



The Pharmacy
Guild of Australia

The Workforce
Capability Project

Pharmacy Profile

guild.org.au



What is Pharmacy?

Pharmacy practice within Australia facilitates the development, storage, preparation, allocation and dispensing of medicines to individuals.

The pharmacy workforce aims to ensure the safe and ethical use of medicines by consumers through the implementation and delivery of pharmaceutical knowledge and systems within their practice. Pharmacists and pharmacy staff improve the health outcomes of individuals within primary, secondary, and tertiary care settings, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all patients.¹ The diversity of pharmacy practice within the healthcare system allows individuals interested in pharmacy to pursue careers in a wide range of roles and settings, such as community, hospital and industrial pharmacy.

Community pharmacies are the most accessible and commonly used means of obtaining medicines and medical information in Australia, with over 443.6 million individual patient visits annually.² Community pharmacies serve as the first point of contact for most individuals seeking services from health professionals and maintain the vital role of providing medical counselling, support, and education for consumers.

Locations of Community Pharmacies

There are 5,935 community pharmacies in Australia;³ however, only 66% of Australians who live in rural and remote areas are within 2.5 km of a pharmacy.⁴

Most community pharmacies within Australia are located within city or MM1 areas,⁵ with 19,957 FTE⁶ pharmacists located in these jurisdictions in 2021. This is a substantial number compared to just 119 FTE pharmacists employed within MM7 areas.⁷ The number of metro community pharmacists mirrors the large growth of population and script volume within these areas. In contrast, the uneven distribution of community pharmacies and pharmacists within rural and regional areas has exacerbated demand and workforce shortages, with low employment rates in these areas not matching the 2.98% annual rise in script volume growth and the expansion of pharmaceutical scope of practice.⁸

1. Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, 2015.

2. GuildLink Data, 2024.

3. PBS Expenditure and Prescriptions Report, 2022-2023.

4. The Pharmacy Guild of Australia, 2024.

5. The Modified Monash Model (MMM) is used to categorise whether a location is a city, rural, remote or very remote area, measuring the remoteness and population size on a scale from MM 1 (major city) to MM 7 (very remote).

6. Full-Time Equivalent.

7. Department of Health and Aged Care, 2023.

8. The Australian Pharmacy Guild, *Supply and Demand* (2023).



Roles within Pharmacy

There are specific roles within pharmacy settings that assist in providing primary healthcare to individuals and the community. The following roles are based upon ANZSCO⁹ descriptions, which are currently being reviewed.¹⁰

- Retail (Community) Pharmacists** prepare, dispense and distribute medicines. They are also responsible for helping customers with disease prevention, the Quality Use of Medicine, supplying pharmacist-only medicines, and improving general well-being and health.
- Hospital Pharmacists** work as part of multidisciplinary healthcare teams within hospital settings to govern the Quality Use of Medicine. Hospital pharmacists advise patients and medical staff of safe and ethical use of pharmaceuticals, while also monitoring and providing medicines.
- Industrial Pharmacists** focus on pharmaceutical research, clinical testing and analysis of medicinal production within Australia. Industrial laboratories, clinical environments and manufacturing plants are the primary workplace settings for pharmacists in this role.
- Pharmacy Sales Assistants** focus on customer service duties, process sales and assist in administrative tasks, such as monitoring stock levels. They may assist in preparing medicines under the supervision of a registered pharmacist.
- Pharmacy Technicians** support pharmacists in the preparation and dispensation of medicines. Community pharmacy technicians are involved in customer service duties and providing medical advice to customers, while Hospital pharmacy technicians are responsible for the delivery of medicines to various wards.¹¹

9. ANZSCO (Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations) is the skill-based categorisation of all paid occupations within the Australian and New Zealand job markets.

10. ABS consultation 2023.

11. Department of Health and Aged Care, *National Strategy for Quality Use of Medicines (2002)*.

Structure of the Pharmacy Workforce

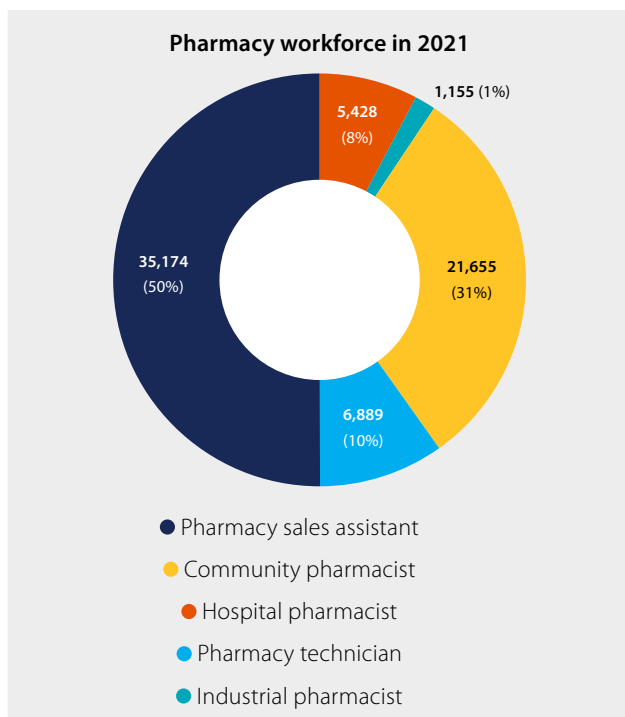
In 2021, the Australian pharmacy workforce consisted of approximately 70,360 people and remained highly feminised, with 63% of pharmacists (2020), 87% of pharmacy assistants (2021) and 88% of pharmacy technicians identifying as female (2021). According to 2021 Census data, the community pharmacy workforce comprised of 28,297 community pharmacists and 35,174 pharmacy sales assistants, making up 90% of the total pharmacy workforce.

As of December 2023, there were 37,393 registered pharmacists in Australia, including non-practising¹².

Community pharmacists accounted for approximately 53% of the 28,297 registered Australian pharmacists in 2020; however, there has been a noticeable growth in the proportion of hospital pharmacists compared to industrial and community pharmacists. Hospital and industrial pharmacists¹³ represented 8% and 1% respectively of the total pharmacy workforce.

The <1% per annum increase of employees within the Australian pharmacy workforce since 2018 is partly attributable to the increased numbers of graduates and skilled migrant worker rates. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of pharmacists exiting the industry has increased to approximately 400-600 annually, limiting the extent in which the pharmacy workforce can grow. As such, the demand for employees within the pharmacy industry continues to rise.

Figure 1: Pharmacy workforce by sub-category and employment setting, 2021



Source: ABS, 2021

12. Australian Pharmacy Board, 2023.

13. ABS, 2021.

14. The Pharmacy Guild, *Training and Qualifications*, 2024.

15. Pharmacy Board of Australia, 2022.

Training and Qualifications

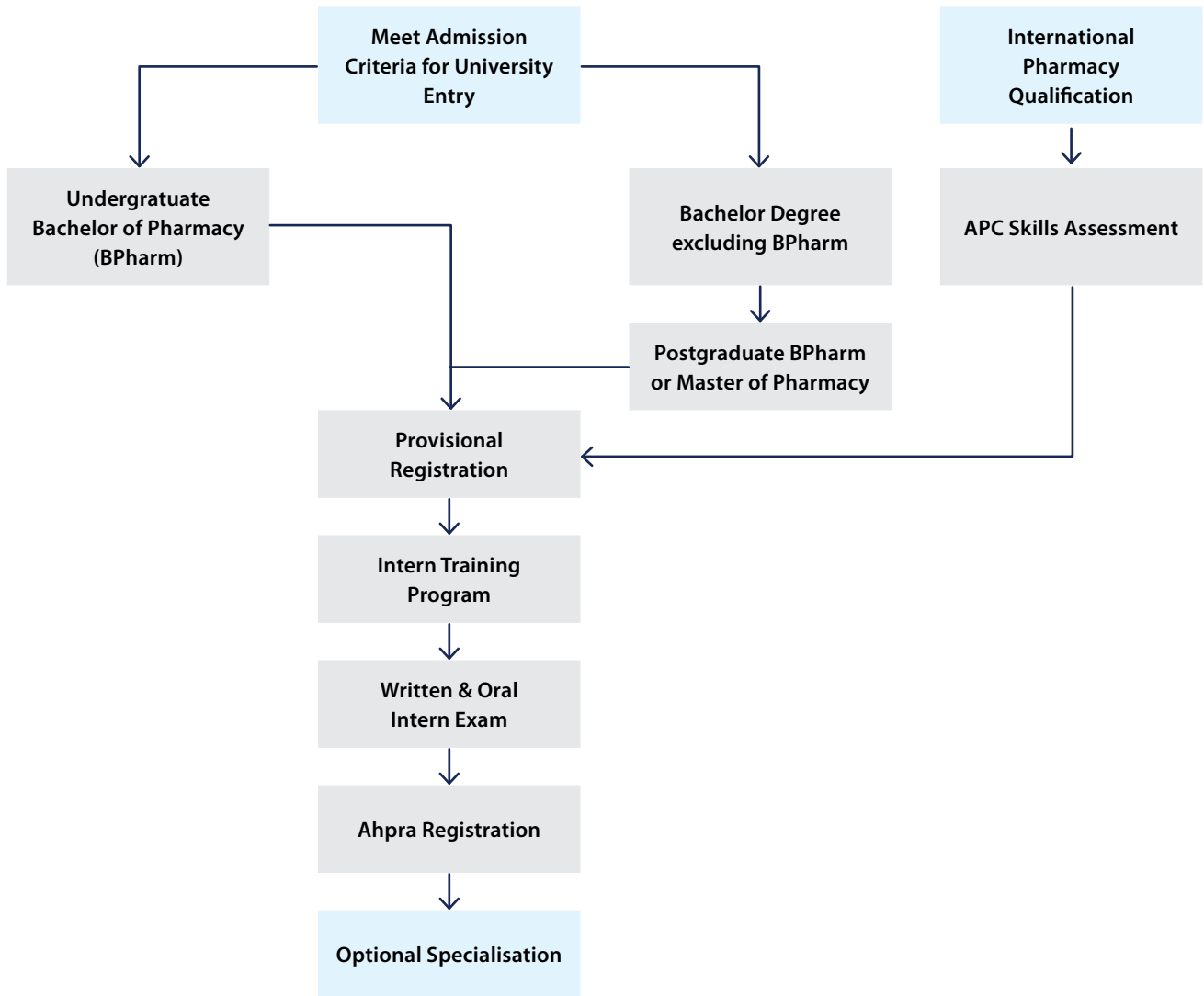
Australian pharmacists are required to obtain either a Bachelor or Master of Pharmacy before completing a period of supervised practice. There are currently 20 universities offering a total of 47 pharmacy programs¹⁴. Before undertaking the Pharmacy Board's registration final examination, a pharmacy intern must complete an accredited intern training program in conjunction with 1,824 hours of supervised practice.¹⁵

Pharmacists are required to have Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) registration before they can commence work in Australia. This ensures that individuals are working within the current pharmaceutical scope of practice and meet national registration standards, codes and guidelines. Pharmacists can also choose to complete post-graduate studies, such as a Graduate Certificate in Clinical Pharmacy, to further specialise within their career.

Internationally trained pharmacists seeking to work as pharmacists within Australia are required to obtain registration from Ahpra. New Zealand-registered pharmacists can work in Australia without undertaking an Australian Pharmacy Council (APC) Skills Assessment Outcome. Qualified pharmacists from Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, or the United States of America are required to sit the Competency Assessment of Overseas Pharmacists (CAOP) examination, while pharmacists who are not New Zealand-qualified or eligible for the CAOP stream must complete an eligibility check with the APC before sitting the Knowledge Assessment of Pharmaceutical Sciences (KAPS) examination.

There are no specified training and qualification requirements for pharmacy technicians and pharmacy sales assistants to be employed within an Australian pharmacy workplace. However, the Pharmacy Board has stated that individuals applying for pharmacy technician roles must be suitably trained and experienced. It is recommended that prospective pharmacy technicians should reflect on the relevance of their previous training, practice, and experience within prior roles. It is recognised that obtaining Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications can improve job entry results for individuals applying for pharmacy roles. There are currently four VET Community Pharmacy courses offered in Australia: Certificate II in Community Pharmacy (SIR20116), the Certificate III in Community Pharmacy (SIR30116), the Certificate IV in Community Pharmacy (SIR40116) and the Certificate IV in Community Pharmacy Dispensary (SIR40216). For individuals that do not want to complete an entire certification, there are also skill set packages that can be undertaken to establish a foundation of skills to carry out their required role within the pharmacy.

Figure 2: Qualified pharmacist pathways within Australia



Employment Conditions

The Pharmacy Industry Award 2020 (PIA) is the predominant Award used by Australian community pharmacies to guide the terms and conditions of employment.

Remuneration is a significant factor for employees and, as such, pharmacists are generally paid above award rates, with many paid 32-55% above the applicable award's employment classification rates for 2022 and 2023.¹⁶ The Australian Pharmacy Guild notes that remuneration for pharmacists in regional and rural areas' rates exceeds that for their metro counterparts, with the hourly rate paid to pharmacists varying between states and territories.

Pharmacy assistants are paid at or close to award rates within Australia, with Pharmacy Assistant Level-4s being an exception at an average remuneration 10% above their applicable award rate. Pharmacy Assistant remuneration is also related to location, as remuneration rates increased with remoteness. Exceptions to this trend were however, noted in MMM 4 and MMM 6 locations, where remuneration rates experienced a slight dip.

16. The Australian Pharmacy Guild, *Community Pharmacy Workforce Remuneration Trends (2024)*.



**The Pharmacy
Guild of Australia**

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia

Level 2, 15 National Circuit, Barton, ACT 2600
PO Box 310, Fyshwick, ACT 2609

Telephone: 13GUILD (13 484 53)
Email: guild.nat@guild.org.au

www.guild.org.au