surveyed 656 provided comments on the second question regarding positive or negative factors that influence practice nurse retention. The majority of comments (267) were positive and reflected the advantages of working as a general practice nurse

including flexible working hours, no requirement for shift work, patient continuity, teamwork and the diversity of the role. Typical comments of this nature include:

I work with a great team, love the variety of general practice.

Good working relationship with practice staff. Clients appreciate my work.

A supportive environment that views the practice nurses as a valuable part of the health care team positively influences my retention in general practice.

Although employed for my vast emergency, acute and aged care experience, the challenge is extreme when switching to primary care.

As a practice nurse I am recognised as a professional in my own right. My opinions and expertise are valued by other members. Practice nursing is friendly, and there is a sense of achievement in helping people to remain or attain health.

Flexibility in my working hours are a big factor in keeping me here.

The vast majority of negative comments (255) related to the low rates of pay particularly when compared to other areas of nursing practice. Typical comments included:

I would be happy to see nurses in general practice paid under the same award as those working in public hospitals. I can see around 35 patients a day including trauma and emergency cases with a pay of \$19.80 per hour. This is not good enough!

Considering the amount of income that is generated by Practice Nurses i.e. care plans; 45+ health checks; 75+ Health Assessments; immunisation; wound dressings etc, the salary for Practice Nurses is quite poor.

General practice nursing should deliver better wages considering the many and varied skills required for this position.

Responsibility and need for constantly updating knowledge unrewarded by higher base rate to compensate for lack of (shift) penalties.

I am being paid much less than I could otherwise if I worked in a hospital; I feel that the amount of work, the broad amount of knowledge required is not reflected in my rate of remuneration.

8. Closing remarks

The 2007 National Practice Nurse Workforce survey results reflect a continued increase in the number of nurses employed in Australian general practices. There is also a trend for those practices currently employing a nurse to employ an additional nurse or nurses. There has been a slight increase in the number of practices employing a nurse.

The Australian Government Nursing in General Practice Initiative administered by the Divisions of General Practice Network aims to continue to support additional practices to recruit and retain practice nurses, and to maximise the contribution of all practice nurses to quality primary care services.

Further information can be obtained from Julie Porritt, Principal Adviser Nursing in General Practice, Australian General Practice Network:

Email jporritt@agpn.com.au or phone (02) 6228 0800.

Appendix 1

Email to Division

Dear Division Executive Officers, Practice Manager and Practice Nurses

The Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) in conjunction with your State Based Organisation is seeking your assistance in conducting a survey of nurses working in general practice. The data from the survey will be used to inform policy makers regarding workforce planning at State and National levels.

The Divisions of General Practice play a key role in the provision of support programs to nurses in general practice, so it is important that we have accurate information on the makeup of this workforce.

AGPN understands that the general practice workforce is constantly being surveyed for one purpose or another, and we do not wish to add to this burden unduly. Unfortunately, we do not have comprehensive data at the state or national level on the nursing in general practice workforce.

The 2007 survey has been designed as a web based survey in response to feedback in order to lessen the burden upon respondents. The survey has three parts, 1) a Division Survey, 2) Practice Survey and 3) Individual Nurse Survey.

NOTE: Individual practices and nurses will not be identified in any of the survey results. All data received will be treated in confidence. The survey is hosted on a secure website to protect your privacy and confidentiality.

This email provides you with the information and instructions about using the survey. **Please read these instructions carefully. All divisions of general practice will be provided with a copy of the data results from their participating practices and practice nurses. In order for this to occur practices and nurses must nominate the name of their local division on the survey form.**

Instructions for Division Executive Officers

Your Division is required to:

- 1) Complete its own survey by clicking the survey link at the bottom of this page and following the instructions. The survey login *User Name* is "agpn" and your password is "2007".
- 2) Forward this email and survey link to practice managers (or their delegates) within your division. (*Practice managers are to complete their own survey and also forward the link to their individual practice nurses*).

Instructions for Practice Managers (or Management Delegates)

Your practice is required to:

- 1) Complete its own practice survey by clicking the survey link below and following the instructions. The survey login *User Name* is "agpn" and your password is "2007".
- 2) Forward this email and survey link to each practice nurse who is working at your practice. (*Practice nurses are to complete their own survey as well*).

Instructions for Individual Practice Nurses

Your practice is required to:

- 1) Complete its own practice survey by clicking the survey link below and following the instructions. The survey login *User Name* is "agpn" and your password is "2007".

AGPN Nursing in General Practice Workforce Survey Link:

http://www.wysdesign.com.au/pia/agpn_survey.html

If you need assistance with the survey you can email Grant Piazza from Piazza Consulting (our consultant for this survey) on grant.piazza@piazzaconsulting.com.au or call 02 9955 0211.

Julie Porritt

Principal Adviser Nursing in General Practice
Australian General Practice Network
PO Box 4308 MANUKA ACT 2603
Phone (02) 6228 0800 Fax (02) 6228 0899

Survey Instrument



Division Cover Sheet

Name of Division: _____

Division Number: _____

Name of Divisional returning officer: _____

Contact phone number: _____

Number of practices in the Division: _____

How many of the practices in your
division employ a practice nurse? _____

In total, how many practice nurses are
employed in the practices in your division? _____

How long did it take you to complete this questionnaire? _____ minutes

Thank you for taking the time to assist with this survey.

Nursing in General Practice Workforce Survey

Practice Survey

To be completed by the Practice Manager or their delegate

(Please note individual practices and people within the practice will not be identified in the survey results)

1a) Which Australian division of general practice are you in (*Division Name*)?

1b) What is the postcode of your practice?

2a) How many GPs work in your practice? 

2b) Number of full time GPs 

(i.e. working 9 or more sessions per week at the practice - one session equals four hours)

2c) Number of part time GPs 

2d) Please indicate the number of sessions per week worked for each part time GP
- one session equals four hours.

No. of Sessions / Week

GP No 1		GP No 7	
GP No 2		GP No 8	
GP No 3		GP No 9	
GP No 4		GP No 10	
GP No 5		GP No 11	
GP No 6		GP No 12	

3) What is the Rural, Remote & Metropolitan Areas (RRMA) classification of the practice?

- RRMA 1 (*Capital City*) ☐ 1
- RRMA 2 (*Large (non capital) centre with population >100,000*) ☐ 2
- RRMA 3 (*Large rural centre with population 25,000-99,000*) ☐ 3
- RRMA 4 (*Small rural centre with population 10,000-24,999*) ☐ 4
- RRMA 5 (*Other rural centre with population <10,000*) ☐ 5
- RRMA 6 (*Remote centre with population >5,000*) ☐ 6
- RRMA 7 (*Remote centre with population <5,000*) ☐ 7

4) Is the practice registered for the Practice Incentives Program (PIP)?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Unsure ☐

5) Is the practice eligible for the current PIP for nursing in general practice?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Unsure ☐

6a) How many practice nurses are employed by your practice?

Please **exclude** contract or sessional nurses as these are included in Q7

6b) Number of full time nurses
(i.e. working 38 hours or more per week)



6c) Number of part time nurses



6d) Please indicate the number of hours worked for each part time nurse.

No of Hours/week

Nurse No 1	_____	Nurse No 6	_____
Nurse No 2	_____	Nurse No 7	_____
Nurse No 2	_____	Nurse No 8	_____
Nurse No 3	_____	Nurse No 9	_____
Nurse No 4	_____	Nurse No 10	_____
Nurse No 5	_____	Nurse No 11	_____

7a) Apart from the nurses listed above does your practice receive nursing services on a contract or sessional basis from another organisation such as a community health service or Division of General Practice?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Unsure ☐

If YES please complete for each nurse:

	Number of hours at the practice per week	Employing organisation Please tick	Type of Service Please tick
Nurse No 1	_____	Division of General Practice ☐	Asthma Education ☐
		Area Health Service ☐	Diabetes Education ☐
		Private Contractor ☐	Health Assessments ☐
		Pharmaceutical Company ☐	Generalist Nursing Services ☐
		Other ☐	Other ☐

	Number of hours at the practice per week	Employing organisation Please tick	Type of Service Please tick
Nurse No 2	_____	Division of General Practice ☐	Asthma Education ☐
		Area Health Service ☐	Diabetes Education ☐
		Private Contractor ☐	Health Assessments ☐
		Pharmaceutical Company ☐	Generalist Nursing Services ☐
		Other ☐	Other ☐

Continued next page...

	Number of hours at the practice per week	Employing organisation Please tick	Type of Service Please tick
Nurse No 3	_____	Division of General Practice ☐	Asthma Education ☐
		Area Health Service ☐	Diabetes Education ☐
		Private Contractor ☐	Health Assessments ☐
		Pharmaceutical Company ☐	Generalist Nursing Services ☐
		Other ☐	Other ☐

8) How many Aboriginal Health Workers are employed in your practice? _____

9) How long did it take you to complete this questionnaire? _____ minutes

It is important that the practices nurses employed at your practice also complete the Individual Nurse Survey. This can be done either on-line (by forwarding your nurses the introductory email containing the link to the survey site) or by using a paper-version of the survey. Your local division can provide you with either the paper version of the survey or the link to the survey website.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

Please mail your response back to:
Toni Rice
Nurse Program Officer
AGPN
PO Box 4308
Manuka ACT 2603

7b) If YES please indicate which other organisation/s

Public hospital ☐

Private Hospital ☐

Aged care facility ☐

Another general practice ☐

Other (please state) _____

8) How long have you been employed as a nurse in general practice?

0 – 1 year ☐

2 – 5 years ☐

6 – 10 years ☐

11 – 20 years ☐

over 20 years ☐

9a) Are you a member of a professional nursing organisation?

Yes ☐

No ☐

9b) If YES please tick. You may tick more than one box.

☐ Royal College of Nursing Australia

☐ The College of Nursing (NSW)

☐ Australian Nursing Federation (or a state branch)

☐ Australian Practice Nurses Association

☐ Association for Australian Rural Nurses

☐ Australian Diabetes Educators Association

☐ Other

10a) Do you have additional qualifications in speciality areas of nursing?

Yes ☐

No ☐

10b) If YES please tick (as many as apply)

☐ Midwifery

☐ Diabetes Educator

☐ Asthma Educator

☐ Women's Health Nurse

☐ Accredited Nurse Immuniser

☐ Emergency Nursing

☐ Intensive Care Nursing

☐ Other

Specify.....

11) Do you have any additional comments relating to formal training you are currently undertaking?

.....
.....
.....
.....

12) Do you have any additional comments regarding positive or negative factors that influence your retention in the nursing in general practice workforce?

.....
.....
.....
.....

13) How long did it take you to complete this questionnaire? _____ minutes

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

Please mail your response back to:
Toni Rice
Nurse Program Officer
AGPN
PO Box 4308
Manuka ACT 2603