



# 2006

## Profile of the Medical Practitioner Workforce in NSW

An overview of information from the 2006 Labour Force Survey

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## 1

# INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of information from the 2006 NSW Medical Labour Force Survey. All persons wishing to work as medical practitioners in this State must be registered with the New South Wales Medical Board ('the Board'). This includes persons whose primary registration may be in another State but who work some or all of their time in NSW.

Medical practitioners are now registered under fifteen categories. This replaces the three categories of 'full', 'conditional' and 'non practising' used until 2005. The 'general' registration is free of conditions and non practising medical practitioners remain registered without rights of practice. The remaining practitioners have certain conditions of practice placed upon them depending upon the specific category of registration.

An extract from the register of medical practitioners maintained by the Board was undertaken in February 2007. All medical practitioners who had been registered on 31 December 2005 and who had been listed under the general, non practising, conditional specialist or limited prescribing and referral categories were invited to renew their registration for the year 2006 unless they had advised the Board that they did not wish to maintain their registration.

Accompanying their invitation to renew was a Labour Force Survey form that the Board requested be completed and returned together with their remittance. Most medical practitioners choosing to renew also participated in the labour force survey. However, it is not mandatory to complete a survey form and some medical practitioners renewed registration without participation in the survey. Persons who chose not to renew by 31 December 2006 were deemed to have unfinancial status. Other reasons for persons to have lost financial status include deregistration following disciplinary action or death.

The survey form was changed in 2006 to reflect common national reporting standards introduced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). While the great majority of responses were derived from the revised form, the data for 826 medical practitioners was still compiled from the 2005 form. The data sets were edited to a common format as far as practicable but certain questions could not be matched.

Other health professions in the 2006 series of reports include estimates of workforce numbers and projections to the workforce. These have been based on changes in professional registrations over a time period of one year and, in the case of the nursing profession, over five years. However, these estimates and projections could not be accomplished for medical practitioners owing to non-availability of registration data for 2005 or 2001 *at the time of writing*. In addition, the 2005 report cautioned that time series data had already been constrained by changes occurring to revisions of the survey instrument. Consequently, this report deals exclusively with the results obtained from the 2006 survey and selected statistics from previous years.

*After the medical practitioner profile report for 2006 was completed, an extract of the register for 2005 became available for analysis. Comparable information from one year to the next was sufficient to allow information from this extract to be incorporated at the end of this report as an Addendum. The Addendum includes a discussion of the characteristics of financial registrants, an estimate for the actual NSW workforce and a projection of medical practitioner registrations for 2006 and 2011.*

Note that selected charts have been included as part of this discussion. They are not designed to be exhaustive but rather to highlight areas of possible interest to the reader. In order to focus on these areas, small groups of respondents or responses may have been consolidated or disregarded in the charts. There may also be small inconsistencies due to rounding.

Strict procedures are followed to ensure the privacy of individual medical practitioners who respond to the Survey. There is no access to identifying data, as individual names and addresses are not included on the data file. Survey information that could identify individual respondents will not be made available. The continued support of the Medical Board of New South Wales, professional organisations and medical practitioners participating in the survey is appreciated.

This report provides an overview and commentary on the medical workforce in 2006. It is intended for readers wishing to obtain information on current labour force conditions without the presentation of detailed tabulations from the survey. Full tables covering responses to each question on the survey form have been placed in a separate report. The series of reports covering eight health professions together with earlier reports in the series can be downloaded free of charge from the NSW Health website:

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/workforce/index.html>

## 2

# CHARACTERISTICS OF ALL SURVEY RESPONDENTS

There were 21,535 medical practitioners who responded to the survey. This number compares with 20,399 in 2005, an addition of 1,136 or 5.6%. The increase in the number of medical practitioners working in NSW was 817 (5.0%) but the change in form design and definitional issues may not allow for accurate comparison. The working status information provided was:

Working only in NSW	15789
Working mainly in NSW	251
Working mainly in other States	267
Currently on leave of less than 3 months	553
Currently on leave, 3 months or more	225
<b>TOTAL Working in NSW</b>	<b>17085</b>
Working only in other States	1350
Working overseas	1127
Not working in Medicine	1720
<b>TOTAL not working in NSW</b>	<b>4197</b>
Did not answer	253

## 2.1 Age and Gender

Chart 2.1a indicates the age and gender distribution of responding medical practitioners. It will be observed that there is a marked shift in the population from a substantial excess of males at older ages to a slight majority of females at the youngest age. Note that the average age shown in this and the following chart is the mean age. Median ages are shown in some later charts.

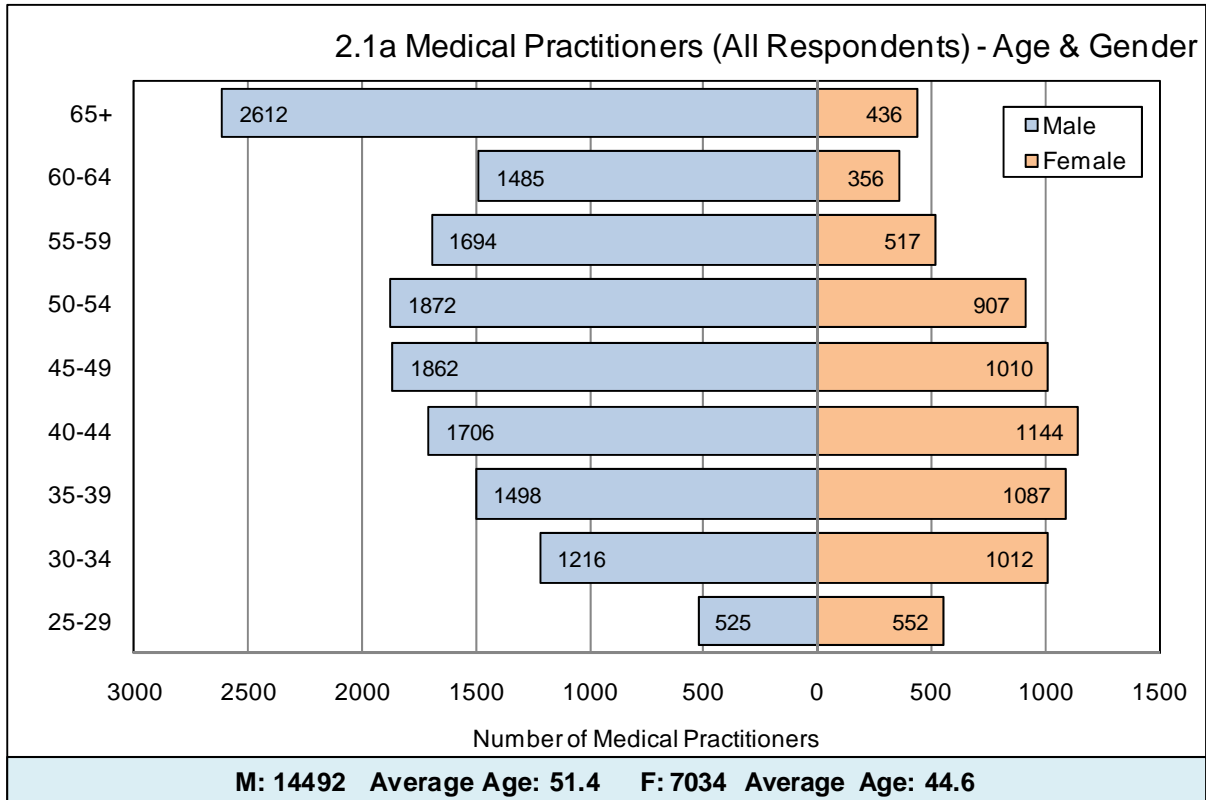
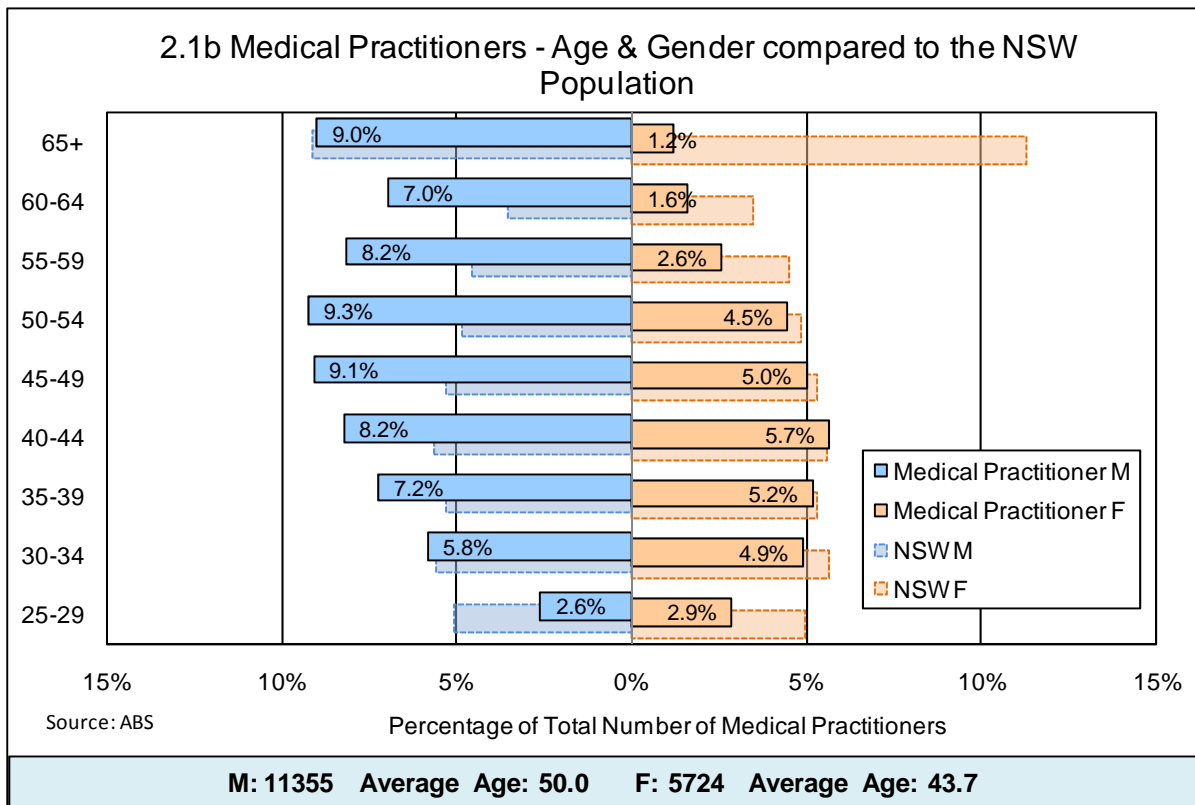


Chart 2.1b compares the population of medical practitioners working in NSW to the whole NSW population between the ages of 25 and 64. Above the age of 35, the distribution of male medical practitioners is above the population norm while for females, it is similar between the ages of 35 and 54. Medical practitioners are under-represented at older ages for females and at younger ages in both males and females.



## 2.2 Selected Characteristics

Table 2.2a indicates certain characteristics of the whole medical labour force regardless of work status. These aspects are relevant to all respondents rather than just those who work in NSW. Persons who did not respond to the question on working status and where that information could not be inferred from other responses are assumed to be not working.

A slightly higher proportion of females than males indicated that they are working in NSW (81% compared to 78%). Usually it would be expected that a higher proportion of women would not be working. The age specific responses indicate the younger population of female medical practitioners disguises the situation that at each age there is a higher proportion of working males. Older medical practitioners do show a larger proportion who are no longer working. However, even for respondents over the age of 60, a majority (66%) are still working as medical practitioners in NSW.

There are 56 Aboriginal medical practitioners, ten of whom are not working. They represent 0.3% of the labour force compared to an Aboriginal population of more than 2%. There are 394 registered medical practitioners (1.8% of the labour force) who are neither citizens nor permanent residents, of whom 159 are currently working in NSW. It was found that 24% of the respondents (23% of those working in NSW) obtained their initial medical qualifications overseas.

There are 97 medical practitioners who stated that they were seeking work, equivalent to 0.5% of the labour force. Over 68% of these medical practitioners are looking for part time work only.

**Table 2.2a Selected Characteristics of Survey Respondents**

	<b>Working as NSW Medical practitioner</b>	<b>Not Working as NSW Medical practitioner</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent not working</b>
Male	11355	3137	14492	21.6
Female	5724	1310	7034	18.6
Aged 60 or over	3206	1683	4889	34.4
Aboriginal or TSI	46	10	56	17.9
Not permanent resident	159	245	394	62.2
Seeking Work*	0	97	97	100.0
Overseas qualification#	3990	1145	5135	22.3
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>21535</b>	

\* Medical practitioners currently working are not asked if they seek further work

# Excludes 826 respondents using the 2005 survey form

## 3

## LOCATION OF RESIDENCE & WORKPLACE

From this point of the report, all the data presented relates only to medical practitioners who work in NSW or are currently on leave from work in NSW. Respondents who did not answer the question on work status are also excluded in tabulations and charts from this section.

On the survey form, medical practitioners were requested to state their postcode of residence and the location and postcode of their main, second or third job (if applicable). The responses were edited to ensure that postcode matched location. Postcode was converted to Area Health Service (AHS) using an algorithm that selects the most appropriate AHS for that postcode.

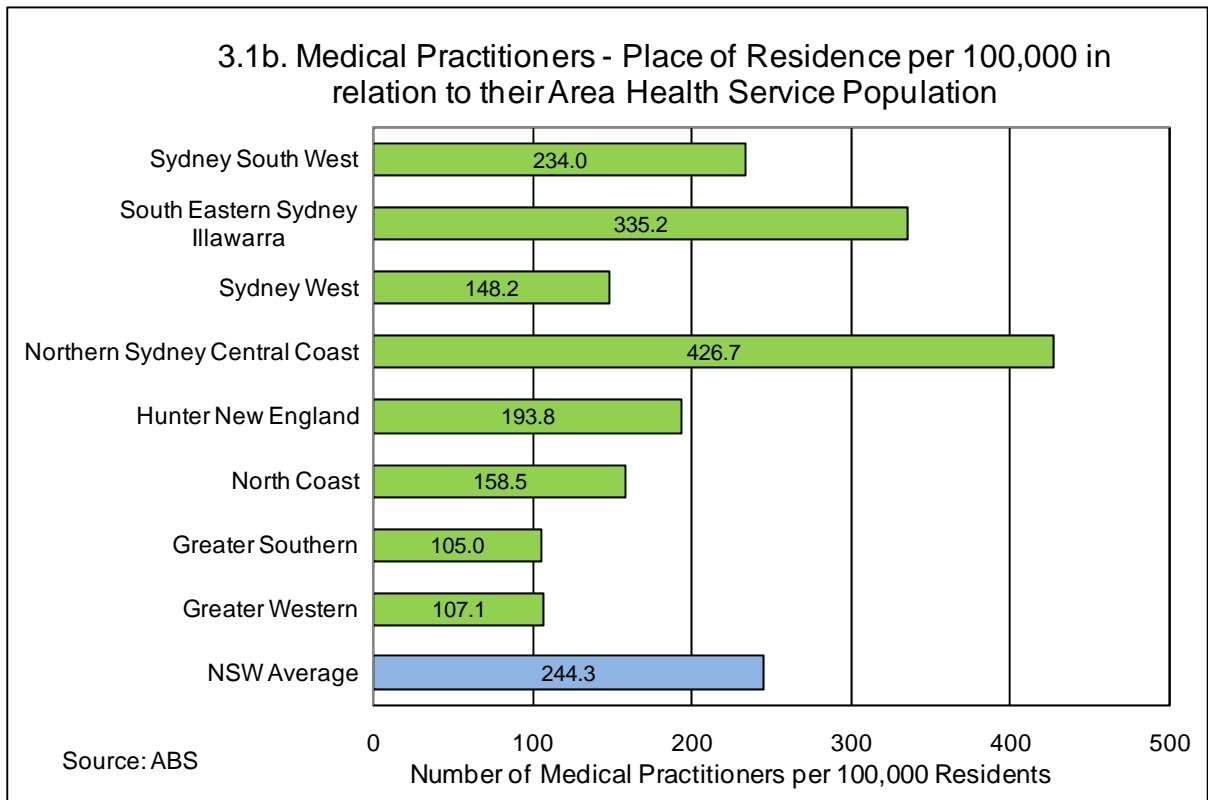
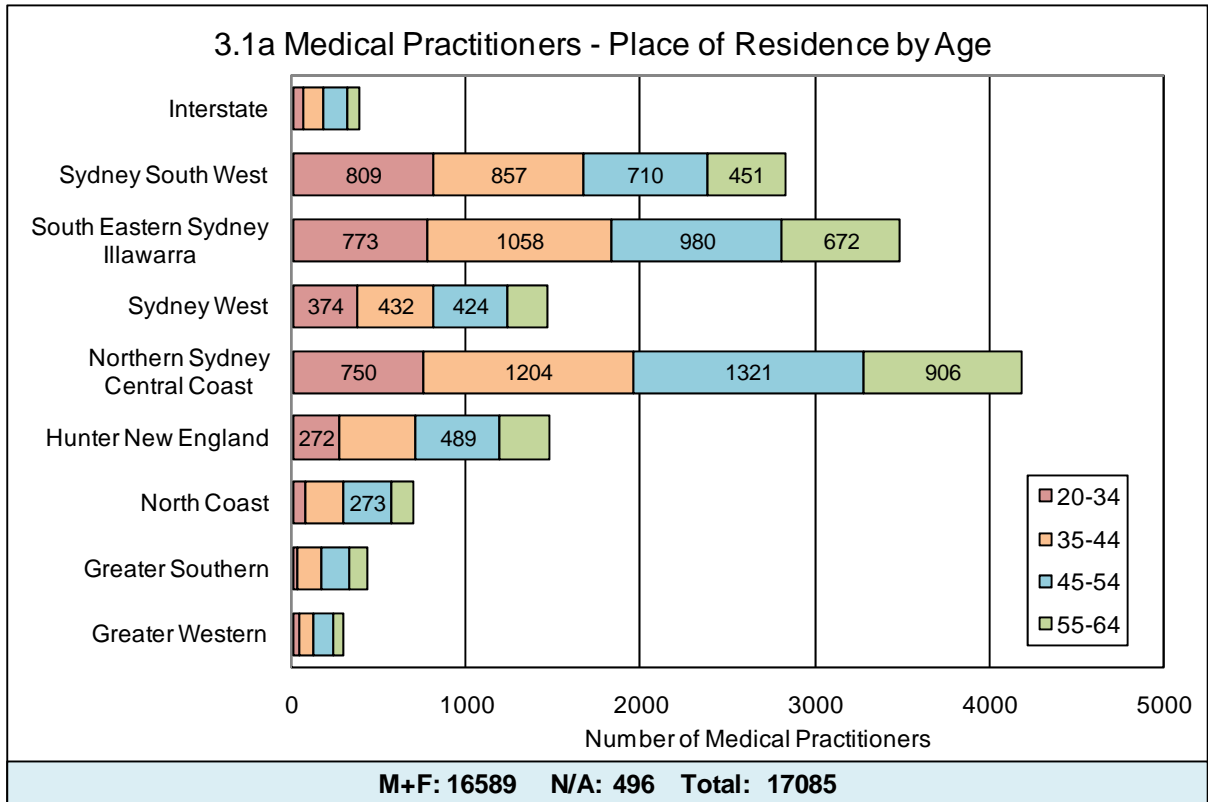
Taken together, location of residence and location of workplace can indicate structural problems with the geography of the workforce. People prefer to work in reasonable proximity to where they live leading to substantial variation in opportunities taken up in different locations.

### Place of Residence

Responses from the survey indicate an average of 244 working medical practitioners per 100,000 population of the State of NSW. If every medical practitioner had responded, the true rate of medical practitioners to population would be a higher figure. One indication is the 2006 Census of Population and Housing. If the number of medical practitioners on the census is applied to population, the State rate is 268 working medical practitioners per 100,000 NSW residents.

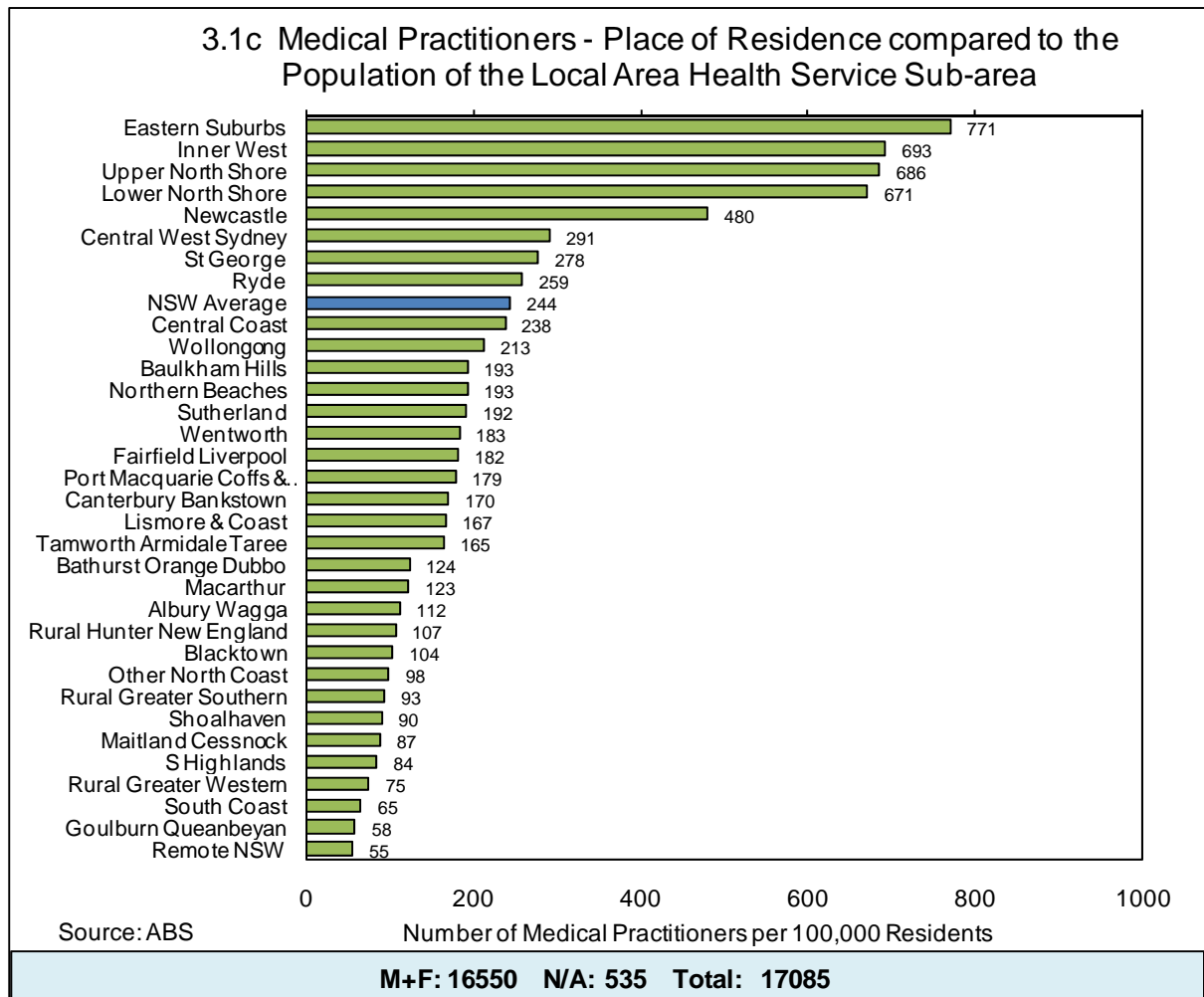
Chart 3.1a shows the AHS of residence by broad age bands for medical practitioners working in NSW. The interstate addresses are usually the ACT, Gold Coast and Wodonga where NSW medical services are situated adjacent to State borders. Chart 3.1b depicts the same information per 100,000 residents

Only Northern Sydney Central Coast and South Eastern Sydney Illawarra contain more medical practitioners than the State average. Northern Sydney Central Coast has almost twice as many as the State average especially among older and presumably more experienced practitioners. The other six AHS have fewer medical practitioners than the State average. It is especially noticeable that Sydney West has a comparable rate to the two entirely rural Areas in the South and West of the State. Sydney West AHS includes many outer western suburbs with high health service needs.



As the AHS are very large and heterogenous, a similar analysis was undertaken for sub-areas, consistent with planning districts within the AHS. The results are shown in Chart 3.1c. There is very great variation within the western metropolitan AHS of Sydney. Sydney South West AHS was shown to contain a rate of medical practitioner supply only slightly below the State average. However, the Inner West suburbs close to the city have more than twice the State average while in Fairfield-Liverpool, Canterbury Bankstown and Macarthur, the rate is less than 100 medical practitioners per 100,000 population. Blacktown in the outer west of Sydney has the lowest rate of resident medical practitioners of any of the nominated sub-areas except for the rural and remote west of the State.

Most medical practitioners live in the higher socioeconomic status suburbs to the north of the city or along the harbour. By contrast, there are few medical practitioners living in the rural sectors of NSW and surprisingly few in the outer fringes of Sydney, Newcastle and Canberra. While there are generally fewer medical practitioners in regional and rural areas than in the cities, many large inland towns hold similar numbers to medium socioeconomic status Sydney suburbs. While Newcastle and Wollongong have similar supply for most health professions, medical practitioners are more concentrated in Newcastle perhaps indicative of the teaching status of John Hunter Hospital.



### 3.2 Place of Work

The working status and AHS of the main job is shown in Table 3.2a for all medical practitioners working wholly or partly in NSW but excluding medical practitioners on leave. If the main job was held outside NSW, the AHS of the second or third job is shown. Medical practitioners indicating that they are working in NSW but not providing data on the location of the NSW component of their work are excluded from these tables. The great majority of medical practitioners work only in NSW. The North Coast and Greater Southern AHS are the main AHS with medical practitioners working partly in NSW and partly interstate.

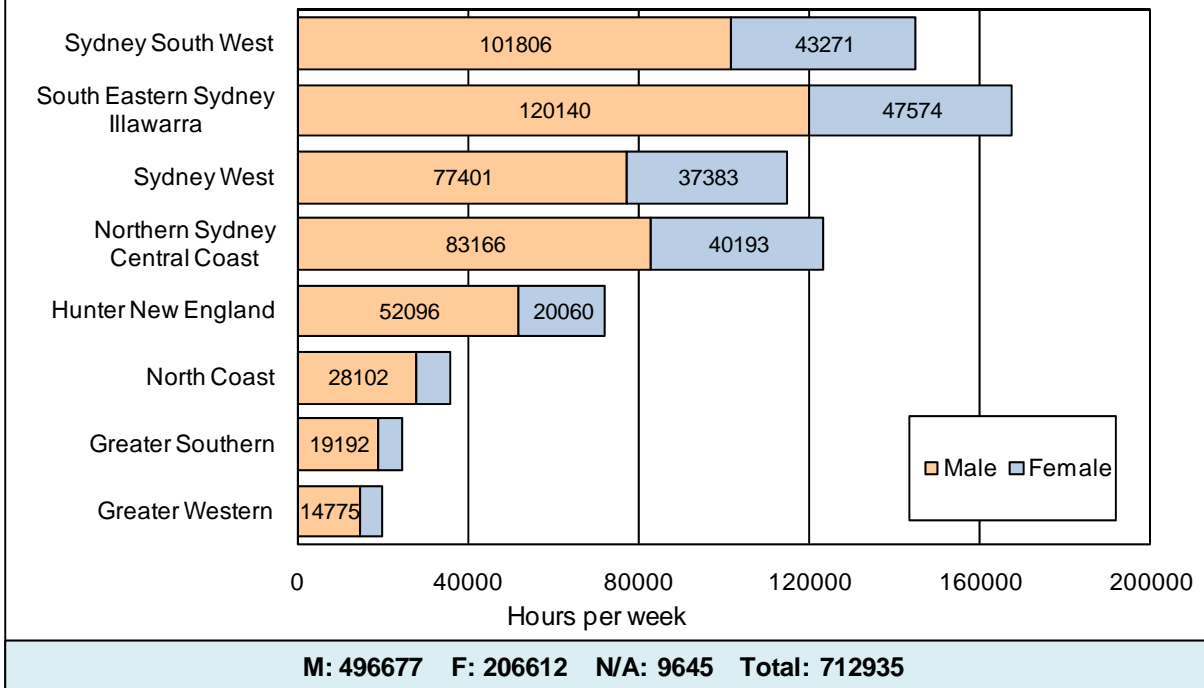
While Northern Sydney Central Coast is the AHS where most medical practitioners live, South Eastern Sydney Illawarra is the most common AHS of work. All AHS with large rural components have less access to medical practitioners.

**Table 3.2a Working Status by Area Health Service – Main NSW Job**

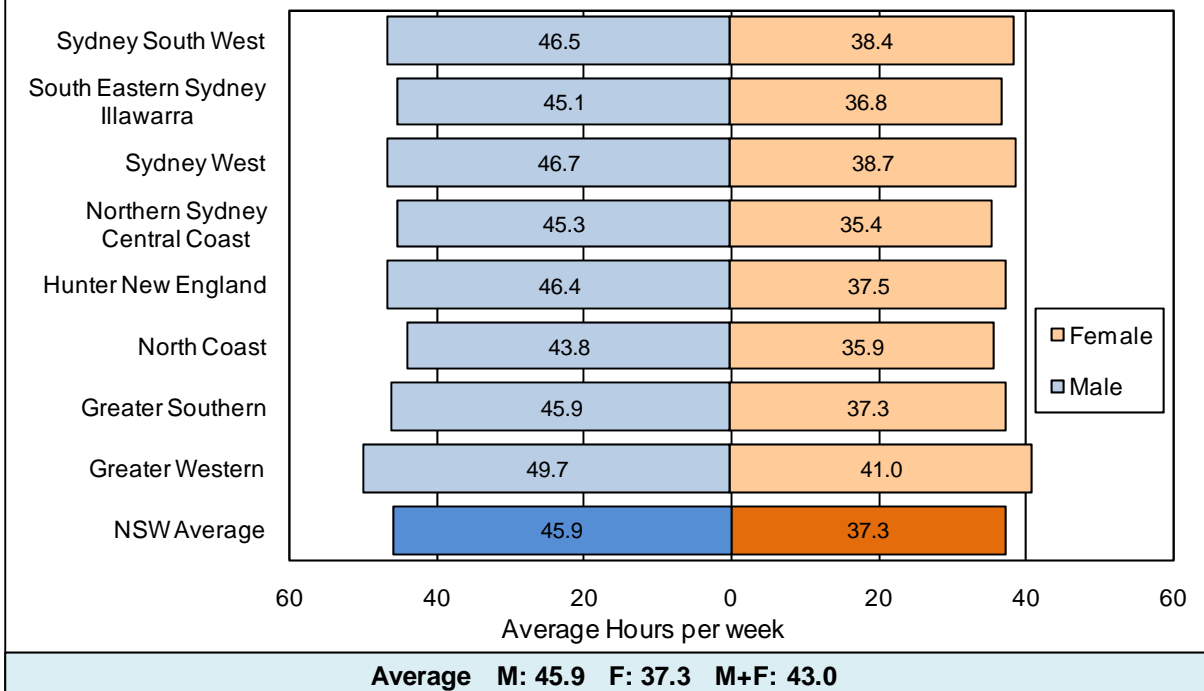
AHS	Males		Females	
	Only NSW	Partly NSW	Only NSW	Partly NSW
Sydney South West	2183	16	1125	3
South Eastern Sydney Illawarra	2649	33	1290	8
Sydney West	1657	8	967	3
Northern Sydney Central Coast	1833	8	1133	5
Hunter New England	1122	10	535	1
North Coast	606	84	213	12
Greater Southern	380	91	132	30
Greater Western	296	14	121	3
<b>ALL AHS</b>	<b>10726</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>5522</b>	<b>65</b>

Chart 3.2b shows the total number of hours of work for all medical practitioners working in NSW while chart 3.2c presents the information in average hours worked per week. For medical practitioners, the number of hours per week cannot exceed 84. The average number of hours is fairly evenly distributed except for a significantly higher average for both males and females in the Greater Western AHS.

### 3.2b Medical Practitioners - Total Hours Worked per week by Area Health Service



### 3.2c Medical Practitioners - Average Hours Worked per week by Area Health Service



### 3.3 Movement between Home and Work

The length of travel between home and work is a key determinant of change in location of the workforce. Table 3.3a indicates movement within and between Area Health Services for medical practitioners providing a valid NSW location for both home and work. In metropolitan Areas where distance travelled to work in another Area is less great, the movement between Areas is more pronounced. In rural Areas, movement is generally within the Area Health Service.

**Table 3.3a Area Health Status of Residence and Main Job**

#### Metropolitan Residents

Residence	Area of Main Job				
	SSWAHS	SESAHS	SWAHS	NSCCAHS	Rural
SSWAHS	1728	515	504	179	91
SESAHS	630	2791	145	183	93
SWAHS	231	49	1160	99	50
NSCCAHS	699	554	728	2463	112
All Metropolitan	<b>3288</b>	<b>3909</b>	<b>2607</b>	<b>2924</b>	<b>346</b>

The proportion of medical practitioners working in their Area of residence is 57% for Sydney South West, 73% for South Eastern Sydney Illawarra, also 73% for Sydney West and 53% for Northern Sydney Central Coast. Thus almost half the medical practitioners living in Northern Sydney Central Coast work in another Area as do a large proportion of Sydney South West residents.

#### Rural Residents

Residence	Area of Main Job				
	HNEAHS	NCAHS	GSAHS	GWAHS	Metro
HNEAHS	1527	8	2	6	48
NCAHS	7	697	4	1	9
GSAHS	1	1	424	1	24
GWAHS	0	1	0	311	7
All Rural	<b>1535</b>	<b>707</b>	<b>430</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>88</b>

In rural Areas, the great majority of medical practitioners work in their Area of residence. The proportions are 96% of residents in Hunter New England, 95% in North Coast, 90% in Greater Southern and 98% in the Greater Western Area.

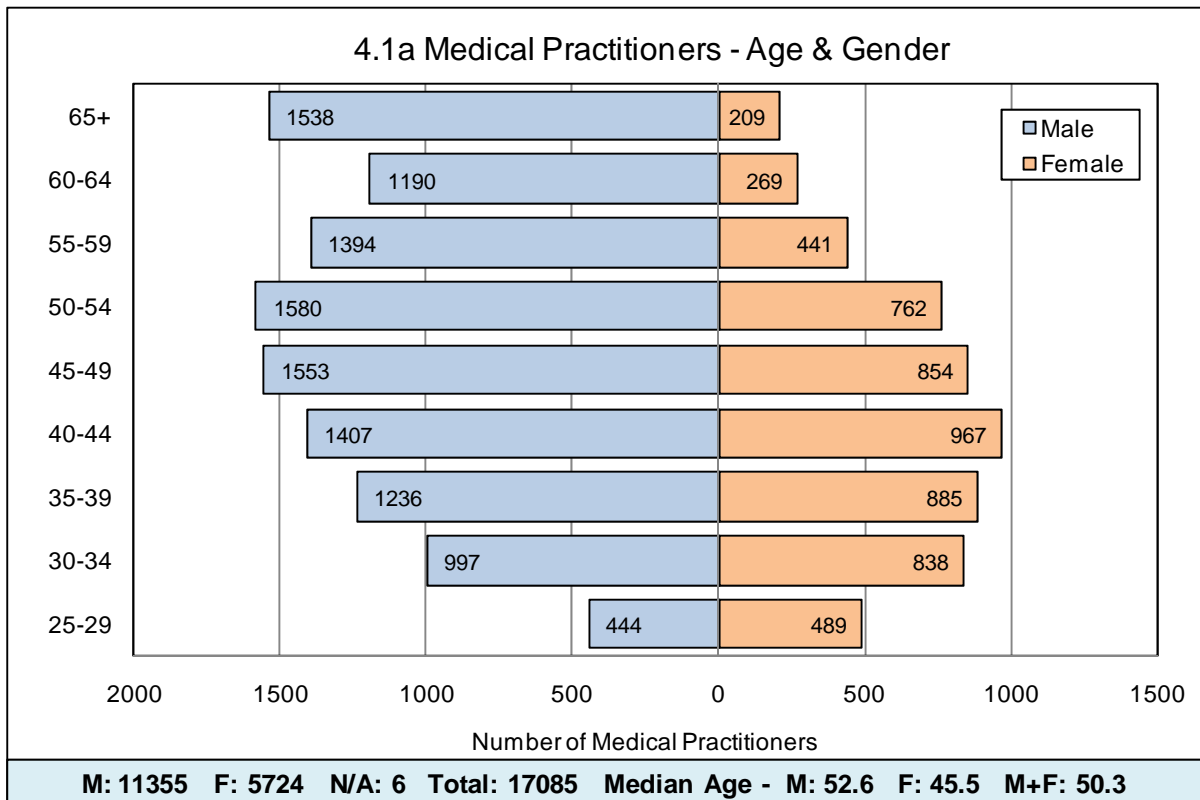
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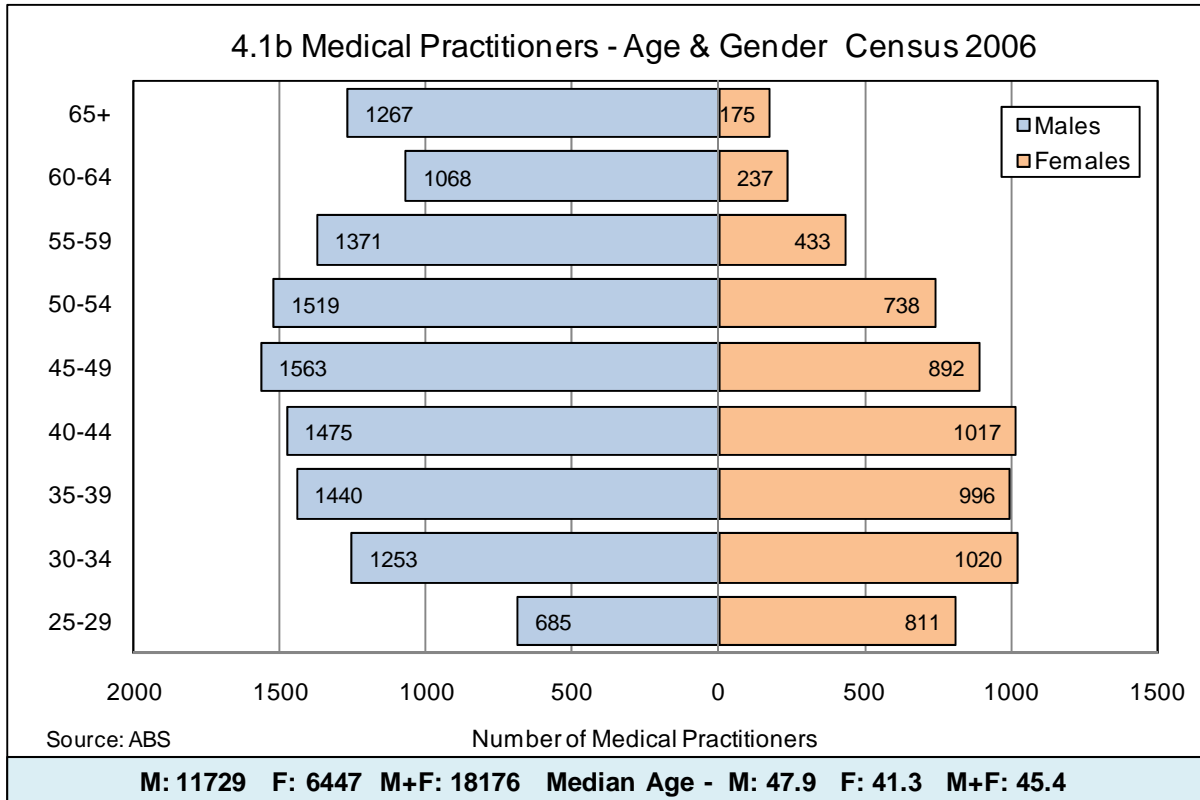
## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TOTAL WORKFORCE

### 4.1 Comparison with Census Returns

The age and gender of medical practitioners responding to the survey can be contrasted with the same information from persons responding as medical practitioners in the 2006 Census. This is shown on charts 4.1a and 4.1b. In total, 18176 persons responded as NSW working medical practitioners to the census compared to 17,085 to the survey indicating a response rate of 94% but this is not comparable to response rates based on the registry.

The comparison indicates that the variation is concentrated at younger ages. In the 25-29 year age group, almost twice as many medical practitioners responded to the census while in the 30-34 year group, the variation was 25%. At age 40 and over, the difference between the two response groups is very small.

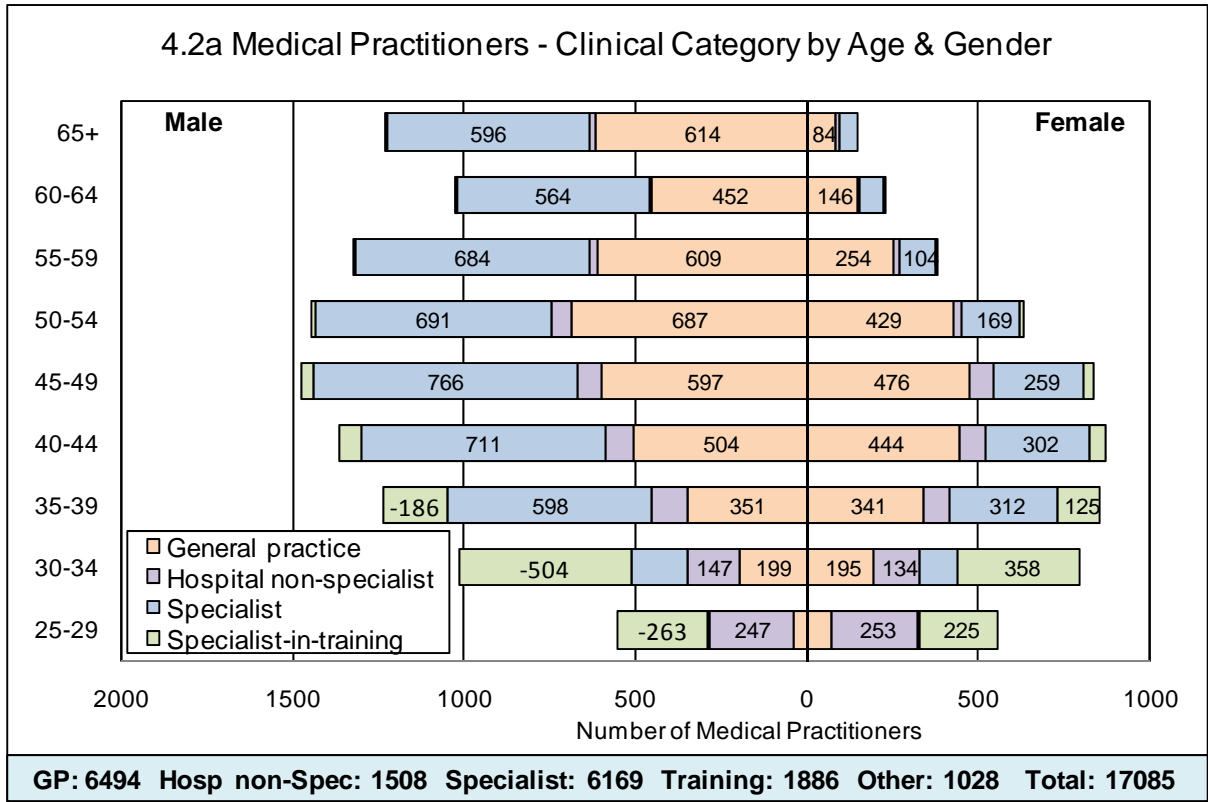




## 4.2 Clinical Category

Medical practitioners were requested to select the clinical category that best fitted their work practice. They selected from five choices (general practitioner, hospital non-specialist, specialist specialist-in-training and other) although sequencing allowed for some overlap. In previous years, one of the first four of these categories was selected and all responses were restricted to questions pertaining to that clinical category. Medical practitioners working outside these fields (e.g. in the pharmaceutical industry) may be unsure how to respond. For these reasons and the general changes with form design, comparison with previous years is very small. The median age is between 4 and 5 years younger based on census returns for both males and females.

Chart 4.2a indicates clinical category by age for male and female practitioner. At younger ages, hospital non specialists and specialists-in-training predominate replaced at older ages by general practitioners and medical specialists. There is little difference in gender for the two categories with mainly younger medical practitioners. However, there are almost twice as many male general practitioners and more than three times as many male specialists. Over the age of 50, males are equally likely to be general practitioners or specialists but females are more than twice as likely to be general practitioners.



The distribution across the Area Health Services by clinical category is shown in Chart 4.2b. Specialists-in-training whose work is primarily in the teaching hospitals are concentrated in Sydney as are, to a lesser extent, hospital non specialists. Specialists outnumber general practitioners in Sydney West, Northern Sydney Central Coast and (especially) South Eastern Sydney Illawarra. There are more general practitioners than specialists elsewhere in the State including Sydney South West.

