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## **USEFUL INFORMATION FOR FILIPINO NURSES WANTING TO WORK IN AUSTRALIA**

There is still a great need for medical practitioners and registered nurses in Australia, particularly New South Wales, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory. It is estimated that by 2010, the shortage of nurses would have reached 40,000. Take note of this statement in the very website of the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC): “Nurses are currently in high demand in Australia. There are excellent career opportunities with permanent and temporary work available in Australia. Most visa applications for nurses receive priority processing.” In order to meet the demands of the Australian health care industry, 12,000 new nurses need to join the workforce every year but only half are able to graduate and register. To compound the problem, the present nursing profession is ageing and are due to retire in the next 15 years. Nursing is still in the 2010 Skilled Occupation List put out by the DIAC for occupations currently in short supply in the Australian labor market. In a blog by a nurse practitioner in [www.nurseinaustralia.com](http://www.nurseinaustralia.com), the shortage was described as ‘severe’. The blogger quotes a few paragraphs from a recent QNU Federal Budget submission from January 2009, which I also quote here:

In Queensland, there remains a critical shortage of nurses across public and private hospitals and aged care facilities (conservative estimates put this at around 1400 nurses) resulting from years of neglect of recruitment and retention strategies.

Currently in Queensland there are shortages in most areas of nursing including accident and emergency, critical/intensive care, midwifery, mental health, community care, aged care and indigenous health (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008). The significant migration to this state and its consequent demand on health services, especially in the south east corner, has exacerbated these shortages.

ABS 2006 Census figures on the rate of nurses per 100,000 population by state or territory reveal Queensland is well below the Australian average of 1107 nurses per 100,000 population with just 1025.3 nurses per 100,000 population. As the population continues to rise in Queensland, the QNU’s data modelling indicates we can expect a shortfall of 14,000 nurses by 2014 across the public, private and aged-care sectors.

In the public sector, Queensland Health’s conservative shortage estimates are based only on maintaining the current service status and fail to take into account significant predicted retirements from the profession, backfill requirements for leave and training, as well as increases in services—such as new beds coming online—which all have a direct impact on the number of additional nurses required.

Aged care figures are difficult to determine without reliable information on staffing shortages. However, the QNU estimates shortages are even more acute in this sector due to poor wages and conditions on offer and the lack of incentives. According to the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AHWI) (2005), based on a predicted retirement age of 65, over the next 20 years Australia will lose 60% of the existing employed registered and enrolled nurse labour force through retirement.

Nearly 15% of nurses are retiring every five years—creating a projected cumulative exodus of 90,000 nurses by 2026 (Australian Health Workforce Institute, 2008). Unfortunately, new graduates from existing educational programs are not adequately replacing these nurses and it seems future planning for the huge exodus of nurses from the health system is severely lacking. To keep experienced nurses in the health system, employers and government should provide transition to retirement programs to retain nurses and knowledge for longer.”

But Filipino medical and nursing professionals need to be aware of the processes involved in the credentialing and registration in Australia and in visa application, preparing for the assessment of one's professional qualifications and the English proficiency requirement—the three most critical preparatory tasks for a registered nurse wishing to work in Australia.

For information on visa options for Filipino registered nurses desiring to work in Australia, please see, [www.immi.gov.au/skilled/medical-practitioners/nurses.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/medical-practitioners/nurses.htm). The attached table of visa options for Filipino nurses, as well as the attached table of visa options for Filipino workers in general, may be instructive.

For a more detailed discussion of the assessment of qualifications of overseas nurses by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (ANMC), please see, [www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/documents/default.aspx?record=WD10%2F3192&dbid=AP&checksum=rbtIhlZj1%2FRDYU7puzOixw%3D%3D](http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/documents/default.aspx?record=WD10%2F3192&dbid=AP&checksum=rbtIhlZj1%2FRDYU7puzOixw%3D%3D). Also, the registration process is now Australia-wide, meaning it is now handled by a national body, the Australian Health Practitioners Registration Authority (AHPRA), [www.ahpra.gov.au](http://www.ahpra.gov.au), which supports the national registration boards of ten professions, including nursing and midwifery. Overseas nurses must first register with AHPRA before applying for a visa.

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