

Building a sustainable and resilient cancer nursing workforce



Over 1 million Australians currently live with or have lived with cancer and it is estimated that between 2022 and 2031, 1.7 million new cases will be diagnosed.¹ This projected increase in cancer rates is the result of Australia's growing and ageing population and improved survival rates.¹ The healthcare system will require a sustainable and resilient specialist cancer nursing workforce to cope with the increased demand to ensure optimal care outcomes.

The nursing profession is the single largest healthcare profession in Australia, but it is facing unprecedented challenges with workforce projections predicting an imminent and acute shortfall.^{1,2}



85,000
nursing
shortfall
(2025)



123,000
nursing
shortfall
(2030)

“
Workload is increasing all the time. We are often overworked and understaffed.
”
QLD Registered Nurse
10-19 years' experience

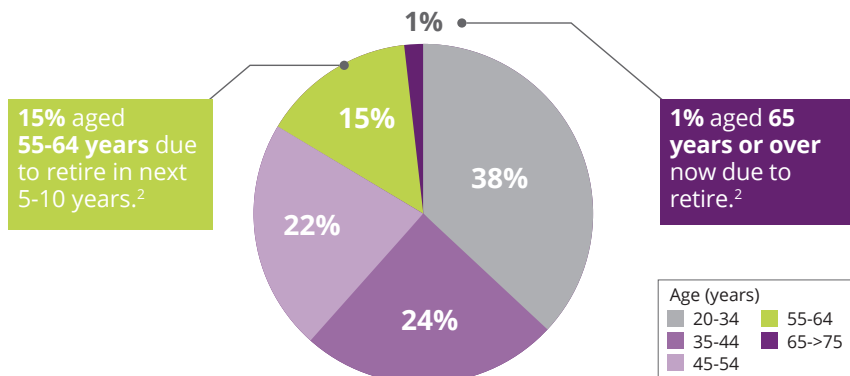
“
Lack of nursing staff let alone ones with cancer competency.
”
WA Clinical Nurse >20 years' experience

“
Inadequate nurse levels or not enough fully trained or experienced staff.
”
NSW Clinical Nurse Specialist
>20 years' experience

An Ageing Cancer Nursing Workforce

In 2021, around 7,200 nurses worked in cancer care in Australia.⁴

The expected nursing shortfall is a result of an ageing workforce and poor retention rates.^{2,3} A significant proportion of the workforce will retire in the next 20 years coinciding with the increasing burden of cancer cases.³



The retirement of experienced cancer nurses will lead to a loss of knowledge, clinical expertise, and leadership. Early career nurses entering the workforce now will have less access to training and mentorship provided by experienced cancer nurses. Succession planning is important to address this skills gap in the workforce.

“
Provision of time and resources to enable all to develop and learn, mentorship of staff when entering senior nursing roles.
 QLD Nurse Manager
 10–19 years' experience
 ”

“
I am able to deliver the education and support to new and developing nurses that is needed.
 WA Nurse Educator >20 years experience
 ”

“
I would like the chance to have my role incorporate teaching and mentoring of less experienced or emerging advanced practice nurses.
 VIC Nurse Practitioner
 >20 years' experience
 ”

Improving Retention Rates

Retention of early career nurses is a priority and addressing job satisfaction is a key aspect to improving their likelihood of staying in nursing. CNSA Cancer Nursing Workforce Survey 2022 showed that younger early career nurses had the lowest level of job satisfaction.⁵



Identifying and mitigating the reasons for nurses leaving the profession will aid in safeguarding against projected workforce shortages. Action should be taken now to reduce turnover and increase retention.

“
I am satisfied with my current job as I feel supported by my peers, it is a safe learning environment with many opportunities for professional development.
 TAS Registered Nurse <5 years experience
 ”

For more information on the Cancer Nursing Workforce Survey visit:
<https://bmcnurs.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12912-023-01629-7>

CNSA is focused on finding ways to create a sustainable and resilient cancer nursing workforce, if you want to share your thoughts, contact Jemma@cnsa.org.au.

REFERENCES

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4. AHPRA. National Workforce Dataset. Available at: <https://hwd.health.gov.au/resources/information/nhwds.html> Accessed August 2023.
5. CNSA Cancer Nursing Workforce Survey 2022. Full Report Published 2023.