



Fact File

The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia

**Australian Pathologist Workforce 2018
General Pathology**

AUSTRALIAN PATHOLOGIST WORKFORCE – GENERAL PATHOLOGY

Overview

A General Pathologist is familiar with the major aspects of all branches of laboratory medicine. A General Pathologist is usually trained in anatomical pathology, cytology, chemical pathology, microbiology, haematology and transfusion serology/medicine, though not in as much detail as subspecialists in each field. A general pathologist would usually work in a medium sized private practice, community hospital or a large country town or other non-metropolitan centre. For problems demanding specific expertise they would consult with more specialised colleagues.

Some, however, also work as part of the team in large metropolitan public or private practices particularly in managing common high volume tests from more than one discipline.

Workforce profile and trends

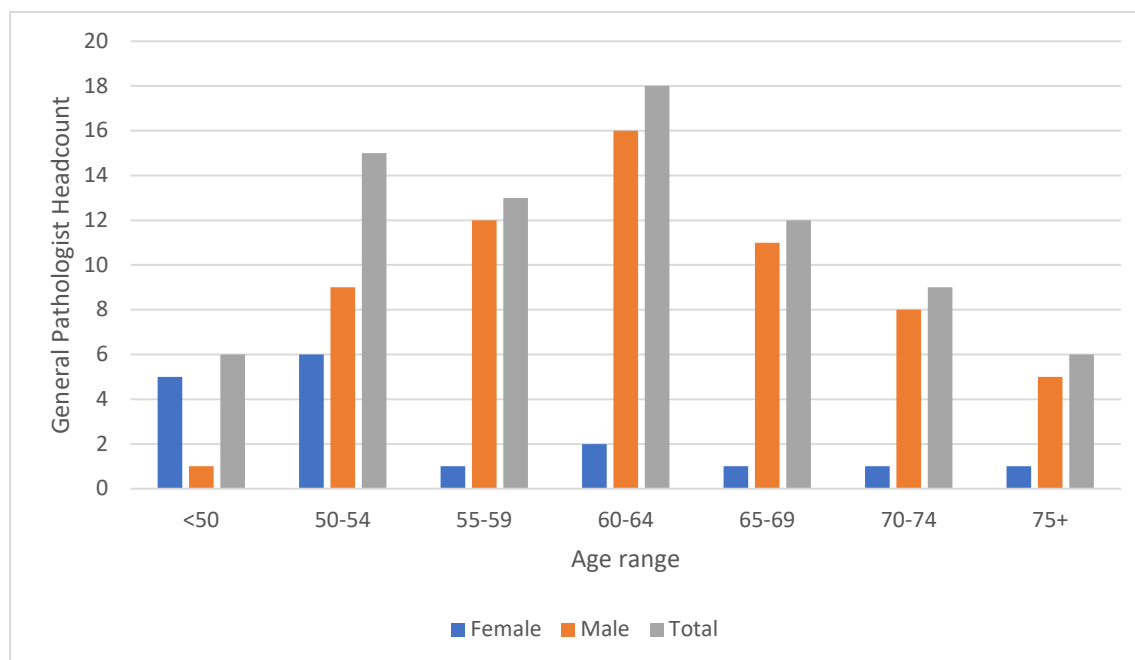
In 2011, the General Pathologist workforce totalled 93 individuals (5.7% of the total national Pathologist workforce). In 2016, the headcount was 79 practitioners (4.1% of the total Australian Pathology workforce in 2016). The decline in workforce size was 3.0% per annum on average

Table 1: General Pathologist Workforce, 2016, Age and Sex Profile

Age Group	Headcount			Percentage	Percentage
	Female	Male	Total	by Age	Female by Age
< 39 years	3	1	4	5.1%	75.0%
40-44	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
45-49	2	0	2	2.5%	100.0%
50-54	6	9	15	19.0%	40.0%
55-59	1	12	13	16.5%	7.7%
60-64	2	16	18	22.8%	11.1%
65-69	1	11	12	15.2%	8.3%
70+	2	13	15	19.0%	13.3%
Total	17	62	79	100.0%	21.5%
55 years and older	6	52	58		
% 55 years and older	35.3%	83.9%	73.4%		

Source: RCPA data base, 2016

Figure 1: General Pathologist Workforce, 2016, Age and Sex Profile



Source: RCPA data base, 2016

The above Table 1 and Figure 1 show that the modal age-range for the workforce is 60 to 64 years, for the female workforce is 50 to 54 years, and for the male workforce is 60 to 64 years. This shows the aged profile of the workforce. There are no members of this discipline aged 40 to 44 years. Females are in the majority up to 50 to 54 years. Males are in the majority for all age cohorts 50 years and over.

Nearly three quarters of the workforce is 55 years or older (73.4%), with 35.3% of females in this age range, and over eighty percent of males (83.9%). This profile has significant implications for the retirement of a very large proportion of the workforce in the next ten years. However, 24.2% of the workforce is aged 65 and older, so that 27 General Pathologists nationally will retire in a much shorter time frame. This has major implications for the sustainability of the General Pathologist workforce.

Trends in trainee numbers

General Pathology trainees increased from six to nine trainees over the period 2011 to 2015 and then declined to five trainees in 2016. This was overall a decline of 16.7% over the period.

Workforce demand and supply

There was discussion and varying views regarding the future role of General Pathologists. Sub-specialisation has resulted in General Pathology being a less attractive career option for trainees. The recent revisions to NPAAC Laboratory Supervision Requirements have stipulated that pathology laboratories will be required to employ people with expertise in the areas where they are providing services. Most laboratories perform testing in Anatomical Pathology, Chemical Pathology, Microbiology and Haematology, which would require employing four specialists, or the alternative of one General Pathologist. Advice was provided that this meets accreditation requirements and regulations regarding claiming against the MBS, and would provide coverage of clinical disciplines in medium and smaller laboratories.

General Pathology is a versatile profession and specialists often go into management roles particularly in private laboratories. The ageing of the Senior Scientist workforce is increasing pressure on General Pathologists to supervise and manage laboratories.

General Pathology was identified as having an important role at a local/regional level, overseeing medium and smaller laboratories and providing an advisory role to General Practitioners in particular. Where complex issues arise outside the knowledge and skill base of the General Pathologist, links to urban providers within the private sector provides this expertise.

The three demand drivers of genetic testing, complexity of testing and the value-adding role were all scored as high demand drivers both for services and the workforce. Population change, cancer incidence and prevalence and technological innovation were identified as medium drivers for services and the workforce. The only low level demand driver was efficiency improvements.

In relation to supply issues, there are currently seven or eight trainees across Australia. Training is demanding as trainees have to have experience in the different disciplines. The ageing workforce is a concern for future supply levels as well as training capacity. As a result, the discipline is experiencing difficulties filling positions.

In relation to training, General Pathology is similar to other generalist specialties where trainees will be working in regional locations in small to medium sized laboratories, so training is best suited to these locations and breadth of work that they will be performing. Specialist Training Program (STP) funding is being used to support training posts in regional areas and Queensland Health also has training places for General Pathologist trainees. There are limitations to training in some subdisciplines of General Pathology in rural areas as there is not the appropriate level of supervision.

It was proposed that a regional workforce strategy is needed to support the sustainability of regional laboratories, particularly in light of the anticipated NPAAC requirements. There is a need to consider the strategy of a regional training pipeline like other generalist programs (e.g. general physician and rural medical generalist programs). The NPAAC requirements will be implemented in the next three to five years and there is a need to be ready for these developments for General Pathologists and Senior Scientists.

Workforce Projections

A High Scenario growth was based on growth in MBS items and a rate of 3.8% was used.

In relation to the Low Scenario demand rate based on workforce graphs as the initial change in workforce numbers between 2011 and 2016 was negative, declining from 93 to 79 General Pathologists, given the feedback regarding the need for more General Pathologists, the assumptions were modified to allow for the Low Scenario ACGR to be set at zero.

Results of projection modelling

Figure 2: Results of Projection Modelling for General Pathologist Workforce, High Scenario (Service Demand)

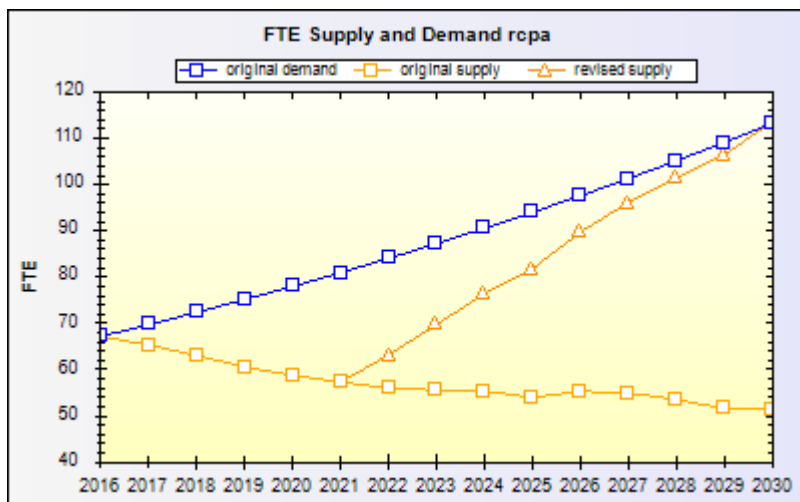


Figure 3: Results of Projection Modelling for General Pathologist Workforce, Low Scenario (Workforce Demand)

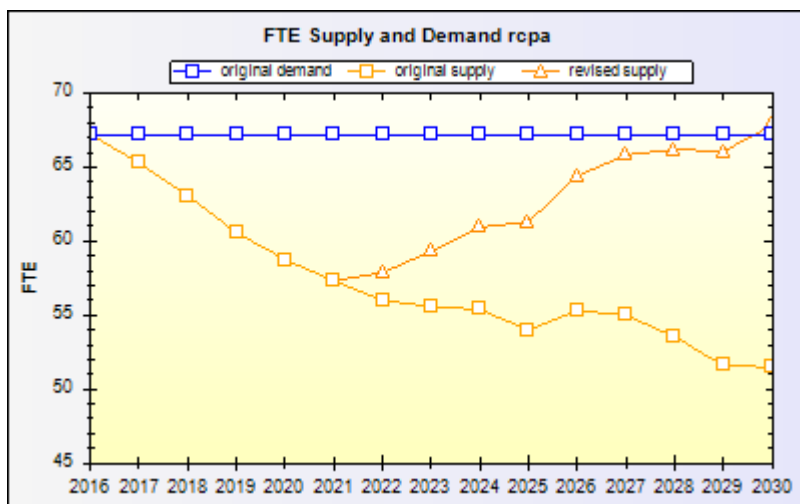


Table 2: Results of Workforce Modelling for General Pathologist Workforce

	Trainees				
	Base Year	Low Scenario	High Scenario	Gap Low Scenario	Gap High Scenario
	2016	2030	2030	2030	2030
General Pathology	2	4	10	2	8
Total six disciplines	97	151	238	54	141
Total Australian Workforce	100	170	192	70	92
	New Fellows				
General Pathology	2	4	9	2	7
Total six disciplines	87	138	213	51	126
Total Australian Workforce	90	153	173	63	83

There was wide variation between the two demand assumptions used in the modelling. However, for both scenarios demand is higher than supply as shown in Figures 2 and 3. There is a need to increase trainee commencements and new fellows from two to four in the Low Scenario and from two to ten trainee commencements and nine new fellows under the High Scenario (See Table 2).