

New South Wales Health

Area Health Service

Aboriginal Nurse Workforce Survey

Final Report

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Acknowledgment

The Office of the Chief Nursing Officer and Aboriginal Health Branch wishes to thank all NSW Area Health Services that participated in collecting information for this report.

Executive Summary

Recruitment and Retention of Aboriginal nurses is a priority of the NSW Government. This commitment includes the provision of funding for initiatives aimed at increasing the number of Aboriginal nurses within the NSW public health system. There is little information on the number of Aboriginal nurses working in the NSW public health system. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996) estimated that overall Aboriginal nurse numbers were 0.4 - 0.6% of the total nursing workforce nationally.

The purposes of this survey were to identify if those estimates have changed, to identify NSW Aboriginal nurse numbers, and to gauge if those numbers are meeting the NSW Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES) targets.

The AES aims to increase the number of Aboriginal people employed throughout NSW Health Services across all occupations achieving a minimum 2%. The 2% target is indicative of the national population of Aboriginal peoples.

For the purposes of this report Aboriginal refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Findings

A questionnaire survey was sent to 19 Area Health Services (AHS), 100 percent of surveys were returned. From the survey a number of important aspects of Aboriginal nurse employment have been identified. These include:

- 0.7% (n=239) of NSW nursing staff are Aboriginal. This is well below the 2% AES Target. Of the 239 Aboriginal nurses, 26% (n=63) are registered nurses.
- In rural areas 62% (n=72) of the Aboriginal nursing workforce are enrolled nurses, compared to 26% (n=33) in metropolitan health services.
- 38% (n=47) of the metropolitan Aboriginal nursing workforce are registered nurses, while rural Aboriginal registered nurses constitute 13.8% (n=16).
- Although it is pleasing to note that the AES target is being met for second (TEN, EN) and third level nurses (AINs) it is of concern that only 0.3% of the total RN workforce is Aboriginal.

Introduction

In the past Aboriginal nurse numbers were speculative. Many people believed that there were low numbers within the health system in NSW, although there was no evidence to confirm this information. A Press Release by the Australian Nursing Federation (1999) based on Australian Bureau of statistics information contended that Aboriginal nurses made up 0.6% of the national nursing workforce.

In order to ascertain the number of Aboriginal nurses currently employed in the NSW public health system, a questionnaire survey was conducted in July 2001. It was anticipated that this survey would provide further insight into the areas where the recruitment process was most needed and to enable comparison of Aboriginal nurse numbers to the total NSW nursing workforce.

Method

A questionnaire survey was developed and was distributed to all Area Directors of Nursing in NSW in July 2001. Each area was required to complete and return the survey by August 2001.

The questionnaire was designed following a format used by the Employee Related Information Systems Unit (April 2001). A copy of the survey used can be found at attachment 1. The survey asked for the number (Headcount) of Aboriginal nurses employed in the Area Health Service and the classification in which they were employed. The classifications included:

- Assistant In Nursing (AIN);
- Trainee Enrolled Nurse (TEN);
- Enrolled Nurse (EN);
- Registered Nurse (RN);
- Nurse Unit Manager (NUM);
- Clinical Nurse Educator (CNE);
- Nurse Educator (NE);
- Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS);
- Clinical Nurse Consultant (CNC); and
- Nurse Manager all grades (NM)

The facilities in which Aboriginal nurses worked were included in the survey information.

Results

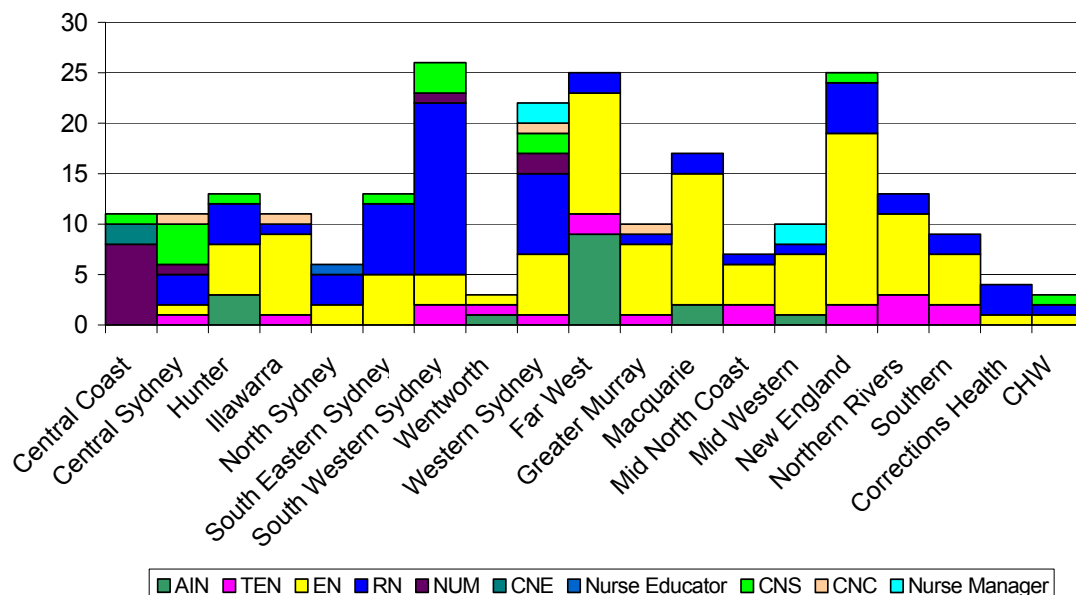
All 19 AHS returned the survey, a 100% response rate.

From information provided by Area Health Services it was possible to ascertain Aboriginal nurse numbers for NSW health system and the classification of their employment.

Aboriginal nurses employed by Area Health Services

A total of 239 Aboriginal nurses were identified by the survey. The three Area Health Services that employ the highest number of Aboriginal nurses are: South Western Sydney (n=26), Far West (n=25) and New England (n=25). The three AHSs that employ the least number of Aboriginal nurses are Corrections Health (n=4), The Children's Hospital at Westmead (n=3) and Wentworth Area Health Service (n=3). See Figure 1.

Figure 1: New South Wales AHS Total Aboriginal Nurses



Aboriginal nurses by classification

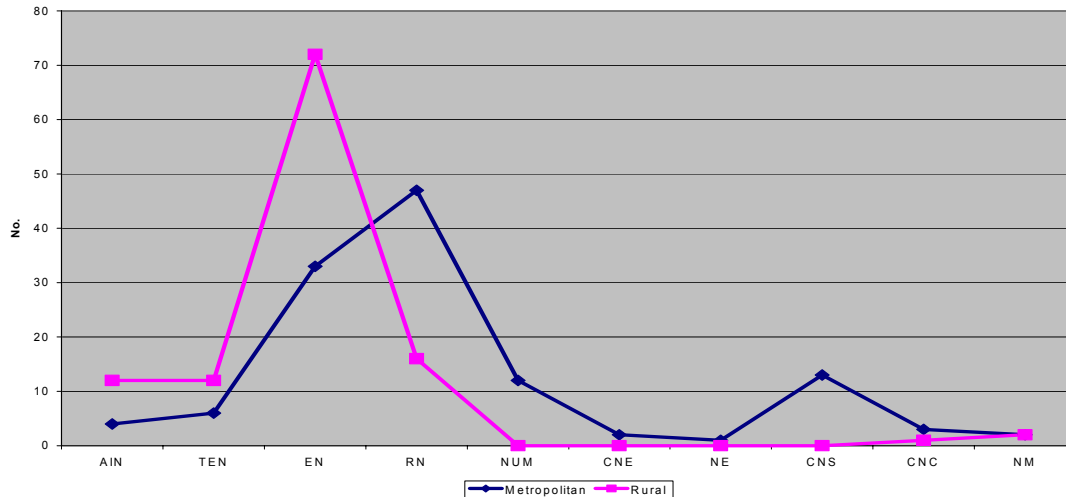
The vast majority of the Aboriginal nursing workforce is made up of enrolled nurses 44.2% (n=105) while registered nurses account for 26% (n=63), CNS, CNC, NE, NUMs and NM 16% (n=37), trainee enrolled nurses 7.5% (n=18), and assistants in nursing 6.7% (n=16).

Comparison of metropolitan and rural AHS employment

There are differences in the employment of Aboriginal nurses between metropolitan and rural areas of NSW. Enrolled nurses (n=72) in rural areas outnumber those in the metropolitan areas (n=33). There are 47 registered nurses in metropolitan areas and 16 in rural NSW.

There are 12 nursing unit managers in the metropolitan area and none in rural NSW. There are 13 clinical nurse specialists in metropolitan areas and none in rural NSW (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Rural and Metropolitan Aboriginal Nurse Profile



Comparison of Aboriginal nurses and the total nursing workforce (FTEs) by category

In the Aboriginal nursing workforce there is a smaller proportion of registered nurses (26%) than in the total nursing workforce (58%). Enrolled nurses make up 43% of the Aboriginal nursing workforce and 14% of the total nursing workforce.

Aboriginal nurses in the CNS, CNC, nurse educator, NUM and NM role account for 16% of the Aboriginal nursing workforce. In comparison with total nursing workforce the same classification group account for 25% of the nursing workforce. See Figure 3 and 4.

Figure 3: Aboriginal Nursing Workforce (By Classification)

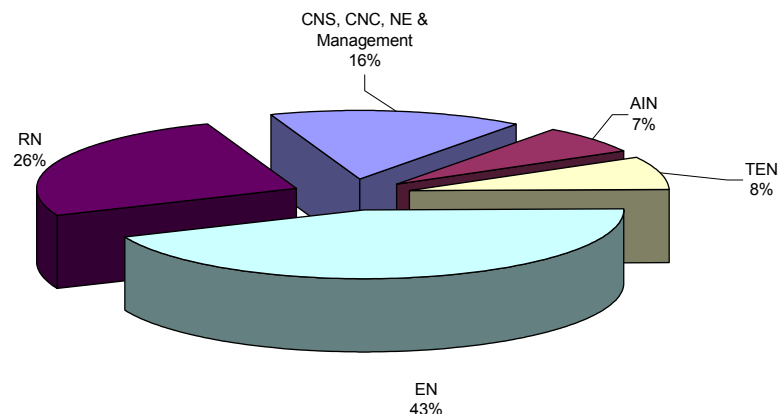
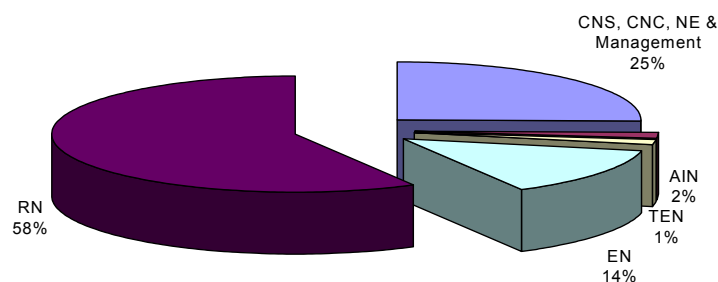


Figure 4: Total Nursing Workforce (By Classification)



Comparison of Aboriginal CNS, CNC, NE and management nurses to total CNS, CNC, NE and management nursing workforce (FTEs) by classification

In the Aboriginal CNS, CNC, NE, NUM, and NM workforce there is a smaller proportion of nurse educators (0.4%) than in the total nurse educator workforce (0.6%). There is a smaller proportion of clinical nurse specialists (CNS) (6%). Of the total nursing workforce, the classification of CNS makes up 13.1%. Clinical Nurse Consultants (CNC) make up 1.5% of the Aboriginal workforce, while CNCs account for 2.8% of the total nursing workforce. In the Nurse Manager (NM) classification NM account for 1.5% of the Aboriginal workforce, while NMs account for 3.7% of the total nursing workforce.

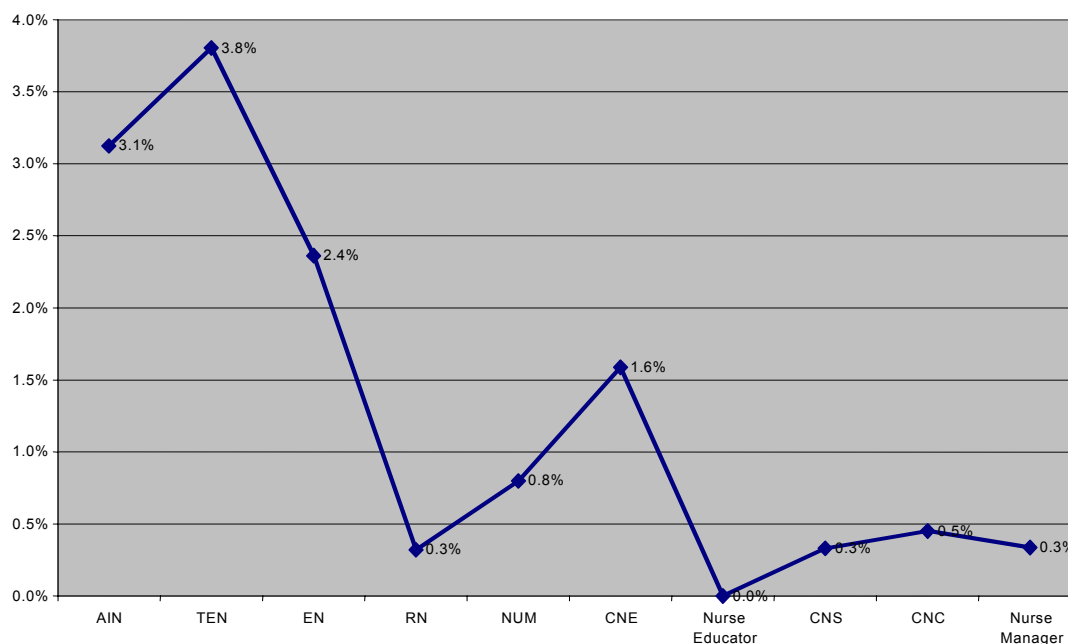
Aboriginal Employment Strategy Targets

The NSW Health Aboriginal Employment Strategy's aim is to increase the number of Aboriginal people employed throughout NSW Health Services across all levels and occupations achieving a minimum 2%. The 2% target is indicative of the national population of Aboriginal peoples.

To ascertain the proportion of Aboriginal nurses within the total nursing workforce the Aboriginal nurse headcount was used as the numerator and total nurse FTE information from April 2001 was used as the denominator.

The results show that the 2% AES target for the classifications of AIN, TEN and EN are being met, however that target is not being met for registered nurses. As a result of this, subsequent registered nurse classifications such as NUM, CNE, nurse educator, CNS, CNC and nurse manager are not meeting the 2% target as demonstrated by Figure 4.

Figure 4: Aboriginal proportion of all NSW nursing staff (by classification)



Discussion

This survey asked for the number of Aboriginal nurses (headcount). It is presumed that all Aboriginal nurses were employed full-time, as it may be difficult for the AHS to provide an FTE figure. The survey results may not be a true representation of Aboriginal nurse numbers as it is not compulsory to identify as Aboriginal.

Aboriginal registered nurses

The low percentage (0.3%) of Aboriginal registered nurses employed by AHS compared to the nursing workforce in general (58%) is of concern. There may be several reasons for lack of Aboriginal people undertaking registered nurse studies. Firstly, the cost of attending university may deter potential students. Secondly, students may have to live away from their community to study, this may be difficult as in the Australian Aboriginal culture, family and community may hold a higher priority. Thirdly, even with the introduction of Aboriginal university admission programs and Aboriginal Education Units to provide student support, access to universities is limited for those in rural areas as they may live great distances from the nearest campus. Finally, a deterrent to Aboriginal people attending university may be a fear of being discriminated or alienated by peers, colleagues, lecturers and workplaces.

One way of recruiting Aboriginal registered nurses may be to encourage those already in the system. With AIN, TEN and EN classifications of nurse meeting the AES target, one strategy would be support and provide assistance to those requesting further education. For example Far West AHS mainly employs ENs, TENs, and AINs, registered nurses make up a very small proportion of the total registered nurse workforce. AINs, TENs and ENs could

be encouraged to undertake further studies, in turn this would increase Aboriginal registered nurse numbers.

Rural and Metropolitan Aboriginal Nurses

Another issue that survey identified is the difference between rural and metropolitan Aboriginal nurse workforces. The major difference is the registered nurse classification. Rural areas in particular followed the trend of a higher number of 2nd and 3rd level nurses. There is very limited representation of Aboriginal nurses in the registered nurse classification of rural Area Health services. The survey identified that 83% of rural Aboriginal nurses were classified as level 2 or lower.

Registered nurses made up the majority (38%) of the metropolitan Aboriginal nursing workforce. Although this percentage is not equivalent to the total nursing workforce, it is a closer representation of the total nursing workforce compared to the rural percentage.

There may be a number of reasons to explain this difference. Metropolitan Aboriginal people have greater access to universities and have less distance to travel to attend the university. Metropolitan areas have greater access to reliable, affordable public transport to attend university.

Conclusion

This AHS survey confirmed that Aboriginal nurses working in the NSW public health system remains small (0.7%). While second and third level nurses (AIN, TEN, and EN) are meeting the AES target; the registered nurse classification is under represented. In order to increase the Aboriginal nurse numbers, particularly the registered nurse category, strategies need to be developed and implemented.

Recommendations

- That efforts to recruit Aboriginal registered nurses in rural areas be a priority.
- That initiatives be developed to encourage 2nd and 3rd level Aboriginal nurses (AIN, EN) into further education and training.
- That OCNO recruitment drives be targeted towards rural and to a lesser extent metropolitan Aboriginal school students and community members.
- That the Office of the Chief Nursing Officer (OCNO) and Aboriginal Health Branch increase the promotion of nursing as a career by attending Careers Markets particularly in rural areas of NSW.
- That scholarships for potential and current Aboriginal nursing students continue to be available.
- That a survey of NSW universities be conducted to ascertain undergraduate Aboriginal nursing student numbers.