



# Clinical Training Profiles Project: *Dietetics*

Draft version 1.1

January 2014

For External Consultation

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Suggested citation:

Health Workforce Australia 2014: Clinical Training Profile Dietetics – Stage 1 DEET project.

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## Dietetics Context

In Australia, the profession of dietetics contributes to the promotion of health and the prevention and treatment of illness by optimising the nutrition of communities and individuals. It uses scientific principles and methods in the study of nutrition and applies these to influencing the wider environment affecting food intake and eating behaviours.<sup>1</sup>

Dietitians work across many different fields, including patient care, private practice and community and public health, food service management, food industry, research and sports nutrition.<sup>1,2</sup>

In daily practice the role of a dietitian can include assessing the nutritional needs of individuals, groups and populations; planning appropriate diets and educating people on their individual nutritional needs; managing food service systems by designing and implementing nutrition policies and menus; providing advice and education on nutrition and undertaking food and nutrition research and evaluating practice.<sup>1</sup>

Dietetics is a practical discipline and experience in an employment setting is a recognised component of the development of professional competency. The clinical placement program builds on the theory taught in the academic program to provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate competence in core activities of the curriculum. Clinical training is required in individual case management, food service management, and the community and public health nutrition environment. Clinical placements involve dietetics students working under supervision in a specific health setting, with the aim of providing the link between theoretical knowledge taught in the academic program and practical application. Variety and/or simulated learning are encouraged for the different placements.<sup>3</sup>

In 2012, 405 students commenced studying a bachelor degree and 289 students an entry-level master degree in nutrition and dietetics. Female students represented 87.5 per cent of the cohort. In the same year the total number of students studying nutrition and dietetics was 1094, with 812 students at bachelor level and 282 students at entry-level master degree. In the total cohort female students represented 91.2 per cent.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dietitians Association of Australia website: <http://daa.asn.au/universities-recognition/dietetics-in-australia/>, accessed 15 November 2013.

<sup>2</sup> There is a distinction between dietitians and nutritionists: The key difference is that in addition to, or part of, their qualification in human nutrition, a dietitian has completed a course of study that included substantial theory and supervised and assessed professional practice in clinical nutrition, medical nutrition therapy and food service management. Therefore, all dietitians in Australia are considered to be nutritionists; however nutritionists without a dietetics qualification can not take on the role of a dietitian.

<sup>3</sup> Dietitians Association of Australia, 2011. Manual for accreditation of dietetic education programs-version 1.2 (October 2011) [http://daa.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/DAA-accreditation-manual\\_v1.2\\_Oct-2011.pdf](http://daa.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/DAA-accreditation-manual_v1.2_Oct-2011.pdf), accessed 15 November 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Students continuing in university courses accredited or seeking accreditation by the DAA (as at 2 December 2013). Source: Department of Education, Higher Education Statistics Collection 2012.

## Accreditation

Dietetics is a self-regulated profession and the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) is the accrediting authority for the dietetic profession in Australia. The DAA has developed criteria and education standards to ensure the quality and continuing improvement of nutrition and dietetic education programs. The accreditation system includes examination of the program structure and management, individual subject information, staffing levels and qualifications, quality of teaching facilities, student assessment procedures and organisation of clinical placements.<sup>5</sup>

The accreditation standard requirements for dietetics, developed by the DAA, state that each higher education provider offering dietetic programs must provide evidence that the clinical training program includes placements that provide opportunities to develop competence in the key areas of dietetics (individual case management, community and food service) and exposure to a range of settings. The clinical training component of dietetics education is competency based and a minimum number of 20 clinical training weeks (or 100 days) must be provided for a course to be accredited as leading to initial entry-level qualification as a dietitian.<sup>6</sup>

The credentialing system of the DAA identifies nutrition and dietetic professionals that meet the DAA standards and recognises commitment to continued professional development (CPD) based on an individual annual CPD plan and log, which are assessed at the time of renewal of membership.

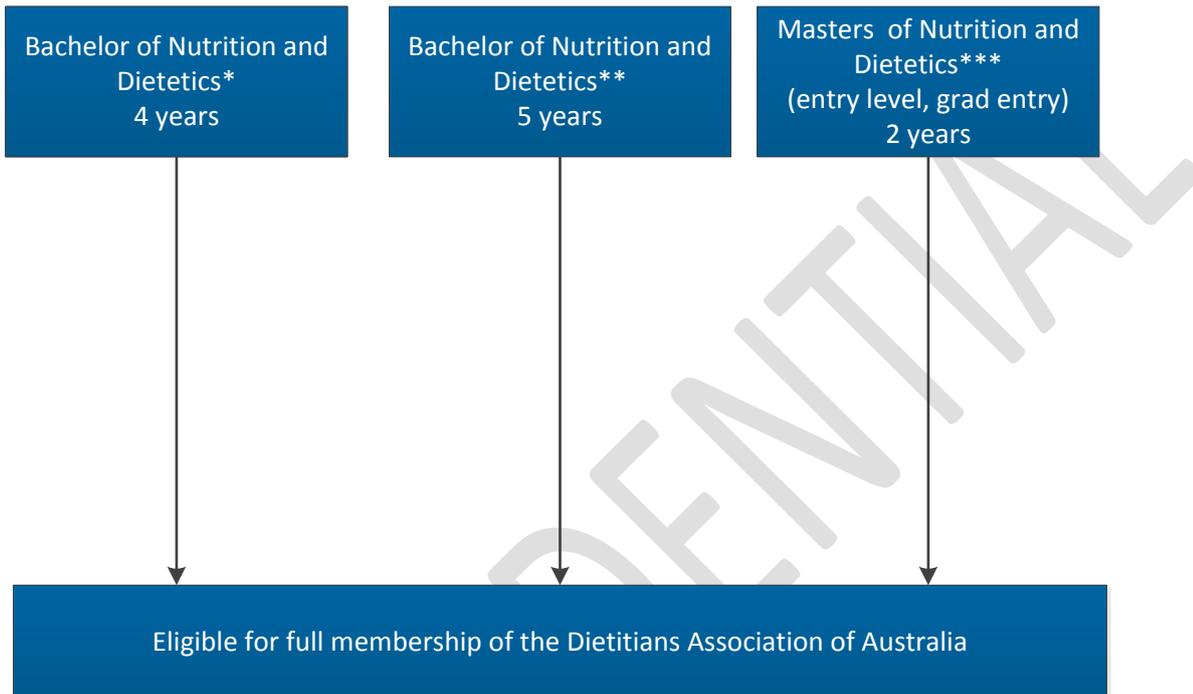
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<sup>5</sup> Dietitians Association of Australia. Manual for accreditation of dietetic education programs, op. cit. p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

## Dietetics Pathway in Australia

**Figure 1** shows the education pathway for dietetics students in Australia.



**Figure 1: Dietetic Education Pathway**

\*Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics includes Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics, Bachelor of Exercise and Movement Science/ Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics, and Bachelor of Health Science (Nutrition and Dietetic) programs.

\*\* Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics includes, Bachelor of Exercise and Movement Science/ Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics, and Bachelor of Health Science (Nutrition and Dietetic/Bachelor of Applied Science (Human Movement studies) courses).

\*\*\* Master of Nutrition and Dietetic programs require as a prerequisite completion of an undergraduate program with the equivalent of 50 per cent of each of the first and second years composed of bioscience, chemistry, physiology and biochemistry, including a minimum 15 per cent of a full year load each of biochemistry and physiology.

Source: Dietitians Association of Australia. <http://daa.asn.au/universities-recognition/dietetics-in-australia/becoming-a-dietitian>, accessed 21 November 2013.

## Clinical Training

All higher education providers offering dietetic programs are required to provide clinical training and work experience in their dietetic programs which is encouraged across a range of settings.<sup>7</sup>

The DAA accreditation standards prescribe the minimum weeks of clinical training for the three practice environments and specification of hours in a designated setting:

- Individual case management: 10-12 weeks of which at least four weeks in a hospital clinical setting where at least two full-time dietitians are employed. Higher education providers need to ensure that the selected placements provide opportunities for the students to be exposed to a variety of cases to enable consistent and safe practice.
- Community and public health nutrition: four to six weeks, placements can be provided in community health centres, and government and non- government departments.
- Food service management: four to six weeks of which at least two weeks should be related to the provision of food service where clients are nutritionally dependent. For example, public and private in-patient and aged care facilities, corrective services facilities, child care centres and respite programs.

For the 20 weeks, the DAA does not mandate the number or hours required to demonstrate competency as models of placement practice and supervision differ widely. According to correspondence from the DAA the average total number of hours of a 20 week placement program in Australia is understood to be between 750 and 800.<sup>8</sup>

There is some variance in the curricula across the Bachelor of Dietetics and the Masters of Dietetic programs. However in all courses, the majority of core clinical training takes place in the fourth or fifth year of the Bachelor programs and in the second year of the Masters program.<sup>3</sup> This is consistent with the expectations of the DAA that final competence to enter the profession must be demonstrated in the final year of the undergraduate or graduate program.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Dietitians Association of Australia, Manual for accreditation of dietetic education programs, op. cit. p. 12

<sup>8</sup> Correspondence to HWA, 11 December 2013: Internal document.

<sup>9</sup> Dietitians Association of Australia, Manual for accreditation of dietetic programs, op.cit, p. 13.

## Dietetic Programs

In 2012, 16 higher education providers delivered 25 entry-level accredited or provisionally accredited nutrition and dietetic programs of which 14 were at bachelor and 11 at master level.<sup>10</sup>

Each dietetic course has an average of 44 students. However, the number of students per course varies as reflected in the equivalent full time student load (EFTSL) for the courses, which varies between four and 253.<sup>11</sup> The low EFTSL is mostly for courses that no longer accept enrolments<sup>12</sup>, and may only have a few students to finish the course

The average of clinical training hours in the dietetic courses is 774,<sup>13</sup> which is consistent with the information provided by DAA.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 2** depicts the range of clinical training hours required by different Australian dietetic courses, as determined by higher education providers. The clinical training requirements for dietetic courses range from 700 hours to 1,000 hours of clinical training. The median requirement is 760 hours (the median being the numerical value separating the higher half of the data from the lower half). This is two per cent below the average of clinical training hours.

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<sup>10</sup> Dietitians Association of Australia website: <http://daa.asn.au/universities-recognition/accreditation-of-dietetic-programs/dietetic-programs-currently-accredited/>, accessed 15 November 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Health Workforce Australia, Survey of 2012 clinical training placements, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> Dietitians Association of Australia Website: <http://daa.asn.au/universities-recognition/accreditation-of-dietetic-programs/dietetic-programs-currently-accredited/>.

<sup>13</sup> Health Workforce Australia, Survey of 2012 clinical training placements. The average is calculated based on the courses that were reported in the Survey; the number has been rounded up for data analysis purposes.

<sup>14</sup> Correspondence to HWA, op. cit.

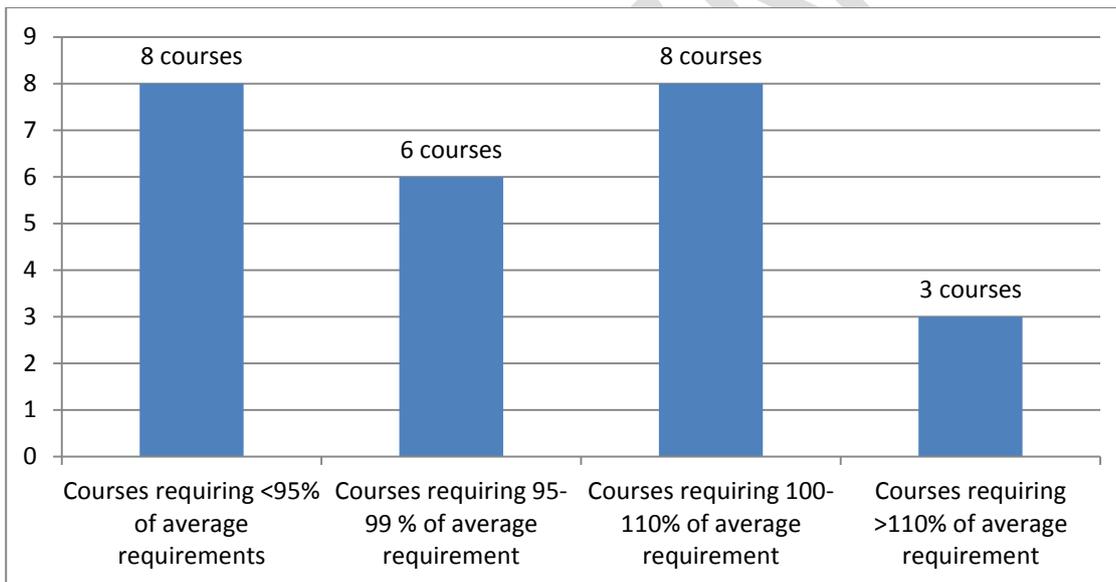


## Courses

**Figure 3** represents the number of dietetic courses offered in 2012 categorised based on the amount of clinical training hours required in comparison to the average requirement. Courses are grouped in categories reflecting the number of courses requiring students to complete:

- 700 hours or less than 95 per cent of clinical training,
- between 700 and 773 hours or 95 and 99 per cent of clinical training,
- between 774 and 849 hours of clinical training which equals 100 to 110 per cent; and
- between 850 and 1000 hours of clinical training which equals 110 to 130 per cent of the average requirement.

Forty-four per cent of courses require their students to complete between 770 and 1,000 hours of clinical training, which is up to 130 percent above the average of 774.



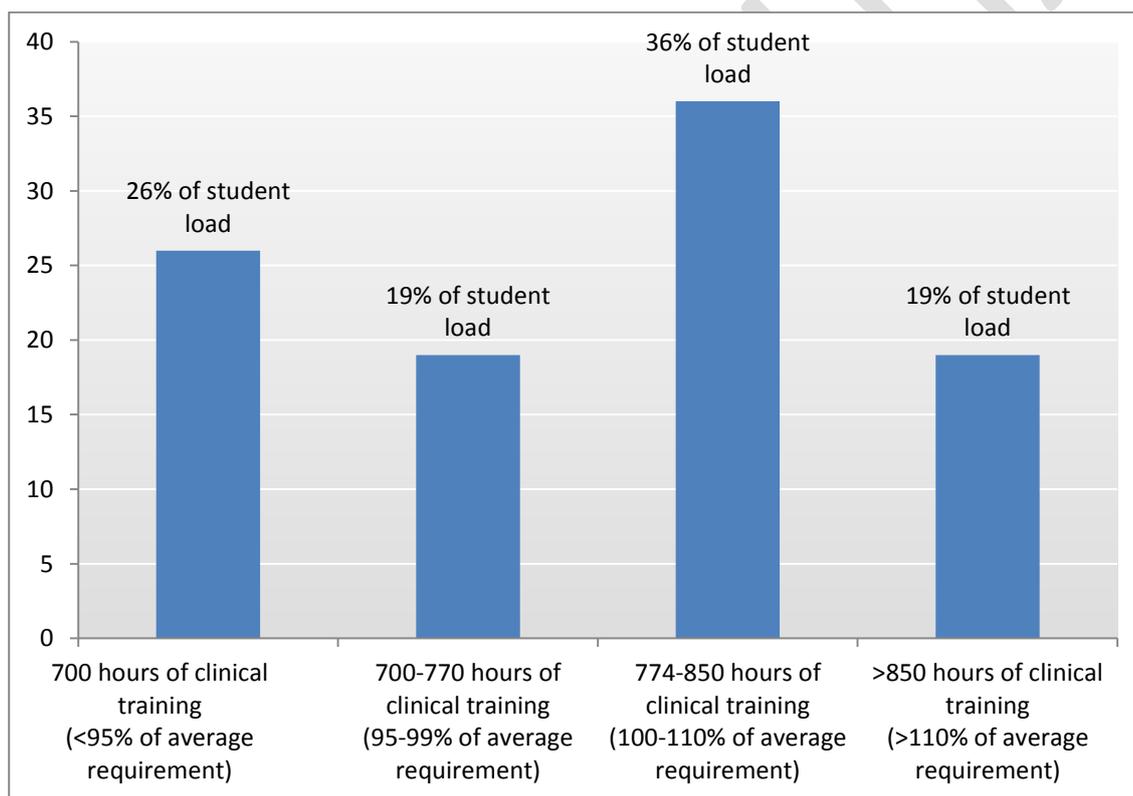
**Figure 3: Numbers of dietetic courses within different ranges of clinical training hours, 2012**

Source: Source: Health Workforce Australia, Survey of 2012 clinical training placements.

## Student Numbers

Twenty six per cent of students are enrolled in courses with less than 95 per cent of the average clinical training requirements, 19 per cent are enrolled in courses with clinical training requirements 95 to 99 per cent below the average requirement, 36 per cent are enrolled in courses requiring 100 to 110 per cent of the average requirement, and 19 per cent are enrolled in courses requiring more than 10 per cent above the average requirement. It should be noted that the clinical training in the last category courses is spread over two to four years, with the majority of hours (720) in the final year.<sup>16</sup> The majority of students (55 per cent) are enrolled in courses with up to 30 per cent above the average requirement of 774 hours.

**Figure 4** demonstrates the proportion of student load in dietetic courses that require completion of clinical training hours in line with the four categories defined in Figure 3. The graph compares each course category with the Equivalent Full Time Student Load (EFTSL) numbers studying that course.



**Figure 4: Proportion of student load in dietetic courses, 2012**

Source: Health Workforce Australia, Survey of 2012 clinical training placements.

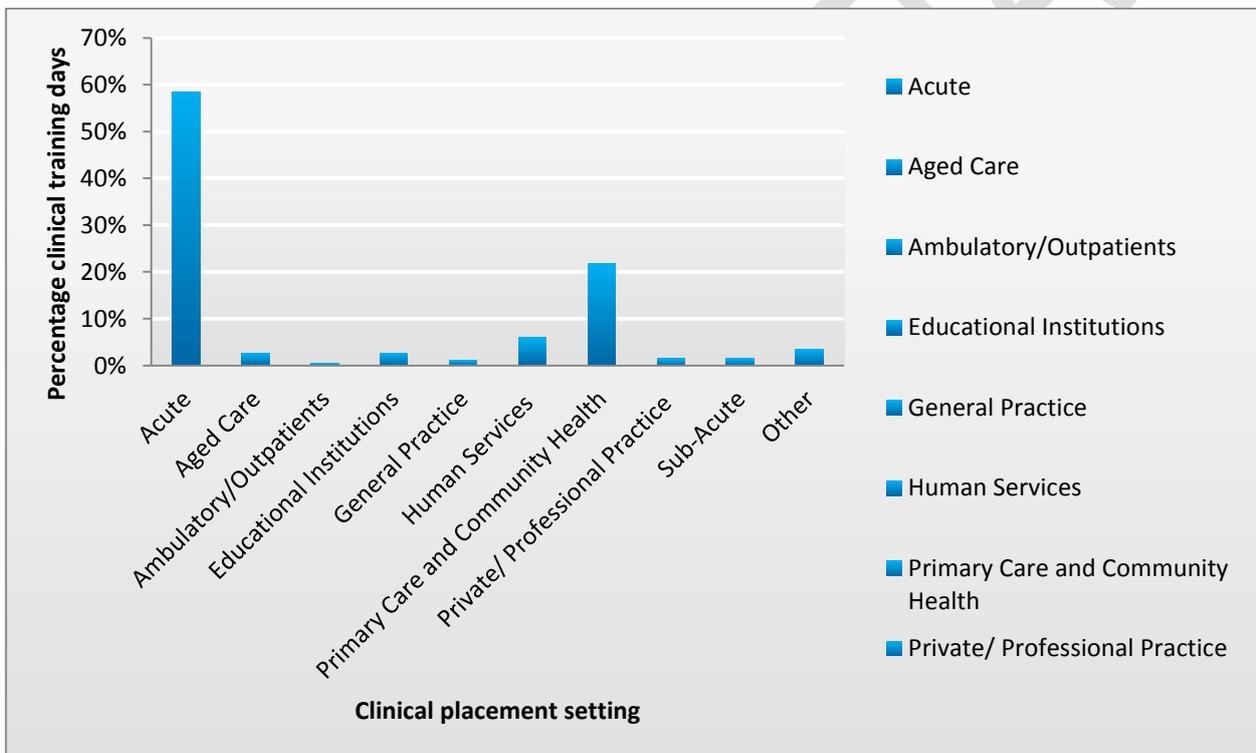
<sup>16</sup> Health Workforce Australia, Survey of 2012 clinical training placements, op. cit.

## Characteristics of Clinical Training

The majority of dietetic placements are reported within acute care services,<sup>17</sup> which corresponds with the 52 per cent of dietitians that reported working in hospital settings in 2011.<sup>18</sup> However, there is a wide variety of clinical placement settings in which a student dietitian can complete clinical training, in both primary care and community health settings.<sup>19</sup>

It is the responsibility of each higher education provider to ensure that the clinical placement experience provides dietetic students with an opportunity to demonstrate competence in the core areas of dietetics.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 5** reflects the proportion of clinical training hours in dietetics by placement setting.



**Figure 5: Proportion of dietetic clinical training by placement setting, 2012**

(a) The acute setting includes medical, surgical, maternity, and emergency settings.

Source: Source: Health Workforce Australia, Survey of 2012 clinical training placements.

<sup>17</sup> Health Workforce Australia. Survey of 2012 clinical training placements, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Health Workforce Australia, 2014. Draft Health Workforce 2015 – Selected Health Occupations – Dietitians.

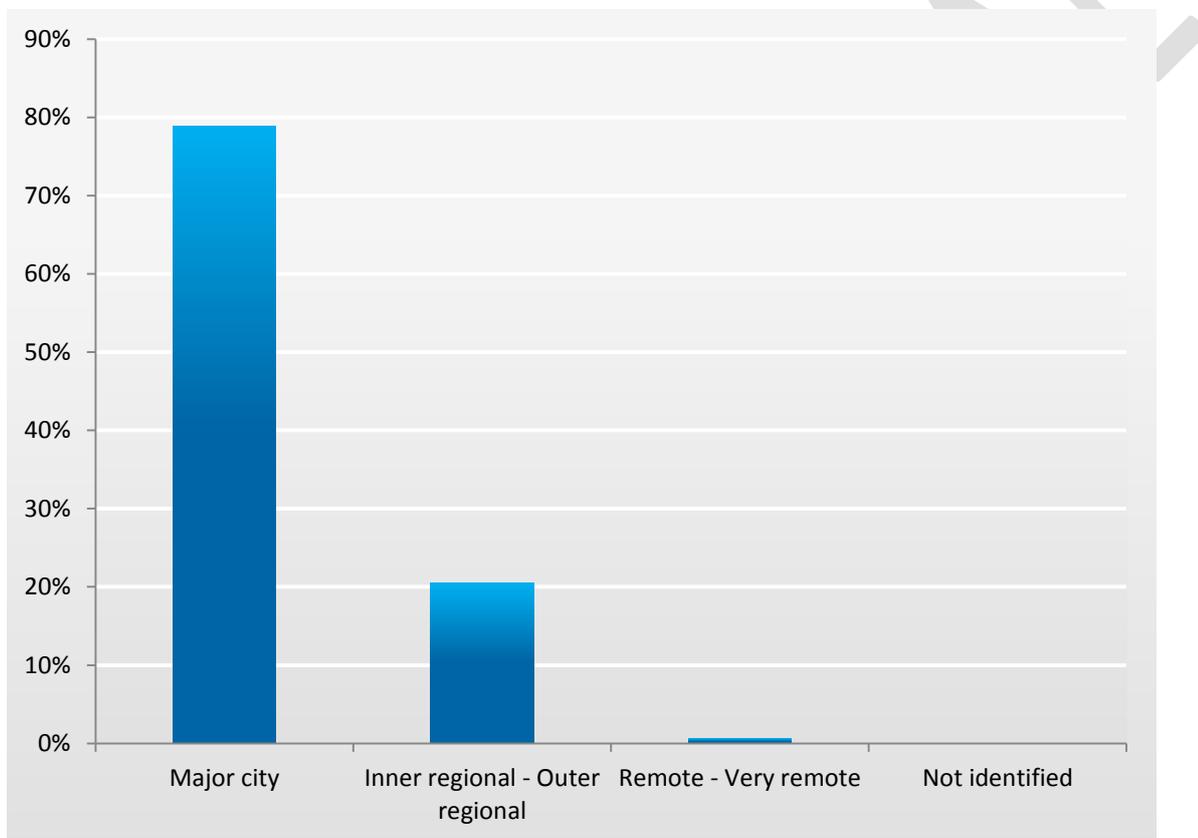
<sup>19</sup> Health Workforce Australia. Survey of 2012 clinical training placements, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> Dietitians Association of Australia, Manual for accreditation of dietetic education programs, op. cit., p.12.

## Metropolitan and Regional/Rural Placements

The majority of dietetic clinical training (79 per cent) occurs in metropolitan locations. Approximately 20 per cent of all dietetic clinical training is completed in regional locations, while only one per cent occurs in remote or very remote settings.

**Figure 6** represents the proportion of clinical training hours by geographical area.



**Figure 6: Proportion of clinical training hours: metropolitan and rural, 2012**

Source: Health Workforce Australia, 2013, Clinical Training 2012.

## Clinical Training Supervision

The DAA accreditation requirements mandate that all dietetic courses include supervised practice in a clinical setting.<sup>21</sup> Educators who provide students with supervised clinical practice are required to use the competency standards to inform expectations of the clinical placement experience. The Australian Dietetics Council states that: “the university must provide evidence that students within, and those who will enter, the program have access to adequately experienced clinical educators to provide a comprehensive clinical education experience”. Furthermore, clinical supervisors should be experienced and trained in the key aspects of dietetics (a range of settings and the management of clients). The higher education provider must provide educational courses for all clinical supervisors to continue to develop the knowledge and skills relevant to their educational roles.

Clinical supervision for dietetics, like other allied health professions, has traditionally involved one clinical supervisor supervising one student (1:1 model).<sup>22</sup> However, DAA recognises the need for the development of flexible placement programs that are sustainable in the local context and does not mandate the type of supervision model applied. DAA encourages innovation in teaching and models of supervision including peer assisted, problem based learning and group experiences, but requires that the final assessment of competence is done on an individual student basis.<sup>23</sup>

## Simulated Learning Environments (SLE)

The use of simulated learning is encouraged for the different placements covering the three domains of dietetic practice.<sup>24</sup>

Health Workforce Australia's Simulated Learning Report for Dietetics highlights that SLE is incorporated into dietetic education curricula with basic activities such as role play and patient interviews with actors as standardised patients. According to the DAA, SLE should not reduce the current requirements for the length of placement as they are already set at a minimum, but can be valuable in enhancing student preparedness for placement.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Dietitians Association of Australia, Manual for accreditation of dietetic education programs, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> John Ramsay & Associates, Clinical Supervision Support Program, Environmental scan and research, internal HWA.

<sup>23</sup> Dietitians Association of Australia, Manual for accreditation of dietetic education programs, op. cit., p. 13

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12

<sup>25</sup> Dietitians Association of Australia, Final Report on Simulated Learning Environment Project. July 2011.

[http://www.hwa.gov.au/sites/uploads/sle\\_dietitians\\_final\\_report\\_201107.pdf](http://www.hwa.gov.au/sites/uploads/sle_dietitians_final_report_201107.pdf), accessed 15 November 2013.

The HWA funded report suggests that due to the costs any SLE elements would be best developed and available on a national level.<sup>26</sup> The views and opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of HWA.

**Disclaimer:** Please note that the survey of clinical placements is a young collection and as such has data constraints which limit interpretation of the results. With time and investment, this type of data will be progressively standardised and analysis of the collection should become more accurate. The data has been reported by the participant Health Education Providers. Training providers were not required to validate the data in 2012.

For the data analysis, 'course' has been defined as training delivered in Australia that on completion leads to graduation, and eligibility to practice the profession.

The training requirements for double degrees in this profile are assumed to relate to the discipline of interest. However, there can be no certainty that the reported clinical training data was allocated to this discipline only.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.3.