

# Psychology



Health

## Who are Psychologists?

Psychologists study human behaviour, learning and thinking, and apply evidence-based testing and interventions to improve mental health and to overcome personal and external issues.

Psychologists provide psychological assessment and treatments as individual practitioners as well as in multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary models. Other tasks performed by psychologists include behavioural assessment, teaching, cognitive assessment, personal coaching, addictions services, research and health promotion including mental and general health. Psychologists practice the diagnosis, formulation, treatment and prevention of psychological problems and mental illness. Additionally, psychologists can engage in addressing developmental issues, learning issues, behaviour management concerns, the impacts of trauma and symptom management.

Psychologists play a significant role in early detection and prevention pathways. They also participate in the research and development of scientifically-based approaches to improving mental health and well-being.

Psychologists are registered through the Psychology Board of Australia.

## Workforce characteristics



There are **31,489** Registered Psychologists in Australia, of which **10,430** Psychologists are registered in New South Wales



**9%** of annual registrations are first-time registrations

**91%** of Psychologists completed their qualification in Australia



**45.5%** of the workforce is employed part-time

On average Psychologists work **32.3** hours per week



**77.6%** of the Psychology workforce are female

**27%** are aged 55 or older



For every **1** public sector Psychologist there are **1.35** private sector Psychologists



**0.6%** of NSW Psychologists identify as Aboriginal, unchanged from 2011 and equal to the national average

## Service access and contact points

Service access points include GP, community health services, family & friends, educational organisations, inpatient admission, triage, and online

- Medication supply
- Care advice
- Referral

Community Services

- Patient education
- Discharge planning
- Continuity of care

Hospital Services

- Daily inpatient review
- Multidisciplinary teams
- Information systems

## Considerations for service planning

- The workforce has a high proportion of part-time employees
- Adults aged 65 or over are likely to be underserved
- Capacity for student internships is a limiting factor on graduate supply
- Funding, planning and delivery of services for chronic and complex cases is an ongoing challenge
- Due to the diverse and complex nature of caseloads, consideration of core competencies and ongoing professional development needs are important management considerations

## Drivers of Psychology workforce supply

Study program places and student placements in supervised clinical settings are limited by a shortage of supervisors

The demand for Masters program places to qualify for specialty practice endorsements significantly exceeds places available.

Retention is influenced by job satisfaction, flexible working hours and remuneration

## Challenges

The Mental Health sector is fragmented and experiences coordination challenges. Individuals with mental illness often have multiple touch-points with such services

Geographic isolation, socio-demographic constraints and a preference for remote consultation over face-to-face delivery may necessitate technological therapy solutions

Chronic and complex services are an ongoing service delivery challenge, with a shift of service design focus to integrated care pathways and preventative measures currently underway

The provision of services to individuals of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is a recognised challenge. Individuals who are members of ethnic minority groups may be less likely to seek and attend psychological services

Young Aboriginal men are particularly unlikely to access mental health services. A focus on relationship building and cultural awareness is particularly important in services for Aboriginal communities

Rural Allied Health professionals commonly report concerns with high workload and limited education opportunities



## Drivers of demand for Psychology services

Population size and the prevalence of Mental Illness are increasing, with approximately 1 in 5 Australians having a diagnosable Mental Health illness

Diagnosis rates for common issues such as anxiety, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism are increasing

Client preconceptions, reduced stigma, community knowledge, service awareness and accessibility and visibility of key programs drive service demand

5% of practice hours are delivered to adults aged over 65

16% of all practice hours are delivered to people who are Aboriginal, however this may vary significantly by geographical location

Barriers to service access include cost, perceptions of limited service effectiveness, fear and distance

## Opportunities

Technology and telehealth can enable long-distance service provision

Increasing student supervision capacity can reduce supervision-related delays to study program completion

A changing policy focus on prevention, community based programs and integrated system-wide care has the potential to reduce hospitalisations and promote continuity of care

Multidisciplinary, community-based and integrated models of care offer the potential to promote person-centred care

Transitional care and stepped models of care to cater for needs across the spectrum of complexity, and to enable continuity of care despite changing individual needs and circumstances

While not widely used at present, Allied Health Assistants in Psychology generally have clear job descriptions however evaluations of actual tasks performed indicate the roles vary depending on practice setting and manager/supervisor preferences

The development of departmental structures could enhance professional profile and professional voice by bringing isolated professionals together

## References

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, Psychology Workforce, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/workforce/psychology/>  
Health Workforce Australia, 2014, Australia's Health Workforce Series - Psychologists in Focus

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