



2018

GP Industry Insights



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Introduction

“Not surprisingly, GPs are the first port of call for Australians with health issues. They provide diagnosis, treatment and ongoing care for over 85% of the population each year”

Dr Bastian Seidel, President of The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners¹

As the first point of contact for most Australians seeking medical attention, GPs play an integral role in all of our lives. Often referred to as a “Specialist in Life”, GPs are increasingly relied upon for a vast array of patient needs.

However, as with every industry, the GP landscape is evolving due to a number of factors: Australia’s population is growing, patient expectations are changing, and technology in the medical industry is improving all the time. For GPs to continue to provide the high quality of care, it’s important GPs have their finger on the pulse when it comes to what’s currently happening in the industry and where it may be headed.

As Natalie Smith, Head of Health at ANZ, says: “GPs play a critical role in the healthcare

industry. Understanding the trends and impacts on GPs is important to ensure access and quality are maintained for patients.”

With so many reports, statistics, trends and predictions available, we wanted to make it easy for GPs to access the industry information that’s most relevant to them. We’ve coupled our own in-house data with data scoured from reports, articles, and statistics, to produce a snapshot of the current Australian GP industry.

This report offers a greater understanding of the GP landscape, patient needs and the changing relationship that GPs and patients have with technology.

Highlights

Due to Australia’s ageing population, GPs’ clinical work has become more centred on care of older people, more frequent management of chronic conditions, more clinical and therapeutic procedures, and more referrals and test ordering.²

The number of GPs continues to rise but the number of practices does not. GPs are migrating from small practice ownership to joining larger clinics.

The number of GPs is growing. Appointments per Full-Time Service Equivalent is down. Competition is increasing.

GPs are increasingly embracing technology as part of patient care.



General Practices & Practitioners



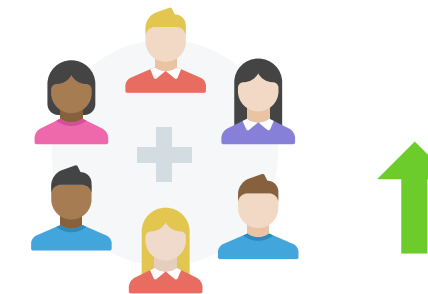
General Practices overview



The number of General Practices in Australia fell from 8,084 to 7,035 between 2002 and 2011, the latest year for which reliable data exists.³



Some supporting evidence from the MABEL⁴ survey shows that the proportion of GPs who are owners (practice principals) has fallen from 35% in 2008 to 24% in 2015.



The proportion of GPs working in a practice with six or more doctors has increased from 47% in 2008 to 61% in 2015.⁵

The number of GPs continues to rise but the number of practices is decreasing.

Despite the number of GPs continuing to rise (partly due to an increase in both local and international medical graduates), the overall number of GP practices is decreasing year on year.

This coincides with a decrease in practice ownership⁶, with many GPs choosing to join clinics as opposed to opening their own. With group practices now the most popular choice for work, GPs are being attracted by the potential for flexible working hours and part-time work.

Young doctors are being deterred from working in small practices by the federal government's promotion of large medical centres and super-clinics.⁷





Practices are becoming larger⁸

Practice sizes are increasing, with more and more clinics offering a diverse range of medical and allied health services. Popular services offered by GP surgeries include on-site pathology, psychology and nutritional advice.

According to the University of Sydney's 2011-12 Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health study program⁹ of General Practice data, practices that have five to nine doctors jumped from 38.6% the previous year to 42.3%.

Corporates on the rise

The proportion of GPs who own their practice is declining, signaling a potential rise in corporate ownership. Corporate practices are now estimated to account for 10-15% of all practices.¹⁰

General Practitioners overview



There are currently 35,942 GPs across Australia, up 53% from 23,540 just 10 years ago.¹¹



Non-Referred Attendance (NRA) services are on the rise. GPs provided 145.4 million NRA services in 2016/17, compared with 100.3 million 10 years ago.¹¹



Total appointments per practitioner are decreasing, from 6,293 10 years ago, to 5,632 in 2016/17 (NRA Services per FSE GP).¹¹

Changing market

The number of GPs continues to rise but the number of practices does not. GPs are migrating from small practice ownership to joining larger clinics.

Competiton is increasing

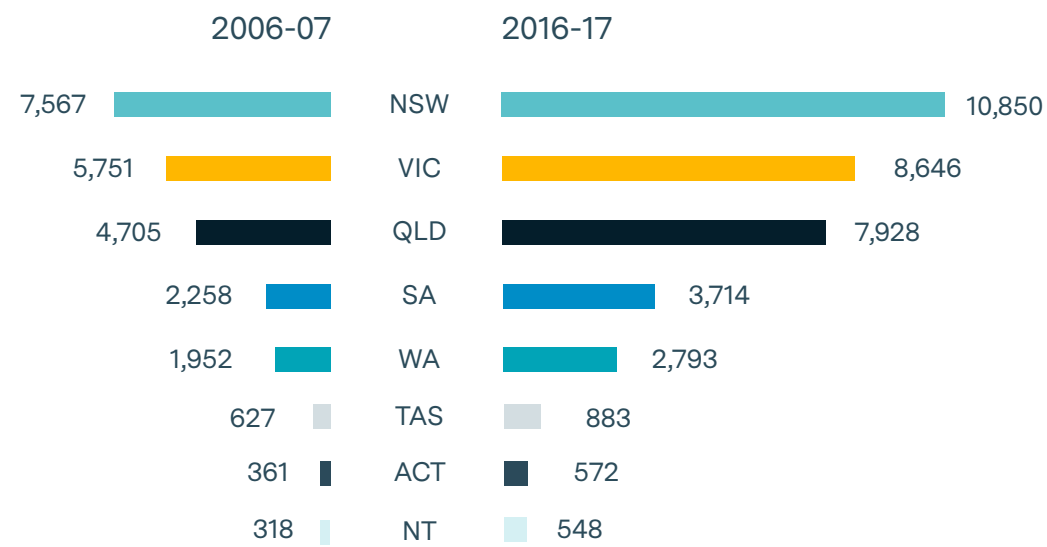
The number of GPs operating across Australia continues to grow and is currently outpacing population growth. This is largely due to the opening of new medical schools in the 2000's which contributed to a doubling in the number of new medical graduates.

With unprecedented levels of choice¹² and an oversupply of GPs, the total number of appointments per practitioner is decreasing.

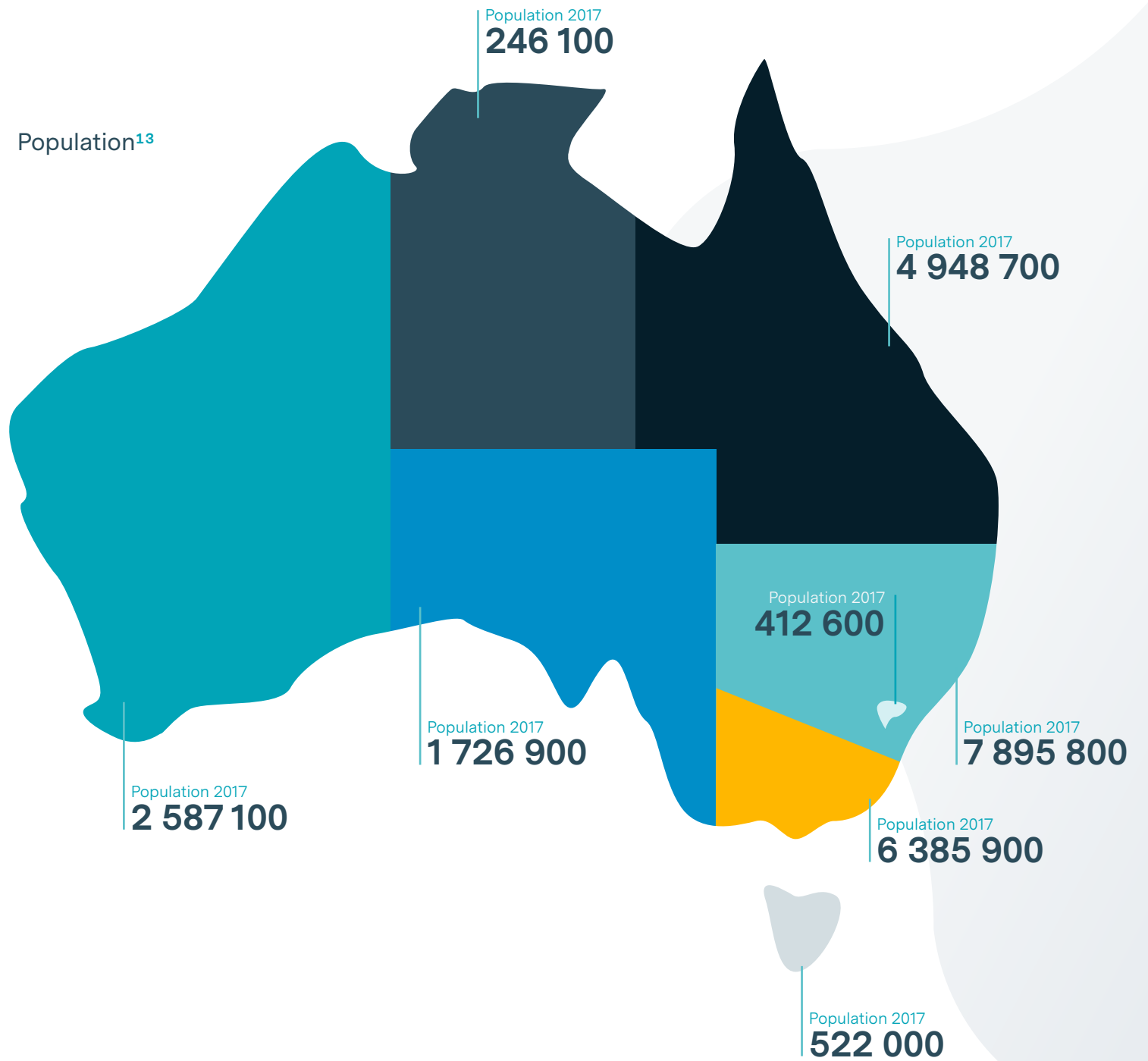
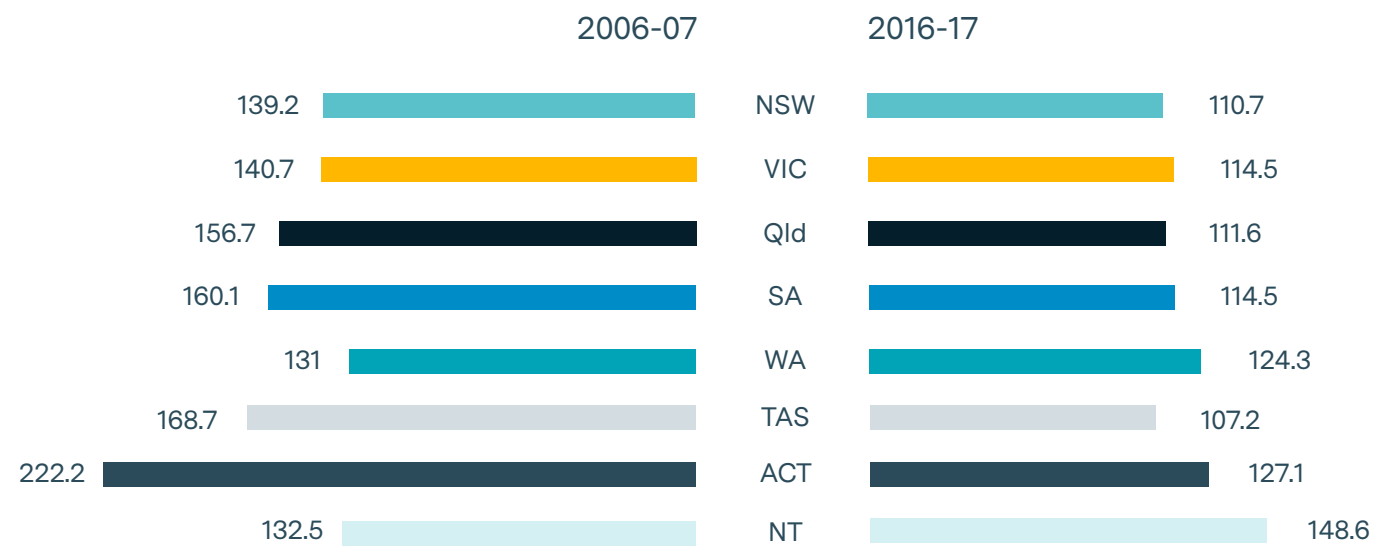


GP headcount per state

GP headcount¹³

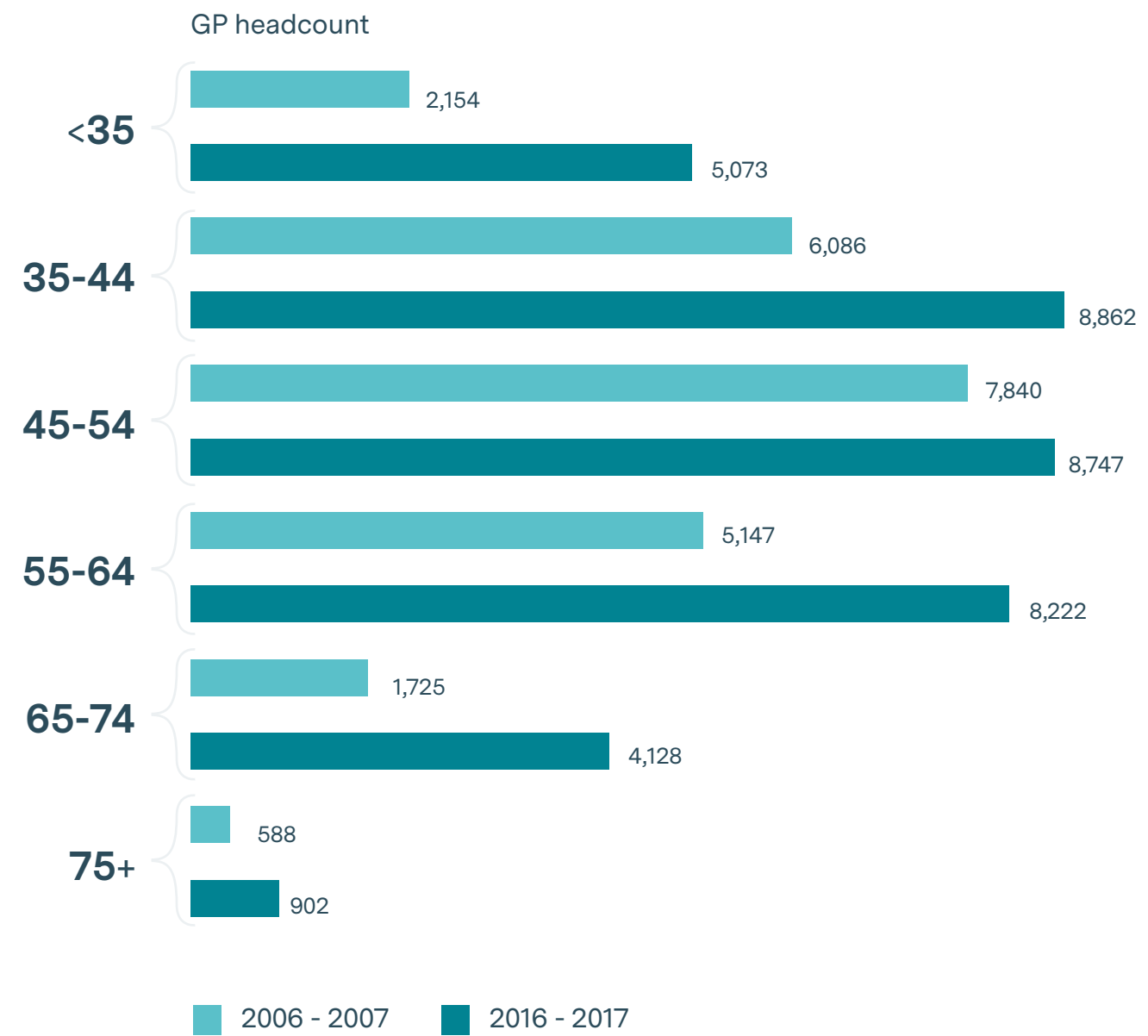


GP headcount per 100,000 population¹³



Practitioner ages

GP age groups¹⁵



There is a strong potential for an oversupply of younger GPs in Australia.

The number of GPs aged under 35 years in Australia has grown by 135% in the last decade. However, this age bracket still only represents 14% of the national GP population.

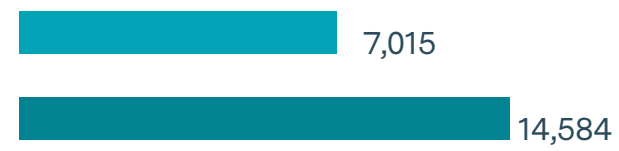
Short-term pain for long-term gain

Despite the potential for an oversupply of younger GPs, having a strong supply of GPs in general is critical when caring for Australia's ageing population, especially when you consider that GP visits increase with age. Almost one third of the number of people aged 85 years and over saw a GP 12 or more times in 12 months.¹⁶



Practitioner - place of qualification

GP's Qualified Overseas¹⁷



GP's Qualified Domestically¹⁷



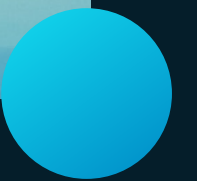
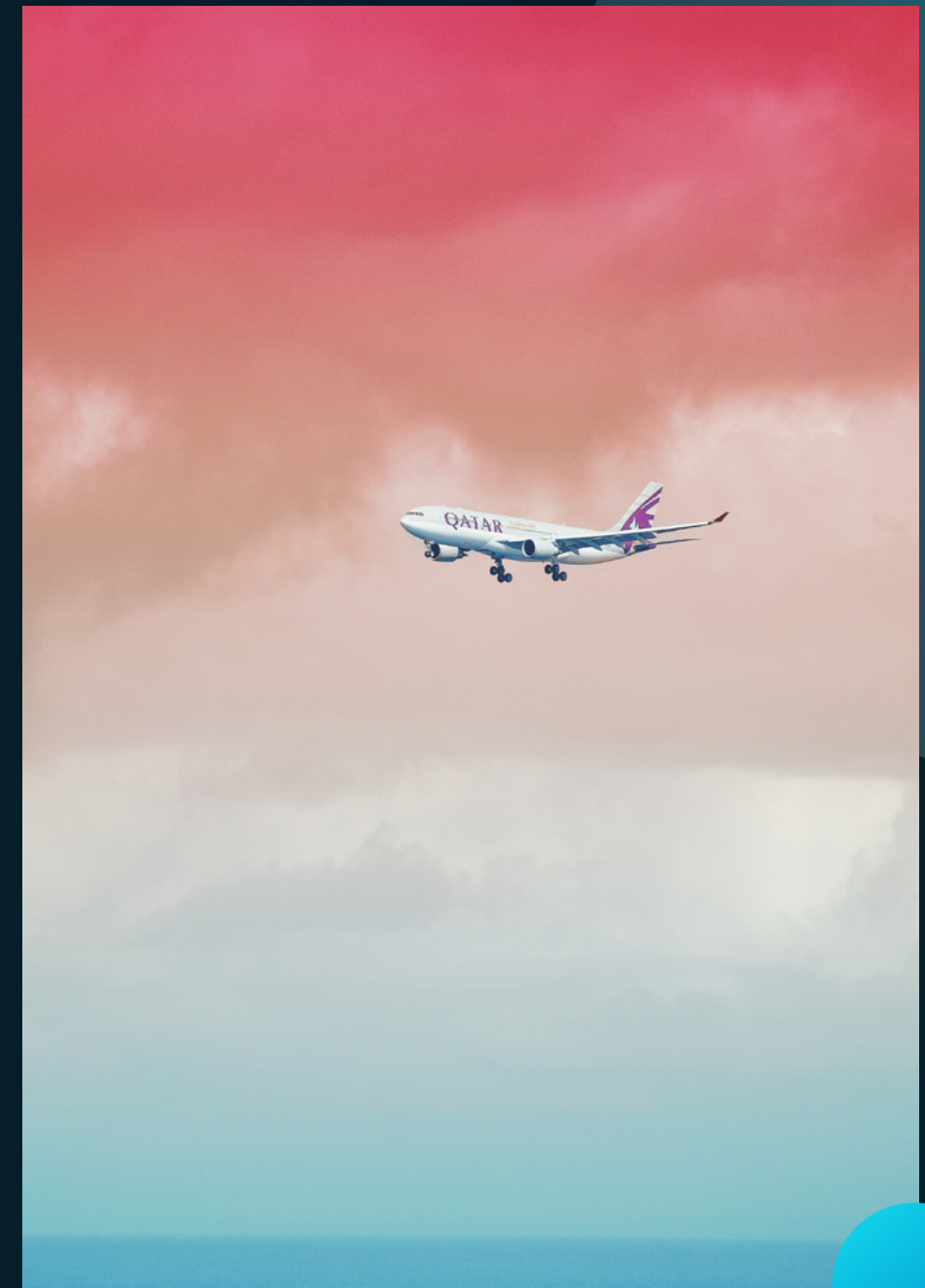
■ 2006 - 2007 ■ 2016 - 2017



Place of qualification

The number of overseas-born doctors and nurses in Australia has increased in recent years, with the number of overseas trained GPs doubling in the last decade.

In 2011, more than half of GPs (56%) and just under half of specialists (47%) were born overseas.¹⁸



Practitioner location: remote vs very remote¹⁹

Remote:

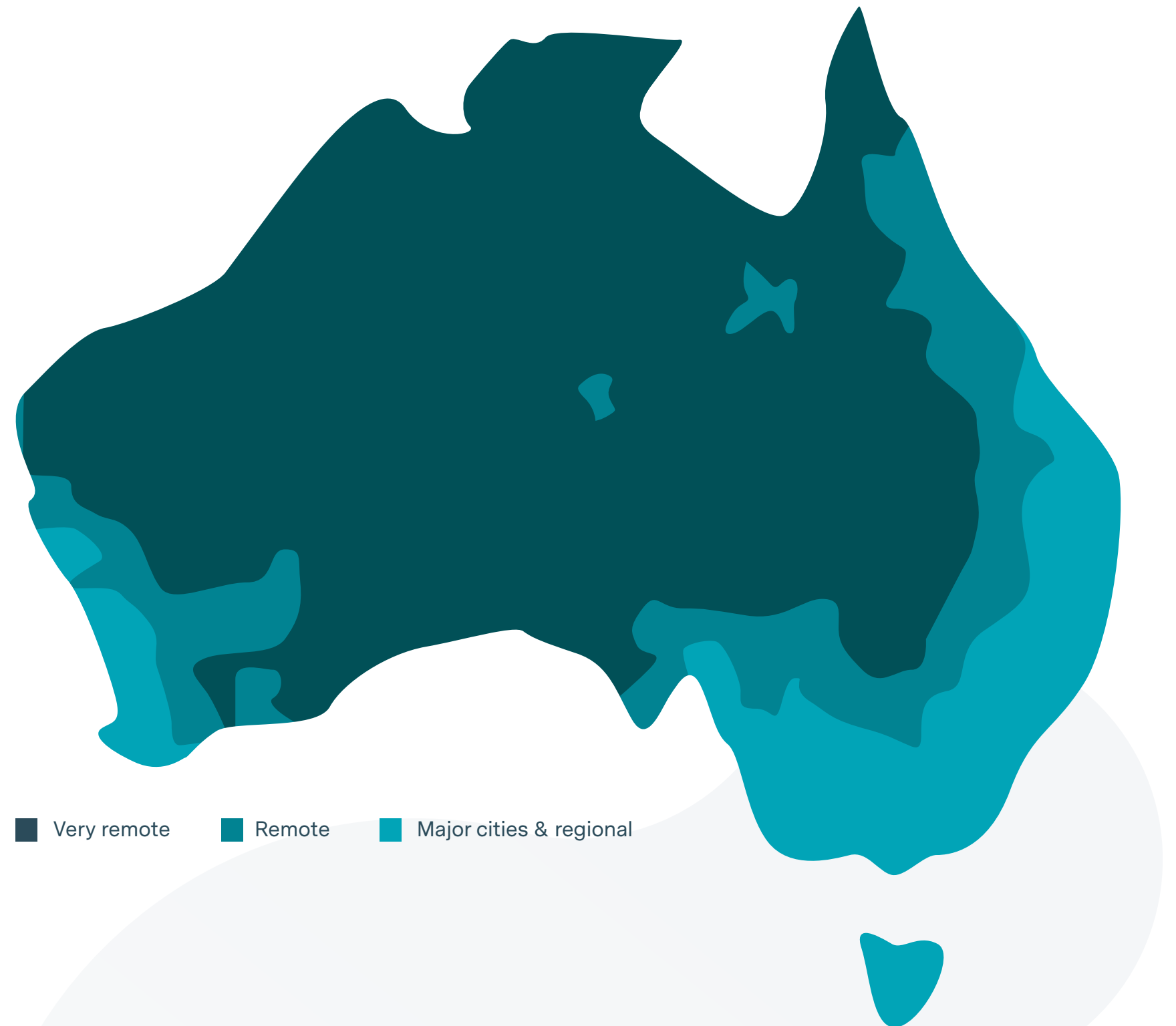
GP head count is rising: **664 from 430** 10 years ago

GP head count per 100,000 population: **207.9 from 141.7**

Very remote:

GP head count rising: **718 from 352**

GP head count per population: **354.7 from 191.8**²⁰



Despite growing GP numbers, the future remains uncertain for rural generalism

According to the RACGP, around 40% of doctors in rural areas are international medical graduates.²¹ This is due to domestic graduates preferring to work in the major cities and the fact that doctors who qualified overseas are required by RACGP to undergo specialist training (including GP training) in rural areas.

With the numbers of GPs in both remote and very remote areas rising, one might assume the future is looking bright. However, due to the potential oversupply of domestically trained doctors, the Government is looking to restrict immigration to ensure domestic graduates have jobs. This has the potential to lead to an undersupply of GPs in both remote and very remote areas, as mentioned in RACGP's 2017 Health of the Nation report:

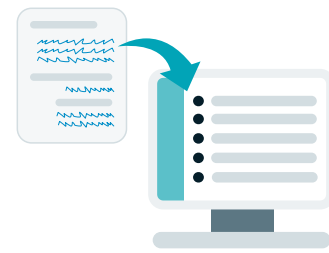
“If current growth trends continue and retirement intentions are acted upon, the general practice workforce is also likely to be much more concentrated in major cities and less prominent in regional, rural and remote areas.”²²



GP technology adoption



Three in four practices said that leveraging technology and communication channels improves the quality of care they are able to provide to patients.²³



Only a small number of practices (15%) maintain and add data to a paper-based record system in addition to their clinical information system.²⁴



85% are looking to boost their tech budgets in the next two years to support their business objectives – including one in five who are planning a significant increase.²⁵

Technology adoption on the rise

Technology uptake among GPs continues to rise, with many embracing new digital technology to improve the level of care they can provide to their patients.

This can be seen in the RACGP 2017 Technology Survey, which showed that 80% of GPs are satisfied with the way they use technology in their patient-oriented²⁶ work (up from 71% in 2016).

GPs are increasingly incorporating technology as part of patient care which is important when you consider that 89% of patients expect to be able to book and manage their appointments online.²⁷

“General practice is well placed to benefit from technology innovations to improve patient and population health, and to lead the development, testing and implementation of new technologies connecting patients and healthcare providers.”

Dr Nathan Pinskier, Chair RACGP Expert Committee – eHealth and Practice Systems





Practices are benefiting from technology

Practices are also switching to digital technology to optimise their processes and replace manual, paper-based systems.

85% are looking to boost their tech budgets in the next two years to support their business objectives – including one in five who are planning a significant increase.²⁸

Competitive edge

As stated in Commbank's GP Insights report from April 2018, "patient expectations and the availability of practice technology are not always aligned. This presents an opportunity for practices to gain an edge over their competitors by investing in digital channels that align with patient expectations and demands".

There are still barriers

As stated in the 2017 RACGP Technology Survey, the perceived barriers for technology adoption include lack of integration with IT systems, issues related to patient confidentiality and privacy, lack of funding, implementation costs and lack of integration with current processes or procedures.²⁹

GP perceptions of patient tech adoption

GPs have identified the importance of patient feedback to not only understand and resolve any current issues within their practice, but also as a way to identify changes to patient expectations.

When asked how patient expectations have changed in the past two years, most practices cited increased patient demand for proactive reminders for tests and checkups (87%) and digital services to book, pay, order scripts and provide feedback online (84%). Practices also said that patients want access to better appointment management solutions (80%). In addition, 86% of practices were aware that patients increasingly want their own health opinions to be acknowledged and respected, as new technology puts more health information at their fingertips.³⁰

What does this mean for practices?

Patients are more likely to attend a practice that offers digital services, in particular those that enable them to manage their health information, book their appointments and communicate with their GP.





Patients of General Practices



Patient overview

Despite the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2014–15 National Health Survey (NHS), showing 85% of Australians aged 15 and over report their health as ‘good’ or better, chronic diseases such as cancer, coronary heart disease and diabetes are becoming increasingly common in Australia.³¹

In 2014–15, based on self-reported data from the NHS, more than 11 million Australians (50%) had at least one of eight selected chronic conditions (arthritis, asthma, back problems, cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cardiovascular disease, diabetes mellitus, or a mental or behavioural condition).³²

Key takeaways

Due to Australia’s ageing population, and social & lifestyle changes, chronic conditions are on the rise placing more and more reliance on GPs.

As our population ages alongside the rise of chronic disease, GPs have an even more critical role in ensuring increased pressure on our healthcare system doesn’t jeopardise the quality of care in Australia.³³

Patient appointment volumes

Total NRA services have been on the rise over the last 10 years.³⁴

National



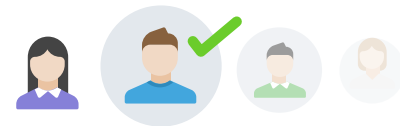
Key takeaways

The number of non-referred attendances across Australia is on the rise, adding to an already increasing demand on GPs.

Patient loyalty



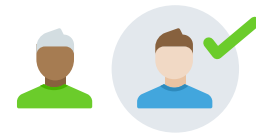
Eight in ten people (83%) saw a GP in the last 12 months.³⁵



78% of patients have a preferred regular GP.³⁶



93% of Australians always go to the same general practice.³⁷



98% of people aged 45 and over have a usual GP.³⁸

Key takeaways

Despite there being more choice and more competition than ever before, patients are remaining loyal to their GPs. If possible, they will continue to visit the same practitioner, at the same practice.

The family effect



18.6% of bookings through HealthEngine are made on behalf of someone else.³⁹



34% of HealthEngine users are parents of a child under 18.³⁹



25% of all bookings made on HealthEngine are for those 45+ years old (up from 15% in 2013).³⁹

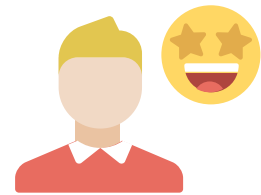


70% of bookings made using HealthEngine on someone else's behalf are for those aged under 18.³⁹

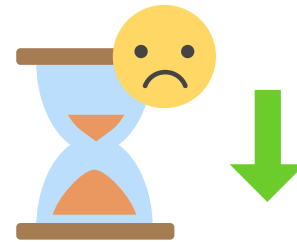
Key takeaways

The relationship between a patient and a GP is not always 1:1. It often involves multiple family members being involved in GP appointments, resulting in more patients for the GP.

Patient satisfaction with GPs



95% of patients claimed to be satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of care provided by GPs.⁴⁰



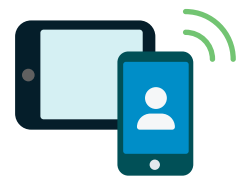
The proportion of people waiting longer than they felt acceptable for a GP appointment decreased from 23% in 2013-14 to 18% in 2016-17.⁴¹

Key takeaways

GPs provide high quality primary care services across the country.

This is best reflected in the latest *Patient Experiences in Australia Survey* by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), which states, “of those patients who saw a GP in the last 12 months, 92% reported that the GP always or often listened carefully to them, 94% reported that their GP always or often showed them respect, and 90.6% reported that their GP always or often spent enough time with them.”

Patient technology adoption



According to the majority of patients surveyed⁴², the most appealing forms of digital communications include:

- Notifications around appointment delays (92%)
- Appointment reminders via SMS or email (91%)
- Book and manage appointments online (89%)

81% of patients agree that technology and communication channels help deliver a better customer experience.⁴³

63% of consumers say technology is important to managing their health.⁴⁴

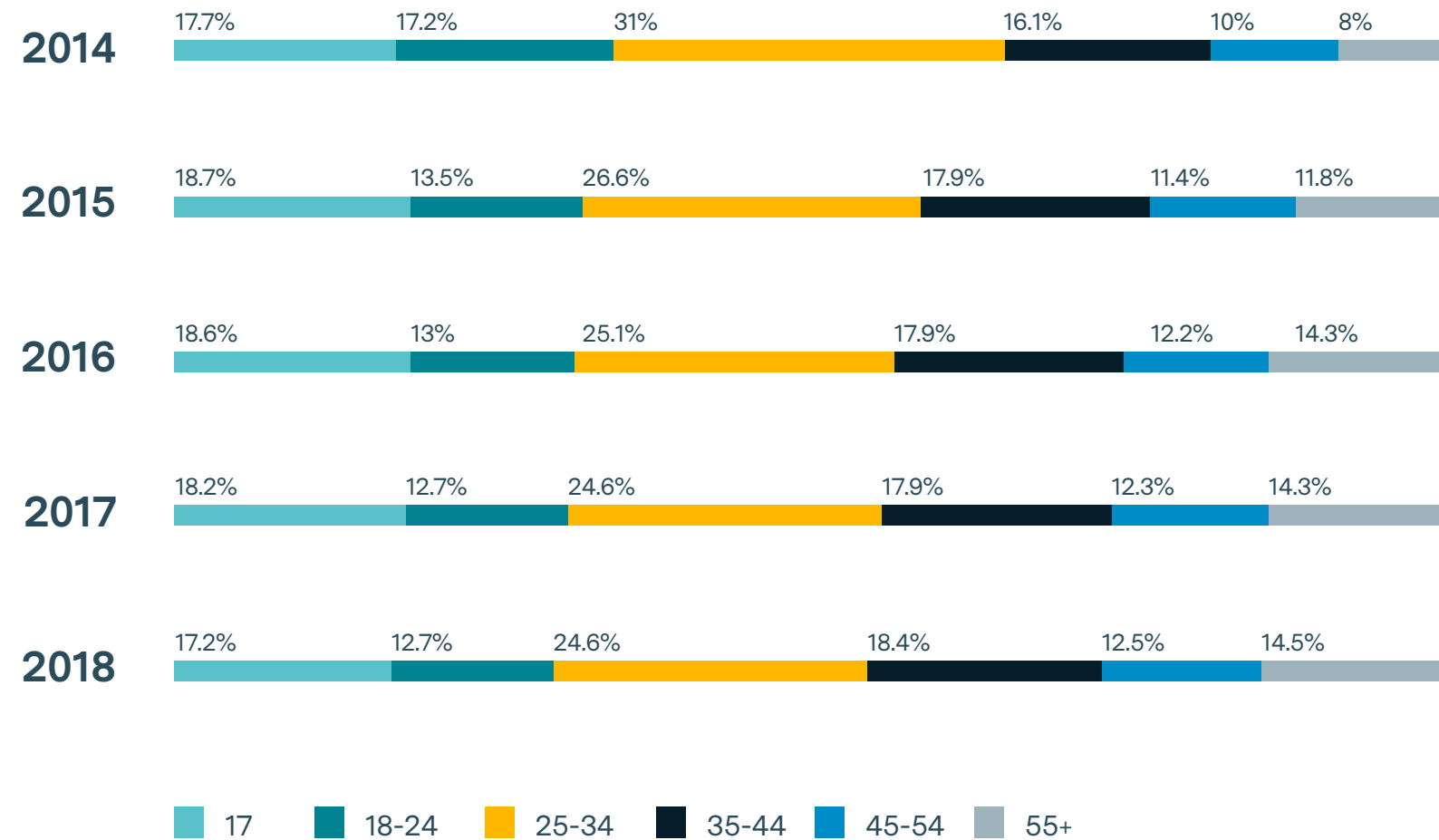
Key takeaways

“With patients now accustomed to a very high quality of care, we are seeing other factors such as technology and digital communications playing a bigger role in shaping what Australians expect from their GPs. This is particularly true for the younger generations, with 92% of Gen Z agreeing that adopting the latest technology delivers a better practice experience, falling to 72% for Baby Boomers and just 64% for Pre-Boomers.”⁴⁵

Cameron Ziebell, National Head of Healthcare, Commonwealth Bank

Booking age data

Percentage of bookings made on HealthEngine by age.⁴⁶



Key takeaways

Over the last 4 years, surprisingly, the percentage of 17-34 year olds making bookings has decreased (by -.5%, -4.5% and -6.4% respectively)

Even more surprising is the fact that the percentage of 35 year olds and upwards has increased (by +2.3%, +2.5% and +6.5% respectively). The most dramatic rise is in the 55+ age group. This shows a growing adoption of technology among older generations in Australia.

Serious about data security



Although Australia is a predominantly tech-savvy country with high use of smartphones, digital payments, online shopping and other digital technologies, there is a general lack of digital healthcare data literacy.⁴⁷



Only 42% of Australians understand digital healthcare data security.⁴⁸

Physicians and healthcare providers are the most trusted entity to keep patient data secure.⁴⁹

Key takeaways

Data security is still a key issue when it comes to the adoption of digital technology. Patients need to trust their GPs to keep their personal health information safe and GPs need to have the same level of trust in the technology they're using.

Conclusion

Short-term pain for long-term gain

The number of GPs operating across Australia continues to grow and is currently outpacing population growth. However, despite the potential for an oversupply of GPs - especially younger GPs - there may not be reason to worry.

Due to Australia's ageing population, and social & lifestyle changes, chronic conditions are on the rise which is placing more and more reliance on GPs. And, considering that the number of GP visits increase with age, having a strong supply of GPs is critical going forward.

Rise and fall

The number of GPs continues to rise while the number of practices continues to decline. This is partially due to a decrease in practice ownership, as more GPs are choosing to join large medical centres and clinics.

The decrease in practice ownership also signals a potential rise in corporate ownership with corporate practices estimated to now make up 10-15% of all practices.

The number of appointments per FSE is decreasing. This is mainly due to increased GP supply brought about by the opening of new medical schools in the 2000's, which contributed to a doubling in the number of new medical graduates.

A future of digitised healthcare

Technology uptake among GPs continues to rise with many embracing new digital technology to improve the level of care they can provide to their patients.

With patients more likely to attend a practice that offers digital services, GPs need to continue to embrace technology to:

- Meet patient expectations
- Be more efficient
- Be competitive in the market
- Offer patient-centric care

Serious about security

Although technology adoption is on the rise among both GPs and patients, data security is still a key issue. Patients need to trust their GPs to keep their personal health information safe and GPs need to have the same level of trust in the technology they're using.



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