

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

Occupational demand

The number of occupational therapists (OTs) in Tasmania increased from 120 to 138 between 2001 and 2006, according to Census data. Occupational therapists are primarily employed by hospitals (23.6 per cent), State Government administration (22.9 per cent), other allied health services (17.1 per cent) and other social assistance services which primarily involve delivery of services to the elderly and the disabled (12.1 per cent).

Demand for occupational therapists is driven by factors such as the frequency of conditions and accidents that result in injuries significant enough to require an extended period of readjustment. The ageing of the population also increases demand, in that conditions requiring the services of an occupational therapist such as strokes, occur more frequently among older people. The number of people with disabilities, both physical and mental, is also a significant driver of demand, particularly those in care. Replacing those who withdraw from the labour force for child rearing is also a demand factor with 2006 Census data showing 91 per cent of the occupational therapists in Tasmania were female.

Occupational supply

There is no training for occupational therapists in Tasmania, so the State has to compete with all other States and Territories for graduates from mainland universities. All other States offer at least one bachelor degree in occupational therapy. According to Census data, 52 occupational therapists arrived in Tasmania from interstate and overseas between 2001 and 2006. The largest group of 16 arrived from overseas, while 12 arrived from Queensland and 12 from Victoria. In total it appears nearly 38 per cent of the occupational therapy workforce in Tasmania in 2006, had arrived in the State within the previous five years.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

Of the employers who advertised for occupational therapists in the lead up to this report, only 20 per cent were able to fill their vacancies. Employers reported very few applicants, with a large percentage coming from overseas, who often lacked an appropriate visa to work in Australia or there were issues with recognising their qualifications. A small number of employers expressed interest in enquiring about skilled migration options.

Employers generally attributed shortages of occupational therapists to the fact there was no local training in Tasmania, and that it was hard to attract people from interstate to relocate to Tasmania. Industry sources indicated this was exacerbated by the predominantly female occupation therapy workforce, suggesting that families are far more likely to move for husbands' careers than wives' careers.

There are particular difficulties in some specialist areas also. According to industry sources, the usual operating level in the mental health area is the relatively senior level three, which are more difficult to recruit than junior positions. However, as there are few entry level OT positions in mental health, the opportunity to recruit at junior levels and then progress through the system is limited.

Labour market outlook

Shortages of OTs in Tasmania are expected to continue for at least the next 12 months, as difficulties in competing with other States for graduates are likely to remain.