



# australian nursing federation

## health survey report

### Introduction

In May 2007 the Australian Nursing Federation (the ANF) conducted a federal election health survey through its journal, the Australian Nursing Journal (the ANJ) and online via the ANF website (<http://www.anf.org.au>). The purpose of the survey was to determine nurses' views on health issues in the lead up to the federal election later in 2007.

Currently there are around 250,000 nurses in Australia making up 54% of the health workforce; 2.5% of the Australian workforce; and 2% of the voting population: 150,000 or 60% of Australia's nurses are ANF members.

The concerns of Australia's nurses regarding health care are informed and legitimate and should be taken seriously by those in political positions influencing health policy.

The survey of more than 450 nurses found:

- 87% said Australia's health care system is in need of reform;
- 97% support comprehensive funding for national preventative and primary health services;
- 93% support the provision of a universal health care system through Medicare with access based on need rather than ability to pay;
- 92% supported a federal government commitment to the adoption of effective nursing workload measures;
- 94% supported the provision of dental health services through Medicare; and
- 76 % of nurses said their voting decisions will be influenced by a political party's industrial relations policy.

The ANF works to represent the professional and industrial interests of its members and support the views of nurses. In the lead up to the federal election later this year, the ANF will be campaigning strongly on the results of this and other surveys.

### Survey Demographics

The ANF survey was completed by 454 nurses in May 2007. There was a reasonable spread of respondents across Australia, with 5.5% from the ACT; 21.8% from NSW; 5.7% from the NT; 8.7% from Queensland; 11.2% from South Australia; 4.6% from Tasmania, 39% from Victoria; and 3.7% from Western Australia. Of those nurses who responded:

- 83.3% were female;
- 16.7% were male;
- 54.6% were aged between 46-60 years;

- 80.4% were aged between 36-60 years;
- 2.0% were over 60 years of age; and
- only 17.6% were aged between 18-35 years.

These demographics are consistent with those of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare which found that in 2004 the average age of nurses was 46 years with 92% being female (AIHW 2006).

Figure 1: Participant distribution (female/male)

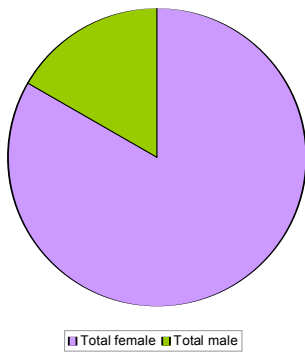
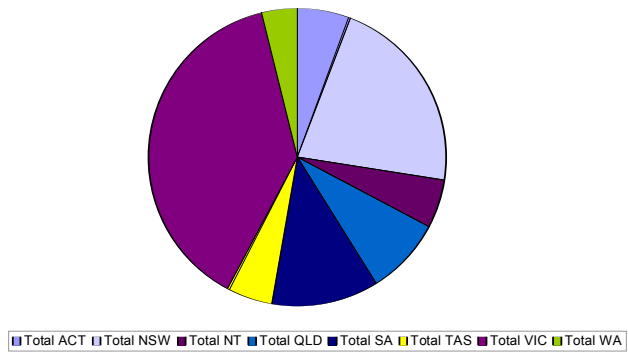
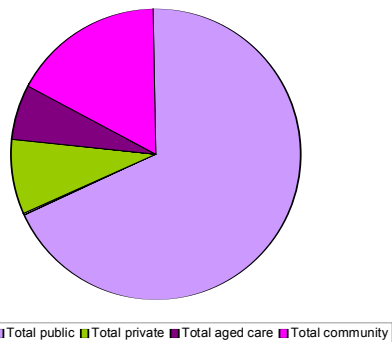


Figure 2: Participant distribution by state



Nearly 68% of respondents worked in the public sector (67.8%), 8.6% worked in the private health sector, 6.4% worked in aged care and 16.7% worked in community health.

Figure 3: Participant distribution by health sector



There were some interesting differences between males and females in the health sector with more males represented in the public and community health sectors while females were more evenly distributed across all sectors.

What is absolutely evident from the survey is that nurses are intensely concerned about how health in Australia is managed and they understand that unless workforce issues are addressed health care standards in Australia will be adversely affected.

### Survey Questions

The survey asked respondents to answer a series of questions with one word answers of yes, no, or unsure (one question was just a yes/no response).

While there were some interesting differences between age and sex for some of the questions, nurses who responded showed overwhelming support for a federal government commitment to:

- health reform;
- universal access to health care through Medicare;

- increases in primary health and preventative measures to prevent ill health;
- access to Medicare rebates for people who use the services of nurse practitioners and midwives;
- the introduction nationally of workload measures for all nurses;
- access to publicly funded dental care through Medicare; and
- closing the gap in Indigenous health and life expectancy.

Nurses also revealed their voting choices would be influenced by the various political parties' industrial relations policies.

***Do you think Australia's health care system needs reforming?***

A strong 87% of all respondents answered 'yes' to this question, with 4.6% answering 'no', and 8% 'unsure'. The strongest response came from 26-35 year olds with over 90% agreeing the health care sector requires reform. The largest group of respondents, 45-60 year olds, had an 87.2% agreement rate. The greatest number of those who answered 'no' or 'unsure' were in the 18-25 and 36-45 year age group.

Figure 4: Do you think Australia's health care system needs reforming?

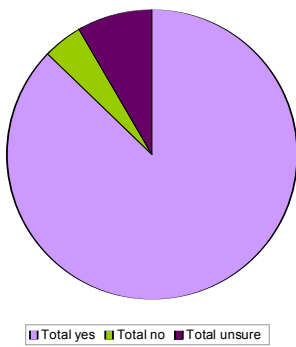
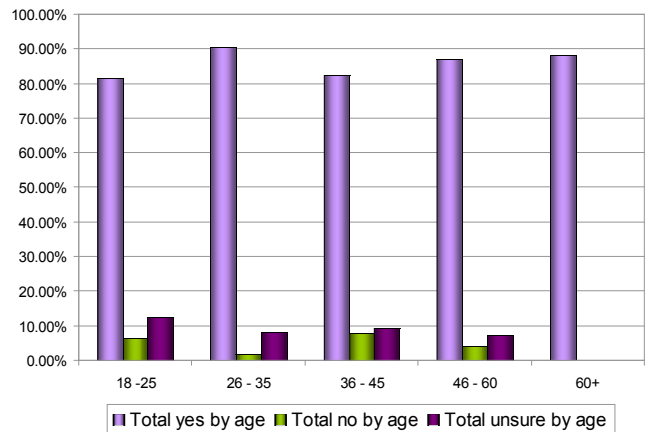


Figure 5: Do you think Australia's health care system needs reforming? (age comparison)



Males who responded were more likely than females to support health reform with 93% of males and 85% of females answering 'yes' to this question.

***Do you agree with the basic principles of universal health care through Medicare with access based on need rather than on ability to pay?***

Ninety three per cent of respondents answered 'yes' to this question, with 3.5% answering 'no' and 3.1% 'unsure'. Ninety six per cent of males and 92% of females answered 'yes', with 100% of those in the 18-25 and 60+ age groups answering 'yes'. The results from this question suggest that nurses consistently, across age and gender, think that health care should be universally accessible to all Australians regardless of ability to pay.

Figure 6: Do you think Australia's health care system needs reforming? (female/male comparison)

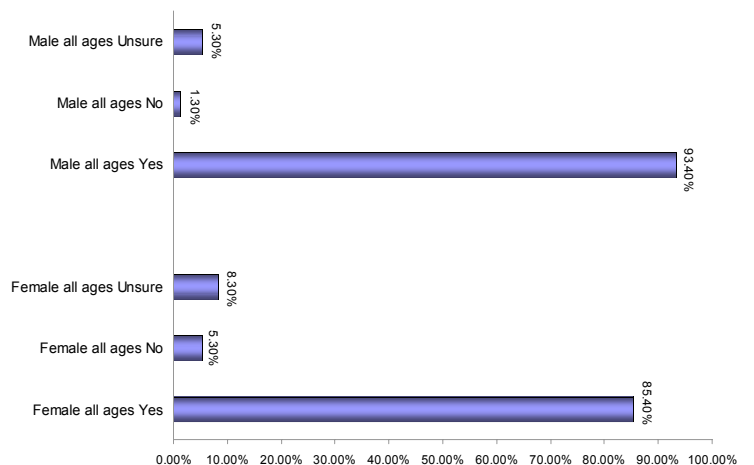


Figure 7: Do you agree with the basic principles of universal health care through Medicare with access based on need rather than on ability to pay?

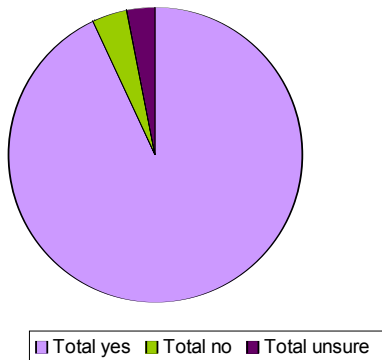
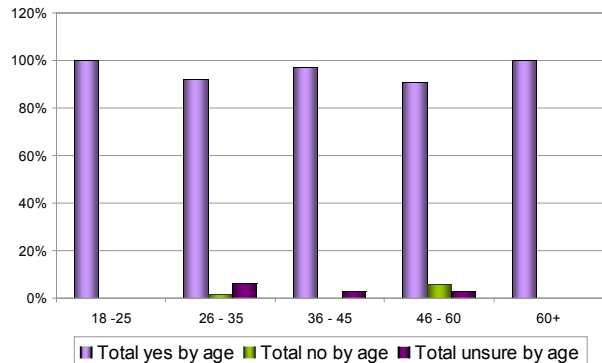


Figure 8: Do you agree with the basic principles of universal health care through Medicare with access based on need rather than on ability to pay? (age comparison)



**Do you support provider numbers for nurse and midwifery practitioners under the Medicare Benefit and Pharmaceutical Benefit Schemes?**

Nurse and midwife practitioners work autonomously with their clients in many health care settings and the services they provide have been demonstrated to be beneficial to patient outcomes in areas such as: aged care, mental health, women's health, sexual health and maternity care. Access to a rebate through Medicare would allow the community to gain maximum benefit from the services that nurse and midwife practitioners provide. To do this, nurse and midwife practitioners require individual provider numbers for the MBS and PBS. The ANF has been calling on the federal government to act on this for a number of years, so far without success, despite support from nurses, midwives and the community.

In response to this question, 91% answered 'yes', 1.1% 'no', with 7.1% 'unsure'. Within the 18-25 year age group there appeared to be some uncertainty, possibly because they are at the beginning of their nursing careers and yet to specialise in their chosen field. Seventy five per cent of 18-25 year olds answered 'yes' with 25% answering 'unsure' (there were not any 'no' answers in this group) and in contrast, 90% of those aged between 26-60 responded 'yes' to this question. Female and male respondents answered similarly with a 2% variation across most parameters, although more women were 'unsure' than were men.

Figure 9: Do you support provider numbers for nurse and midwifery practitioners under the Medicare Benefit and Pharmaceutical Benefit Schemes?

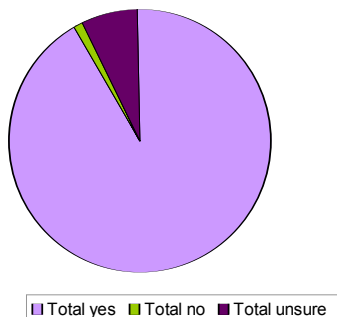
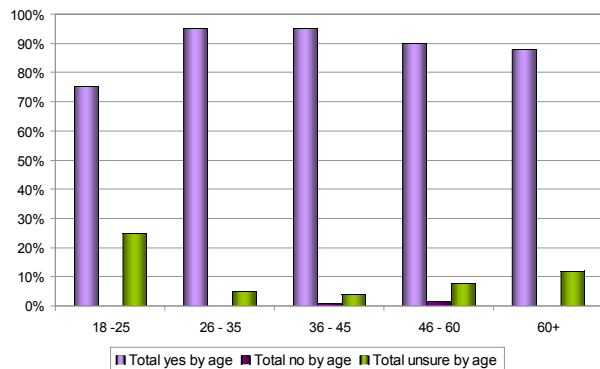


Figure 10: Do you support provider numbers for nurse and midwifery practitioners under the Medical Benefit and Pharmaceutical Benefits Schemes? (age comparison)



**Do you support comprehensive funding for national preventative and primary health services?**

Nurses are at the coal face of the health care system and constitute a majority of the health care professionals delivering care to the Australian community. Nurses work in hospitals, schools, medical centres and in residential care. Nurses understand and see the consequences of a society that ignores primary health care and lacks a

focus on the prevention of ill health. Ninety seven per cent of respondents answered 'yes' to this question, with only 1.4% answering 'no' and 1.6% 'unsure'. There was little difference by age, although older nurses were more inclined to say 'no' in response to this question with 2.4% of 46-60 year olds saying 'no' (they were the only group to give a 'no' answer to this question).

Figure 11: Do you support comprehensive funding for national preventative and primary health services?

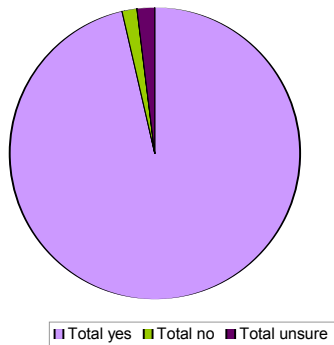
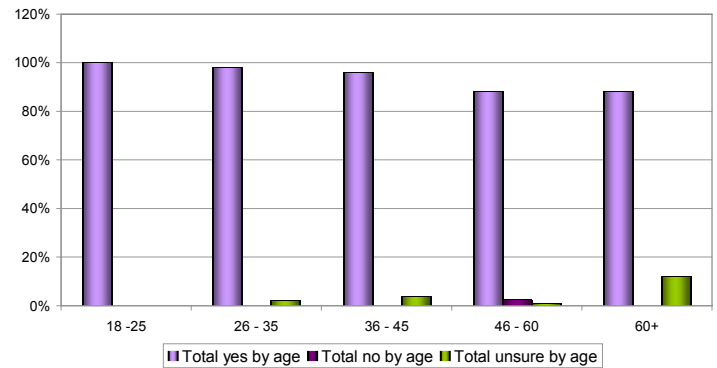
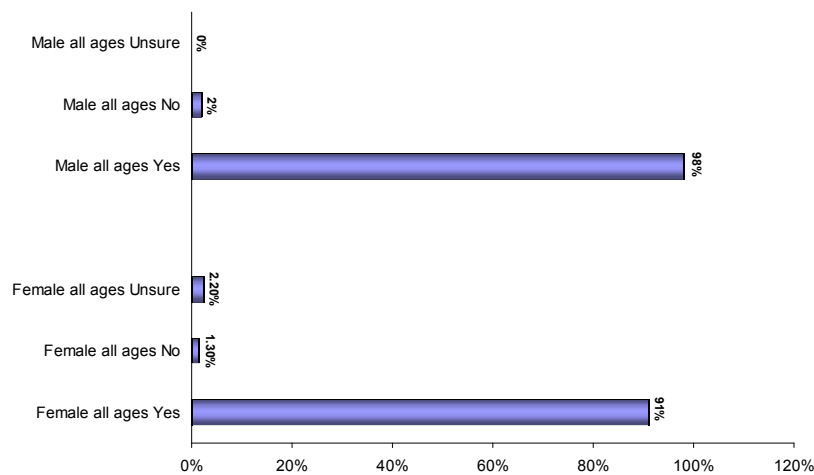


Figure 12: Do you support comprehensive funding for national preventative and primary health services? (age comparison)



Males were 7% more likely to say 'yes' to this question than females.

Figure 13: Do you support comprehensive funding for national preventative and primary health services? (female/male comparison)



**Do you support the call for federal government initiatives to close the gap in Indigenous health outcomes and life expectancy by 2025?**

The ANF supports the call to close the gap in health and life expectancy for Indigenous Australians by 2025. It is heartening to see that the issue of action on Indigenous health is overwhelmingly supported by nurses in Australia, with 87% of nurses surveyed indicating they would support closing the gap, while 7% were unsure and 6% answered 'no'. There was less support within the 36-60 year age group but 100% support in the 18-25 year group. Males were less likely to respond 'yes' to this question than females.

Figure 14: Do you support the call for federal government initiatives to close the gap in Indigenous health outcomes and life expectancy by 2025?

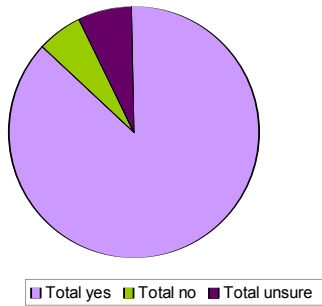
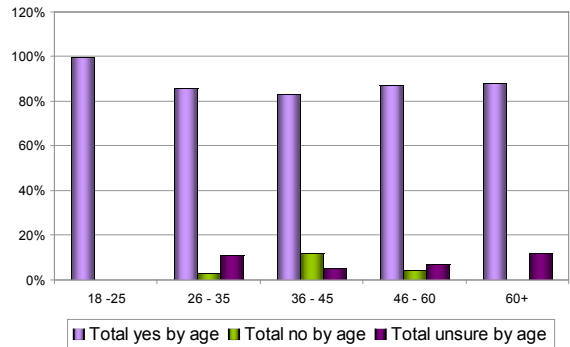


Figure 15: Do you support the call for federal government initiatives to close the gap in Indigenous health outcomes and life expectancy by 2025? (age comparison)



**Would you support a federal government commitment to the adoption of effective nursing workload measures?**

Increasing workloads and the increasing intensity of work are a constant concern for nurses in their daily attempts to deliver high quality health care to the Australian community. This will only increase as the Australian population ages. In this survey nurses have indicated they would support the efforts of any political party that takes this issue seriously with 92% answering 'yes' to this question and only 1.6% responding 'no' and 6.4% 'unsure'. Older nurses were less likely to answer 'yes', although most were 'unsure' rather than responding 'no'. There were no significant differences in response based on gender.

Figure 16: Would you support a federal government commitment to the adoption of effective nursing workload measures?

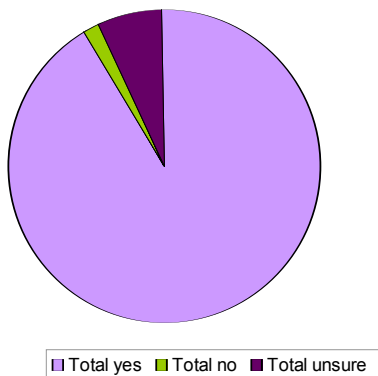
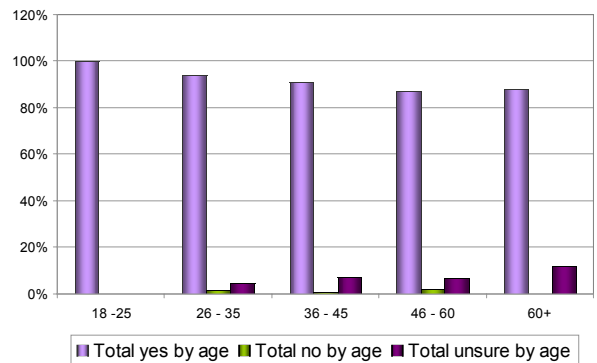


Figure 17: Would you support a federal government commitment to the adoption of effective nursing workload measures? (age comparison)



**Do you support a call for the consolidation of health care funding with transparent lines of responsibility for service delivery?**

The ANF is seeking sufficient funding for the whole health care system, not just for nurses. Nurses want appropriate care to be provided when and where it is needed; to ensure there is sufficient staff to provide it; with workloads that allow for the delivery of quality care while maintaining a reasonable work/life balance. Nurses want funding spent directly on health, with governments and providers accountable and transparent in the way it is spent (ANF 2007 submission to the ALP). Eighty four per cent of survey respondents supported the consolidation of health funding with only 1.2% of nurses answering 'no', although 14.2% were unsure, and and perhaps require further information regarding this point. There were interesting age related differences in the responses to this question with younger respondents more likely to be 'unsure'. In the 18-25 year group, 56% were in support while 44% were unsure. In all age groups those who answered 'no' were consistently below 2%.

Figure 18: Do you support a call for the consolidation of health care funding with transparent lines of responsibility for service delivery?

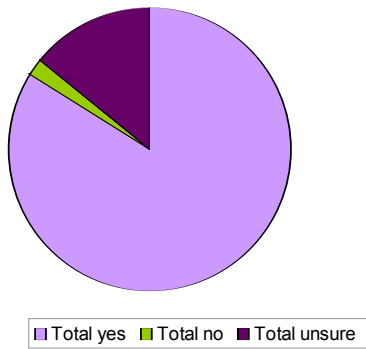
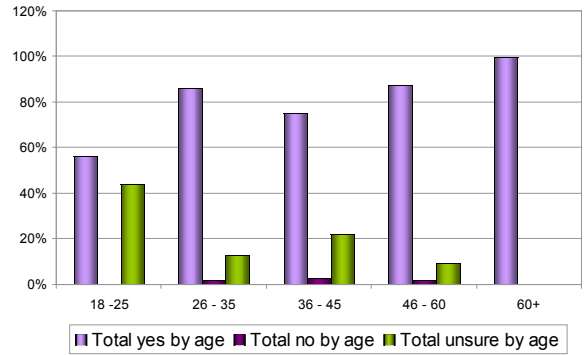
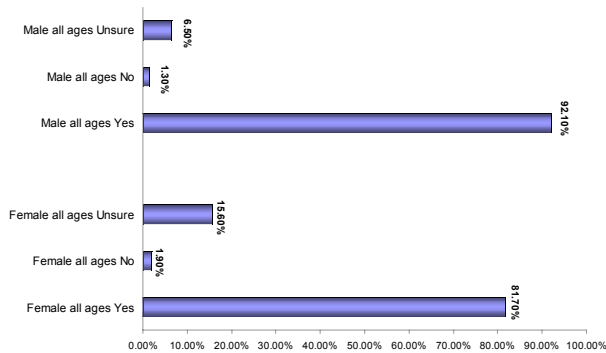


Figure 19: Do you support a call for the consolidation of health care funding with transparent lines of responsibility for service delivery? (age comparison)



Males were 11% more likely to support funding reforms than females. Males were 10% less likely to be unsure and about as likely to answer 'no' as their female colleagues.

Figure 20: Do you support a call for the consolidation of health care funding with transparent lines of responsibility for service delivery? (female/male comparison)



**Would you support the federal government establishing access to dental services through Medicare?**

With over 650,000 people on the public waiting lists for dental care and many more Australians putting off dental care because of the expense there is clearly a desperate need to assess the dental funding arrangements in Australia. Nurses support the availability of a publicly funded dental service and are asking the government to establish a Medicare funded dental system in this country. Ninety four per cent of respondents indicated they would support a federal government which established dental services through Medicare. Only 2.2% were opposed with 3.8% unsure. There was very little difference in the results when comparisons were made on age, although those over 60 were completely in favour of a publicly funded dental service. Males were about 5% more likely to respond 'yes' to this question.

Figure 21: Would you support the federal government establishing access to dental services through Medicare?

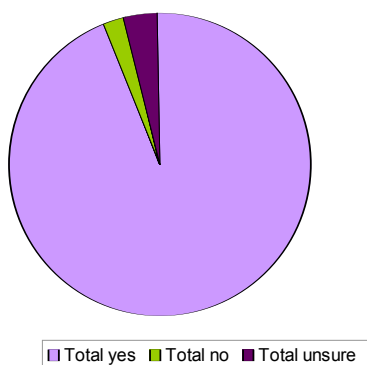
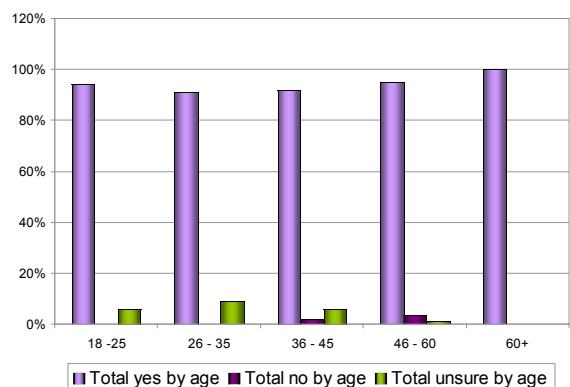


Figure 22: Would you support the federal government establishing access to dental services through Medicare? (age comparison)



**Has (or will) your voting decision been influenced by the different political parties' policies on industrial relations?**

Industrial relations is a vote determining issue for nurses. Nurses are already feeling the impact of the federal governments 'Work Choices' legislation, particularly nurses working in aged care and the private sector. Some of the complaints from nurses received by the ANF include: nurses being sacked and offered their jobs back as aged care workers with less pay; hours being reduced; rosters changed without notice; inadequate time off between shifts; loss of penalty rates for overtime and weekend work; and reductions in annual and sick leave. Seventy six per cent of nurses who responded to the survey indicated that their voting decision would be influenced by the different political parties' policies on industrial relations. Older respondents were more likely to indicate that industrial relations policies would influence their vote in this years' federal election, with 100% of those respondents aged over 60 indicating this was the case.

Figure 23: Has (or will) your voting decision been influenced by the different political parties' policies on industrial relations?

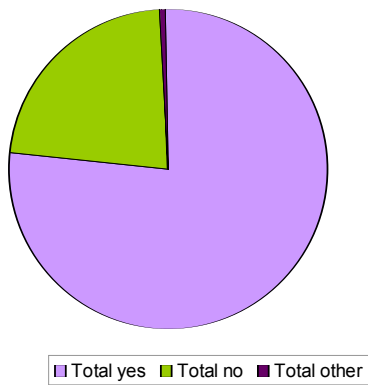
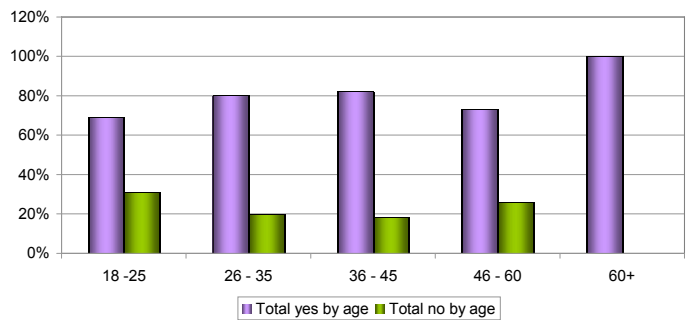


Figure 24: Has (or will) your voting decision been influenced by the different political parties' policies on industrial relations? (age comparison)



**Conclusion**

This survey reflects what nurses in Australia think about health care issues and demonstrates that the policies of political parties around those issues will influence the voting decisions nurses make. As nurses make up 2.5% of the workforce and 2% of the voting public nurses' views should be taken seriously.

Nurses in Australia and the ANF know that to obtain the best health outcomes and contain health costs into the future, we need politicians who have the courage and vision to look at the health system as a whole, listen to health consumers and health professionals as well as health administrators and make decisions on the common good.

The ANF is committed to working with governments on behalf of nurses. But governments need to care for people and the people who provide health services, especially nurses. The ANF wants to work with a national government that is prepared to listen, take nurses' issues seriously, resolve them, and deliver strong, efficient, quality health and aged care services.

This survey outlines how nurses feel about some of the issues of significance to health. The ANF will be campaigning strongly around these and other issues in this 2007 election year.