



**T**his report provides information on the dental therapist labour force in Australia based on the 2005 national dental labour force survey. Where appropriate, comparisons have been made with data from the most recent previous collection (2003).

## Main findings

- In 2005 there were an estimated 1,760 dental therapist registrations in Australia, of whom 1,521 were estimated to be practising in dental therapy.
- Since the 2003 labour force collection, there had been an estimated 22% increase in the number of practising dental therapists.
- The practising rate of dental therapists ranged from 3.9 dental therapists per 100,000 population in New South Wales to 15.9 in Western Australia.
- Across remoteness regions, the number of dental therapists per 100,000 population was higher in outer regional areas (10.9) than in major cities (6.6).
- The average age of dental therapists was 40.7 years and only 2.5% were male.
- The majority (79%) of dental therapists worked in the public sector.
- On average, dental therapists worked 29.5 hours per week and the majority (56%) worked part-time (less than 35 hours per week).
- Dental therapists aged 20–24 and 25–29 years worked longer hours than those aged 35–39 years.
- Only a small percentage (5.5%) expected that they would not be practising as an allied dental practitioner in 12 months time.

## Overall numbers

In 2005 there were an estimated 1,760 dental therapists registered in Australia. Of these,

298 were also registered as dental hygienists (39 in Victoria, 205 in Queensland, 30 in Western Australia and 24 in South Australia). The majority of registered dental therapists (1,314 or 75%) were practising as a dental therapist. Of those with dual registration, 207 were practising as both a dental therapist and a dental hygienist, or as an oral health therapist. A further 32 were practising mainly as a dental hygienist. Of the total number of registrations, 109 (6%) were either on leave for 3 months or more (56), overseas (2) or not working (51). A further 81 were working in dentistry but not as a dental auxiliary (42), or working but not in dentistry (39) (Table 1).

**Table 1: Registered dental therapists, practice status by state/territory, 2005**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
Practising therapy	261	211	267	319	153	58	26	19	1,314
Practising hygiene and therapy	..	5	194	—	8	..	..	..	207
Practising hygiene	..	18	—	n.p.	12	..	..	..	32
Practising mainly or solely in other states	6	n.p.	3	4	n.p.	—	—	—	16
On leave for 3 months or more	13	7	11	20	3	n.p.	n.p.	—	56
Overseas	—	—	n.p.	—	—	n.p.	—	—	n.p.
Not working	6	3	5	34	3	—	—	—	51
Working in dentistry, but not as dental auxiliary	13	10	—	9	8	n.p.	—	n.p.	42
Working, but not in dentistry	—	12	3	23	—	—	—	—	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>1,760</b>

### Notes

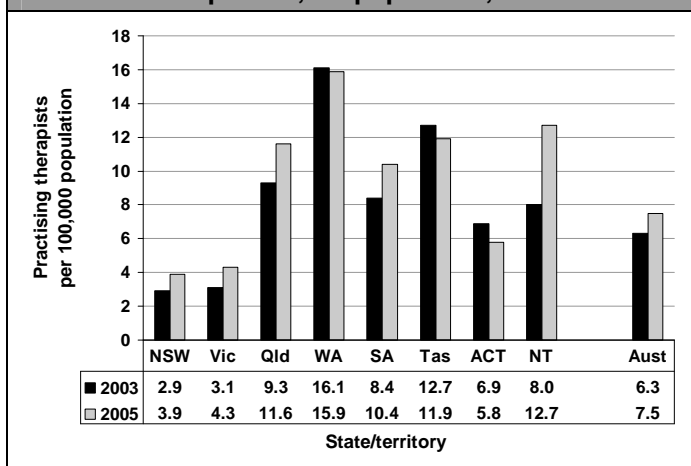
1. Column/row totals may not sum to total because of rounding of estimates.
2. Information on dual registration was not collected for all jurisdictions. Where this was the case, cells have been replaced by '..' (not available).
3. Values less than 3 are not published (n.p.).

Between 2003 and 2005 there was a 22% increase in the number of practising dental therapists, from 1,243 to 1,521. Some of this increase may be attributed to changes at the state/territory level in data collection methods as a result of the introduction of formal registration and/or the inclusion of dual registered dental therapists in certain jurisdictions.

## Regional distribution

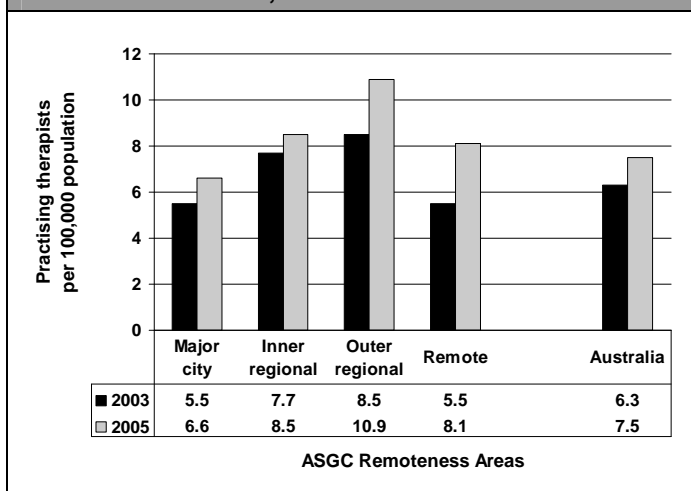
The number of practising dental therapists per 100,000 population increased from 6.3 in 2003 to 7.5 in 2005. Increases occurred across most jurisdictions, with the exception of Tasmania, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, each of which recorded a slight decrease (Figure 1). In 2005 the number of practising dental therapists per 100,000 ranged from 3.9 in New South Wales to 15.9 in Western Australia (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Practising dental therapists, state/territory, rate per 100,000 population, 2003 and 2005**



Across remoteness regions, the variation in the rate of dental therapists per 100,000 population was not large. In 2005 the number of practising dental therapists per 100,000 population ranged from 6.6 in major cities to 10.9 in outer regional areas. Between 2003 and 2005 there were increases in practising rates across all regions, most notably in outer regional areas, which increased from 8.5 to 10.9 (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Practising dental therapists per 100,000 population by remoteness areas, Australia, 2003 and 2005**



## Demographic characteristics

Dental therapy remains a predominantly female profession with males comprising only 2.5% of all practising dental therapists. In 2005 the average age of dental therapists was 40.7 years, a slight increase from 40.3 years in 2003. The largest percentage of dental therapists was in the 45–49 years age group (30.6%). The smallest percentages were in the two younger age groups, 20–24 and 25–29 years (Table 2).

**Table 2: Practising dental therapists by age group and state/territory, 2005**

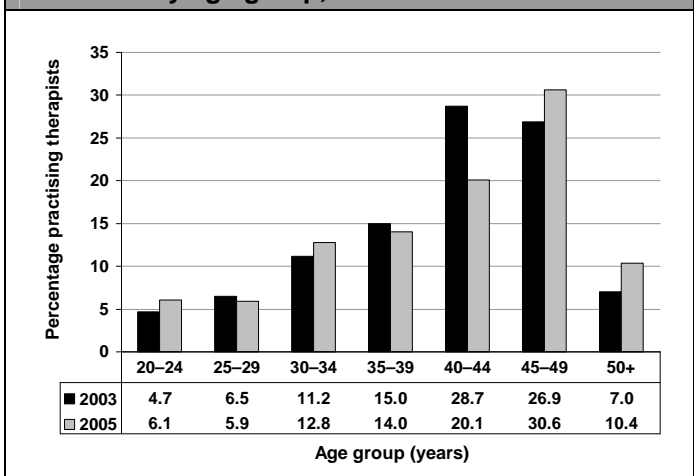
Age group (years)	State/territory								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
20–24	16	16	30	12	17	—	n.p.	—	93
25–29	25	22	23	5	9	n.p.	n.p.	—	89
30–34	22	26	82	44	12	4	—	4	195
35–39	22	36	66	48	25	10	6	—	213
40–44	63	43	127	43	15	10	3	n.p.	306
45–49	91	47	119	112	53	22	8	13	465
50+	22	25	15	54	30	9	3	n.p.	159
<b>Total</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1,521</b>
<b>Average age (years)</b>									
<b>Persons</b>	<b>41.1</b>	<b>39.8</b>	<b>39.0</b>	<b>41.1</b>	<b>42.4</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>40.8</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>40.7</b>

*Notes*

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Between 2003 and 2005 there was a slight shift towards an older age distribution, as indicated by the increase in percentages in the two older age groups, 45–49 and 50 years and over (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Percentage practising dental therapists by age group, 2003 and 2005**



## Practice characteristics

In 2005 the majority (63.7%) of practising dental therapists worked in the school dental services, 15.6% worked in private general practice and 9.5% worked in community dental services. Overall, 21.4% of dental therapists worked in the private sector, an increase from 13.0% in 2003. There were marked differences in the percentage working in the private sector across jurisdictions. Western Australia had the highest percentage (44.9%) while the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory had no dental therapists working in private general practice (Table 3).

**Table 3: Number of practising dental therapists, practice type by state/territory, 2005**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
<b>Public</b>									
School dental service	101	137	358	163	136	44	8	22	969
Community dental service	94	15	5	3	—	11	11	4	145
Dental hospital	22	6	7	n.p.	—	—	—	—	37
Teaching institution	3	3	6	3	3	—	—	—	18
Other	19	—	4	4	—	—	—	—	27
<b>Private</b>									
General practice	19	31	71	95	19	n.p.	—	—	238
Specialist practice	—	23	7	38	n.p.	—	—	—	70
Other	3	n.p.	n.p.	11	n.p.	—	—	—	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1,521</b>
% Public	91.6	74.0	82.6	55.1	86.4	96.2	100.0	100.0	78.6
<i>Notes</i>									
1. Column/row totals may not sum to total because of rounding of estimates.									
2. Values less than 3 are not published (n.p.).									

## Practice activity

The majority (55.7%) of all practising dental therapists worked part-time, ranging from 33% in the Australian Capital Territory to 71% in Victoria. The largest percentage (41.1%) of dental therapists worked between 30 and 39 hours per week. Only 4.7% worked less than 10 hours per week. On average, dental therapists worked 29.5 hours per week, ranging from 25.0 hours in Victoria to 32.1 hours in New South Wales (Table 4).

The average hours worked per week varied by age group. Dental therapists in the 20–24 and 25–29 years age groups worked on average the longest week (37.4 and 37.0 hours, respectively) while

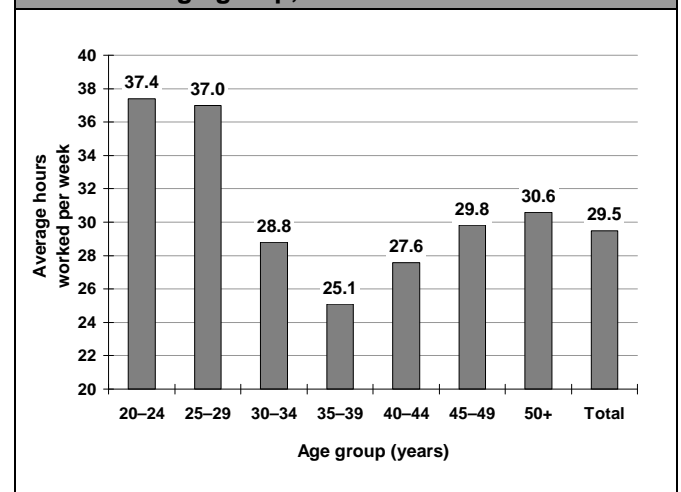
those in the 35–39 years age group worked the shortest week (25.1 hours) (Figure 4).

**Table 4: Practising dental therapists, hours worked per week by state/territory, 2005**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
<b>Hours</b>	<b>Per cent</b>								
<10	1.2	12.3	2.0	6.8	4.4	—	6.7	8.3	4.7
10–19	8.4	19.9	13.6	20.3	19.6	7.7	6.7	8.3	15.3
20–29	20.5	25.1	19.4	18.1	21.0	50.0	26.7	16.7	21.5
30–39	42.2	35.8	34.6	50.0	47.0	30.8	53.3	58.3	41.1
40+	27.7	7.0	30.4	4.9	8.1	11.5	6.7	8.3	17.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Average hours usually worked per week</b>									
<b>All</b>	32.1	25.0	31.8	27.4	28.6	29.1	29.6	31.9	29.5
<b>Percentage working part-time<sup>(a)</sup></b>									
<b>All</b>	48.2	70.7	49.3	58.3	64.1	63.5	40.0	33.3	55.7

(a) Part-time defined as working less than 35 hours per week.

**Figure 4: Average hours worked per week by age group, 2005**



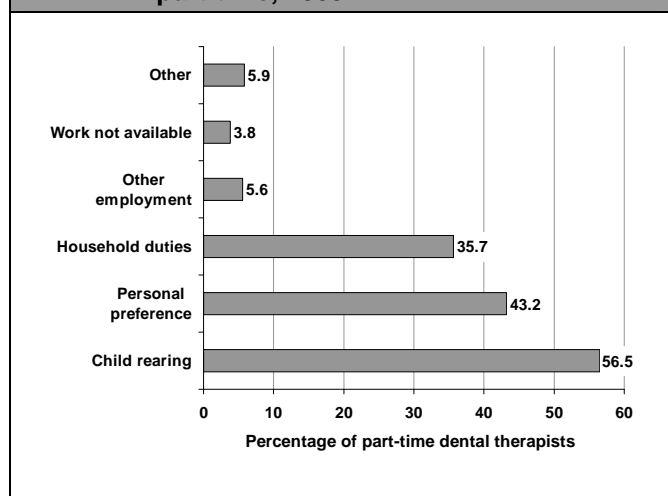
Dental therapists working part-time (less than 35 hours per week) were asked to indicate their major reasons for doing so. The most common reasons given were child rearing (56.5%), personal preference (43.2%) and household duties (35.7%). Only 3.8% indicated that dental therapy work was not available (Figure 5).

## Most likely career position in 12 months time

In order to determine potential future wastage or loss from the labour force, dental therapists were asked to report their 'most likely' career position in 12 months time. Only a small percentage of dental therapists indicated that they would not be working in dentistry in 12 months time, with 2.9% expecting to be either not working or on extended

leave, and 1.6% expecting to be working in another profession (Table 5).

**Figure 5: Most common reasons for working part-time, 2005**



**Table 5: Practising dental therapists, most likely career position in 12 months time, 2005**

Most likely career position in 12 months	Per cent
Working as dental auxiliary part-time	52.1
Working as dental auxiliary full-time	39.5
Not working/on extended leave	2.9
Working in another profession/industry	1.6
Other	1.0
Not stated/not applicable	2.9

## Data collection

Data were collected in the second half of 2005. The collection was conducted in all states and territories, in conjunction with registration renewal, with the assistance of the dental boards and state health departments. For New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania data were collected by direct mail out. In New South Wales only members of the Australian Dental Therapist Association (ADTA) were surveyed as a registration list was not available due to registration commencing in 2005 for that state.

The completeness of the survey was estimated to be 89% of the Australian dental therapist labour force. This includes dental therapists who were dual registered. Of those surveyed, an overall response rate of 78% was achieved; however, this drops to an effective rate of 70% when actual registration figures are used as the denominator. For example, in New South Wales only 37% of dental therapists were surveyed. Table 6 shows the effective response rates for each jurisdiction.

For the purposes of generating estimates, it was assumed that non-respondents had the same characteristics as respondents; hence, data were weighted up to the number of dental therapists registered in each state/territory.

The survey questionnaire included items on demographic characteristics, practice status and practice characteristics of up to three locations for each dental therapist. Data on hours worked for each location were also collected and summed to give the total hours usually worked per week.

**Table 6: Dental therapist labour force collection, effective response rate by state/territory, 2005**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
Total registered	299	268	483	412	189	61	19	20	1,751
Response rate (%)	31.8	72.4	79.9	81.6	68.3	91.5	68.4	80.0	69.6

## Additional data sources

AIHW DSRU (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Dental Statistics and Research Unit) 2006. Dental therapist labour force in Australia, 2003. Cat. no. DEN 155. (Dental statistics and research series no. 29. Adelaide: The University of Adelaide).

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005. Population estimates by age and sex, Australian States and Territories, June 2005. Cat no. 3201.0.

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*The AIHW Dental Statistics and Research Unit (DSRU) is a collaborating unit of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, established in 1988 at The University of Adelaide and located in the Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health (ARCPOH), School of Dentistry, The University of Adelaide. DSRU aims to improve the oral health of Australians through the collection, analysis and reporting of information on oral health and access to dental care, the practice of dentistry and the dental labour force in Australia.*

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