

The World Council of Optometry

Meeting of the General Delegates to be held 5 June 2009

Australia Country Report

Status of Optometry in Australia 2009 Optometrists Association Australia

Demographics of optometrists

Number of OAA members: 3346 (representing 95% of practicing optometrists)

Females (% of workforce): 47%

Median age: 37 years

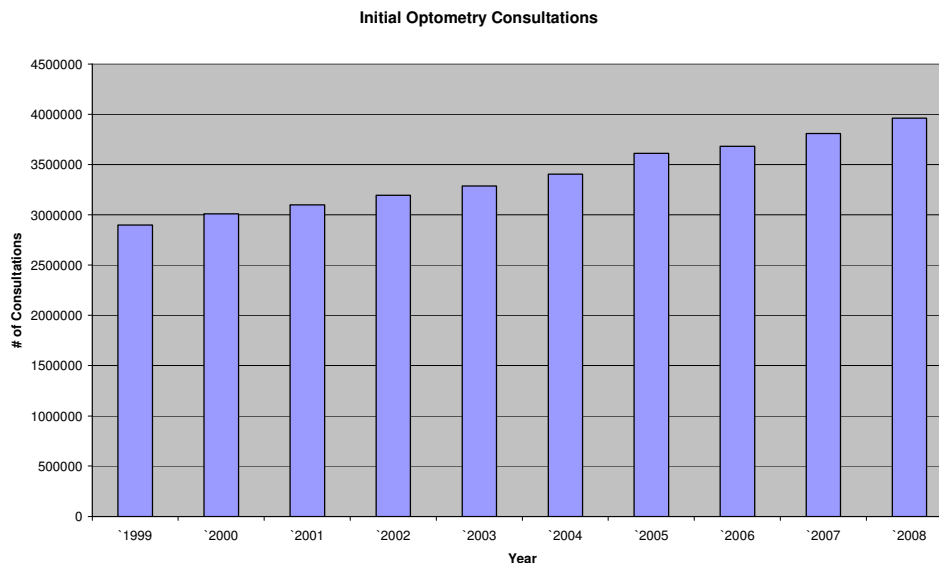
Average income: AUD \$95,000

Per capita ratio: 1 Full-time equivalent optometrist per 7414 head of population

Distribution: There is currently a maldistribution of optometrists, with a slight excess in city centres and metropolitan suburbs, especially on the east coast.

Optometry services

- Over the past decade, the Australian public's demand for optometry services has grown steadily.
- Since 1999, initial optometry services have grown by 36%, whereas the population has only grown by 15% in that same period of time.



Therapeutics

- Approximately 16% of practicing optometrists are therapeutically endorsed, meaning they are able to use and prescribe a limited number of topical ocular agents.
- The proportion of therapeutically endorsed optometrists is likely to grow at approximately 5% p.a. for the next few years, as all Australian universities have changed their professional-entry programs to include therapeutics training.
- The list of topical agents used by optometrists varies from state to state. The most comprehensive lists are available in Victoria and South Australia, and include antibiotics, anti-inflammatory and anti-allergy agents, mydriatics and cycloplegics, and antiglaucoma agents.
- 'National registration' for optometrists is planned to commence in 2010, meaning that all optometrists will be listed under a single register. Thus, a single list of therapeutic agents for optometrists is likely to be supported under these new arrangements.

Therapeutics Legislation - Two significant changes have recently occurred regarding optometrists' prescribing rights:

- January 2008 – Optometrists are for the first time allowed to prescribe medications under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), a government-subsidised medicines scheme, available to all Australian citizens, permanent residents, and people from countries with which Australia has a reciprocal health agreement. This change provides greatest benefit to patients of lower socio-economic status.
- March 2009 – Optometrists are allowed to prescribe antiglaucoma medications under the PBS, using shared-care arrangements agreed upon by the Australian government (Department of Health and Ageing), the Optometrists Association and Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists.

Education

There are currently three schools of optometry, all located on the eastern seaboard of Australia. A brief description of the courses provided by the universities follows:

University of Melbourne:

- Undergraduate: The course was extended in 2002, from 4 to 5 years in duration, and to include therapeutics training.
- Postgraduate: Postgraduate training in therapeutics began in 2000. The course is not running in 2009 due to a slight shortfall in candidates.
- Future changes: From 2011, the first intake of students into the 'Doctor of Optometry' program will occur. Students must complete a 3 year undergraduate degree to enter this program, and complete the 4 year postgraduate degree before professional entry.

University of New South Wales:

- Undergraduate: The course was changed in 2006, from a 4 year undergraduate course to a Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Optometry double degree. The entire program is now 5 years in duration, and includes therapeutics training.
- Postgraduate: Postgraduate training in therapeutics began in 2007.

Queensland University of Technology:

- Undergraduate: The course was changed in 2009, from a 4 year undergraduate course to a Bachelor of Science, Master of Optometry double degree. The entire program is now 5 years in duration, and includes therapeutics training. The first intake into this course is a record high 60 places (approximately 50% increase in placements offered previously)

- Postgraduate: Postgraduate training in therapeutics began in 2004.

New optometry course:

In 2010, Flinders University in South Australia will offer entry into an additional professional-entry optometry program. The program will comprise a 3 year Bachelor of Medical Science followed by a 2 year Master of Optometry.

This is the first new professional-entry degree to be offered in optometry since 1981.