ACA AUSTRALIAN COUNSELLING ASSOCIATION

Australian Counselling Association

2024 Workforce Census

Abridged Report

Prepared by Survey Matters

December 2024

Contents.

Executive Summary	**04**
Executive Summary	05
Key Findings	08
Workforce Distribution	**10**
Demographics	11
Employment	12
Location	14
Qualifications and Experience	15
Employment Profile	**18**
Sector	19
Specialisation	21
Private Practice	24
Counsellor Satisfaction with Working Conditions	26
Client and Community Demand	**28**
Service Demand	29
Capacity	31
Workforce Development	**32**
Students	33
Employment Preferences	34
Rural Workforce Development	37
Career Plans	38
Appendix	**40**
Methodology	41
About Survey Matters	43

Introduction

In mid-2024, the Australian Counselling Association (ACA) commissioned Survey Matters, an independent research agency, to conduct the **2024 Counsellor Workforce Census.**

The 2024 Counsellor Workforce Census Report provides valuable insights and information on the demographics, employment profile, sector engagement, practice areas and working conditions for the counsellor workforce in Australia.

The Australian Counselling Association Limited (ACA) is the largest peak registration body representing over 18,500 registered counsellors, psychotherapists and students in Australia. An overwhelming response was received to the 2024 Counsellor Workforce Census (21%) reflecting one in five (practicing) ACA registered counsellors in Australia. Additionally, ACA has over 9,000 students (and growing) fostering confidence in the future of the workforce.

As a not-for-profit association, ACA is dedicated to its vision of advancing the profession through comprehensive education, continuing professional development, supervision, research initiatives, and advocacy efforts that promote the value of counselling as a vital component of mental health care.

ACA recognises the significant role that counselling and psychotherapy has in the Australian mental health system. The foundations of the profession are built upon the principles of ensuring the safety, quality and competency of registered counsellors and psychotherapists in Australia.

At the heart of ACA's mission is a commitment to strengthen the profession and provide an avenue for the growth and development of its members. This involves supporting and upholding high standards, and fostering a culture of quality care, accountability and continuous education.

This is the only report of its kind for counsellors in Australia, however, please note that this is an abridged version of the full report, modified for use by the intended audience. The ACA is invested in the future of counsellors and psychotherapists by understanding its members through demographics, data and engagement opportunities.

For more information or requests for further data analysis, please contact Jodie McKenzie, CEO of ACA at jodie@theaca.net.au

We thank all of our counsellors who completed the survey. Without counsellors dedicating the time to fill in the survey we would not have these relevant and insightful findings to share with you.

We hope you find this report valuable.

Jodie McKenzie
CEO
Australian Counselling Association

01.

Executive Summary

survey matters.

Executive Summary

The Australian Counselling Association (ACA) is the leading professional body for counselling in Australia and represents over 18,500 registered counsellors, psychotherapists and students nationwide.

Counsellors play a vital role in Australia's mental health system, providing diverse and essential support to individuals, families, and communities across the country. Representing a highly qualified and dedicated workforce, they operate in a variety of settings, including private practices, not-for-profit organisations, schools, and government programs. This workforce is characterised by its diversity in employment arrangements, educational backgrounds, and areas of practice, which allows counsellors to address a wide range of mental health and wellbeing needs.

Currently, the majority of counsellors work in private practices, particularly in regional and rural areas. Employed counsellors, on the other hand, are more likely to work in not-for-profit organisations, schools, and institutional settings, reflecting the different client needs and structural demands of these environments.

Despite these distinctions, counsellors across all settings share a commitment to enhancing the lives of their clients, with anxiety, depression, family relationships, and trauma emerging as the most commonly addressed issues.

Workforce Composition and Distribution

Australia's counselling workforce comprises approximately 34,600 professionals[1] and is expected to grow by 15.1% between May 2023 and May 2028[2].

The majority of counsellors are motivated by a desire to make a difference (85%),followed by an interest in mental health (65%), Personal experiences also play a significant role, with 55% citing lived experiences as a motivation for joining the profession, reflecting the intrinsic values underpinning the profession.

The workforce is predominantly mid-career, with 59% of counsellors aged between 41 and 60. Only 13% of the workforce is under 30 years old, with over four in five (81%) survey respondents identifying as female.

The largest proportion of counsellors are self-employed (36% of respondents), with 25% working in permanent, salaried positions and 19% combining both employed and self-employed roles. Six percent (6%) work on a contract or casual basis. Students comprise 14% of respondents.

While half of survey respondents work in capital cities, and two in five in regional towns, notably, only 9% operate in rural or remote areas, a figure that underscores a geographic disparity in counselling service accessibility. Private practices counsellors dominate regional, rural and remote settings, accounting for 43% of all respondents in these areas. Respondents holding a Diploma of Counselling are also more common in regional, rural and remote areas, with 65% of this group working outside of metropolitan areas. This urban concentration highlights the need for targeted strategies to expand counselling services in underserved areas.

The counselling workforce is highly educated, with 85% holding counselling specific qualifications. Nearly half hold post-graduate qualifications, with 35% holding a Master of Counselling as their highest qualification and 12% a Graduate Diploma. A further 12% possess a Bachelor of Counselling degree, and 26% hold a Diploma of Counselling. Of those respondents with a Diploma of Counselling, approximately 6% hold Bachelor level qualifications in another discipline.

Reflecting their expertise counsellors with advanced qualifications, such as Master's degrees, are more likely to be employed in salaried positions or contact roles (40%). Conversely, respondents with Diploma level qualifications are significantly more likely to be self employed in private practice (51%).

ACA also currently has approximately 9,000 student members, with one in five practicing survey respondents also studying for higher level qualifications in counselling.

Over a quarter of respondents report a CALD background, although the demographic data suggests the profession lacks diversity in other areas. Only 2% of counsellors identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, suggesting a significant underrepresentation in Indigenous communities. Increasing representation and addressing barriers to entry could enhance the profession's inclusivity and effectiveness in meeting diverse community needs.

Employment Profile and Remuneration

Employment conditions in the counselling profession are highly variable, with significant disparities in income and workload across different employment types.

The survey revealed differences in income and working conditions between self-employed and salaried counsellors. Combined-role practitioners report the highest average annual income at $125,952, followed by employed counsellors at $87,539 and self-employed practitioners at $75,140. Casual counsellors earn the least, with an average annual income of $37,636.

1. Jobs and Skills Australia
2. NSW Government

Self-employed practitioners charge the highest average session fee at $133.30 but work fewer hours (19.9 weekly) compared to their employed counterparts (32.1 hours). This disparity reflects the challenges self-employed practitioners face in balancing client-facing work, administrative duties, and income generation.

Hourly rates also differ significantly. Employed counsellors earn an average of $44.30 per hour, while casual practitioners report the highest hourly rate at $65.40.

Across all employment types, counsellors work an average of 25.4 hours per week. While a third of respondents work over 33 hours per week, the sector also provides many opportunities for part time employment, with 29% working less than 16 hours per week. Of those who hold permanent salaried positions, 49% are on a part time basis. Those who work a combination of employed and self-employed roles work an average of 30.3 hours each week, slightly less than a standard full-time load of 38 hours per week.

Just over half (58%) of counsellor's time is spent on direct counselling activities. On average, respondents conduct 13.1 consultations per week. Employed counsellors average 13.6 consultations and self-employed professionals average 11.2 consultations per week. Counsellors with postgraduate qualifications report higher weekly consultation rates (averaging 12 sessions) compared to diploma holders (10 sessions).

Client Profiles and Service Demand

While demand for counselling services is driven by anxiety, stress, and depression, counsellors support a wide spectrum of client needs across a multitude of settings and regions.

The survey highlights that anxiety, stress, and depression are the most common presentations, with 70% of counsellors identifying these as primary client concerns. Demand for trauma and post traumatic stress disorder (36%), family, parenting and relationship issues (30%), communication and conflict resolution (24%) and grief and loss (22%) are also reported in significant numbers. These needs align with the skills of the counselling workforce, with 53% of respondents including anxiety, stress and depression among their main areas of practice.

Private practitioners report higher demand for family and relationship counselling (38%), while employed counsellors are more likely to address children's and adolescents' issues (29%) and family violence (25%).

The level of demand also varies across employment types. Nearly half (49%) of employed counsellors report very high demand for their services, compared to 17% of private practitioners. This disparity may reflect the broader scope and intensity of services often required in institutional or community-based settings.

Regional differences are also apparent, with rural practitioners reporting higher demand for neurodivergence services than those in urban centres. In contrast, urban counsellors tend to see a broader spectrum of issues, reflecting the diverse challenges of metropolitan populations.

Sector Capacity

The counselling workforce has capacity to accommodate additional client demand, with over half of respondents indicating they can take on more clients.

Across the profession, 56% of counsellors report capacity for new clients, with an average capacity to see 7.2 additional clients weekly, equating to a collective ability among respondents to manage over 7,600 new clients each week.

Of the counsellors with capacity to take on more work, 62% specialise in anxiety, stress and depression, the highest area of demand. Nearly two thirds (66%) include disability support among their main practice areas, while 62% specialise in neurodivergence, 61% in sexuality, 59% in addiction and 55% in family violence counselling.

Private practitioners demonstrate the greatest willingness and capacity to expand their client base, with 71% able to accept more clients, averaging 7.5 additional consultations weekly. While employed counsellors are less likely to have capacity, with only 29% reporting availability, those with capacity can manage an average of 7.1 new clients per week. Dual-role practitioners strike a balance, with 62% having capacity to see 6.5 additional clients on average.

Geographic trends reveal little difference in capacity across rural and remote practitioners (57%) and their urban counterparts (56%). South Australian counsellors notably report the highest capacity at 8.4 clients weekly.

Among those who do not have capacity to take on new clients, 14% have capacity but do not want to take on more work and 19% do not have capacity.

Existing high demand for services is the most common reason for counsellors to report they are not willing to take on more clients (42%), particularly in regional and rural areas (47% and 56%, respectively).

Other barriers include maintaining personal-professional life balance (34%), administrative burdens (13%), and burnout (7%). Interestingly, 31% of respondents are content with their current workload, reflecting diverse perspectives on work-life capacity

Workforce Development

An experienced, educated and mature workforce and a strong pipeline of students signal significant future workforce capacity.

The counselling profession is characterised by a mature and experienced workforce. The average age of entry into the profession is approximately 43, resulting in over half (53%) of survey respondents aged over 50. While this could might suggest a potential turnover challenge in the coming decade, the data is reassuring. Only 5% intend to retire in the next five years and 23% of respondents have been practicing for more than a decade. This demonstrates not only the depth of maturity and experience within the profession but also a strong likelihood of long-term commitment, ensuring stability and continuity in the workforce.

Instead, 54% intend to continue in their current roles, 11% plan to establish private practices, and 6% aim to undertake further study. Career progression pathways remain a priority, with many mid-career counsellors expressing interest in supervisory or academic roles.

The profession's future is also bolstered by a strong pipeline of students, who currently account for 14% of respondents. Additionally, 20% of practising counsellors are pursuing further qualifications, with most upgrading to a Master of Counselling degree. By 2025, 65% of these individuals are expected to complete their studies, leading to an increase in the education levels across the workforce.

There is also potential to build the supply of practitioners in the regional workforce should the need arise, with nearly two in five respondents willing to consider working in rural or remote areas. Higher remuneration and financial support for relocation would be the most critical support needs to encourage practitioners to relocate.

Professional Challenges and Support Needs

Financial pressures, limited recognition, and administrative burdens are key challenges impacting the counselling profession.

Counsellors face significant financial challenges, particularly in private practice. Many practitioners struggle with low remuneration and high operational costs, compounded by the absence of Medicare rebates. Only 17% of respondents include non-clinical activities such as administration and marketing in their fees, suggesting a widespread undervaluation of professional time. This financial strain is exacerbated for practitioners in rural and remote areas, where reduced access to resources create additional barriers.

Professional recognition is another area of concern for counsellors. Many counsellors feel overshadowed by psychologists and other allied health professionals, limiting their ability to secure referrals and funding.

Balancing administrative tasks with therapeutic work (31%) and finding enough clients to meet income needs (29%) are also significant stressors, especially for self-employed counsellors. For many, the burden of administrative work, marketing, and unpaid professional development contributes to isolation and exhaustion.

Regional and Rural Challenges

Geographic disparities in counselling services highlight the need for targeted strategies to support rural and remote practitioners.

Rural and remote counsellors account for only 9% of the workforce, yet they face unique challenges in meeting client demand. Demand appears to be high in regional areas, with 31% of respondents working in regional towns classifying demand as very high, compared to just 23% in capital cities. Yet many of these practitioners struggle with a lack of recognition by local healthcare networks, and inability to obtain referrals and find clients and indicate that many clients cannot afford to pay for their services.

They also report lower average incomes and session fees compared to their urban counterparts. Among self-employed counsellors, weekly earnings average $1,458 in rural areas compared to $1,599 in capital cities.

Despite these financial constraints, rural practitioners often serve clients with complex needs, including neurodivergence and trauma-related issues. Private practitioners in regional areas also conduct more consultations each week than their urban counterparts (11.6 compared to 11.0)

Conclusion

The **2024 ACA Workforce Census** provides a detailed snapshot of the counselling profession in Australia and underscores the counselling profession's critical role in addressing Australia's mental health needs.

By aligning areas of practice with client demand, supporting professional development, and addressing systemic challenges, the profession can continue to thrive and expand its impact.

These insights provide a roadmap for the Australian Counselling Association to advocate for the profession, ensuring its sustainability and growth in the years ahead.

KEY FINDINGS

01

Diverse Employment Arrangements Shape the Workforce

The counselling workforce is split across employment types, with 36% self-employed, 31% salaried (including contract and casual roles), and 19% combining both roles. Private practice dominates in rural areas (43%), while salaried roles are more common in metropolitan settings, suggesting accessibility and demand vary by location. The trend to self-employment is also particularly strong among counsellors with over 10 years of experience, half of whom choose self-employment.

02

Predominantly Female and Mid-to-Late Career Workforce

The workforce is 81% female, with most professionals aged between 41 and 60 (59%). Only 13% are under 30, highlighting an experienced and mature workforce. Nearly a quarter (23%) of counsellors identify as being from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, with a notable concentration in urban areas. However, only 2% identify as Aboriginal, indicating very low Indigenous representation.

03

Qualifications Reflect High Professional Standards

Over four in five (85%) respondents hold counselling-specific qualifications, with the most common being a Master of Counselling, held by 35% of respondents. This proportion is higher among employed counsellors (42%) than self-employed ones (27%). Diploma-level qualifications are prevalent among self-employed practitioners (31%), suggesting varied educational pathways within the profession. Of those respondents with a Diploma of Counselling, approximately 6% hold Bachelor level qualifications in another discipline.

04

Significant Variation in Earnings Across Roles

Counsellors combining employment and private practice roles report the highest average annual income at $125,952, compared to $87,539 for employed counsellors and $75,140 for private practitioners. Casual counsellors earn the least, averaging $37,636 annually, reflecting disparities in financial stability. This suggests many counsellors may be supplementing their salary with additional consulting hours to meet their income requirements.

05

High Levels of Specialisation Across Diverse Practice Areas

Nearly seven in ten (69%) counsellors specialise in a particular practice area, with self-employed counsellors more likely to focus on common mental health issues like anxiety, stress, and depression (59%). Employed counsellors tend to focus more on childhood or adolescent counselling (31%) and family violence (27%). Trauma (49%), grief and loss (40%) family and relationships (38%), communication and conflict resolution (27%) are also common practice areas.

KEY FINDINGS

06

Workload and Client-Facing Time Vary Across Employment Types

Counsellors report an average weekly workload of 25.4 hours, with employed professionals working the most at 32.1 hours compared to self-employed counsellors who average 19.9 hours per week. Of this, only 57.9% of time is spent on direct counselling activities, reflecting significant administrative demands. On average, counsellors conduct 13.1 consultations per week, with employed counsellors averaging 13.6 consultations and self-employed professionals averaging 11.2 consultations.

07

Anxiety and Depression Dominate Service Demand

Across all settings, 70% of counsellors report demand for anxiety, stress, and depression services. Private practitioners also see high demand for family and relationship support (38%, compared to 22% among employed counsellors), while employed counsellors more frequently address children's and adolescents' issues (29% vs 12%). Family violence (23%) and addiction services (16%) are also more commonly treated by employed counsellors.

08

Existing Workforce Capacity to Expand Client Service

The counselling workforce has a substantial capacity to accommodate additional client demand, with over half of respondents indicating they can take on more clients. Across the survey sample, 56% of counsellors report capacity for new clients, with an average capacity to see 7.2 additional clients weekly. This equates to a collective ability to manage over 7,600 new clients each week among respondents. Of the counsellors with capacity to take on more work, 62% specialise in anxiety, stress and depression, while 66% include disability support among their main practice areas, 62% specialise in neurodivergence, 61% in sexuality, 59% in addiction and 55% in family violence counselling.

09

Motivations Highlight a Commitment to Wellbeing

Eighty-five percent of counsellors are driven by a desire to make a difference, followed by a general interest in mental health (65%). Personal experiences also play a significant role, with 55% citing lived experiences as a motivator, reflecting the intrinsic values underpinning the profession.

10

High Student Numbers Support Workforce Development

Students account for 14% of respondents, with 20% of practicing counsellors also pursuing further qualifications. Most are upskilling to a Master of Counselling, which 65% expect to complete by 2025, leading to an increase in the education levels across the workforce. Additionally, career plans indicate that 54% of counsellors plan to remain in their current roles, while 11% aim to start their own private practice, and only 5% plan to retire.

02.

Workforce Distribution

Workforce Demographics

The Australian counselling workforce is largely experienced professionals, with nearly a quarter from CALD backgrounds.

Over four in five (81%) survey respondents identify as female, with only 17% identifying as male. Gender diversity remains limited, with non-binary or other gender identities comprising just 1% of the workforce.

The age distribution within the counselling profession is varied, with the majority clustered in the 51-60 age bracket (34%), followed by the 41-50 group (25%) and the 61-70 group (18%).

This indicates that the profession is largely comprised of mid- to late-career individuals, with younger counsellors aged 25-40 representing a smaller proportion. It also suggests that there is a wealth of experience and maturity within the workforce.

The approximate age of entry to the profession is 43, suggesting counselling is often a second or third career that provides ongoing employment later in life. While three in ten (30%) students are aged under 40, 32% are in the 41–50-year-old age group, which should ensure a solid foundation for the workforce in coming years.

In terms of cultural diversity, 23% of counsellors identify as being from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, with a notable concentration in urban areas, particularly capital cities (27%). It is also notable that 30% of students identify as from a CALD background.

However, only 2% of respondents identify as Aboriginal, and none as Torres Strait Islander, suggesting that Indigenous representation within the profession remains very low. This low level of Indigenous participation may present an opportunity for targeted initiatives to increase representation and provide culturally relevant services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Figure 1: Age of the Workforce, 2024

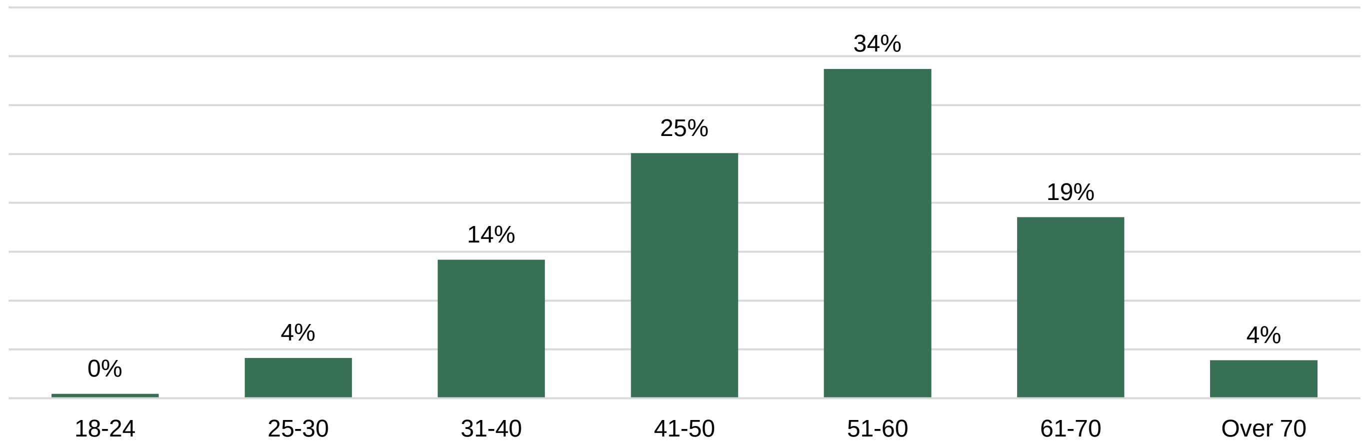


Table 1: Workforce Demographics, 2024

	Total	Workforce	Student
Sample	2240	1,918	322
Female	81%	81%	80%
Male	17%	17%	18%
Non-binary / Use a different term	1%	1%	1%
Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander	2%	2%	2%
CALD Background	23%	22%	30%

Q4. How old are you? n=2,240 (Exclude “prefer not to say’) / Q5. Are you (gender)? n=2,240 / Q6. Do you identify as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin? n=2,240 / Q7. Do you identify as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background? n=2,240

Significantly higher / lower than other groups

Employment

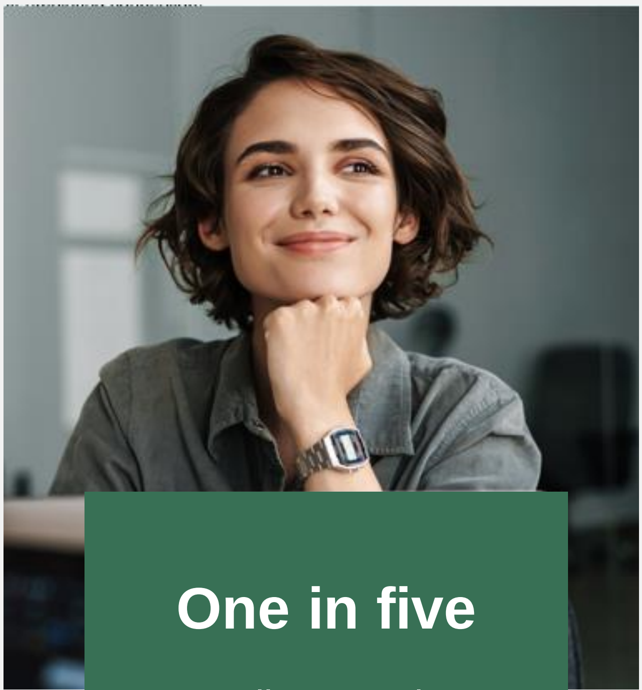
The counselling workforce in Australia offers a range of employment types, with many counsellors combining private practice with employed roles.

A high proportion of respondents are self-employed counsellors (36%). Counsellors with over 10 years of experience are the most likely to work in private practice, with half (50%) of this group choosing self-employment over other types of employment.

Salaried employment, including contract and casual arrangements, accounts for 31% of the workforce, with a slightly stronger presence in capital cities (38%), suggesting urban counsellors may have greater access to institutional employment opportunities. Of those holding a permanent position, 51% are employed on a full-time basis, and 49% work a part time position.

A significant segment (19%) of the respondent workforce combines both salaried and self-employed roles, showing a pattern of flexible employment arrangements that may be driven by demand variability and client access across regions. Among these counsellors, a majority (79%) have a part time role that they supplement with private practice work, although just over one in five also hold a full-time position.

Students comprise 14% of the sample, indicating a pipeline of new professionals entering the field.



One in five

Counsellors supplement their paid employment with private practice work.

Figure 2: Employment Type, 2024

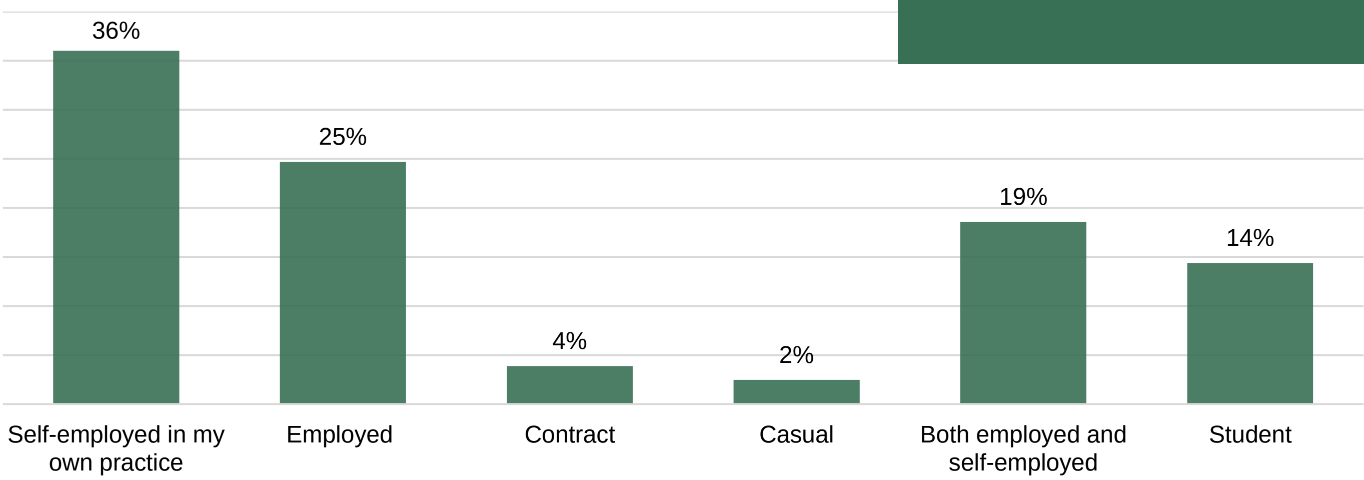


Table 2: Employment Basis, 2024

	Total	Employed Counsellor	Both Employed and Self Employed
	969	553	416
Full Time	38%	51%	21%
Part Time	62%	49%	79%

Q1. What is your current employment situation? n=2,228 (Exclude "prefer not to say') / Q19. In your PRIMARY role or position, are you employed: n=969

Significantly higher / lower than other groups

The majority of working respondents identify as counsellors (68%), a trend consistent across private practice (68%), employed counsellors (69%), and those combining both roles (64%).

Psychotherapists are significantly more common in private practice (17%), compared to just 4% among employed counsellors.

Respondents engaged in non-counselling roles (7%), and management functions (3%) are more likely to be employed, reflecting the broader scope of responsibilities within institutional settings. Supervisory roles are evenly distributed across all employment types at 3-4%.

Table 3: Role, 2024

	Total	Private Practice Counsellor	Employed Counsellor *	Both Employed and Private Practice
Sample	1918	807	695	416
Counsellor	68%	68%	69%	64%
Psychotherapist	11%	17%	4%	11%
Manager	3%	1%	5%	3%
Supervisor	3%	3%	3%	4%
Non-counselling role	7%	3%	9%	9%
Other	9%	8%	10%	10%

Q17. Which of the following best describes your PRIMARY job role or position? n=1918 (excludes students). * (Note: Employed Counsellors includes Casual and Contract Counsellors)

Significantly higher / lower than other groups

Location of the Workforce

The survey data reveals that the Australian counselling workforce is predominantly concentrated in capital cities, with 50% of counsellors working in urban centers.

Regional cities or towns account for 40% of the workforce, indicating a substantial presence outside the capitals but still within populated areas. Rural areas and remote communities collectively account for a smaller share, with 8% in rural communities and just 1% in remote areas.

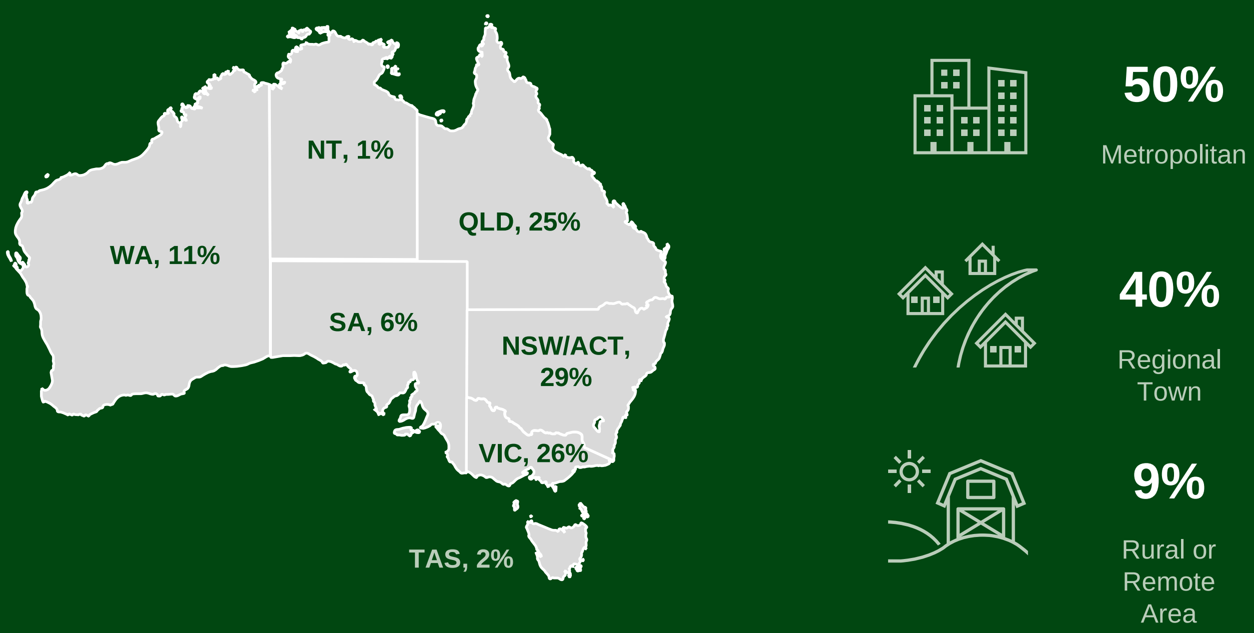
State-wise, New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria (VIC) each comprise 26% of the workforce, while Queensland (QLD) follows closely with 25%, indicating a broad regional spread across the east coast. Western Australia (WA) represents 11% of the workforce, while the remaining states and territories, including the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), South Australia (SA), Northern Territory (NT), and Tasmania (TAS), collectively account for smaller portions.

In terms of work settings, there appears to be a employment pattern based on location. While differences are not statistically significant, counsellors in capital cities are more likely to be salaried employees, working under contract or casual arrangements, compared to their counterparts in regional and rural areas, who show a higher tendency towards self-employment.

Table 4: Location of the Workforce, 2024

	Total	Private Practice Counsellors	Employed Counsellors *	Both Employed & Self Employed	Student
Sample	2240	807	695	416	322
ACT	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%
NSW	26%	25%	24%	29%	26%
NT + SA	7%	9%	7%	5%	8%
QLD	25%	26%	26%	26%	22%
TAS	2%	2%	2%	3%	0%
VIC	26%	26%	26%	25%	27%
WA	11%	10%	12%	11%	14%

* (Note: Employed Counsellors includes Casual and Contract Counsellors)



Q2. Which State or Territory do you live in? n=2,240 / Q3. Which best describes where you work? n= 1,922

Qualifications and Experience

The counselling workforce is highly qualified, with 85% indicating their highest qualification is counselling specific.

The most common credential is a Master of Counselling, held by 35% of respondents, with a significantly higher proportion among employed counsellors (42%) compared to those who are self-employed (27%).

A further 26% of respondents hold a Diploma of Counselling, which is more prevalent among self-employed counsellors (31%). Bachelor of Counselling (12%) and Graduate Diploma of Counselling (12%) round out the counselling qualifications held by respondents. Of those respondents with a Diploma of Counselling, approximately 6% hold Bachelor level qualifications in another discipline.

When examining years of experience, the data reveals a balanced mix of early-career and seasoned counsellors. About 13% of respondents are newcomers with less than one year of practice, while 17% have been practicing for one to two years. Those with three to five years of experience represent 23% of the workforce, showing a solid segment of emerging professionals.

Mid-career counsellors with six to ten years of practice make up 19%, while experienced practitioners with 11 to 20 years account for 18%, with a notable concentration of these professionals (22%) working in self-employed roles.

A smaller, yet significant, proportion (9%) have more than 20 years of experience, highlighting the presence of long-term expertise within the field and a tendency for counselling to be a long-term career choice.

Of note and possibly reflecting that more experienced practitioners choose to start their own practice, 53% of self-employed practitioners have over 5 years experience, significantly more than the employed cohort of counsellors (38%). A third of the counsellors working in private practice have over 10 years experience in the role.

These findings indicate a robust mix of qualifications and experience levels across the counselling profession, suggesting the capability to cater to a diverse range of client needs.

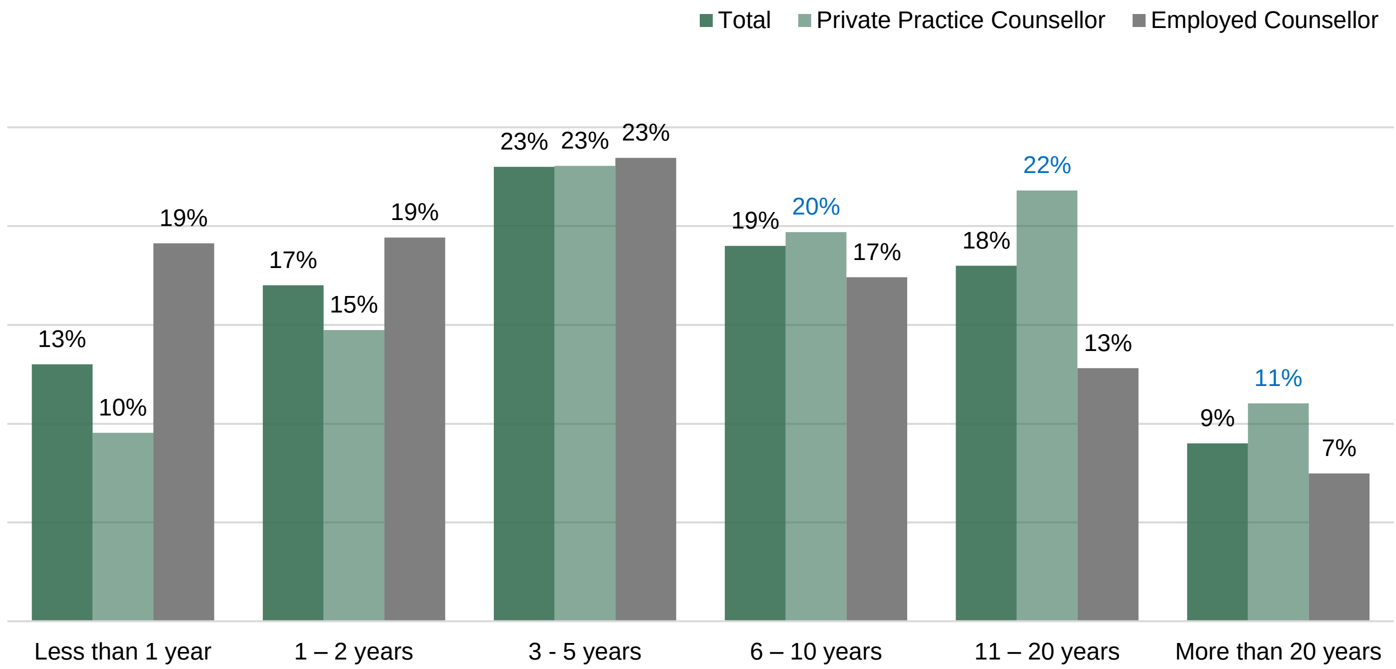
Table 5: Workforce Qualifications

	Total	Private Practice Counsellor	Employed Counsellors *	Both Employed & Private Practice
Sample	1921	807	695	416
Master of Counselling	35%	27%	42%	37%
Diploma of Counselling	26%	31%	22%	22%
Bachelor of Counselling	12%	13%	11%	12%
Graduate Diploma of Counselling	12%	11%	11%	14%
Other Master's degree	6%	7%	5%	5%
Other Bachelor degree	5%	5%	5%	4%
Other	4%	4%	4%	4%
PhD	1%	1%	1%	1%
Prefer not to say	1%	0%	1%	0%

Q8. What is the highest level of qualification you hold in relation to counselling? n=1,921 /*
(Note: Employed Counsellors includes Casual and Contract Counsellors)

Significantly higher / lower than other groups

Figure 3: Workforce Experience, by Counsellor Type



Q9. Approximately, how many years have you been practicing as a counsellor?
n=1,920 (Note * Employed Counsellors includes Casual and Contract Counsellors)

Significantly higher / lower than other groups

33%

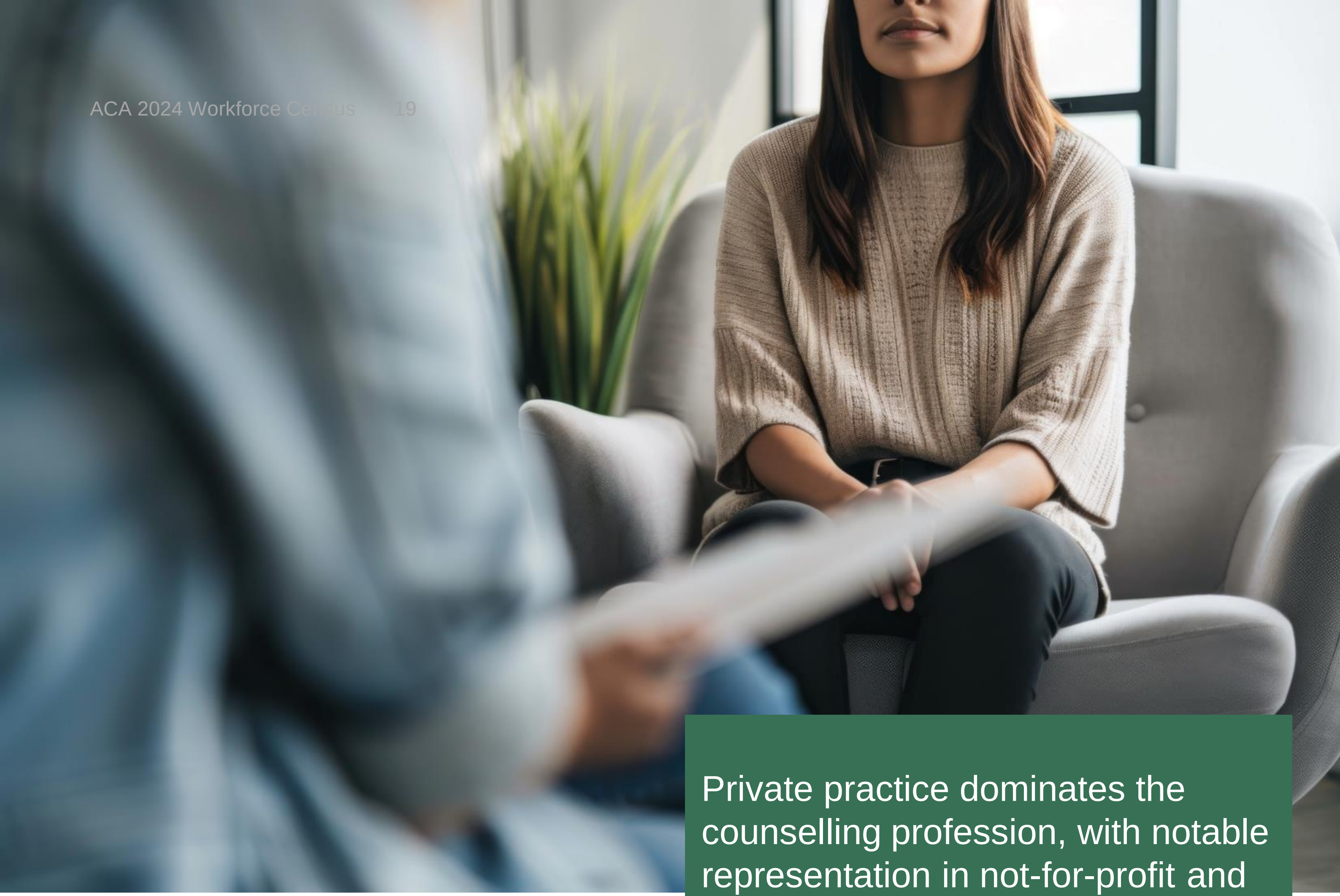
Of counsellors working in private practice have over 10 years experience.

“I’m currently completing a masters degree in counseling and have changed from a 20-year career as a nurse because I felt that this career I could help people more and would provide longevity in my later working years”

Student, VIC

03.

Employment Profile



Private practice dominates the counselling profession, with notable representation in not-for-profit and NDIS support settings.

Employment Sector

The majority of Australian counsellors work in private clinics or practices, with 57% indicating this as their primary work setting.

This proportion rises significantly among self-employed professionals, of whom 88% are in private practice, underscoring a strong trend toward independent work within the field.

Not-for-profit organisations also employ a substantial portion of counsellors (28%), especially among those who receive salaries or work on contract (45%). Two in five counsellors who combine salaried employment with private practice work in a not-for-profit organisation in some capacity.

Engagement in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is another key area, with 18% working with NDIS adults and 9% with NDIS children, highlighting a significant commitment to disability support within the profession.

This sector is a particularly prominent employer in South Australia and Northern Territory, where 33% of counsellors work with NDIS adults and 19% with children. In regional cities, NDIS involvement is also high (20% for adults and 12% for children), suggesting that counsellors fill a critical gap in disability support across non-metropolitan areas.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) employ 18% of counsellors, especially among those who combine salaried and self-employed roles (27%), indicating demand for mental health services within workplaces. In Tasmania, EAP roles are significant (35%), possibly due to partnerships with local industries and a focus on workforce mental health.

Less common settings include aged care (2%) and community centres (4%), while work in hospitals, both private and public, remains minimal.

Overall, 14% of respondents currently work in the university or school sector, increasing to 19% in Victoria and 17% in capital cities.

These findings reflect a diverse range of practice environments within counselling, with a strong leaning toward private practice, community-oriented services, and disability support.

Table 6: Sector Engagement, by Counsellor Type

	Total	Private Practice Counsellors	Employed Counsellors *	Both Employed & Private Practice
Sample	1921	807	695	416
Private clinic / practice	57%	88%	13%	74%
Not for profit organisation	28%	7%	45%	40%
EAP	18%	23%	7%	27%
NDIS adults	18%	26%	8%	16%
University / School	14%	3%	23%	22%
NDIS children	9%	13%	6%	9%
Community centre	4%	2%	5%	7%
GP / Allied Health Clinic	3%	3%	2%	3%
Aged care facility	2%	2%	2%	3%
Private hospital	2%	0%	2%	3%
Public hospital	1%	0%	2%	2%
Other	10%	9%	11%	13%

Q12. In which settings do you currently work? n=1,921 (Note * Employed Counsellors includes Casual and Contract Counsellors)

Significantly higher / lower than other groups

69%
Of counsellors work in a specific practice area.

Area of Practice

Practice areas for counsellors vary significantly between self-employed and employed practitioners.

Working in specific practice areas of counselling is more common among self-employed and dual-role (both employed and self-employed) counsellors, with 74% and 73% respectively indicating they have a practice area that they specialise in. In contrast, only 60% of employed counsellors report specialising in particular practice areas, with this proportion even lower for casual counsellors at 55%.

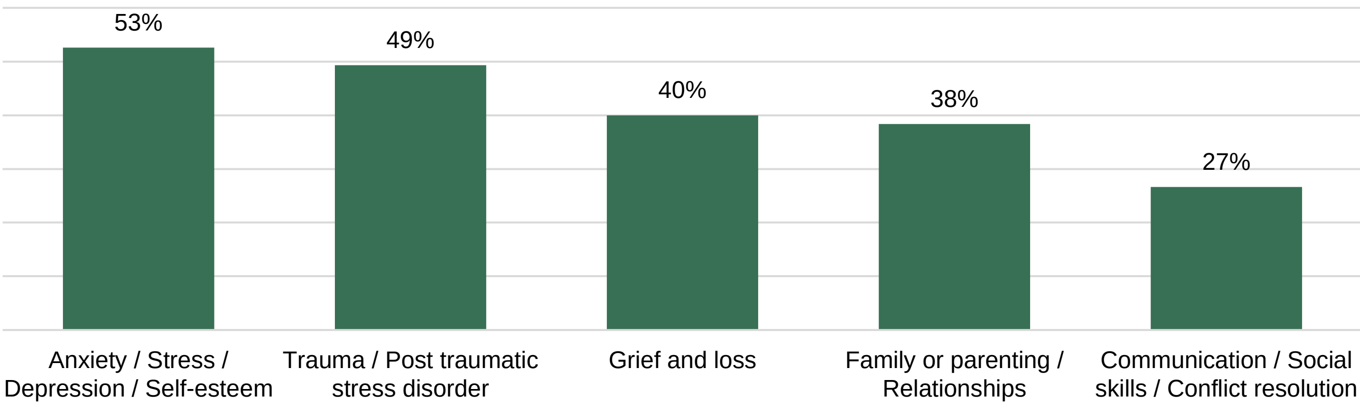
Overall, the top five practice areas are anxiety, stress and depression (53%), trauma and post traumatic stress disorder (49%), grief and loss (40%), family and relationships counselling (38%) and communication and conflict resolution support (27%).

Self-employed counsellors are more likely to practice in common mental health areas, with high proportions focusing on anxiety, stress, depression, and self-esteem (59%), trauma and PTSD (52%), and grief and loss (42%). They also have a higher emphasis on family or relationship counselling (43%) and communication or conflict resolution (32%).

Areas such as neurodivergence (25%), anger management (21%), disability (17%) and sexuality (15%) are also more common practice areas for self-employed counsellors than those in employed roles, suggesting a demand for diverse expertise within private practice.

In contrast, employed counsellors tend to work more in childhood or adolescent counselling (30%) and family violence (26%), reflecting the needs of institutional and community service roles. There is also a slightly higher emphasis on addiction support (23%) and career or school counselling (13%) among employed counsellors.

Figure 4: Top 5 Practice Areas



Q13. Do you specialise in any particular area of counselling? n=1,918 /Q 14. In which of the following areas do you specialise? n=1,318

Those counsellors who specified other practice areas included trauma and mental health, such as sexual abuse, childhood trauma, and PTSD, with many practitioners specialising in areas like suicide prevention, grief, and bereavement. Relationship and family counselling, including couples therapy and support for separated families, also feature prominently.

A number of counsellors focus on niche practice areas like LGBTQIA+ issues, neurodivergence, and cultural or religious challenges, while others cater to specific populations, such as youth, carers, or first responders.

Creative and alternative therapies, such as art therapy, equine-assisted therapy, and mindfulness-based practices, are also frequently cited. These diverse practice areas highlight the adaptability of counsellors to meet diverse client needs while also underlining the breadth and complexity of the challenges faced within the profession.

Table 7: Sector Engagement, by Counsellor Type

	Total	Private Practice Counsellor	Employed Counsellor*
Sample	1318	598	417
Anxiety / Stress / Depression / Self-esteem	53%	59%	39%
Trauma / Post traumatic stress disorder	49%	52%	41%
Grief and loss	40%	42%	33%
Family or parenting / Relationships	38%	43%	29%
Communication / Social skills / Conflict resolution	27%	32%	19%
Childhood or adolescent	26%	20%	30%
Family violence	24%	20%	26%
Addiction	21%	19%	23%
Neurodivergence (ADHD, Autism)	20%	25%	16%
Anger management	17%	21%	12%
Disability	13%	17%	10%
Sex & sexuality / Gender / Identity	12%	15%	7%
Career / School counselling	11%	7%	13%
Chronic pain or illness / Palliative care	9%	11%	6%
Cultural / Migrant & refugee / Indigenous Healing	6%	5%	6%
Pre and post-natal issues	6%	7%	2%
Eating disorders	5%	6%	3%
Veterans and Defence Force	4%	6%	2%

Q 14. In which of the following areas do you specialise? n=1,318 (Note * Employed Counsellors includes Casual and Contract Counsellors)

Significantly higher / lower than other groups

“Remuneration and working conditions are great overall. However, it would be fantastic to see more recognition of counselling/art therapy as a legitimate healthcare profession by legislators/other healthcare professionals/general public”

Self-employed, SA

Private Practice

Survey results reveal that self-employed counselling professionals conduct an average of 11.2 consultations per week, charging an average fee of $133.30, with an average weekly income of $1,565.00.

Experience plays a pivotal role in earnings and consultation frequency. Practitioners with over 20 years of experience report the highest weekly earnings ($1,967.10) and consultation rates (14 per week). In contrast, those with less than two years of experience earn significantly less ($921.80) and conduct fewer consultations (7.0 per week).

Similarly, qualifications matter; those holding a Master's degree earn the highest weekly income ($1,681.80) and charge the highest average fees ($137.40), outperforming diploma holders, who earn $1,352.10 weekly and charge $125.70 per consultation.

State-based differences also emerge. Tasmania reports the highest weekly earnings at $1,900.30, driven by a higher consultation frequency (12.7 per week). Queensland practitioners also report a high caseload at 12.1 consultations per week and average fees of $132.00, resulting in strong weekly earnings ($1,656.90). By comparison, Western Australia has the lowest consultation frequency (9.3 per week), consultation fees ($129.50) and average weekly earnings ($1,246.80).

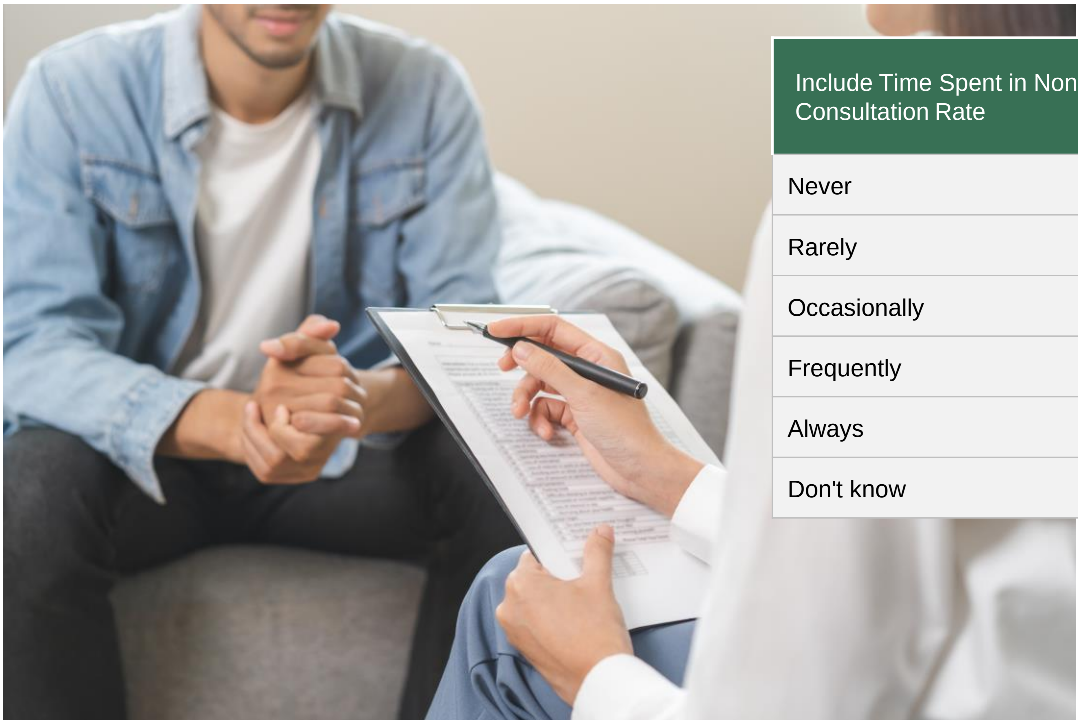
Other states, such as New South Wales and Victoria, align closely with the national averages for fees and consultations. The highest billing rates were reported in the ACT ($140.10)

Location also affects fees and earnings. Counsellors in capital cities charge higher fees on average ($138.70) than their regional ($128.00) and rural/remote counterparts ($129.40). Consequently, weekly earnings are highest in capital cities ($1,599.30), followed by regional towns ($1,550.90) and rural/remote areas ($1,458.70).

Psychotherapists consistently report higher average fees per consultation ($151.20), a higher median fee ($150.00), and greater weekly earnings ($1,924.10) than counsellors, who average $127.30 per consultation and $1,536.30 in weekly earnings.

A majority of respondents do not account for non-clinical activities—such as marketing, administration, or report preparation—in their fees. Only 17% always factor in these activities, while 37% never do so. This suggests that many practitioners may undervalue their professional time, which could impact their overall financial sustainability.

Table 8: Proportion of Time Spent on Non- Clinical Activities



Include Time Spent in Non-Clinical Activities in Consultation Rate	
Never	37%
Rarely	17%
Occasionally	16%
Frequently	9%
Always	17%
Don't know	3%

Q27. When calculating your standard consultation rate, do you include time spent on non-clinical activities such as marketing, business administration, preparation time, preparing case notes and report preparation? n=1,223

“It's an incredibly hard job to put a price on, and an hourly rate is nowhere near reflective of the enormous amount of work that goes into maintaining a private practice and being a prepared and well-balanced mental health worker. The very personal limits to how many contact hours can reasonably be fit into a week reflect a hard ceiling on what can be earned …”

Self employed, VIC

> “It's hard to strike the balance between being affordable and being adequately remunerated”
>
> (Self employed, SA)

Counsellor Satisfaction with Remuneration and Working Conditions

When asked for their feedback about their remuneration and working conditions, respondents highlighted a range of challenges and opportunities faced by practitioners.

Central to the feedback were comments about the profession’s financial sustainability, with many counsellors reporting significant challenges in maintaining viable practices. Low remuneration, coupled with high overhead costs such as supervision, professional development, and operational expenses, leaves many feeling the profession is undervalued. Respondents report that the lack of Medicare rebates further exacerbates these financial difficulties, limiting access for clients and creating inequities when compared to psychologists and social workers who can offer subsidised services.

Professional recognition and qualifications emerged as another issue, with many counsellors feeling their expertise and education are not adequately valued. Other counsellors suggested they face challenges in competing with other allied health professionals.

Work-life balance and well-being was also a common theme, but with mixed sentiment among counsellors. Many appreciate the flexibility their roles offer, enabling them to create schedules that align with their personal priorities. However, high workloads, administrative burdens, and the emotional intensity of counselling work often lead to burnout and reduced job satisfaction. Some counsellors noted that maintaining boundaries and managing non-client-facing tasks is a persistent struggle, particularly in self-employed settings where much of the work is unpaid.

Accessibility and affordability of services were also highlighted, as counsellors frequently encounter clients deterred by the lack of financial subsidies. Without Medicare rebates or other funding mechanisms, many clients are unable to afford private counselling, particularly in low-income or rural areas. As a result, many counsellors indicated they often find themselves balancing their desire to provide affordable care with the need to sustain their businesses.

Finally, a theme of career stability underscores the variability in opportunities available within the profession. While some counsellors report satisfaction with their roles and the flexibility it offers, others—particularly new entrants—struggle to find stable, well-paying positions. As a result, many counsellors expressed the need for increased support, training, and advocacy to improve pathways into the profession and to ensure sustainable careers for those already practising.

Remuneration and Working Conditions

Work-life Balance and Wellbeing

Counsellors often face challenges in managing their workload, balancing client-facing and administrative tasks, and coping with burnout. At the same time, many value the flexibility counselling offers, which allows them to align their schedules with personal priorities.

> “I work from home. Choose my own hours." (Self-employed, QLD, Regional city)
>
> "Like the flexibility as I can book in times when it suits me as well as the clients.” (Self-employed, QLD)
>
> “Possiblty of burnout due to the volume of clients” (Employed, NSW)
>
> “In addition to the financial pressures, the emotional demands of being a counsellor can take a toll on wellbeing. Managing clients' trauma, anxiety, and complex life issues requires constant emotional presence, which can lead to burnout if not properly managed.” (Self-employed, NSW)

Professional Recognition

Many counsellors feel their qualifications and expertise are not adequately recognised in comparison to psychologists and social workers. This lack of recognition impacts their ability to attract clients and secure opportunities.

> "Counsellors are generally undervalued because the profession is misunderstood; 'oh, did you do a TAFE course?' People expect therapists to be psychologists, if they even know the [academic] difference between psychology and counselling." (Both, NSW)
>
> "The counselling profession is regarded as second rate compared to allied health workers." (Self-employed, QLD)
>
> "Everyone wants a Psychologist or Social Worker due to Medicare billing." (Self-employed, NSW)

Financial Sustainability and Remuneration

Some counsellors reported significant financial challenges, including low pay, high overhead costs, and difficulty establishing financially viable private practices. Limited access to Medicare rebates exacerbates these challenges.

> "Running a business is very challenging without Medicare."(Self-employed, SA)
>
> "It is hard to claw back no shows, cancellations, and reschedules even with a cancellation policy. People may ghost you or they are reluctant to pay.“ (Self-employed, VIC)
>
> "It feels very hard to justify charging my fees without access to a Mental Health Care Plan." (Self-employed, VIC)
>
> “It is very challenging covering all costs and non-billable hours and still stay affordable and competitive. I can't just add extra sessions as this leads to burn out.” (Self-employed, QLD)

Accessibility and Affordability of Services

Other counsellors spoke of the impact of barriers to accessing counselling services such as the lack of Medicare rebates, high out-of-pocket costs, and low public awareness of counsellors’ roles.

> "Clients do not wish to see a counsellor. I live in an area where 'free & cheap healthcare' is expected from the people.” (Self-employed, NSW)
>
> “I love my work,and keep my fee as low as I can. I just wish that counsellors could bulk bill, I truly believe that more people would be able to access the help they need” (Self-employed, NSW)
>
> “I like to keep costs low to make counselling more affordable. It would be great to have access to the Medicare rebate”. (Self-employed, QLD)
>
> " It is exceedingly annoying and unfair that counsellors are required to pay GST on earnings, when no other comparable allied health professionals do..“ (Self-employed, WA)

Q. Do you have any comments about your remuneration and working conditions as a counsellor? 1269 free text comments

04.

Client and Community Demand

Service Demand

Client presentations highlight distinctions in demand for private practice and employed counsellors.

Over half of survey respondents (54%) report that demand for counselling services in their area is high or very high.

Employed counsellors report very high demand at a much higher rate (45%) than private practitioners (17%), with private practitioners more likely to report moderate demand (37%). Demand is also higher in regional areas, with 31% of respondents working in regional towns classifying demand as very high, compared to just 23% in capital cities.

The survey also reveals significant variations in client presentations across private practice and employed counsellors. While anxiety, stress, depression, and self-esteem are the most common presentations across all respondents (70%, one of the top three presentations), client demand for specific concerns differs markedly across the public and private sectors.

Private practice counsellors experience higher demand for family, parenting, and relationship support (38%) compared to employed counsellors (21%). Employed counsellors, however, see greater demand for support related to children and adolescents (27% vs. 12%) and family violence (23% vs. 9%), indicating public support for vulnerable populations.

Qualifications and experience also delineate the clients counsellors work with. For example, counsellors with a Diploma are significantly less likely to work with clients experiencing trauma (27%) than those with a Masters of Counselling (40%). On the other hand, Diploma of Counselling qualified practitioners experience higher demand for disability support services (15%) than those with post graduate qualifications (5%).

Similarly, more experienced counsellors report significantly higher demand for counselling services for trauma and post-traumatic stress (51%) than those with less experience (29%). Conversely, those newer to the profession report higher demand for career and school (17%) and childhood and adolescent counselling services (25%).

Within private practice, practitioners with a Master of Counselling are more likely to work with clients experiencing trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (43%) and family or parenting challenges (41%) than those with Diploma or Bachelors qualifications. Instead, private practitioners with a Diploma of Counselling are predominantly focused on addressing anxiety, stress, depression, or self-esteem issues (77%) and family or parenting challenges (35%).

Within permanent employment, respondents with Diploma level qualifications are the most likely to provide counselling for addiction (20%) while Masters graduates experience more demand for careers, childhood and adolescence counselling.

While no state-based variations in demand are evident, demand for counselling support for neurodivergence is significantly higher in regional areas (19%) than in capital cities (12%). Support for family violence issues is also significantly lower in major cities (12%, vs 18% in regional towns and rural areas).

Table 9: Level of Service Demand, By Counsellor Type

	Total	Private Practice Counsellor	Employed Counsellor *
Very low	2%	4%	0%
Low	7%	10%	3%
Moderate	29%	37%	17%
High	27%	23%	30%
Very high	27%	17%	45%
Unsure	7%	10%	4%

Significantly higher / lower than other groups

Q39. How would you rate demand for counselling services in your location? n=1918 / (Note * Employed Counsellors include Casual and Contract Counsellors).

Figure 5: Level of Service Demand, by Location

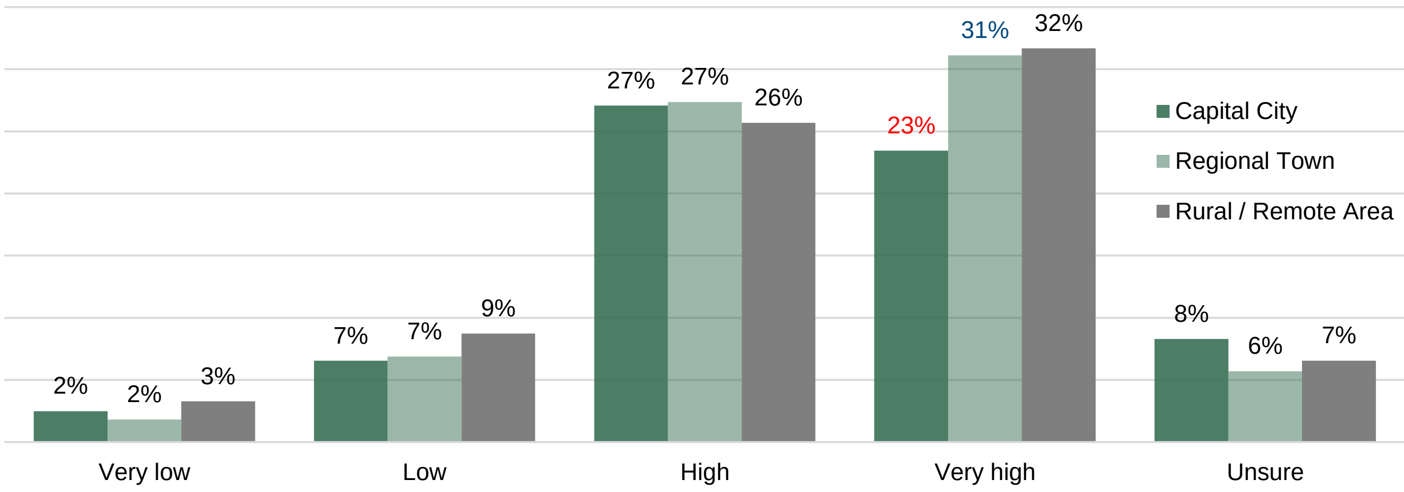


Table 10: Service Demand, Top 3 by Counsellor Type

	Total	Private Practice Counsellor	Employed Counsellor *	Both Employed & Private Practice
Sample	1918	807	695	413
Anxiety / Stress / Depression / Self-esteem	70%	73%	65%	70%
Trauma / Post traumatic stress disorder	36%	37%	34%	38%
Family or parenting / Relationships	30%	38%	22%	30%
Communication / Social skills / Conflict resolution	24%	28%	21%	22%
Grief and loss	22%	22%	21%	24%
Childhood or adolescent	20%	12%	27%	24%
Neurodivergence (ADHD, Autism)	15%	19%	13%	12%
Family violence	15%	9%	23%	13%
Addiction	12%	8%	16%	12%
Disability	9%	11%	7%	6%
Career / School counselling	8%	3%	14%	8%
Anger management	7%	7%	8%	6%
Chronic pain or illness / Palliative care	4%	3%	5%	5%
Sex & sexuality / Gender / Identity	4%	5%	3%	5%
Cultural / Migrants / Indigenous healing practices	3%	1%	4%	4%
Pre and post-natal issues	2%	1%	1%	4%
Eating disorders	1%	1%	0%	2%
Veterans and Defence Force	1%	1%	0%	1%

Q39. How would you rate demand for counselling services in your location? n=1918 /Q38. In which area do you see the most demand for your services? n = 1918 (Proportion represents top three presentation) / (Note * Employed Counsellors include Casual and Contract Counsellors).

Significantly higher / lower than other groups

Capacity

Survey respondents have capacity to take on over 7,600 additional clients per week.

Survey data reveals that 56% of respondents report having capacity to take on new clients, with an average of 7.2 additional clients per week, amounting to a total capacity of 7,632 clients across the respondent pool each week.

Private practice counsellors show the highest willingness to take on new clients (71%), with an average capacity of 7.5 clients, while employed counsellors are significantly less likely (29%) to have capacity, although those with capacity average 7.1 clients per week. Practitioners who are both employed and self-employed balance these dynamics with 62% having capacity for 6.5 clients on average.

Geographically, capacity remains relatively consistent, with rural and remote practitioners (57%) slightly more able to accommodate additional clients compared to those in capital cities (56%) or regional towns (55%).

Differences emerge across states, with South Australia reporting the highest willingness (62%) and capacity (8.4 clients per week), while the Northern Territory has the lowest proportion of practitioners able to take on new clients (32%).

Qualifications and experience also influence capacity. Practitioners with Graduate Diplomas are most likely to report capacity (62%), though they have the lowest average ability to take on clients (6.3). Newer practitioners with less than two years of experience have the highest willingness (61%) and capacity (7.9 clients), while those with over 20 years of experience report lower capacity (40%, 6.2 clients).

Of the counsellors with capacity to take on more work, 62% specialise in anxiety, stress and depression, the highest area of demand.

Existing high demand for services is the most common reason for counsellors to report they are not willing to take on more clients (42%), particularly in regional and rural areas (47% and 56%, respectively).

Other barriers include maintaining personal-professional life balance (34%), administrative burdens (13%), and burnout (7%). Interestingly, 31% of respondents are content with their current workload, reflecting diverse perspectives on work-life capacity.

56%

Of respondents have capacity to take on additional clients

05.

Workforce Development

Students

Nearly a third (31%) of counselling professionals are currently pursuing further qualifications.

The proportion of respondents studying for higher level qualifications increases to 27% of those who currently hold a Diploma and 28% of those with a Graduate Diploma of Counselling as their highest counselling qualification.

One in five (20%) private practice counsellors are pursuing further qualifications, as are 21% of those in employed roles.

The most common qualifications being pursued by those undertaking further study are a Master of Counselling (38%), followed by a Diploma of Counselling (17%), Bachelor of Counselling (11%) and Graduate Diploma of Counselling (6%).

Diploma level qualifications attract those earlier in their career or transitioning into the profession, while those upgrading their qualifications from a Diploma of Counselling are most commonly pursuing a Bachelor (25%) or a Master of Counselling (21%). Of those respondents who currently hold a Graduate Diploma of Counselling and have chosen to undertake further studies, three quarters (74%) are pursuing a Masters level qualification.

Of interest, self employed counsellors who are studying to upgrade their qualifications are less likely to be working towards a Masters of Counselling (27%) than those who are employed (32%).

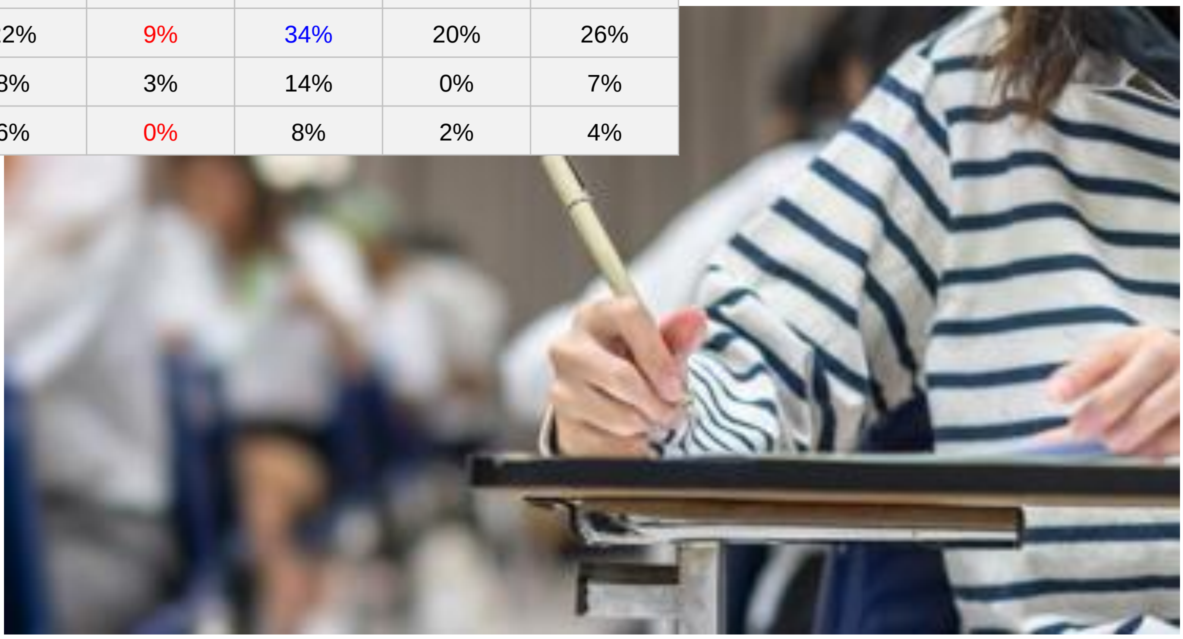
Looking ahead, 65% of respondents who are currently studying expect to graduate by 2025, indicating that there will be a strong transition of qualified counsellors into the profession over the next two years. This increases to 88% of those undertaking a Diploma of Counselling and 62% of those currently studying for a Master's level counselling qualification.

Viewed from another perspective, 23% of those who will complete their studies by the end of 2025 will graduate with a Diploma of Counselling, and 36% will complete a Masters of Counselling.

Table 11: Area of Study and Expected Year of Completion

	Total	Diploma of Counselling	Bachelor of Counselling	Grad Dip of Counselling	Master of Counselling
% Studying	**30%**	**17%**	**11%**	**6%**	**38%**
No. Studying	**696**	**117**	**77**	**44**	**261**
2024	19%	27%	12%	18%	15%
2025	46%	61%	32%	59%	48%
2026	22%	9%	34%	20%	26%
2027	8%	3%	14%	0%	7%
2028 or later	6%	0%	8%	2%	4%

Significantly higher / lower than other groups



Q29. Are you currently studying for a qualification / further qualification in counselling? n=2240 / Q30. What type of qualification are you studying for? n=696 / Q31. In what year do you expect to graduate? n=696

Sector Employment Preferences

Two thirds of respondents who are studying would like to work in private practice.

This preference is significantly higher among self-employed individuals (85%), compared to three in five students (61%) and employed counsellors (55%).

In contrast, students show greater interest in settings such as not-for-profit organisations (39%), university or school roles (29%) or community centres (27%) than those who are self employed (9%,11% and 8% respectively).
.
Flexible work is the biggest driver of preferred work settings, mostly among those looking to work in private practice (55%), EAP (58%), NDIS (55%) or community centres (50%).

Stable employment is also important (28%) and is a key factor for those favouring public hospitals (44%) and university settings (43%).

Those with a preference for working with a not-for-profit organisation (31%), in a community centre (35%) or in a public hospital (39%) were significantly more likely to say that a primary reason for their preference is to gain experience.

In terms of employment capacity, full-time (27%) and part-time employment (30%) are the most sought-after roles. A preference for full time employment is most common among those currently in an employed role (40%).

Contract or casual employment is a less popular choice overall (5-7%), while uncertainty remains significant with 14% of respondents indicating they are unsure about their career direction.

Figure 6: Preferred Employment Settings on Graduation

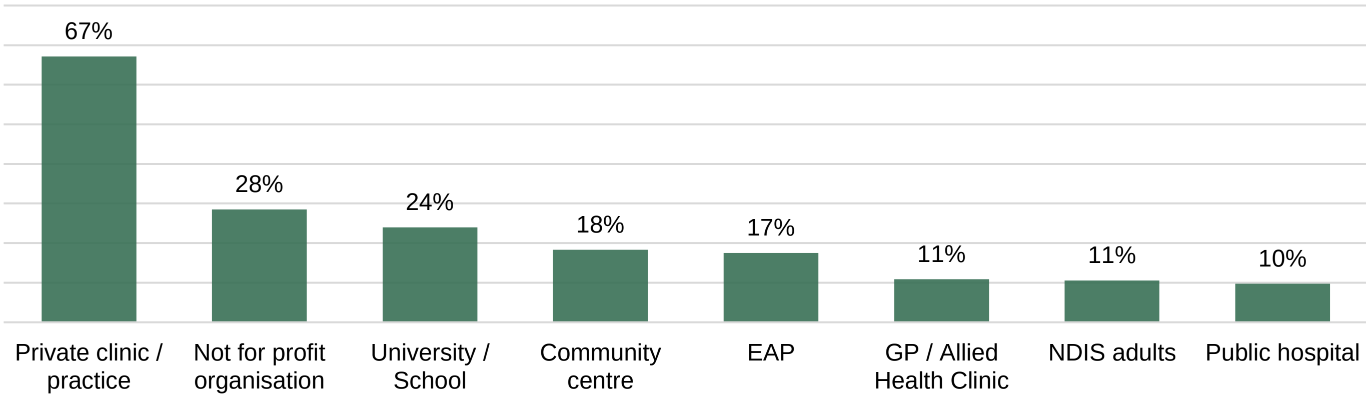


Table 12: Reasons for Preferred Employment Setting

	Total	Private practice	Not for profit	University / School	Community centre	EAP	GP / Allied Health	NDIS	Public hospital
Total	601	410	173	145	115	109	72	86	64
Flexible work	51%	55%	46%	45%	50%	58%	44%	55%	38%
Stable employment	28%	25%	32%	43%	33%	28%	38%	33%	44%
Area of interest to me	25%	26%	23%	17%	25%	22%	21%	23%	14%
Higher income	23%	23%	24%	28%	23%	26%	28%	16%	34%
To gain experience	22%	22%	31%	25%	35%	18%	33%	19%	39%
High demand in area	12%	13%	14%	10%	17%	14%	11%	21%	14%

Q32. What type of settings would you prefer to work in after you graduate? n=696 / Q35. Of the following, what are the primary reasons you are seeking this type of employment? n=601

Significantly higher / lower than other groups

Drivers of Employment Setting Preferences

1. Flexibility and Work-Life Balance

Flexibility was particularly important for respondents seeking part-time roles or those wishing to balance their counselling work with family commitments or other responsibilities. Counselling roles in settings that allow for remote work or tailored hours were preferred, with flexibility most often associated with private practice, NDIS services, and EAP programs.

- "Flexibility and autonomy to work in a method I prefer." (Student, NSW, NDIS)
- "Flexibility of work hours and days. Can choose online counselling with client if away in another country." (Student, WA, Private Hospital)
- "Work-life balance as a mother to three children." (Student, VIC, NFP)
- “To maintain a balance between work, life and family commitments.” (Student, NSW, University)

2. Experience and Professional Advancement

Other respondents expressed a need to gain hands-on experience to develop their counselling skills, meet client hour requirements for professional registration, or build confidence before advancing to independent practice. The pursuit of experience is closely linked to roles in community centres, GP/allied health clinics, EAP programs, non-profit organisations (NFPs), and private hospitals.

- "To gain a substantial amount of hours and experience to better myself as a counsellor and to learn the field of mental health." (Student, WA, Community Centre)
- "I want to apply my learned skills into practice to enhance my professional experience. Moreover, I have to work full time to meet my personal expenses at the moment. ."(Student, WA, Public Hospital)
- "I want to work in a collegial, diverse setting to maintain professional connectedness, be able to pursue my own practice in parallel, and avoid burnout." (Student, NSW, GP / Allied Health)
- “To gain experience before opening own private practice*” (Student, NSW, Private Clinic)*

3. Financial Stability

Respondents prioritising financial stability often sought counselling roles in settings that could provide consistent pay and benefits. This driver aligns strongly with roles in NDIS services, public hospitals, and non-profit organisations, which are perceived as offering steady workloads and financial security.

- "To get experience and keep up with cost of living and repay my student debt.” (Student, QLD, Private Clinic)
- “I need to provide financial security for my family and require full time employment to do this. (Student, VIC, Private Clinic/University)
- "Financial security." (Student, NSW Public hospital)

Q. In your own words, what are the primary reasons you are seeking employment in this setting? N=546 free text comments

27%

of counsellors with a Diploma of Counselling are currently studying for a higher-level counselling qualification

Rural Workforce Development

Nearly two in five respondents are willing to consider working in rural or remote areas.

Table 13: Consider Employment in a Rural Area

Total	39%
Private practice counsellors	31%
Employed Counsellors	44%
Both Employed and Self Employed	37%
Contract	29%
Casual	45%
Students	50%

Students (50%) and employed counsellors (44%) show a higher willingness to work in rural or remote areas than self-employed respondents, fewer of whom are inclined to move (31%).

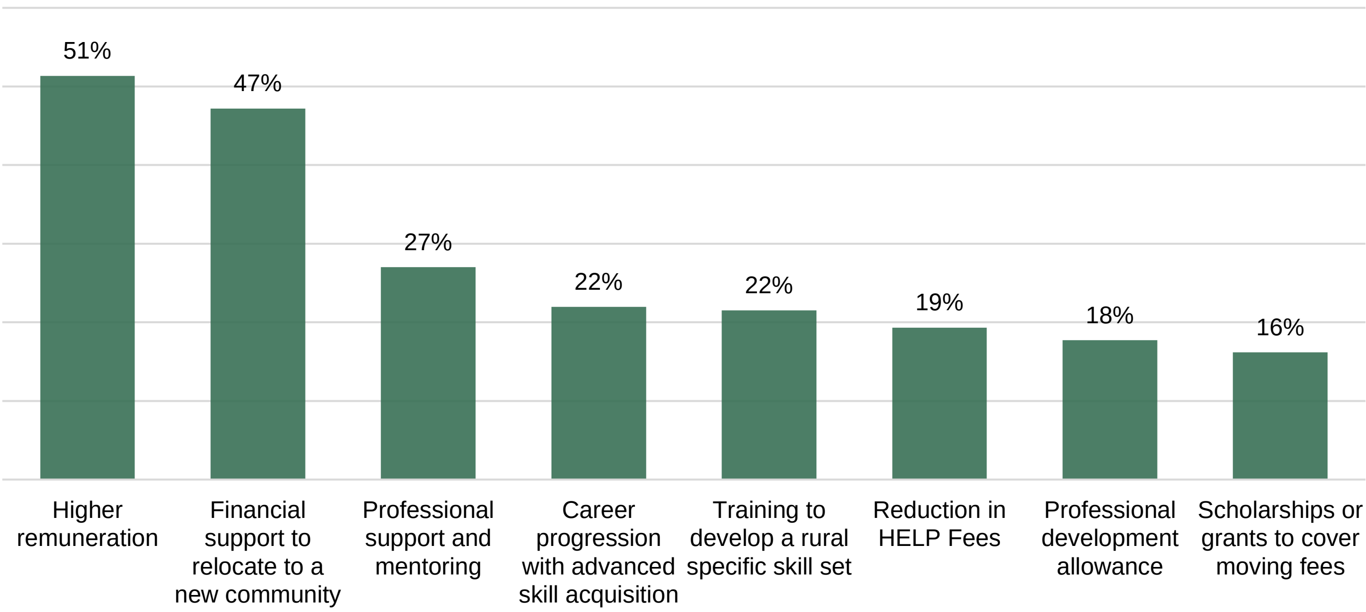
Geographically, interest varies slightly, with NT respondents showing higher openness (82%) compared to other states. Notably, respondents in regional city or town settings exhibit a greater readiness (47%) to transition to rural or remote roles, compared to those based in capital cities (28%).

Survey results indicate that higher remuneration (51%) and financial support for relocation (47%) are the most critical factors influencing counsellors to consider rural employment. These needs are consistently highlighted across employment types and geographic locations, with remuneration of particularly high importance among employed respondents (62%).

Professional support and mentoring (27%) and career progression opportunities (22%) are also valued but rank lower overall. Students were significantly more likely to say that professional support and mentoring (38%) and career profession and skill development opportunities (33%) would encourage them to take up employment in a rural area.

Counsellors with less than 5 years experience expressed greater interest in HELP fee reductions compared to their more experienced counterparts (24% vs. 8%)

Figure 7: Support to Consider Employment in a Rural Area



Q45. Would you be willing to consider working in a rural or remote area? n = 2058/ Q46. What factors would support you in undertaking employment in a rural area? n = 1180

Career Plans

Respondents' career plans over the next five years indicate a stable counselling workforce, with a majority planning to continue in their current capacity.

Over half of the respondents (54%) plan to continue in their current roles, indicating a significant desire for stability. However, this trend varies by employment type, with self-employed counsellors (66%) being significantly more likely to remain in their current situation compared to salaried employees (41%).

Approximately 11% of respondents expressed plans to establish their own private practices, highlighting a trend toward entrepreneurial growth, particularly among newer entrants to the profession. Conversely, 6% of respondents aim to move to another employer within the counselling sector, suggesting that some professionals may be seeking better opportunities or working conditions.

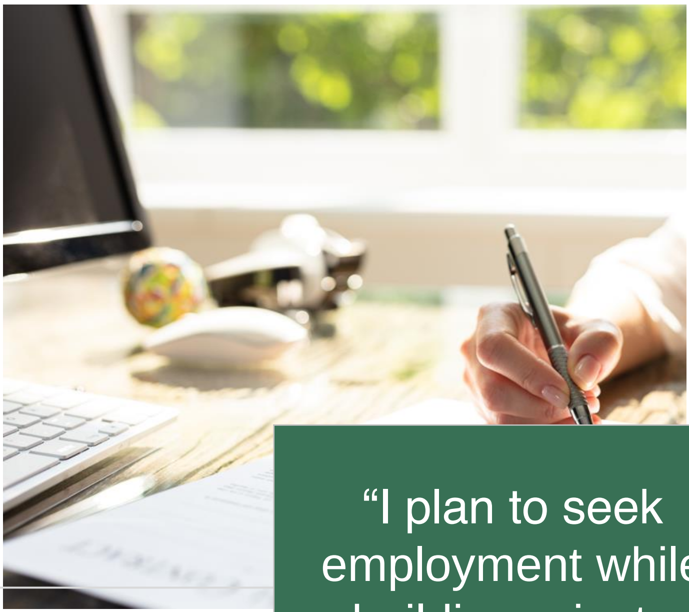
Career diversification is also evident, with 6% planning further study to advance their qualifications and skills, while 5% intend to retire, particularly those with extensive experience in the field.

A notable theme in the feedback from counsellors indicating other plans is the financial strain faced by self-employed practitioners, with several respondents expressing concerns about generating sustainable income through counselling. Many plan to expand their private practices or diversify their income streams through supervision, teaching, enhanced marketing or creating online courses.

For others, burnout and workload pressures are key considerations, with some intending to reduce client-facing hours or transition into semi-retirement while focusing on other roles, such as supervision or consultancy.

Many counsellors are focused on expanding their private practices, increasing client bases, or diversifying services offered. Some respondents plan to transition fully into private practice, while others aim to expand by adding contractors or offering new services, such as supervision or niche counselling.

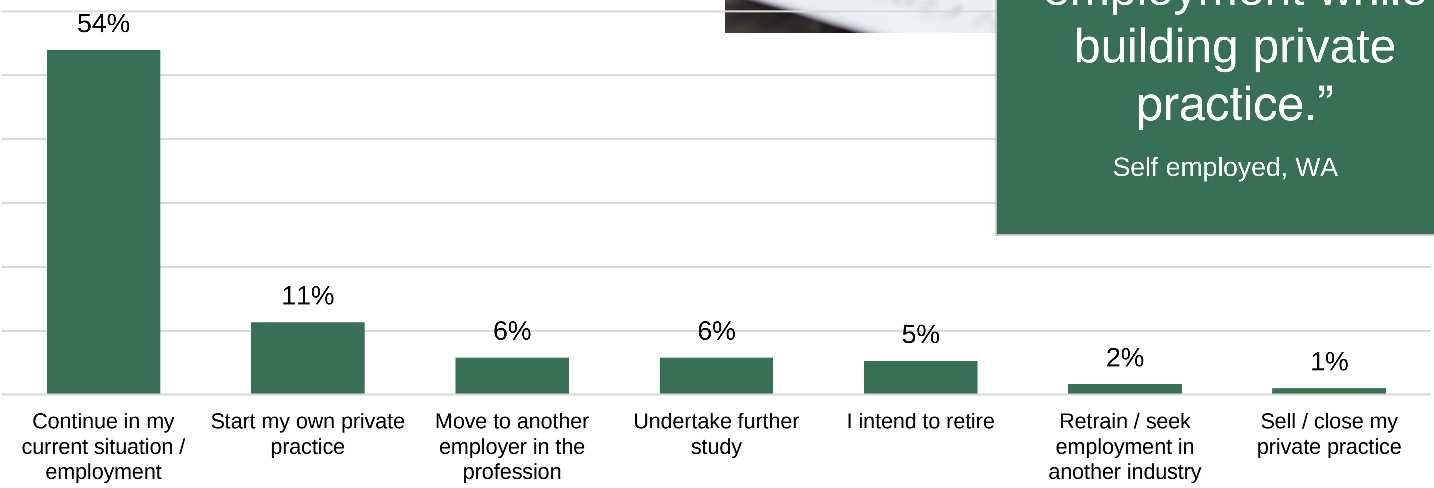
Finally, a small proportion (2%) plan to retrain or seek employment in another industry, citing barriers such as inadequate pay, limited recognition, and the emotional toll of the profession..



"I plan to seek employment while building private practice."

Self employed, WA

Figure 8: Career Plans Next Five Years



Q50. What are your career plans over the next five years? N=1918

Career Plans

1. Stability and Continuity in Current Role

A significant proportion of respondents plan to maintain their current employment or private practice arrangements over the next five years. For some, this continuity includes gradual adjustments, such as scaling back workloads to manage burnout or transitioning into semi-retirement.

"I will continue with my private practice until I retire." (Self-employed, VIC)

"I intend to continue as is for 3-4 years then retire." (Both, NSW)

"I plan to stay in my current job while building my private practice on the side." (Employed, ACT)

2. Expansion and Growth of Private Practices

Many counsellors are focused on expanding their private practices, increasing client bases, or diversifying services offered. Some respondents plan to transition fully into private practice, while others aim to expand by adding contractors or offering new services, such as supervision or niche counselling.

"Add contractors to my private practice." (Self-employed, VIC)

"I plan to increase my caseload to hire more counsellors and become a business that normalises and increases access to counselling." (Self-employed, QLD)

"Expand my private practice." (Both, WA)

"Continue to build my private practice; reduce hours working for someone else." (Both, QLD)

3. Pursuing Further Study and Professional Development

A considerable number of respondents intend to pursue further qualifications, ranging from diplomas to PhDs. Many view education as a pathway to career advancement, skill diversification, or entry into new roles within or outside counselling.

"Complete further study, develop the business further." (Both, NSW)

"Undertake further study and continue work in NFP though I am looking at leaving my current employer due to work changes." (Employed, WA)

"Complete PhD." (Employed, QLD)

4. Diversification of Career Focus

A subset of respondents plan to diversify their professional focus, moving into related fields, such as academic roles, training, supervision, or advocacy. Others are exploring additional income streams through non-client-facing activities like writing, creating online programs, or consulting.

"Build my supervision practice, do less clinical work, and move into academic work." (Self-employed, NSW)

"I am currently having my new website completed and plan to create a niche for myself with Women over 40." (Self-employed, NSW)

"Develop programs to sell online and develop products and training on various platforms and possibly write a manual/book." (Self-employed, VIC)

Q50. What are your career plans over the next five years? (Other) n=128

06.

Appendix

Methodology

The ACA Workforce Census was conducted using an online survey of membership of the ACA. The census was open for approximately four weeks in October 2024.

Background	ACA is the largest peak body for counsellors and psychotherapists in Australia. The Association exists to support, serve and advocate for its members and to uphold and enhance industry standards and professionalism. In 2024, ACA commissioned independent research agency, and association experts, Survey Matters to undertake a census of the counselling workforce, to help inform policy and advocacy efforts.
Objectives	The key objectives of the research were to: • Understand the demographics and workforce composition of counsellors in Australia; • Measure counsellors' hours of work, consultation fees and remuneration; • Understand client demand, most common presentations and counsellor specialisations; • Identify business priorities and challenges; and • Determine future intentions to remain in the profession
Survey Instrument	The survey was conducted using a quantitative, online instrument. A total of 52 questions were included. As well as 45 quantitative questions, there were also several opportunities for respondents to provide free text or qualitative comments, to expand or explain their answers or to offer their ideas and suggestions. Their inclusion adds depth and richness to the quantitative findings.
Data Collection and Sample	The survey was distributed on 30 September 2024 and the survey remained open until 27 October 2024. From an ACA membership of approximately 9,000 registered counsellors and psychotherapists and 9,000 students, a total of 2242 respondents completed the survey. This includes 1918 employed counsellors and 322 students, resulting in a 21% response rate among employed counsellors. This provides 95% confidence that the actual results are within a +/- 1.9% confidence interval to those presented in this report.

Analysis	Survey data was analysed in Q Research Software and Microsoft Excel for in-depth analysis. This data has also been provided in Australian dollars to provide relevance for respondents working in Australia. Income and hourly rates exclude superannuation, bonuses and other benefits. Also, it should be noted that while the questionnaire asked for pre-tax income, some respondents may have provided post-tax income. No effort has been made to adjust for this possibility, but it should be taken into consideration when analysing remuneration and rate data. <u>Overall remuneration and rate data has been calculated as follows:</u> 1. Weekly pre-tax income for private practice counsellors is calculated by multiplying no. of consultations by charge out rate provided by respondents 2. Annual pre-tax annual income for private practice counsellors is calculated by multiplying calculated weekly earnings by 48 weeks 3. Weekly pre-tax annual income for employed counsellors is calculated by dividing annual pre-tax income provided by respondents by 52 weeks 4. Weekly pre-tax income for contract and casual counsellors is calculated by multiplying hours worked by hourly rate provided by respondents. 5. Annual pre-tax annual income for contract and casual counsellors is calculated by multiplying calculated weekly earnings by 48 weeks 6. Weekly and annual income for counsellors who are both employed, and self employed are calculated by adding together both employed and self-employed data provided. Remuneration and rate data was cleaned, with outliers examined on a case-by-case basis. Where respondents had clearly entered hours, salaries or rates that were too high or low, these have been excluded. Where respondents have appeared to double count hours across permanent and self-employment, these have been corrected. Across hours worked, remuneration and rate data, three figures have been presented, the average, range and median. • The average has been calculated for all rates provided for each segment • The median is the midpoint for all rates when sorted from smallest to largest • The range represents the high and low income and hourly rates
Report	To better understand the remuneration and working conditions of ACA members, responses have been segmented and analysed based on employment basis, such as self employment, permanent employment, casual or contract employment, or a mixture of both. While segmented results are provided throughout this report, please note that due to the overall sample size some subgroups may contain small samples. As such they do not aim to be a representative sample of the different segments but rather to provide directional information on remuneration received and rates charged by these members. Small sample sizes are noted throughout the report. Results are provided at an aggregate level only, and no individual responses are identified.

About
Survey Matters.

Survey Matters is a research and strategic insights agency specialising in member-based organisations and associations.

Our work goes beyond surface-level insights to unearth the core truths that drive organisational success. Whether it's understanding retention rates and engagement levels, supporting policy design and advocacy efforts, or raising awareness and changing behaviour, our insights serve as the cornerstone of meaningful impact and change.

As specialists in the association sector, we've dedicated ourselves to supporting organisations to achieve their mission. By leveraging our expertise, we deliver insightful research that fuels strategic growth and equips organisations with the understanding they need to support their sector with confidence.

If you would like to know more about this report or the work we do, please get in touch.

Rebecca Sullivan
Research Director

rsullivan@surveymatters.com.au

T +61 3 9452 0101

Brenda Mainland
Managing Director

bmainland@surveymatters.com.au

T +61 3 9452 0101

surveymatters.com.au