Occupational Therapy Australia

Occupational Therapy National Workforce Data Report

August 2023



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1. Introduction

In 2023 OTA commissioned a significant workforce development project which aimed to formulate a workforce development plan in partnership with the occupational therapy profession. This report provides details of the data analysis that was provided to OTA. This analysis was prepared for the purpose of understanding the key trends across the Occupational Therapy (OT) workforce for the development of the Occupational Therapy Australia (OTA) Workforce Plan. This report is a summary of the key data findings; it is not intended to be an in-depth analysis but has supported an understanding of broad trends and key issues for the profession which informed the national workforce survey and the stakeholder consultation phases of the OTA Workforce Development Project. While every attempt has been made to ensure accuracy of the data in this report, discrepancies in OT workforce numbers have been identified across multiple data sets and sources that were accessed.

2. Occupational Therapy Globally

Occupational Therapy is a recognised profession across a large number (almost 100) countries globally. According to the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) (table 2.1), there were 24,700 practicing OTs in Australia in 2022, which ranks 5th in the world by headcount, and 10th in the world by head of population.

Table 2-1: World Federation of Occupational Therapists: Measures - 2022

WFOT 2022 Measures	Count	World ranking
Number of Practicing Occupational Therapists	24,700	5th
Number of Occupational Therapists per 10,000 head of population	10	6th
Number of WFOT Approved Education Programmes	60	5th
Number of students studying in WFOT approved education programmes	9,800	3rd

Source: World Federation of Occupational Therapists, Human Resources Project 2022.
https://www.dropbox.com/preview/OT%20Australia/Data%20Analysis/WFOT-Human-Resources-Project-2022-NUM- Final.pdf

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3. Australian Occupational Therapy Workforce Demographics

Occupational Therapists as a professional group, form a major part of the Australian health care workforce. The most recent workforce data reported by the OT Board of Australia (table 3.1), demonstrates in March 2023 there were 29,473 registered OTs in Australia. The states of NSW, Victoria and Queensland report the highest numbers of registered OTs at 7,884, 7,572 and 6,042 respectively.

In 2021, there were 26,904 registered OTs in Australia (table 3.2). From 2013 to 2021, the numbers of registered OTs increased in every state and territory with Victoria and the ACT recording the highest growth rates at 179% per head of population. Western Australia had the highest per head of population rates at 133 OTs per 100,000 people.

In 2021, according to the National Health Workforce Dataset, there were 23,346 Occupational Therapists which formed 3.5% of the total registered health care workforce in Australia (table 3.4). In comparison, nurses and midwives formed more than half of the total national workforce at 54.7%, followed by medical practitioners and physiotherapists at 16.2% and 4.8% respectively. Out of 15 registered health professionals in Australia, OTs ranked the 6th highest group by volume of registered health professionals (table 3.4).

Table 3-1: Occupational Therapists by State

Source	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	OTH	Total
National Health Workforce Data 2021	449	7,288	237	5,511	2,153	390	6,900	3,694	282	26,904
OT Board March 2023	475	7,884	243	6,042	2,354	424	7,572	4,034	445	29,473

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Table 3-2: Occupational Therapists by State 2013 – 2021

Source	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	% 13-21
ACT	251	274	317	339	365	368	392	417	449	179%
NSW	4,414	4,728	5,067	5,337	5,671	6,004	6,521	6,916	7,288	165%
NT	138	158	171	182	186	200	203	211	237	172%
QLD	3,121	3,294	3,499	3,740	4,008	4,307	4,704	5,079	5,511	177%
SA	1,272	1,344	1,413	1,489	1,546	1,664	1,796	1,945	2,153	169%
TAS	260	276	286	295	309	313	341	365	390	150%
VIC	3,859	4,066	4,423	4,727	5,049	5,565	6,064	6,471	6,900	179%
WA	2,327	2,473	2,606	2,713	2,798	2,933	3,207	3,444	3,694	159%
Other territories	127	144	147	179	213	215	252	275	282	222%
Total	15,769	16,757	17,929	19,001	20,145	21,569	23,480	25,123	26,904	141%

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

Table 3-3: Occupational Therapists Per State Per 100,000 Population

Source	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	% 13-21
ACT	65	71	81	83	88	87	90	94	99	152%
NSW	59	62	66	68	72	75	81	85	89	151%
NT	57	65	70	74	75	81	82	85	95	167%
QLD	67	69	73	77	81	85	92	97	104	156%
SA	76	79	83	87	89	95	102	109	119	157%
TAS	51	54	55	57	59	59	63	66	69	137%
VIC	67	69	74	76	79	85	92	98	104	156%
WA	91	96	100	106	108	113	121	127	133	146%
Total	68	71	75	78	81	86	92	98	104	153%

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

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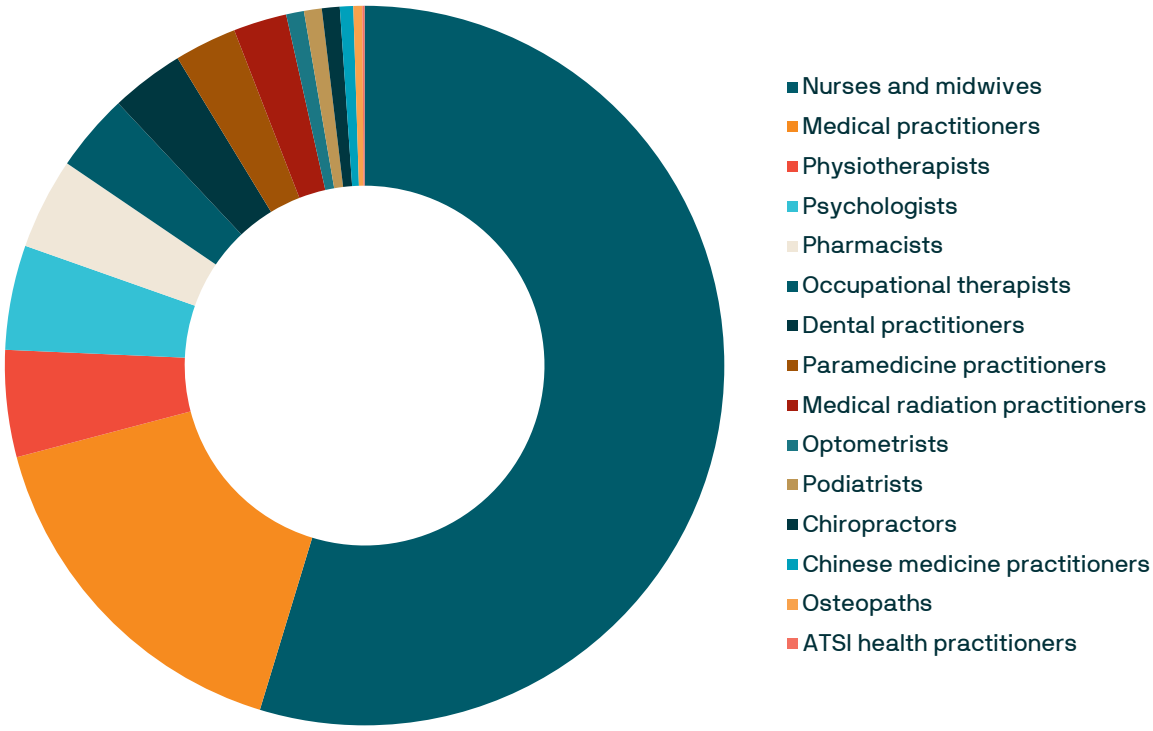
Table 3-4: Registered Australian Health Workforce Groups

Workforce group	2021	% of total
Nurses and midwives	366,696	54.7%
Medical practitioners	108,501	16.2%
Physiotherapists	32,376	4.8%
Psychologists	31,431	4.7%
Pharmacists	27,744	4.1%
Occupational therapists	23,346	3.5%
Dental practitioners	22,039	3.3%
Paramedicine practitioners	18,718	2.8%
Medical radiation practitioners	16,088	2.4%
Optometrists	5,686	0.8%
Podiatrists	5,253	0.8%
Chiropractors	5,226	0.8%
Chinese medicine practitioners	3,952	0.6%
Osteopaths	2,721	0.4%
ATSI health practitioners	639	0.1%
Total	670,416	100.0%

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

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Figure 3-1: Practitioner Count - 2021



Occupational Therapists as a professional group are a predominantly female and young workforce (table 3-5, 3.6), with more than half of the total workforce being under 34 years of age. In the last decade, there has been a small but increasing representation of males in the OT workforce, though this percentage is small and sits at approximately 10%. In comparison to nursing and midwifery[2], OTs are a younger workforce. In comparison to other allied health professions, OTs are slightly younger than their physiotherapy counterparts, and demonstrate a younger age profile to psychologists who have a more even workforce distribution across the first 3 decades of work.

Table 3-5: Occupational Therapists by Gender

Gender	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Male	8.3%	8.4%	8.5%	8.6%	8.8%	9.1%	9.3%	9.5%	9.9%
Female	91.7%	91.6%	91.5%	91.4%	91.2%	90.9%	90.7%	90.5%	90.1%
Not stated	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

[2] Nursing and midwifery workforce used as a comparison given its large representation in the Australian health workforce. Physiotherapy cited given traditional comparisons between the professions, psychology cited given the increasing representation of OTs in the mental health sector.

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Table 3-6: Occupational Therapists by Age

Age	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
20-34	52.8%	52.5%	52.3%	51.7%	51.2%	51.5%	51.3%	51.1%	51.5%
35-44	24.7%	24.9%	25.1%	25.4%	25.5%	25.6%	25.7%	25.9%	25.7%
45-54	14.6%	14.5%	14.4%	14.6%	14.8%	14.5%	14.5%	14.5%	14.4%
55-64	7.0%	7.2%	7.2%	7.2%	7.2%	7.3%	7.2%	7.2%	7.1%
65-74	0.9%	1.0%	1.0%	1.1%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.3%	1.3%
75-99	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

Table 3-7: Physiotherapists by Age

Age	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
20-34	47.1%	47.4%	47.8%	47.7%	47.8%	48.3%	48.7%	48.9%	48.8%
35-44	23.2%	23.3%	23.1%	23.3%	23.3%	23.4%	23.6%	24.0%	24.5%
45-54	16.9%	16.3%	15.8%	15.8%	15.5%	15.1%	14.7%	14.4%	14.1%
55-64	10.4%	10.6%	10.7%	10.7%	10.8%	10.6%	10.3%	9.9%	9.5%
65-74	2.2%	2.2%	2.2%	2.2%	2.3%	2.3%	2.5%	2.6%	2.8%
75-99	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

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Table 3-8: Nurses and Midwives by Age

Age	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
20-34	25.9%	26.7%	27.4%	28.4%	29.5%	30.7%	31.6%	32.5%	32.9%
35-44	23.3%	22.7%	22.1%	21.7%	21.4%	21.1%	21.2%	21.8%	22.5%
45-54	27.0%	25.9%	25.0%	24.2%	23.5%	22.7%	21.9%	21.2%	20.6%
55-64	20.4%	21.0%	21.5%	21.6%	21.4%	21.0%	20.5%	19.7%	18.9%
65-74	3.2%	3.5%	3.7%	3.9%	4.1%	4.3%	4.5%	4.7%	4.9%
75-99	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

Table 3-9: Psychologists by Age

Age	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
20-34	22.7%	22.3%	21.6%	20.9%	20.6%	19.8%	20.0%	19.6%	20.0%
35-44	27.7%	28.2%	28.3%	28.4%	28.7%	28.7%	28.6%	28.0%	28.6%
45-54	22.4%	22.1%	22.1%	22.7%	22.9%	23.5%	24.0%	23.8%	24.8%
55-64	19.8%	19.5%	19.2%	18.8%	18.1%	17.9%	17.2%	16.6%	16.3%
65-74	6.8%	7.3%	8.1%	8.5%	8.7%	8.8%	8.9%	10.2%	8.6%
75-99	0.6%	0.6%	0.7%	0.8%	0.9%	1.1%	1.3%	1.8%	1.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

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Indigenous OTs have increased by 30% from 2013 to 2021, though numbers remain small at 217 Indigenous OTs in Australia (table 3.9). The percentage of Indigenous OTs in Australia is 0.81% which is marginally higher that Indigenous physiotherapists at 0.77% and lower than indigenous nurses at 1.6%. These percentages are below the percentages of the Indigenous population in Australia.

Table 3-10: Indigenous Occupational Therapists

Indigenous OTs	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Indigenous	67	76	83	82	94	119	150	172	217
Not Indigenous	15,667	16,645	17,807	18,883	20,033	21,447	23,330	24,950	26,683
Not stated	35	36	39	36	18	3	0	0	4
Total	15,769	16,757	17,969	19,001	20,145	21,569	23,480	25,123	26,904

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

Table 3-11: Indigenous Occupational Therapists Compared with Other Health Professions

Indigenous OTs	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Indigenous	0.42%	0.45%	0.46%	0.43%	0.47%	0.55%	0.64%	0.68%	0.81%
Not Indigenous	99.35%	99.33%	99.32%	99.38%	99.44%	99.43%	99.36%	99.31%	99.18%
Not stated	0.22%	0.21%	0.22%	0.19%	0.09%	0.01%	0.00%	0.00%	0.01%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Indigenous % Physio	0.51%	0.51%	0.57%	0.56%	0.68%	0.73%	0.75%	0.74%	0.77%
Indigenous % Nurses	0.90%	1.01%	1.05%	1.11%	1.19%	1.33%	1.43%	1.49%	1.59%

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

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4. Years Worked

In 2021, Occupational therapists spent an average of 11.2 years practicing as an OT, with the mean value being 9.0 years worked (table 4.1). Over the 8-year period of 2013 to 2021, average and median years worked have remained largely static. When compared to physiotherapy, nursing, and all health workforce groups (tables 4.2, 4.3, 4.4), the average and median years worked for OTs is less (by up to an average of 4 years). There are a range of factors that may likely contribute to this, including the younger age of the profession, and the increasing national OT programs coming on line.

Table 4-1: Years Worked – Occupational Therapists

Occupational Therapist	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Average	11.2	11.5	11.7	11.7	11.6	11.6	11.6	11.5	11.2
Median	8.9	9.3	9.6	9.6	9.6	9.5	9.5	9.3	9.0

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

Table 4-2: Years Worked – Physiotherapists

Physiotherapists	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Average	13.3	13.5	13.4	13.4	13.4	13.3	13.3	13.2	13.0
Median	10.3	10.4	10.3	10.3	10.3	10.3	10.3	10.2	10.0

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

Table 4-3: Years Worked – All Health Workforce Groups (Except Nurses and Midwives)

All excl. Nurses and Midwives	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Average	15.3	15.3	15.3	15.3	15.3	15.2	15.1	15.1	14.8
Median	12.3	12.1	12.1	12.0	12.0	12.1	12.1	122.2	12.0

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

Table 4-4: Years Worked – Nurses

Nurses	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Average	17.1	16.7	16.6	16.4	15.9	15.9	15.7	15.4	15.1
Median	14.9	14.0	13.6	13.0	12.4	12.2	12.1	11.9	11.6

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

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5. Job Setting and Scope of Practice

Occupational Therapists work across a broad range of settings and sectors, and across many practice areas. In 2021, the top four settings for OTs were the hospital setting (15.5%), followed by private group practice (11.2%), community health (11.1%) and disability services (10.1%) (table 5.1).

When reviewing and grouping OTs by job settings, private practice forms approximately one quarter (25.7%) of all workforce settings and is the largest workforce setting for OTs (table 5.2).

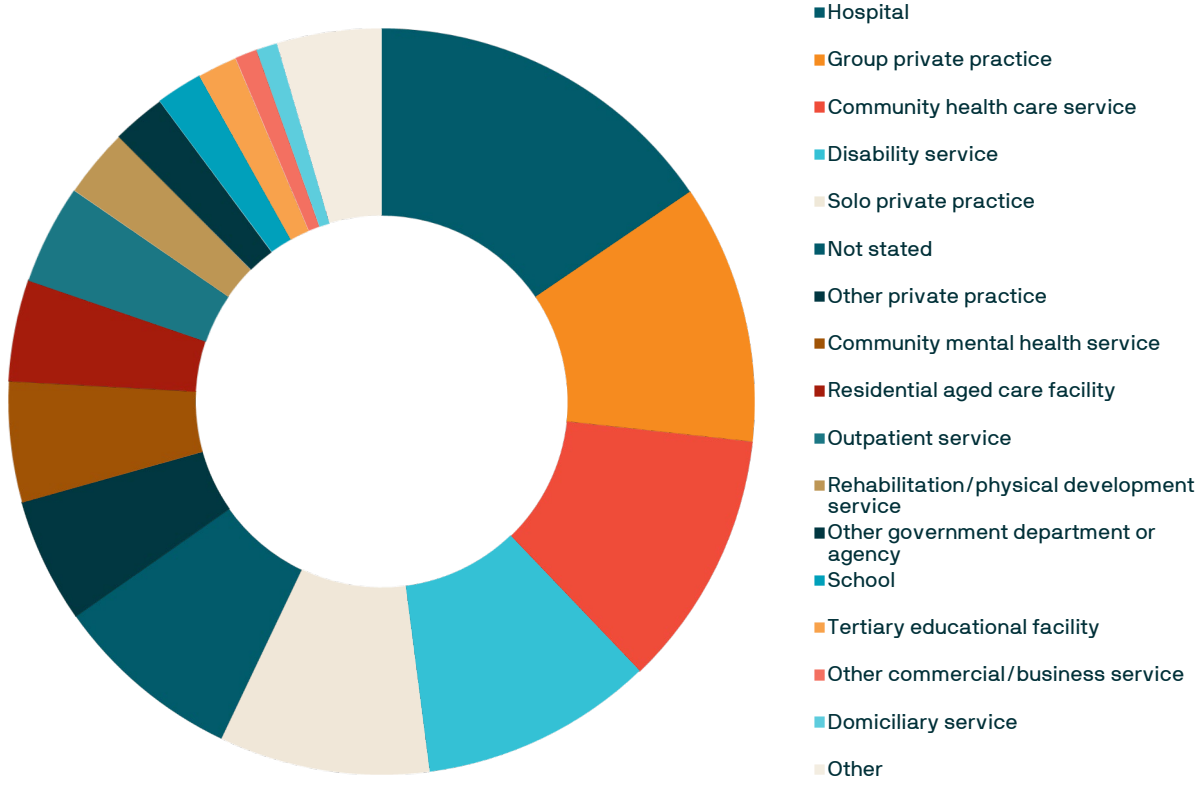
Table 5-1: Occupational Therapy Job Settings

Job setting	2021 Count	%
Hospital	4,171	15.5%
Group private practice	3,009	11.2%
Community health care service	2,990	11.1%
Disability service	2,717	10.1%
Solo private practice	2,438	9.1%
Not stated	2,210	8.2%
Other private practice	1,456	5.4%
Community mental health service	1,405	5.2%
Residential aged care facility	1,190	4.4%
Outpatient service	1,151	4.3%
Rehabilitation/physical development service	801	3.0%
Other government department or agency	630	2.3%
School	534	2.0%
Tertiary educational facility	466	1.7%
Other commercial/business service	268	1.0%
Domiciliary service	246	0.9%
Other	1,222	4.5%
Total	26,905	100.0%

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

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Figure 5-1: Occupational Therapists – Job Setting 2021



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Table 5-2: Occupational Therapists by Job Setting (Grouped)

Job setting	2021 Count	%	
Group private practice	3,009	11.2%	
Solo private practice	2,438	9.1%	25.7%
Other private practice	1,456	5.4%	
Hospital	4,171	15.5%	
Outpatient service	1,151	4.3%	22.8%
Rehabilitation/physical development service	801	3.0%	
Community health care service	2,990	11.1%	11.1%
Disability service	2,717	10.1%	10.1%
Community mental health service	1,405	5.2%	5.2%
Residential aged care facility	1,190	4.4%	4.4%
Other government department or agency	630	2.3%	2.4%
School	534	2.0%	2.0%
Tertiary educational facility	466	1.7%	1.7
Other commercial/business service	268	1.0%	
Domiciliary service	246	0.9%	14.7%
Not stated	2,210	8.2%	
Other	1,222	4.5%	
Total	26,905	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

Occupational Therapists work across a large range of practice areas and the data demonstrates some significant trends in growth and decline across these areas.

Over the period from 2013 to 2021, there has been a nearly 9% increase in OTs practicing the field of disability and a nearly 6% increase in OTs practicing in paediatrics. In absolute numbers of OTs, the largest growth has been in the field of paediatrics. Alternatively, rehabilitation has seen the largest percentage decrease over the same time period at a decline of 6% (table 5.3).

Interestingly, over the 8 year period, as a percentage of the total workforce, there has been a small percentage decrease of OTs working in aged care and mental health, but an increase in absolute numbers (with an additional 1,294 and 1,090 OTs respectively).

The areas of driving assessments and palliative care have seen minimal change in workforce numbers across this time period.

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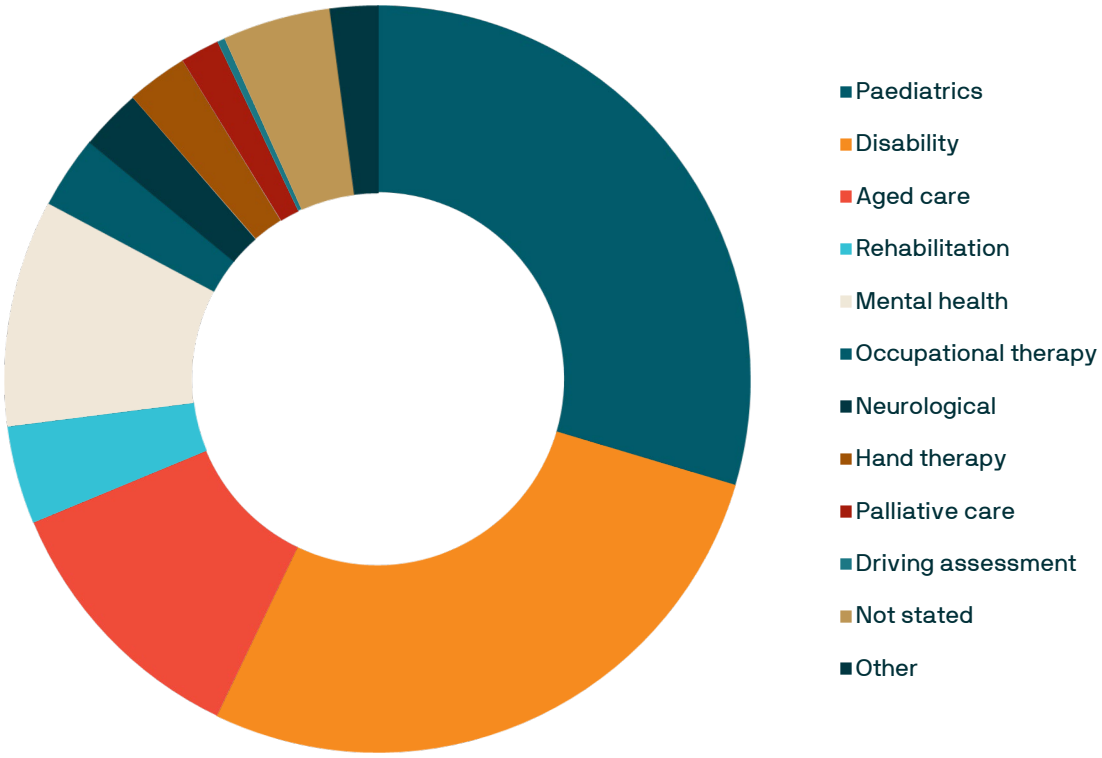
Table 5-3: Occupational Therapists – Scope of Practice 2013-2021

Scope of practice	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	13-21 ±%	13-21 No.
Paediatrics	15.5%	15.2%	16.3%	16.5%	16.8%	17.5%	18.2%	19.7%	21.3%	+5.8%	+3,297
Disability	6.1%	6.6%	6.6%	7.1%	7.9%	8.9%	11.1%	13.3%	15.0%	+8.9%	+3,062
Aged care	14.7%	14.7%	14.8%	14.8%	15.4%	15.9%	15.1%	14.2%	13.4%	-1.3%	+1,294
Rehabilitation	18.8%	18.2%	18.0%	17.3%	17.1%	16.0%	15.5%	13.6%	12.8%	-6.0%	+474
Mental health	10.6%	10.8%	10.6%	10.6%	10.7%	10.7%	10.7%	10.7%	10.3%	-0.3%	+1,090
Occupational therapy	7.4%	7.4%	6.8%	6.8%	6.1%	5.4%	4.9%	4.4%	5.7%	-1.8%	+353
Neurological	2.8%	2.7%	2.7%	2.7%	2.6%	2.9%	2.6%	2.8%	2.8%	-0.1%	+297
Hand therapy	2.8%	3.0%	3.0%	3.0%	3.0%	3.1%	2.9%	2.8%	2.8%	-0.1%	+294
Palliative care	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	+0.7%	+188
Driving assessment	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	+38
Not stated	12.3%	12.7%	12.4%	12.3%	11.8%	10.8%	11.6%	9.9%	9.2%	-3.2%	+520
Other	8.5%	8.5%	8.6%	8.8%	8.3%	8.6%	7.1%	8.5%	5.8%	-2.7%	+228
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	-	11,135

Source: Health Workforce Data Tool - National Health Workforce Data Set (NHWDS)

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Figure 5-2: Occupational Therapists – Scope of Practice 2021



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6. Replacement Rates and Demand Forecasts

Across the 5-year period from 2015 to 2019, there has been an increasing number of graduating OTs in Australia from 1,474 new graduates in 2015 to 1,919 new graduates in 2019 (table 6.1). During this same period, there have been variations in the numbers of OTs exiting the profession with the highest number of OTs exiting in 2018. The replacement rate of new entrants and exits has varied year on year, with 2018 to 2019 having the biggest variation from a replacement rate of 2.9 in 2018 to 5.1 in 2019. The replacement of OTs has exceeded the exit of OTs each year across the data reviewed.

The Australian government forecasts an approximately 7.1% increase in demand for OTs across Australia from 2021 to 2026. This is considered a moderate growth rate (table 6.2).

Table 6-1: Occupational Therapy National Replacement Rate

Replacement rate	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
New entrants	1,474	1,413	1,416	1,940	1,919
Exits	447	453	446	662	376
Replacement rate	3.3	3.1	3.2	2.9	5.1

Source: NHWDS, Occupational Therapists, 2015 – 2019

Table 6-2: OT Workforce Demand

Year	Number of employed OTs
2011	11,100
2012	12,800
2013	10.500
2014	11,000
2015	18,600
2016	11,600
2017	15,800
2018	17,300
2019	22,500
2020	22,200
2021	23,900
2026	25,600

Source: ABS Labour Force Survey, ABS seasonally adjusted data to November 2021 and Jobs and Skills Australia Employment Projections to 2026. https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/occupation-profile/occupational- therapists?occupationCode=2524

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