

Occupational Therapist		Northern Territory
ANZSCO Code: 2524-11		May 2009
Labour market rating	Shortage	
Comment:		

Occupational demand

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data show there were 59 occupational therapists employed in the Northern Territory (NT) in 2006 which is an increase of nine per cent since 2001. Employment for the occupation is too small in the NT for the ABS Labour Force Survey data to provide a meaningful indicator of employment growth for the period following the 2006 Census. The Australian Government Private Health Insurance Administration Council reported 123 occupational therapy general treatments were claimed in the NT through private health insurance in the March 2009 quarter.

Occupational supply

Charles Darwin University has an Occupational Therapists feeder course enabling NT students to complete the first year of their degree in Darwin before needing to transfer to an interstate university to complete their degree. The number of students commencing the feeder course has consistently been 10 or below for the past eight years. Many employers relied on recruiting graduates from interstate.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

Most employers surveyed were unable to fill advertised vacancies for occupational therapists, with 13 per cent of positions being filled. There were a small number of applicants per vacancy and most were considered unsuitable. Employers tended to alter occupational therapist roles to enable other health professionals (such as physiotherapists, psychologists, or registered nurses) to apply in an effort to improve recruitment chances. Unsuitable candidates were rejected as they lacked qualifications, skills or experience. There were cases of both metropolitan and regional vacancies remaining vacant for extended periods.

Some employers found it difficult to attract people to the NT which commonly is perceived as unattractive by potential applicants because of its small size, relative isolation and cost of living. Although remuneration was on par with other jurisdictions, occupational therapists commonly expected higher pay to work in the NT to compensate for the location and had a preference to work in interstate capital cities.

The vacancies surveyed were due to both the creation of new positions and job turnover. Job turnover typically occurred when previous occupants moved interstate to work within the same industry.

A high turnover rate of occupational therapists is considered a problem and is largely driven by the reliance on recruiting from interstate with employees not committing to stay in the NT long-term. The prevalence of job options nationally and internationally has also led to greater flexibility for occupational therapists allowing them to move frequently and explore new options. Skills wastage is also an issue with employees seeking roles with less stress, a better work/life balance and higher remuneration.

Labour market outlook

The labour market for occupational therapists is expected to remain in shortage over the coming year. The global economic crisis has had limited impact on demand for occupational therapists; however, less interstate migration due to reduced mobility with new job security concerns may impact supply for the NT.