A description of the Australian disability nursing workforce using census data from Ahpra 2022

Macey Barratt
Lecturer in Nursing and PhD Candidate
University of Canberra

Co authors:
Dr Peter Lewis, Toni Azzopardi, Dr Thierno Dallo and Prof. Nathan Wilson
Western Sydney University

UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

Aim

- To describe the profile of the nursing workforce in the area of disability.

- To compare the disability workforce to other nursing workforce areas.

Design

- Existing data was collected from the National Health Workforce Data website (https://hwd.health.gov.au/).
- Data for the survey at the time of registration renewal is voluntarily completed by nurses at the time of re-registration. It can be completed online or in hard copy, with most participants preferring online.
- All nurses completing their registration renewal are eligible to complete the survey, with 94.2% of all nurses completing their registration renewal opting in to complete the survey (Department of Health and Aged Care, 2022).

The variables collected from the National Health Workforce Data website included:

Age
Gender
Indigenous status
Registration level
Job setting
Job area

State
Remoteness
Job role
Years worked as a nurse, and
Years intending to work as a nurse.

2,337

Nurses identified in their AHPRA registration survey that they worked in the disability sector.

Comparing disability to other healthcare sectors:

Other
12.8%

Mental health
7%

Rehabilitation
2.7%

Community
9.2%

Aged care
14.7%

Child, maternity and family health
6.7%

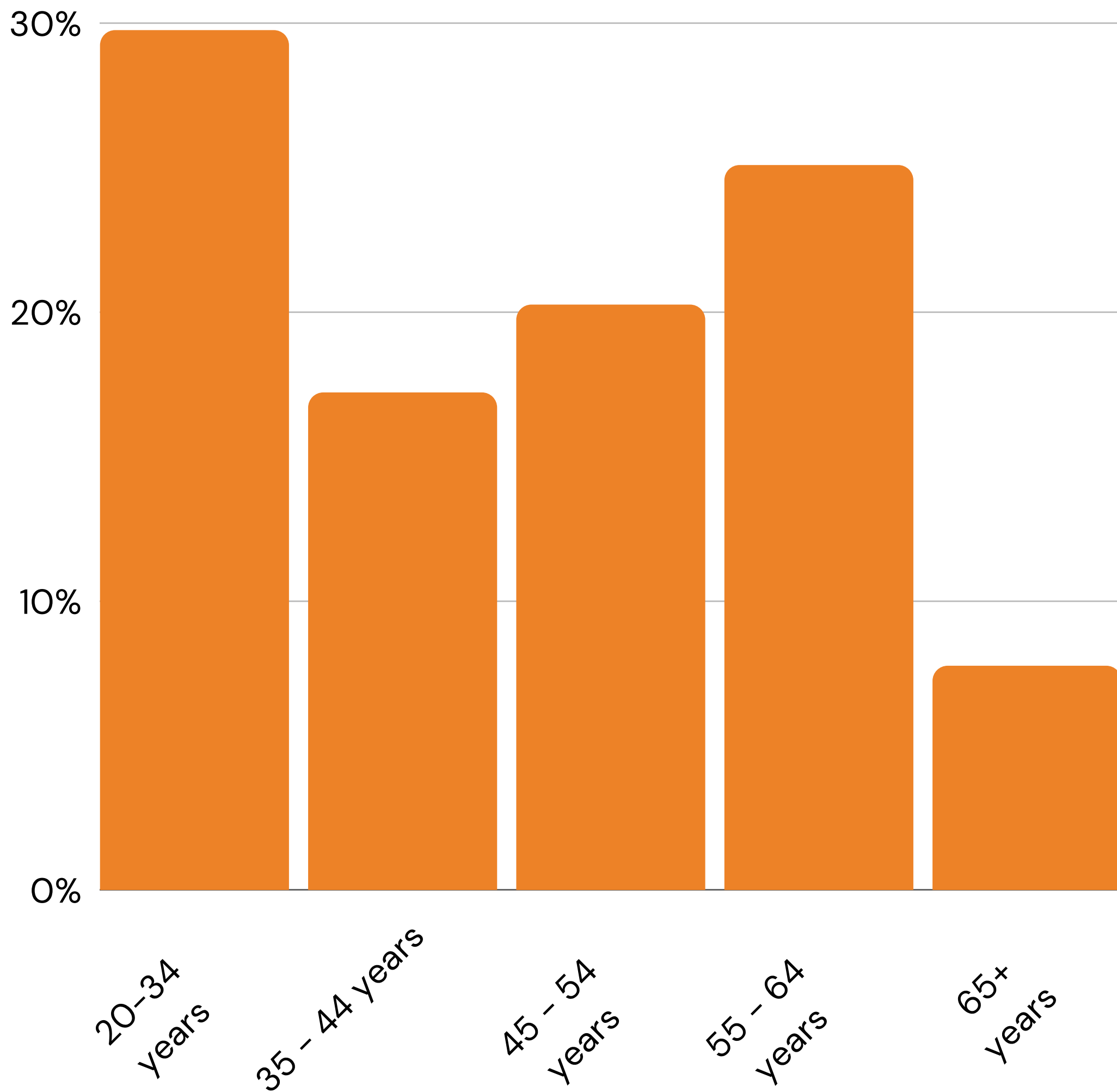**Disability sector**
0.65%

Acute
46.2%
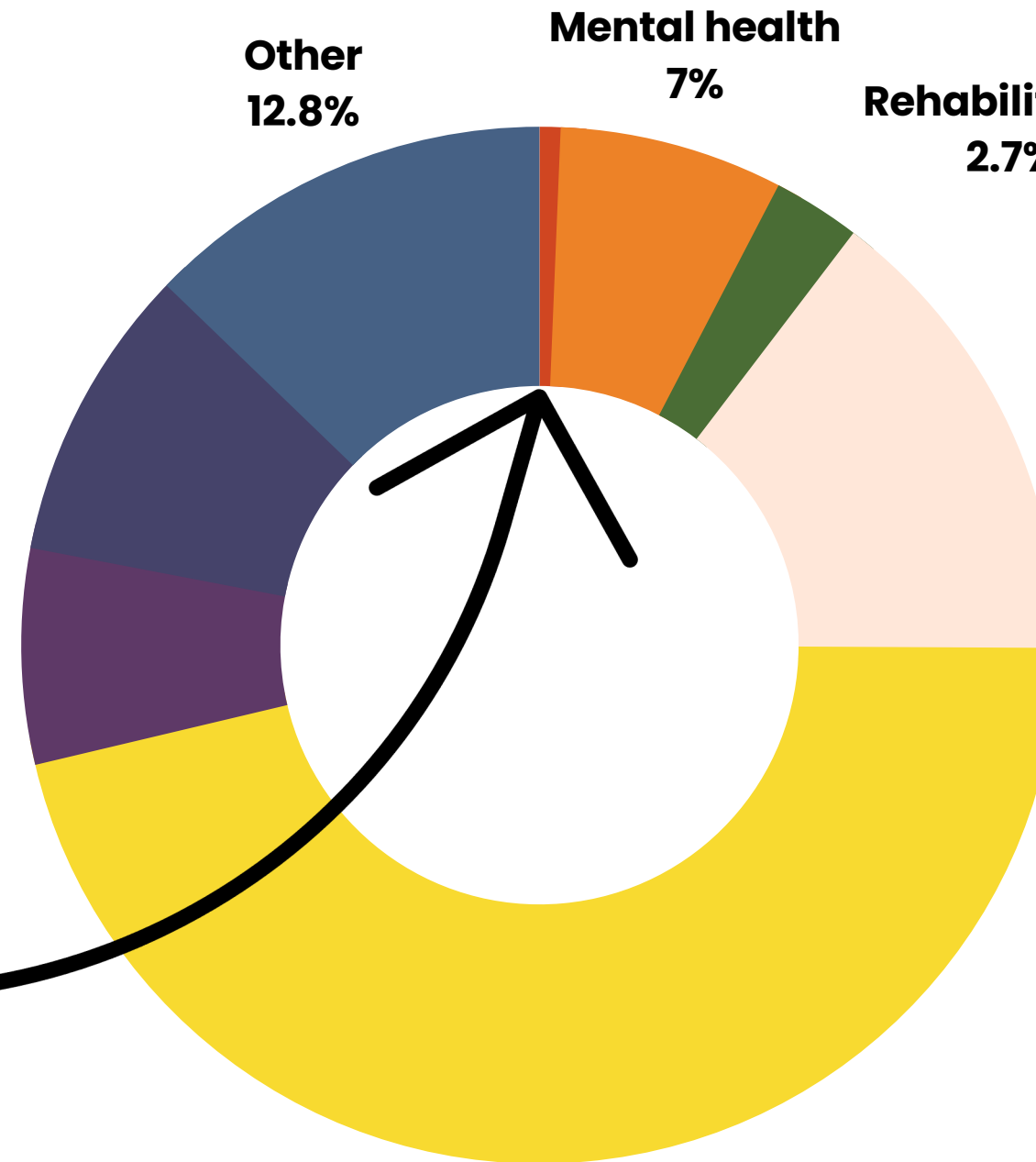
Demographics

8 OUT OF 10

Nurses were female (n=82.6%)

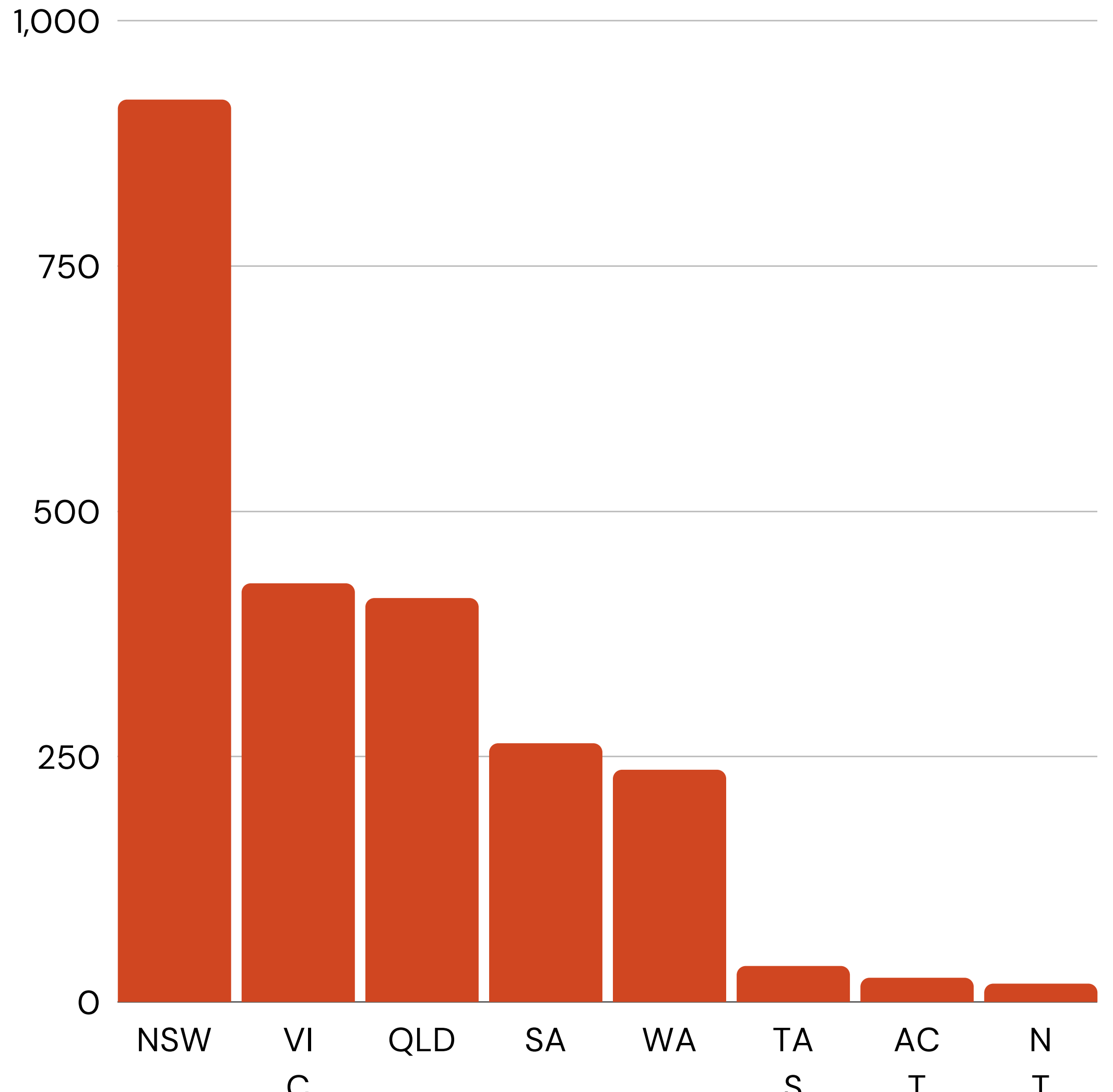Age of nurses working in the disability sector

Registration

6 OUT OF 10

Nurses were registered nurses (n=61.1%)

Where are disability nurses working?

Commerical business
2.7%

Schools and educator services
2%

Hospital
5.7%

Aboriginal health services
0.5%

Private Practice
11.4%

Community health service
40.3%

Residential health care facility
33.2%

State of work

1,000	
750	
500	
250	
0	NSW VIC QLD SA WA TAS ACT NT

Job roles

Administrator
10.9%

Teacher or educator
4.3%

Other
2.3%

Academic or researcher
0.68%

Clinician
81.8%
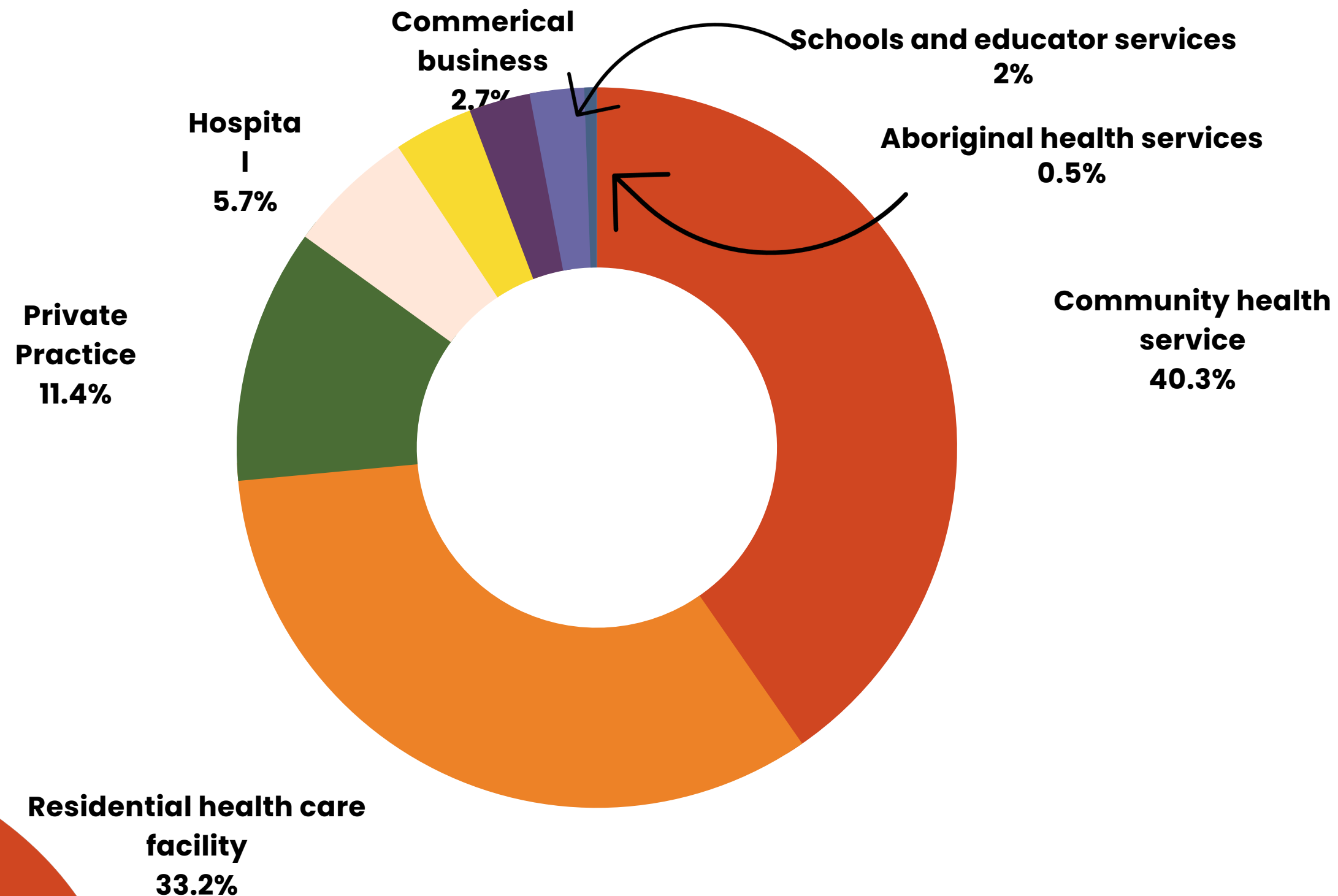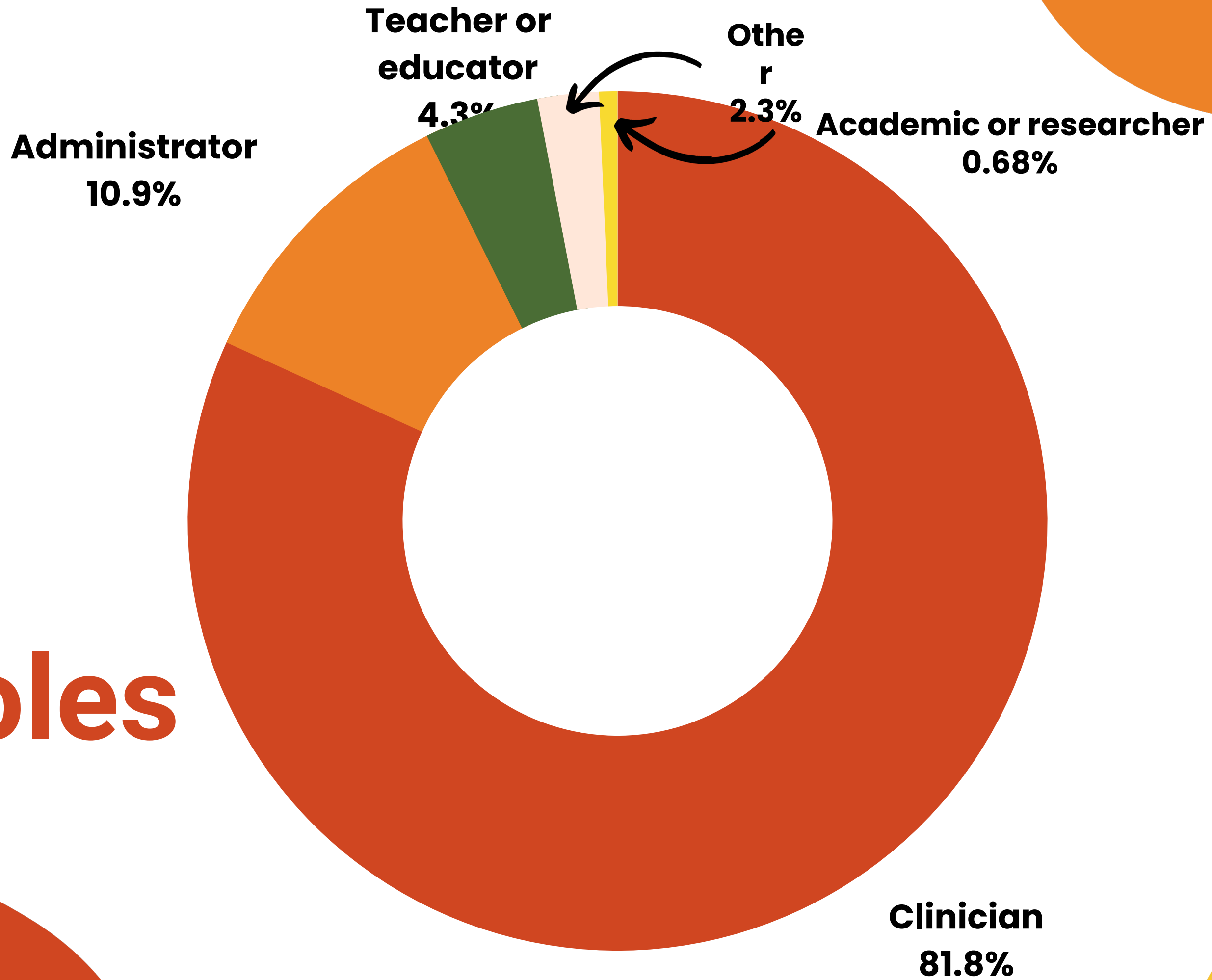
Comparing the disability nursing work to other sectors

Indigenous status

1.9% of disability nurses identified themselves as Indigenous, which was the second highest proportion by sector.

Born in Australia

The proportion of disability nurses who were born in Australia was lower compared to the rest of the nursing workforce (53% vs 60.2% respectively).

Age

The average age for disability nurses was higher than for all other nurses in the Australian workforce combined (45.4 versus 43.1 years or age)

Working hours

Average hours worked per week was similar for disability nurses and the rest of the Australian nursing workforce (33.17 vs 33.97 hours per week).

Comparing disability to rehabilitation and mental health nursing workforces

Gender

Disability and rehabilitation sectors had larger proportions of nurses identifying as females (82.6% and 87.5% respectively), whereas only 71.3% of nurses in mental health identified as females.

Registration

Disability nurses were represented by significantly more enrolled nurses compared to mental health ($\chi 2$ = 774; p <0.001) and rehabilitation ($\chi 2$ = 67.4; p <0.001)

Age

Disability nurses had a much higher percentage of nurses aged over 55 years when compared to mental health and rehabilitation (32.8% versus 29.84 and 24.9% respectively)

Job role

Nurses in mental health and rehabilitation were employed in clinical roles (94.7% and 96.6% respectively) in higher proportions than disability nurses (81.8%).

So whats next?

Further research is needed!

- We know more now about nurses who work with people with disability than we have for many years.
- The identification of disability nurses as representing 0.65% of the overall nursing workforce presents a potentially ongoing challenge for the care of people with disability.
- Low numbers of nurses primarily caring for people with disability can mean that nurses in this field are overlooked in terms of career planning and staff development.
- Between 2016 and 2019, the number of nurses registered in Australia and working in all areas grew by 10.25% (National Health Workforce Data, 2019). During the same period, the number of registered nurses employed in the rehabilitation and disability fields grew by only 6% (National Health Workforce Data, 2019).
- An approach to supporting nurses in the care of people with intellectual disability both upstream, in the health promotion arena, and downstream, in the acute care setting, might be required to maximise the health and wellbeing of Australians with intellectual disability and, potentially, other disabilities as well.

THANKYOU

References:
Department of Health & Aged Care. (2022). Health Workforce Data. Canberra, Australia

National Health Workforce Data, S. (2019). Factsheet, Nursing and Midwifery 2019. In https://hwd.health.gov.au/resources/publications/factsheet-nrmw-2019.html.