



**T**his report provides information on the dental hygienist 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 1,046 dental hygienist registrations in Australia, of whom 873 were estimated to be practising in dental hygiene.
- Since the 2003 labour force collection, there had been an estimated 66% increase in the number of practising dental hygienists.
- The practising rate of dental hygienists ranged from 1.9 dental hygienists per 100,000 population in Tasmania to 10.5 in the Australian Capital Territory.
- Across remoteness regions, the number of dental hygienists per 100,000 population was higher in major cities (5.0) than outer regional areas (2.5).
- The average age of dental hygienists was 36.8 years and only 3.5% were male.
- The majority (80%) of dental hygienists worked in the private sector.
- On average, dental hygienists worked 31.6 hours per week and the majority (53%) worked part-time (less than 35 hours per week).
- Dental hygienists aged 20–24 and 25–29 years worked longer hours than those aged 35–39 and 50 years and over.

### Overall numbers

In 2005 there were an estimated 1,046 dental hygienists registered in Australia. Of these, 298 were also registered as dental therapists (39 in Victoria, 205 in Queensland, 30 in Western

Australia and 24 in South Australia). The majority of registered dental hygienists (666 or 64%) were practising as a dental hygienist. 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 44 were practising mainly as a dental therapist. Of the total number of registrations, 61 (6%) were either on leave for 3 months or more (37), overseas (7) or not working (17). A further 20 were working in dentistry but not as a dental auxiliary (8), or working but not in dentistry (12) (Table 1).

**Table 1: Dental hygienists, practice status by state/territory, 2005**

|   | NSW        | Vic        | Qld        | WA         | SA         | Tas      | NT        | ACT       | Aust         |
|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| Practising hygiene                                | 149        | 139        | 77         | 130        | 128        | 9        | ..        | 34        | 666          |
| Practising hygiene and therapy                    | ..         | 5          | 194        | —          | 8          | ..       | ..        | ..        | 207          |
| Practising therapy                                | ..         | 12         | —          | 28         | 4          | ..       | ..        | ..        | 44           |
| Practising mainly or solely in other states       | 12         | 5          | n.p.       | 8          | 7          | —        | ..        | n.p.      | 37           |
| On leave for 3 months or more                     | 10         | 5          | 5          | 5          | 4          | —        | ..        | 7         | 37           |
| Overseas  | —          | 3          | —          | —          | 4          | —        | ..        | —         | 7            |
| Not working                                       | n.p.       | 4          | n.p.       | 7          | n.p.       | —        | ..        | n.p.      | 17           |
| Working in dentistry, but not as dental auxiliary | 6          | —          | —          | n.p.       | —          | —        | ..        | —         | 8            |
| Working, but not in dentistry                     | —          | 5          | —          | 5          | n.p.       | —        | ..        | —         | 12           |
| <b>Total</b>                                      | <b>179</b> | <b>178</b> | <b>279</b> | <b>185</b> | <b>159</b> | <b>9</b> | <b>12</b> | <b>45</b> | <b>1,046</b> |

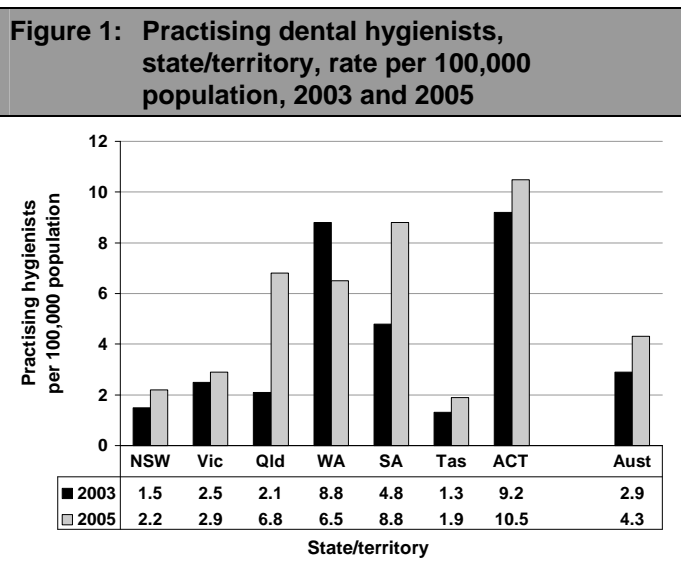
*Notes*

1. No responses were received from the Northern Territory; therefore, subtotals exclude the Northern Territory.
2. Column/row totals may not sum to total because of rounding of estimates.
3. Information on dual registration was not collected for all jurisdictions. Where this was the case, cells have been replaced by '..' (not available).
4. Values less than 3 are not published (n.p.).

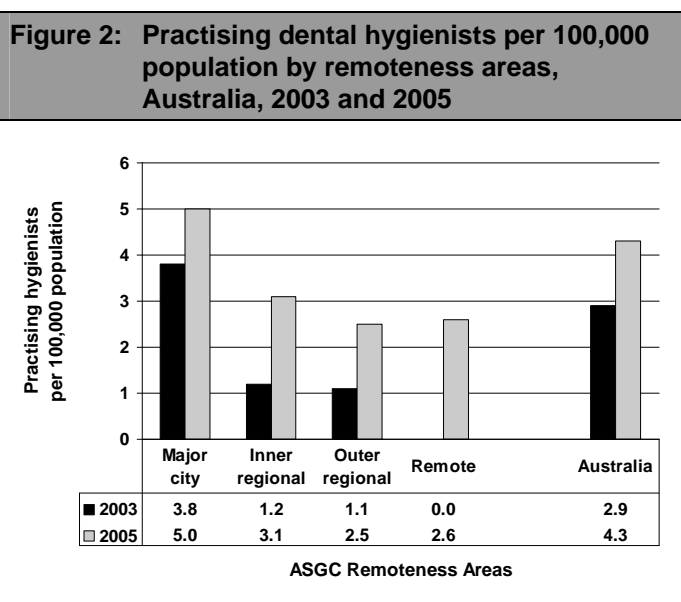
Between 2003 and 2005 there was a 66% increase in the number of practising dental hygienists, from 577 to 873. Most of this change is attributed to improved identification of dental hygienists in Queensland and to changes in data collection methods as a result of the introduction of formal registration and/or the inclusion of dual-registered dental therapists/hygienists in certain jurisdictions.

## Regional distribution

The number of practising dental hygienists per 100,000 population increased from 2.9 in 2003 to 4.3 in 2005. Increases occurred across most jurisdictions, with the exception of Western Australia, where there was a decrease from 8.8 in 2003 to 6.5 in 2005 (Figure 1). In 2005 the number of practising dental hygienists per 100,000 ranged from 1.9 in Tasmania to 10.5 in the Australian Capital Territory (Figure 1).



Across remoteness regions, the variation in the rate of practising dental hygienists per 100,000 population was not large. In 2005 the number of practising dental hygienists per 100,000 population ranged from 2.5 in outer regional areas to 5.0 in major cities. Between 2003 and 2005 there were increases in practising rates across all regions, most notably in remote regions; however, this may be an artefact of improved identification of dental hygienists (Figure 2).



## Demographic characteristics

Dental hygiene remains a predominantly female profession with males comprising only 3.5% of all practising dental hygienists. In 2005 the average age of dental hygienists was 36.8 years, a slight increase from 36.5 years in 2003. The largest percentages of dental hygienists were in the 30–34 and 45–49 years age groups (each 18.7%). The smallest percentage was in the oldest age group, 50 years and over (Table 2).

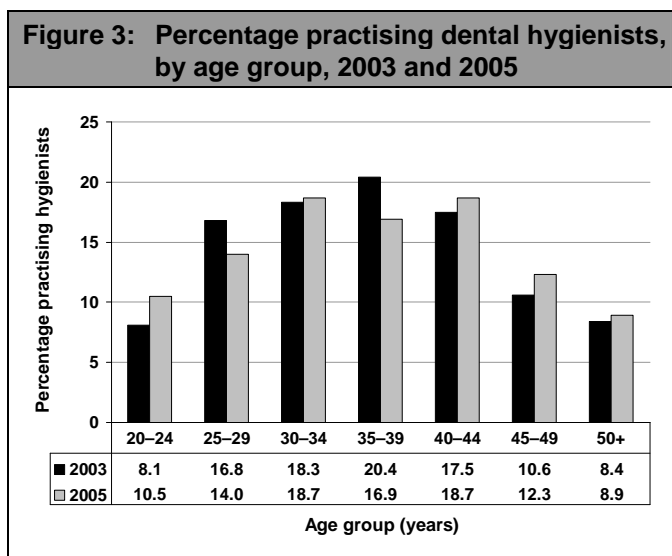
**Table 2: Practising dental hygienists by age group and state/territory, 2005**

| Age group (years)          | NSW         | Vic         | Qld         | WA          | SA          | Tas         | ACT         | Aust        |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 20–24                      | 6           | 16          | 31          | 22          | 13          | —           | 4           | 92          |
| 25–29                      | 12          | 23          | 26          | 41          | 13          | —           | 7           | 122         |
| 30–34                      | 26          | 19          | 61          | 30          | 23          | —           | 4           | 163         |
| 35–39                      | 24          | 34          | 40          | 14          | 25          | 5           | 5           | 148         |
| 40–44                      | 40          | 23          | 58          | 11          | 22          | 4           | 5           | 164         |
| 45–49                      | 20          | 19          | 42          | 6           | 17          | —           | n.p.        | 107         |
| 50+                        | 20          | 10          | 11          | 6           | 23          | —           | 7           | 78          |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>149</b>  | <b>144</b>  | <b>271</b>  | <b>130</b>  | <b>136</b>  | <b>9</b>    | <b>34</b>   | <b>873</b>  |
| <b>Average age (years)</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| <b>Persons</b>             | <b>39.8</b> | <b>36.8</b> | <b>36.4</b> | <b>38.4</b> | <b>31.9</b> | <b>38.6</b> | <b>37.7</b> | <b>36.8</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 three older age groups, 40–44, 45–49 and 50 years and over (Figure 3).



## Practice characteristics

In 2005 the majority (59.6%) of practising dental hygienists worked in private general practice, 14.7% worked in school dental services (oral health therapists in Queensland) and 17.5% worked in specialist practices. Overall, 79.8% of dental hygienists worked in the private sector, an increase from 74.5% in 2003. There were marked differences in the percentage working in the public sector across jurisdictions. Queensland had the highest percentage (51.9%), while in Tasmania there were no dental hygienists in the public sector (Table 3).

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

|                                  | NSW        | Vic        | Qld        | WA         | SA         | Tas      | ACT       | Aust       |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Public</b>                    |            |            |            |            |            |          |           |            |
| School dental service            | n.p.       | 3          | 124        | —          | —          | —        | —         | 128        |
| Other                            | n.p.       | 3          | 17         | 16         | 8          | —        | 4         | 48         |
| <b>Private</b>                   |            |            |            |            |            |          |           |            |
| General practice                 | 99         | 99         | 105        | 85         | 106        | 9        | 18        | 520        |
| Specialist orthodontist practice | 20         | 21         | 11         | 27         | 11         | —        | 7         | 97         |
| Specialist periodontal practice  | 10         | 15         | 13         | n.p.       | 11         | —        | 5         | 56         |
| Other                            | 16         | 4          | n.p.       | n.p.       | —          | —        | —         | 23         |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>149</b> | <b>144</b> | <b>271</b> | <b>130</b> | <b>136</b> | <b>9</b> | <b>34</b> | <b>873</b> |
| % public                         | 2.7        | 3.6        | 51.9       | 5.6        | 12.0       | —        | 10.5      | 20.2       |

### Notes

- Column/row totals may not sum to total because of rounding of estimates.
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## Practice activity

The majority (52.9%) of all practising dental hygienists worked part-time, ranging from 40% in Tasmania to 64.7% in South Australia. The largest percentage (40.5%) of dental hygienists worked between 30 and 39 hours per week. Only 4.0% worked less than 10 hours per week. On average, dental hygienists worked 31.6 hours per week, ranging from 26.8 hours in South Australia to 35.6 hours in Tasmania (Table 4).

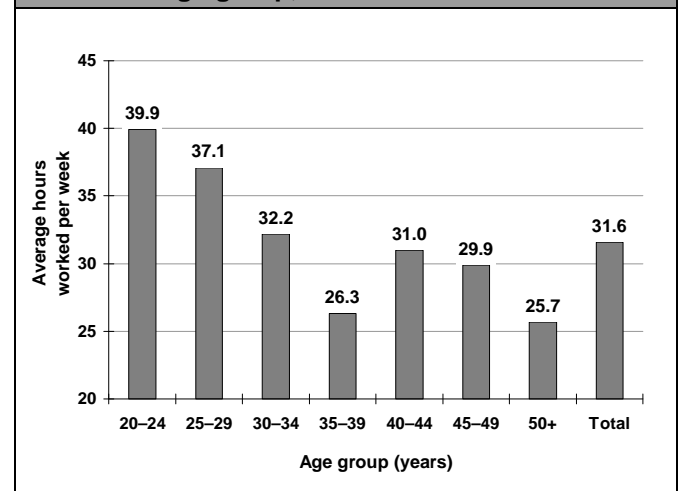
The average hours worked per week varied by age group. Dental hygienists in the 20–24 and 25–29 years age groups worked on average the longest week (39.9 and 37.1 hours, respectively) while those in the 50 years and over and 35–39 years age groups worked the shortest week (25.7 and 26.3 hours, respectively) (Figure 4).

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

|   | NSW        | Vic        | Qld        | WA         | SA         | Tas        | ACT        | Aust       |
|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| <b>Hours</b>                                      |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| <10   | 1.4        | 8.0        | 2.3        | 2.4        | 8.8        | —          | —          | 4.0        |
| 10–19   | 8.1        | 17.8       | 7.7        | 16.8       | 19.3       | —          | 5.3        | 12.4       |
| 20–29   | 21.6       | 17.9       | 17.9       | 9.6        | 27.9       | 20.0       | 26.3       | 19.2       |
| 30–39   | 45.9       | 37.5       | 38.5       | 50.7       | 29.1       | 80.0       | 42.1       | 40.5       |
| 40+   | 17.6       | 17.9       | 30.2       | 19.3       | 13.3       | —          | 21.1       | 21.1       |
| <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>Average hours usually worked per week</b>      |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| <b>All</b>  | 33.0       | 29.3       | 33.7       | 31.8       | 26.8       | 35.6       | 35.4       | 31.6       |
| <b>Percentage working part-time<sup>(a)</sup></b> |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| <b>All</b>  | 52.7       | 62.5       | 44.5       | 46.9       | 64.7       | 40.0       | 57.9       | 52.9       |

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

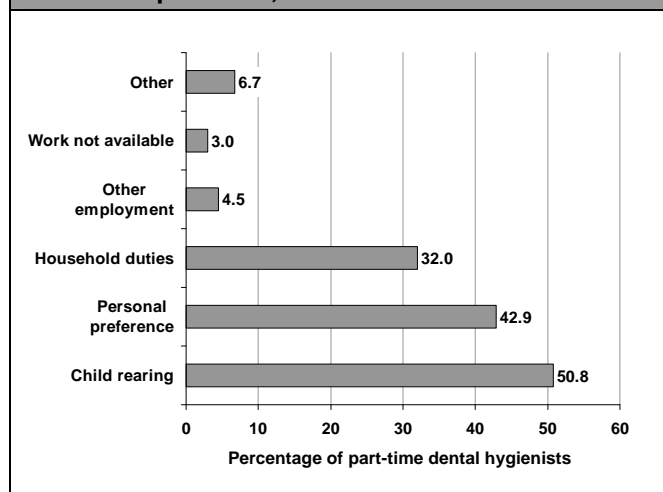
**Figure 4: Average hours worked per week by age group, 2005**



Dental hygienists 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 (50.8%), personal preference (42.9%) and household duties (32.0%). Only 3.0% indicated that dental hygiene 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 hygienists were asked to report their 'most likely' career position in 12 months time. Only a small percentage of dental hygienists 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 0.7% expecting to be working in another profession (Table 5).

**Figure 5: Most common reasons for working part-time, 2005****Table 5: Practising dental hygienists, most likely career position in 12 months time, 2005**

| Most likely career position in 12 months | Per cent |
|--|----------|
| Working as dental auxiliary part-time    | 46.7     |
| Working as dental auxiliary full-time    | 47.5     |
| Not working/on extended leave            | 2.9      |
| Working in another profession/industry   | 0.7      |
| Other                                    | 0.6      |
| Not stated/not applicable                | 1.6      |

## 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 Dental Hygienist Association of Australia (DHAA) 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 92% of the Australian dental hygienist labour force. This includes dental hygienists who were dual registered. Of those surveyed, an overall response rate of 76% 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 79% of dental hygienists 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 hygienists 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 hygienist. Data on hours worked for each location were also collected and summed to give the total hours usually worked per week.

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

|                   | NSW  | Vic  | Qld  | WA   | SA   | Tas  | NT  | ACT  | Aust  |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|-------|
| Total registered  | 179  | 178  | 279  | 185  | 159  | 9    | 12  | 45   | 1,046 |
| Response rate (%) | 49.7 | 77.5 | 79.2 | 62.2 | 84.9 | 55.6 | 0.0 | 55.6 | 69.6  |

## Additional data sources

AIHW DSRU (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Dental Statistics and Research Unit) 2006. Dental hygienist labour force in Australia, 2003. Cat. no. DEN 146. (Dental statistics and research series no. 22. 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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