

This report provides information on the dental hygienist labour force in Australia. Data were collected in 2000 as a part of the national dental labour force data collection. The collection was conducted with the assistance of the Dental Hygienists' Association of Australia (DHAA). A summary of the collection findings and some comparisons to previous collections are presented.

Data collection

The data collection was conducted in the last quarter of 2000 and the first quarter of 2001. In South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory all registered hygienists were mailed a questionnaire. In New South Wales and Queensland, where there is no formal registration, all DHAA members were surveyed. States not included in the collection were Tasmania, where hygienists were not permitted to practise until 2001, and Victoria, where the collection was postponed due to a change in the 2000 registration period.

The questionnaire included data items on demographic characteristics, practice status, qualifications, hours worked, and area and type of practice.

A response rate of 73.9% was achieved. It was assumed that the non-respondents to the survey in each State/Territory had the same labour force characteristics as the respondents, hence response numbers were scaled up to the known number of hygienists residing in each State/Territory. Consequently there may be an overestimation of numbers if non-respondents were more likely to be those not working in the dental industry.

DHAA membership coverage is less than 100% and consequently results for Queensland and New South Wales may be underestimated.

Practice status

The majority of hygienists surveyed were in practice (85.1%) with an additional 2.7% on leave for 3 months or longer. The Australian Capital Territory

and South Australia had the highest rates of dental hygienists per 100,000 estimated resident population (Table 1). The Australian Capital Territory and South Australia also reported the greatest differential between practising rate and full-time equivalent (FTE) rate, with the mean number of hours worked per week well below full-time employment (Table 5).

Table 1: Practice status by State/Territory, 2000

	NSW n	Vic n	Qld n	WA n	SA n	NT n	ACT n	Total n	%
Working as dental hygienist	58	N/A	45	82	110	2	22	241	85.1
Working, on 3+ months' leave	-	N/A	2	2	5	-	1	10	2.7
Working, not in dental hygiene	2	N/A	5	11	9	-	1	28	7.5
Not working	1	N/A	1	2	8	-	-	12	3.2
Overseas	-	N/A	1	-	5	-	-	6	1.6
Total	61	N/A	54	97	137	2	24	410.0	
Practising rate*	0.9	N/A	1.3	4.4	7.3	1.0	7.1	2.3	
FTE rate*	0.8	N/A	1.0	4.0	5.0	0.8	5.5	1.8	

Notes: 1) N/A denotes data not available, Victoria was omitted from the 2000 collection.
2) Full-time equivalence (FTE) based on 37.5 hours per week.
* Per 100,000 population.

Demographic characteristics

Just over half (52.4%) of the 319 practising hygienists were under 35 years of age and 22.6% were in the 30 to 34 age group (Table 2). Western Australia had the youngest labour force with a mean age of 27.4 years; this was substantially lower than the national mean of 35.3 years of age. There was only one male respondent.

Table 2: Practising hygienists, age group by State/Territory, 2000

	NSW n	Vic n	Qld n	SA/NT n	WA n	ACT n	Total n	Total %
20-24	-	N/A	2	1	40	-	43	13.5
25-29	8	N/A	8	15	21	1	53	16.3
30-34	12	N/A	11	30	9	9	71	22.6
35-39	17	N/A	12	22	2	6	59	18.5
40-44	11	N/A	7	24	4	-	46	14.4
45-49	6	N/A	2	11	6	3	28	8.8
50+	4	N/A	3	9	-	3	19	6.0
Total	58	N/A	45	112	82	22	319	100.0
Mean age	37.6	N/A	35.7	37.2	27.4	37.7	35.3	

Notes: 1) N/A denotes data not available, Victoria was not included in the 2000 collection.
2) Due to small numbers in the NT, results are combined with SA to ensure respondent confidentiality.

Qualifications

Prior to 1996 there was only one hygiene course available: in Adelaide, South Australia. In 2000 there were four hygiene courses available in Australia, including a degree course established at the University of Queensland (Bachelor of Oral Health). In addition, a small number of hygienists are trained by the Australian Defence Forces (ADF).

Just over half of practising hygienists reported that they had qualified in South Australia (52.0%; Table 3), a decline from 74.4% in 1996. Overseas-trained hygienists made up 18.8% of the practising labour force in 2000.

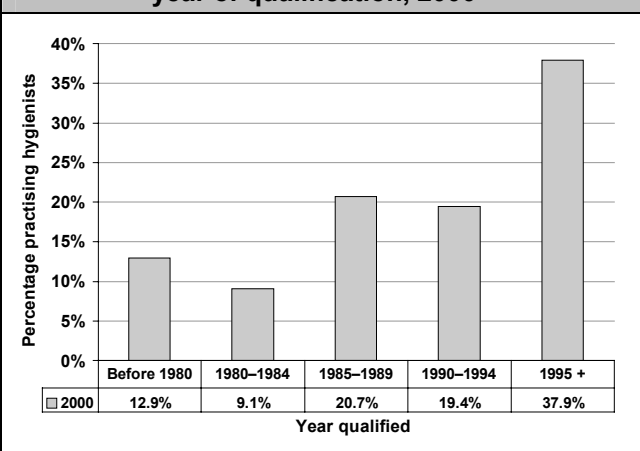
Table 3: Practising hygienists, place of qualification by State/Territory, 2000

Place of qualification	NSW n	Vic n	Qld n	WA n	SA/NT n	ACT n	Total n	Total %
South Australia	26	N/A	20	5	104	11	166	52.0
Western Australia	4	N/A	1	71	–	–	76	23.8
Queensland	–	N/A	7	–	–	–	7	2.2
Victoria	–	N/A	1	–	–	1	2	0.6
ADF	1	N/A	5	–	1	1	8	2.5
UK	15	N/A	5	2	5	–	27	8.5
USA/Canada	9	N/A	6	–	2	6	23	7.2
Other overseas	3	N/A	–	4	–	3	10	3.1
Total	58	N/A	45	82	112	22	319	100.0

Note: N/A denotes data not available, Victoria was omitted from the 2000 collection.

The majority of practising hygienists held an associate diploma (56.1%), only 6.3% held an associate degree/degree, 23.8% held a diploma, 9.1% held a certificate, and 4.7% cited another qualification.

Figure 1: Percentage practising hygienists, year of qualification, 2000

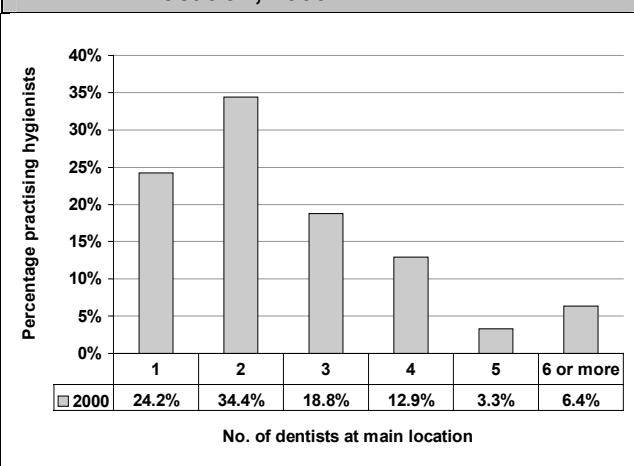


Over a third of all practising hygienists qualified in the five years prior to the collection (37.9%; Figure 1). This is most likely associated with the introduction of three new dental hygiene courses in Australia since 1996.

Practice size and type

Nearly one quarter of practising hygienists were employed in practices with only one dentist (24.2%) and 69.4% worked in practices with two to five dentists (Figure 2). In contrast, it is estimated that 47.9% of private general dentists worked in single dentist practices and 47.3% worked in practices with two to five dentists (ABS 1997/98).

Figure 2: Number of dentists at main practice location, 2000



Just over half (55.5%) of hygienists reported that their main practice location employed only one hygienist, 22.3% employed two hygienists and 22.2% employed three or more hygienists.

Most hygienists practise in the private sector with 71.5% in general dental practice (Table 4). Only 3.4% of hygienists reported working in public hospitals or public community dental clinics; no hygienists in New South Wales or the Australian Capital Territory reported working in the public sector.

Table 4: Practising hygienists, type of main practice by State/Territory, 2000

	NSW n	Vic n	Qld n	WA n	SA/NT n	ACT n	Total n	Total %
Private – general practice	42	N/A	31	51	88	16	226	71.5
Private specialist – orthodontic	7	N/A	5	25	9	3	49	15.4
Private specialist – periodontic	–	N/A	3	2	6	3	13	4.4
Private specialist – other	5	N/A	1	–	1	–	7	2.2
Public	–	N/A	4	2	5	–	11	3.4
Teaching	–	N/A	–	2	3	–	5	1.6
Other	4	N/A	1	–	–	–	5	1.6
Total	58	N/A	45	82	112	22	319	100.0

Note: N/A denotes data not available, Victoria was not included in the 2000 collection.

Over one-fifth of hygienists worked in specialist practice (22%), in comparison 11.3% of private sector dentists worked in specialist practice, indicating differences between employment distribution of dentists and hygienists across practice type.

Practice activity

Hours dedicated to various areas of practice were totalled for all reported work locations. The vast majority of hours (85.2%) were dedicated to clinical practice. Small amounts of time were dedicated to oral health promotion (4.0%), teaching/research (3.7%), administration (3.7%) and chairside assistance (2.5%).

The majority of practising hygienists worked part-time (71.0%, Table 5). Hygienists in New South Wales and Western Australian reported the highest mean hours per week, while those in South Australia and the Northern Territory reported the lowest mean (25.8 hours per week).

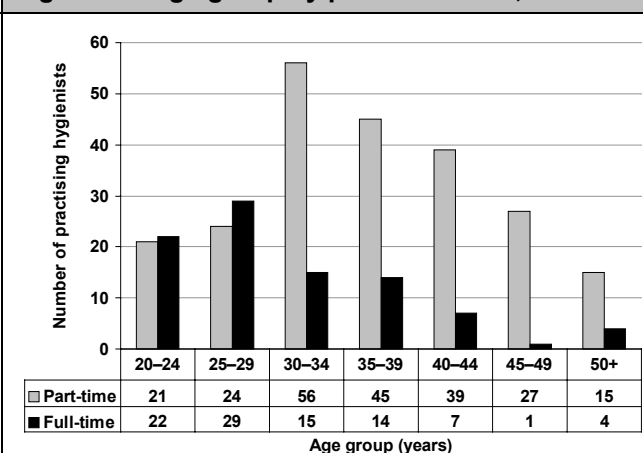
Table 5: Practising hygienists, hours worked by State/Territory, 2000

Hours per week	NSW n	Vic n	Qld n	WA n	SA/NT n	ACT n	Total n	Total %
<10	–	N/A	2	4	5	2	13	4.1
10–19	6	N/A	8	8	31	4	57	17.9
20–29	13	N/A	4	11	33	3	64	20.1
30–39	23	N/A	20	38	31	9	121	37.9
40+	16	N/A	11	21	12	4	64	20.0
Total	58	N/A	45	82	112	22	319	100.0
Part-time								
<37.5 hrs	39	N/A	33	45	95	15	227	71.0
Full-time								
37.5+ hrs	28	N/A	23	37	17	7	92	29.0
Mean hours	33.5	N/A	30.7	34.2	25.8	29.0	30.0	

Notes: 1) Total does not represent Australian total as Victoria was not included.
2) Full-time is 37.5 hours per week or more.

It can be observed from Figure 3 that hygienists aged under 30 were more likely to work full-time and those aged 30 and over were more likely to work part-time (less than 37.5 hours per week).

Figure 3: Age group by practice status, 2000



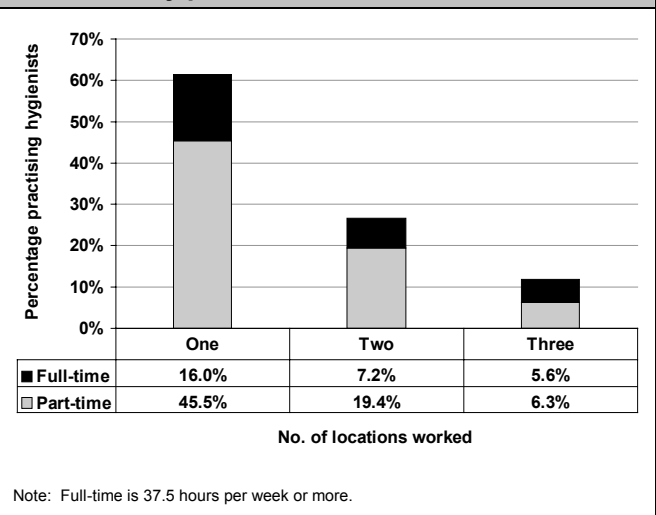
Note: Full-time is 37.5 hours per week or more.

The majority of practising hygienists worked in only one practice location (61.5%), while 26.6% worked in two locations and 11.9% worked in three practice locations or more. Of the 319 practising hygienists, 25.7% worked a part-time week across two or more

employment positions. Only 16.0% of hygienists worked full-time in one location (Figure 4).

By examining the practice data from the collection it was estimated that there were 472 employment positions held by the 319 practising hygienists; of these, 87.9% were part-time positions and only 12.1% were full-time positions.

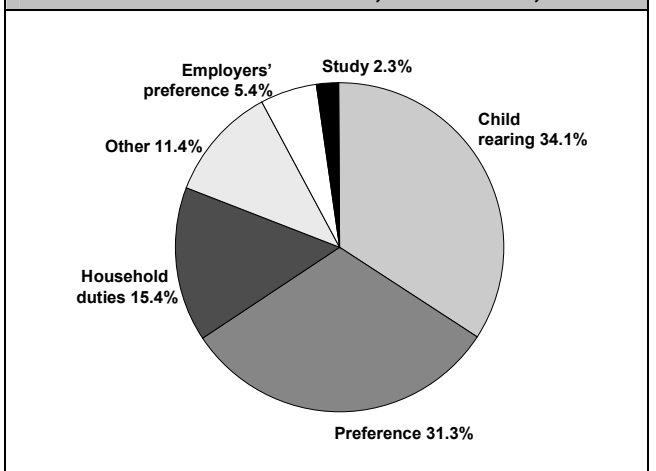
Figure 4: Number of locations worked by practice status, 2000



Note: Full-time is 37.5 hours per week or more.

Respondents who worked less than 35 hours per week were asked what was their main reason for doing so; child rearing and preference were the main reasons cited (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Practising hygienists in casual or less than full-time work, main reason, 2000



Only 9.6% of all hygienists reported to be looking for work, the majority of whom were currently working in dental hygiene (75.0%, Table 6).

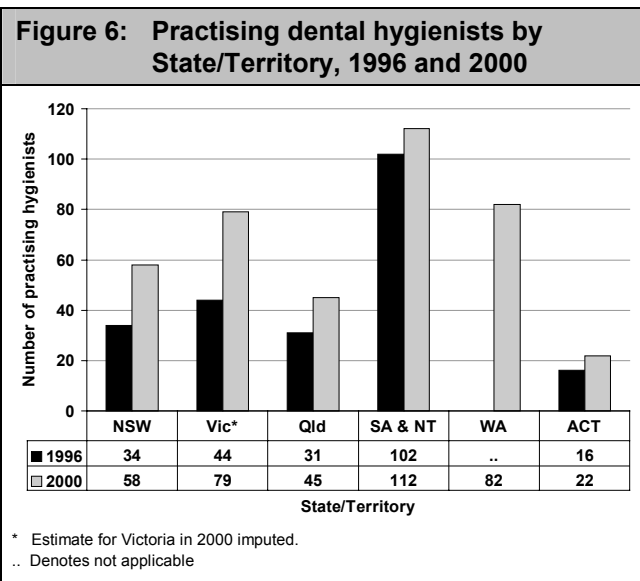
Table 6: Hygienists looking for work, full-time or part-time, by State/Territory, 2000

Looking for:	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA/NT	ACT	Total
Full- or part-time	5	N/A	3	7	1	–	16
Part-time	2	N/A	5	4	9	–	20
Total	7	N/A	8	11	10	–	36

Labour force changes

Victoria was not included in the 2000 collection, hence for the purposes of comparing the 1996 collection with the 2000, an estimate for hygienists practising in Victoria was imputed. The total number of hygienists registered in Victoria in the year 2000 (98) was multiplied by the 1998 Victorian participation rate (percentage of practising hygienists, 80.9%).

There was a 74% increase in the number of practising hygienists from an estimated 227 in 1996 to 398 hygienists in the year 2000. A large proportion of the increase can be attributed to the introduction of Western Australia to the collection (first collected in 1997; legislation enabling hygienists to practise in Western Australia was passed in 1996).



Between 1996 and 2000 the number of practising hygienists per 100,000 estimated resident population increased in all States/Territories; nationally the rate increased from 1.2 to 2.1 (Table 7).

Table 7: Practising rate per 100,000 population, 1996 and 2000

	NSW	Vic*	Qld	WA	SA/NT	ACT	Aust
1996	0.5	1.0	0.9	–	6.2	5.2	1.2
2000	0.9	1.7	1.3	4.4	6.6	7.1	2.1

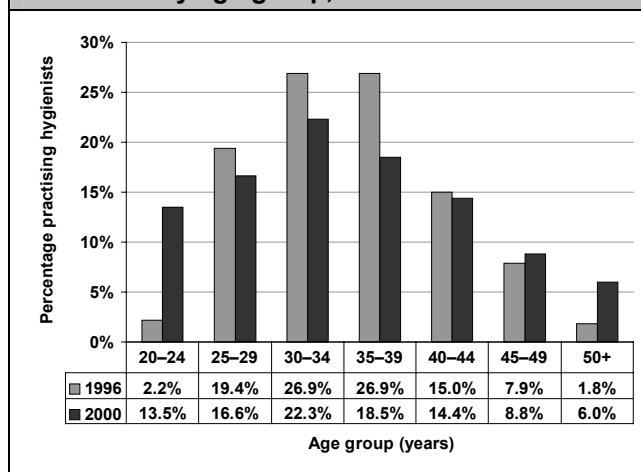
* Estimate for Victoria in 2000 imputed.

Figure 7 compares the age distribution in 1996 with the age distribution in 2000.

As a proportion of the labour force, there have been increases in the youngest age group (20–24 years) and the older age groups (45–49 and 50+ years). The largest decrease was in the 35–39-year age group. However, the mean age of practising hygienists was the same in 1996 as it was in 2000 (35.3 years of age).

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Figure 7: Percentage of practising hygienists by age group, 1996 and 2000



Summary

- Nationally, it was estimated that there were 2.1 practising hygienists per 100,000 population.
- Just over half were under 35 years of age (52.4%).
- Over a third qualified in the 5 years prior to the collection (37.9%).
- Three-quarters cited general private practice as their main practice type (71.5%) and 22% worked in private specialist practice.
- The majority worked part-time (71.0%, less than 37.5 hours per week).
- Only 12.1% of employment positions held were full-time employment positions.
- There was a 74% increase in the labour force since the 1996 collection.

References

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