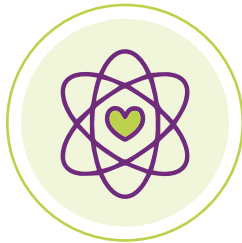# Cancer Nursing Workforce Survey

SUMMARY REPORT

*Working with Cancer Nurses Towards a Healthier Australia*
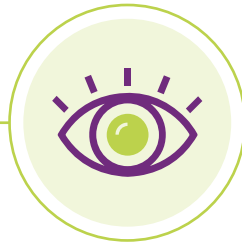
Cancer Nurses Society of Australia

# Cancer Nursing Workforce Survey

## About the Cancer Nurses Society of Australia (CNSA)

### Our Purpose

Peak member organisation for cancer nurses working in Australia.

### Our Vision

Best possible outcomes and experiences for all people affected by cancer.

### Our Mission

Use our expertise as cancer nurses to promote excellence in cancer care and control.

## About this survey

The *Cancer Nursing Workforce Survey* was commissioned by the CNSA and this report summarises the highlights of the 2022 survey. We are grateful to the 930 nurses who participated in the survey and provided their information to contribute to these insights.

This report provides a snapshot of the demographics, job satisfaction and professional concerns of the cancer nursing workforce in Australia in 2022. This data provides valuable workforce insights for employers, policymakers, and government about the state of the workforce, and can be used to contribute to future workforce planning in delivering cancer services.

**The Cancer Nursing Workforce Survey is the only national survey focusing specifically on cancer nurses working across Australia today.**

## Why this work is important

There are currently around 7,200 nurses working in cancer care across Australia. Cancer nurses are a pivotal component of cancer care. The specialist knowledge and quality of care they provide directly influences the outcomes and experiences of patients. Understanding and responding to the needs of the workforce are therefore crucial to ensuring the availability of experienced, educated, and skilled nurses to provide quality cancer care.

This survey is a platform for cancer nurses to voice their experiences and capture workforce data that will inform healthcare planning and support the ongoing development and growth of the cancer nursing workforce.

# Who works in cancer nursing in Australia?

## Who responded?
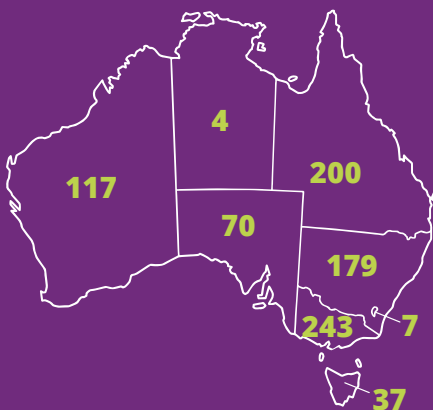
**857*** cancer nurses
*provided demographic data.

**95%** female

**55.5** average age
**~28%** near retirement age

## ... across Australia

117
4
200
70
179
243
7
37

**67%** Major city

**17%** Inner regional

**11%** Outer regional

**5%** Remote/rural

Demographic data showed that of the nurses who responded **28%** were approaching retirement age (55 years or over), compared with **18%** in the same age cohort represented in the AHPRA 2021 survey data of Australia's nursing workforce.[1]
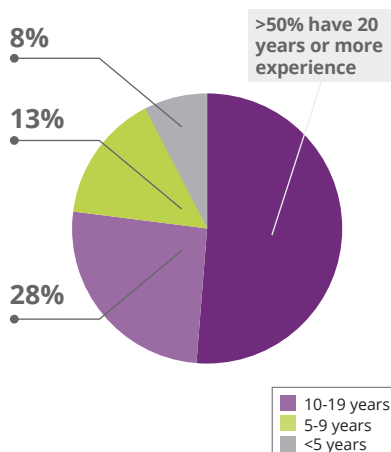
**Highly experienced** group of nurses:

- **79%** had **>10** years of nursing experience.
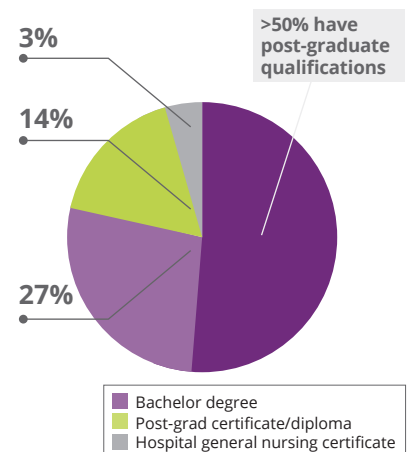- **65%** had **>10** years of cancer nursing experience.

However, only **32%** identified themselves as specialist cancer nurses.

The survey respondents represent an older more experienced segment of the cancer nursing workforce, which should be considered when interpreting their responses and experiences compared with the broader population of Australian cancer nurses.
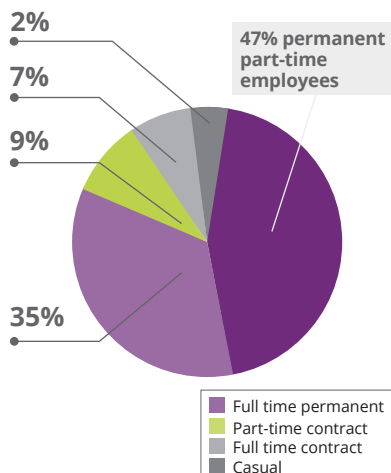
### Years of nursing experience

8%
13%
28%

>50% have 20 years or more experience

Legend:
- 10-19 years
- 5-9 years
- <5 years

### Nursing qualifications

3%
14%
27%

>50% have post-graduate qualifications

Legend:
- Bachelor degree
- Post-grad certificate/diploma
- Hospital general nursing certificate

Most nurses held permanent positions, with few employed in contract positions or as casual staff, and they mostly worked in the public sector in cancer centres in metropolitan locations.

### Employment status

2%
7%
9%
35%

47% permanent part-time employees

Legend:
- Full time permanent
- Part-time contract
- Full time contract
- Casual

### Healthcare system setting

6%
7%
17%

70% work in public hospitals

Legend:
- Private
- Not for profit
- Mixed
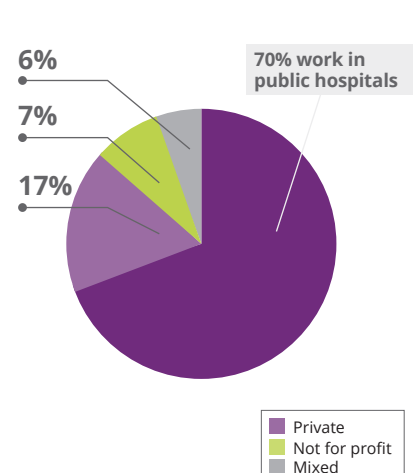
# What is the role of the cancer nurse?

Respondents identified they worked in the following speciality areas, including:

**61%**
Medical Oncology

**17%**
Palliative Care

**47%**
Haematological Oncology

**15%**
Paediatric / Adolescent and Young Adult Oncology

**23%**
Radiation Oncology

**12%**
Surgical Oncology

**77%** of nurses told us they had a **clearly defined scope** for their role.

Nurses reported that the following are all components of their job:

**77%**
Patient education

**66%**
Outpatient care

**59%**
Staff education

**55%**
Treatment and supportive care

**5%**
Home care

**24%** of nurses were involved in the **management of other staff.**

**20%** of nurses were involved in **research activities.**

# What are nurses' perceptions of the workplace support they receive?

**68%**
Adequate peer support to undertake the role

**61%**
Adequate educational support to undertake the role

**70%**
Adequate opportunities for professional development

**53%**
Adequate opportunities for career progression

# What impacts job satisfaction among cancer nurses?

The survey shed light on what workplace factors impact on job satisfaction.

**Job satisfaction rating among cancer nurses was high 75/100**

Higher scores were reported by nurses who agreed that they had career progression opportunities and adequate peer support.

Many nurses reported that their job satisfaction was related to the challenging, yet rewarding nature of the work and role.

> "Work in a fabulous multidisciplinary/ interdisciplinary team. Have autonomy and respect. Work in an amazing work environment with tumour-specific cancer care coordinators."

> "...the difference to patients' lives is the largest component for satisfaction in my work."

> "Work within a cohesive and passionate team who uphold values of integrity, compassion, collegiality, and patient focused care"

*Sample comments from survey respondents.*

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Those nurses who reported job dissatisfaction attributed this to excessive patient allocations and workloads, which compromised their ability to deliver good quality care.

**85% of nurses reported their greatest challenge was a high workload**

> "Heavy acute workloads, insufficiently trained staff does result in job dissatisfaction as we can't always deliver the care each patient requires."

> "...very rarely anyone is available to cover for me, so I am only able to take ~5-6 days of annual leave each year. This certainly interferes with my job satisfaction."

> "Less and less resources and time leading to many challenges in my role. Time is not available to train staff due to heavy workloads."

*Sample comments from survey respondents.*

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Nurses identified three key workforce challenges that need to be addressed.

**01 Attracting new and retaining cancer nurses**

**02 Mental health support**

**03 Limited training & career progression opportunities**

> "Succession planning in all cancer centres/wards - as the workforce ages there is a need to encourage, entice and attract new staff into cancer nursing."

> "Mental health and well-being support structure that...targets the particular experience of cancer nurses."

> "More learning opportunities – time for staff to learn away from the clinical setting."

*Sample comments from survey respondents.*

# Cancer Nursing Workforce Survey

## The important contribution of cancer nurses

Thank you to the following contributors who were involved in this project: Natalie Bradford,  Elizabeth Moore, Karen Taylor, Olivia Cook, Lucy Gent, Theresa Beane, Natalie Williams, Kimberly Alexander, Jemma Still, Gemma McErlean, Deborah Kirk, Leanne Monterosso, Alexandra (Sandie) McCarthy, Zerina Lokmic-Tomkins, Jessica Balson, Priscilla Gates, Cameron War, Erin Pitt, Xiomara Skrabal Ross, Kate White, Mei Krishnasamy, and the CNSA Research Standing Committee and Board of Directors.

We would like to thank all the nurses who contributed their time to participate in the 2022 survey, including CNSA members. We need as many voices as possible to answer the call and complete these surveys which contribute to increasing recognition and respect for the important role cancer nurses play in healthcare delivery in Australia.

## What next

CNSA launched the *Cancer Nursing Workforce Survey* to better inform our understanding of what is happening in the workforce and shape our policy and advocacy in the following areas:

**Workforce representation** helps us understand and predict employment, education, training, and professional development needs and future trends, so we can better support the cancer nursing profession.

**National demographics** help with the strategic planning of cancer services to better meet the needs of healthcare professionals and patients to ensure equity of access to care.

The survey results will enable informed workforce discussions in the planning of cancer service delivery and initiatives, to ensure sustainable care for cancer patients in Australia. CNSA will continue to conduct the *Cancer Nursing Workforce Survey* to enable us to track the cancer nursing workforce and inform workforce planning as a national healthcare data asset. The full data report will be made available upon request to anyone interested in learning more.

## Want to learn more

If you have any questions or want to learn more about the *Cancer Nursing Workforce Survey* you can contact Jemma Still at: jemma@cnsa.org.au.

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