

Primary health care nurses

Introduction

Primary health care nurses (sometimes called practice nurses) play an important role in the delivery of primary health care services in New Zealand. In 2001 the Primary Health Care Strategy identified primary health care nurses as crucial to its successful implementation, and called for greater development of the role of nurses in the New Zealand health sector.

Nurses have skills and abilities that can be used effectively to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. Increased nurse involvement in primary health care is acknowledged to be an effective way not only to reduce inequalities in health, but also to improve population health in a way that is cost effective (Primary Health Care Nurse Innovation Evaluation Team 2007).

What were the survey questions?

In the 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey, all adult participants and parents of child participants were asked how many times they/their child had seen a primary health care nurse in the previous 12 months, (a) as part of a GP consultation and (b) alone without seeing a GP. If they had seen a primary health care nurse in the previous 12 months, they were asked about the health issue concerned, how long ago (adult participants only), and the cost of their last visit.

If adult participants saw a primary health care nurse who was not based at their usual health care provider in the previous 12 months, they were asked the reason why.

Saw a primary health care nurse in the previous 12 months

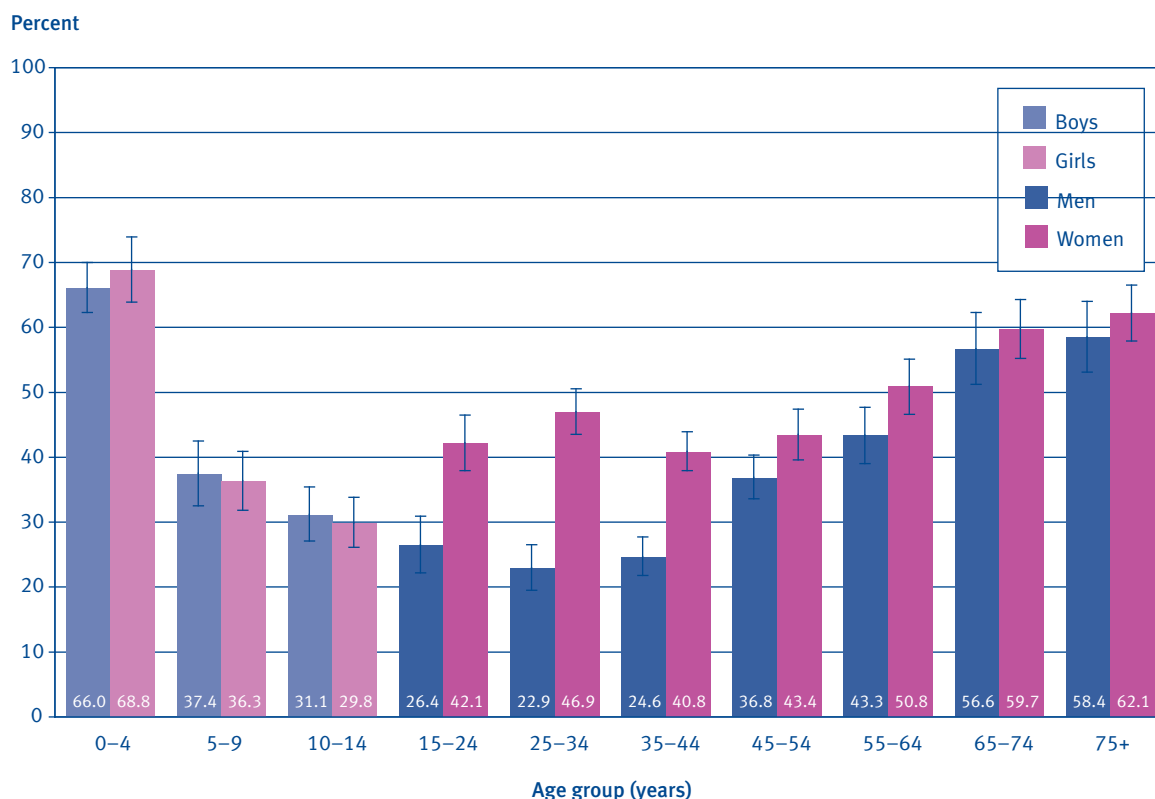
Overall, two out of five children (44.7%, 42.8–46.6) and adults (40.8%, 39.7–42.0) saw a primary health care nurse in the previous 12 months. Women (46.1%, 44.4–47.9) were significantly more likely than men (32.3%, 30.8–33.8) to have seen a primary health care nurse in the previous 12 months, while boys and girls were equally likely to have seen a primary health care nurse in the previous 12 months, adjusted for age.

One in three (33.5%, 31.8–35.2) children and one in four (25.5%, 24.5–26.5) adults saw a primary health care nurse as part of a GP consultation. One in five (22.7%, 21.2–24.3) children and one in four (28.7%, 27.7–29.7) adults saw a primary health care nurse alone without seeing a GP.

Saw a primary health care nurse, by age group

Children aged 0–4 years (67.4%, 63.9–70.8) were significantly more likely than all other age groups except those aged 65 years and over to have seen a primary health care nurse in the previous 12 months (Figure 6.27). Women aged 15–44 years were significantly more likely than men of the same age to have seen a primary health care nurse in the previous 12 months.

Figure 6.27: Saw a primary health care nurse in the previous 12 months, by age group and gender (unadjusted prevalence)



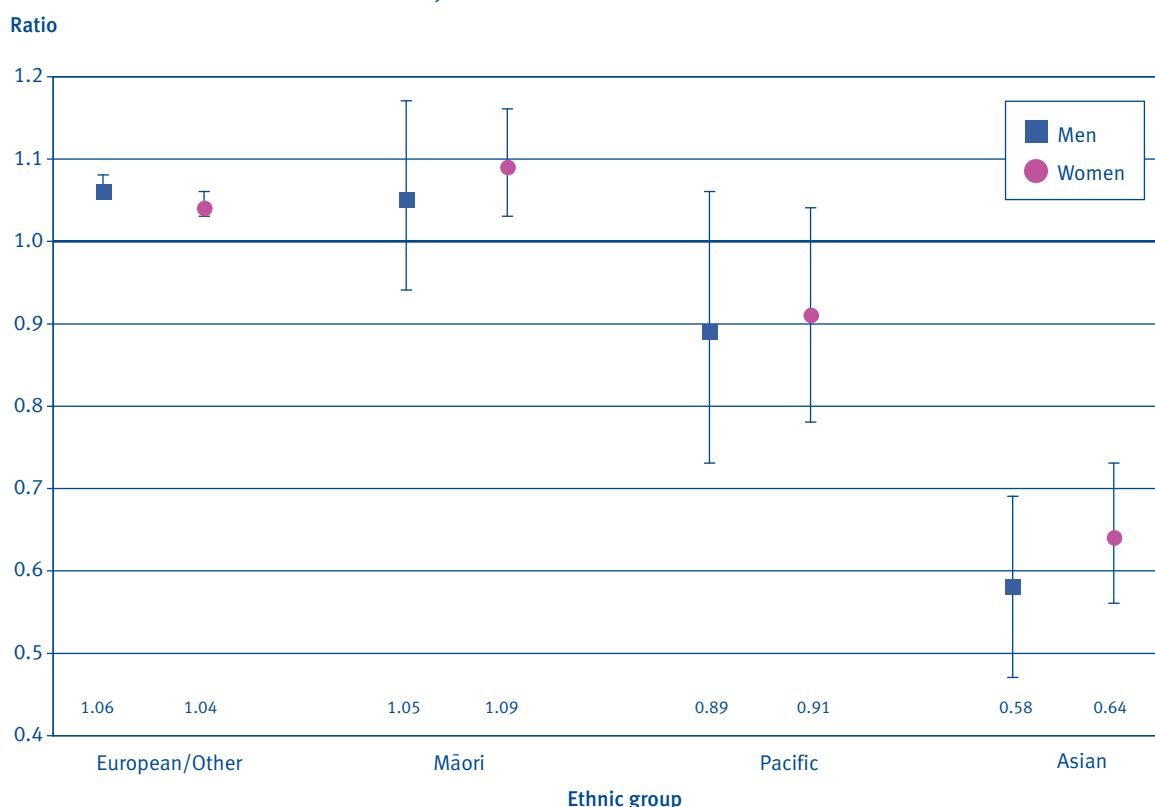
Source: 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey

Saw a primary health care nurse, by ethnic group

Asian children (SRR 0.81, 0.72–0.90) were less likely and Māori children more likely (SRR: 1.06, 1.00–1.11) than children in the total population to have seen a primary health care nurse in the previous 12 months. There were no other significant differences by ethnic group in the proportion of children who saw a primary health care nurse in the previous 12 months.

European/Other men and women and Māori women were significantly more likely than men and women in the total population to have seen a primary health care nurse in the previous 12 months (Figure 6.28). Asian men and women were significantly less likely to have seen a primary health care nurse in the previous 12 months.

Figure 6.28: Adults who saw a primary health care nurse, by ethnic group and gender (age standardised rate ratio)



Source: 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey

Notes: Age standardised to the WHO world population. Reference group, with a rate ratio of 1.0 (indicated by the bold line), is the total male or female population aged 15 years and over. Total response standard output for ethnic groups has been used.

Saw a primary health care nurse, by neighbourhood deprivation

There were no significant differences by neighbourhood deprivation in the proportion of children and adults who had seen a primary health care nurse in the previous 12 months.

Number of visits to a primary health care nurse in previous 12 months

For those who saw a primary health care nurse as part of a GP consultation in the previous 12 months, the median number of visits for both children and adults was two. For those who saw a primary health care nurse alone in the previous 12 months without seeing a GP, the median number of visits for both children and adults was one.

Reason for last visit to primary health care nurse

For children who saw a primary health care nurse as part of a GP consultation, the main reasons given for the last visit were immunisation (39.1%, 35.7–42.4), short-term illness (34.0%, 30.7–37.3) and injury (10.5%, 8.4–12.5). For children who saw a primary health care nurse alone, the vast majority of last visits were for immunisation (70.4%, 67.2–73.6), followed by short-term illness (12.8%, 10.4–15.1) and routine check-up or health advice (5.2%, 3.8–6.6).

For adults who saw a primary health care nurse as part of a GP consultation, the main reasons given for the last visit were a blood or urine test (25.2%, 23.1–27.2), short-term illness (20.5%, 18.9–22.2) and routine check-up or health advice (17.6%, 16.2–18.9). For adults who saw a primary health care nurse alone, the main reasons for the last visit were immunisation (18.7%, 17.1–20.3), a blood or urine test (18.4%, 16.7–20.1) and a routine check-up or health advice (15.4%, 14.1–16.8).

Cost of last visit to primary health care nurse alone

The majority of children's last visits to a primary health care nurse were free, with 85.7% (82.7–88.7) of parents of child participants stating that the last time their child saw a nurse alone without seeing a GP they were not charged for the visit. A further 6.4% were charged less than \$10.

Pacific boys (SRR 1.11, 1.05–1.18) and Māori girls (SRR 1.07, 1.01–1.14) were significantly more likely to have not been charged for their last primary health care nurse visit than boys and girls in the total population.

After adjusting for age, children in NZDep2006 quintile 5 (most deprived) (92.7%, 89.1–96.4) were significantly more likely to have a free last primary health care nurse visit than those in quintile 1 (least deprived) (79.9%, 70.9–89.0).

One in two adults (55.7%, 53.4–57.9) reported they were not charged for their last visit to a primary health care nurse alone. A further 15.9% (14.2–17.6) of adults were charged \$1 to \$10, and 14.2% (12.7–15.8) were charged between \$10 and \$20.

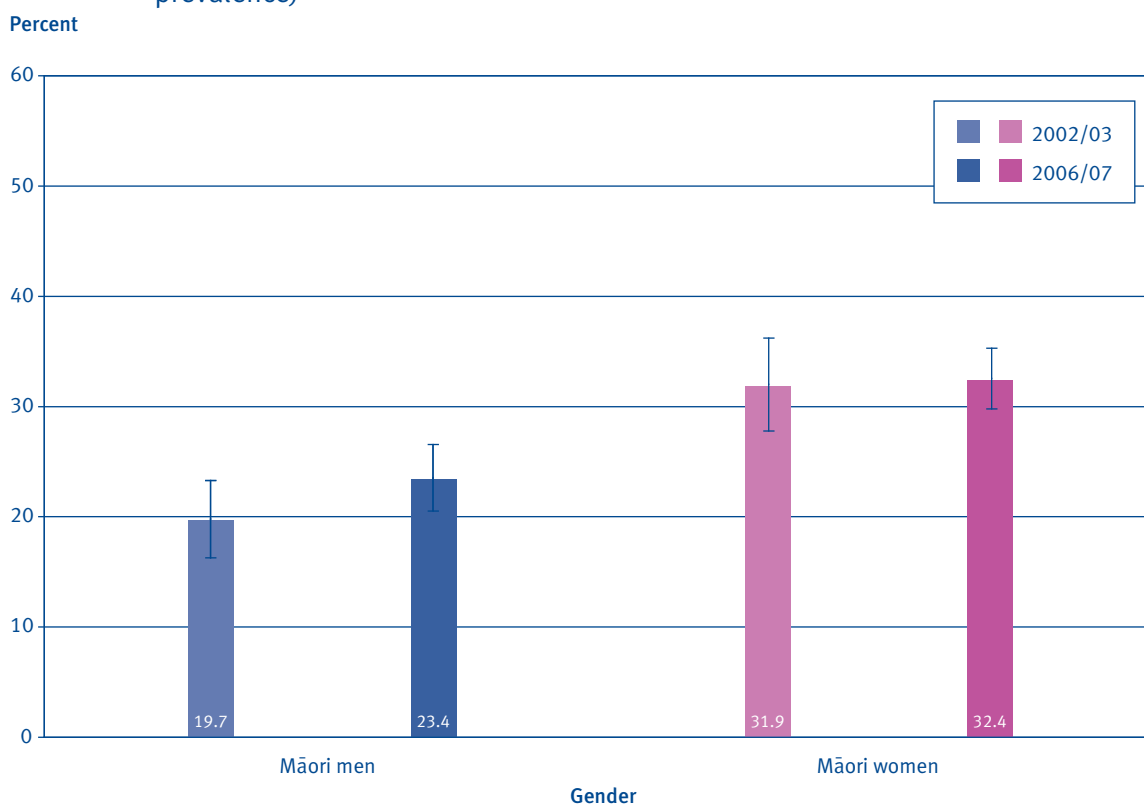
Asian women (SRR 1.23, 1.06–1.41) were significantly more likely than women in the total population to have not been charged for their last primary health care nurse visit.

Adults aged 65–74 years (66.5%, 62.0–71.0) and 75 years and over (66.0%, 60.9–71.0) were more likely than younger adults to have not been charged for their last visit to a primary health care nurse. There were no other significant differences in those who had not been charged for their last primary health care nurse visit by age and no differences by neighbourhood deprivation quintile.

Time trends in use of primary health care nurses

Between 2002/03 and 2006/07 there were no changes in the proportion of all adults who saw a primary health care nurse as part of a GP consultation in the previous 12 months, adjusted for age (graph not shown). However, there was a significant increase in the proportion of Māori men who saw a primary health care nurse as part of a GP consultation (p-value < 0.05), adjusted for age (Figure 6.29).

Figure 6.29: Māori adults who saw a primary health care nurse as part of a GP consultation in previous 12 months, by gender, 2002/03 and 2006/07 (age standardised prevalence)

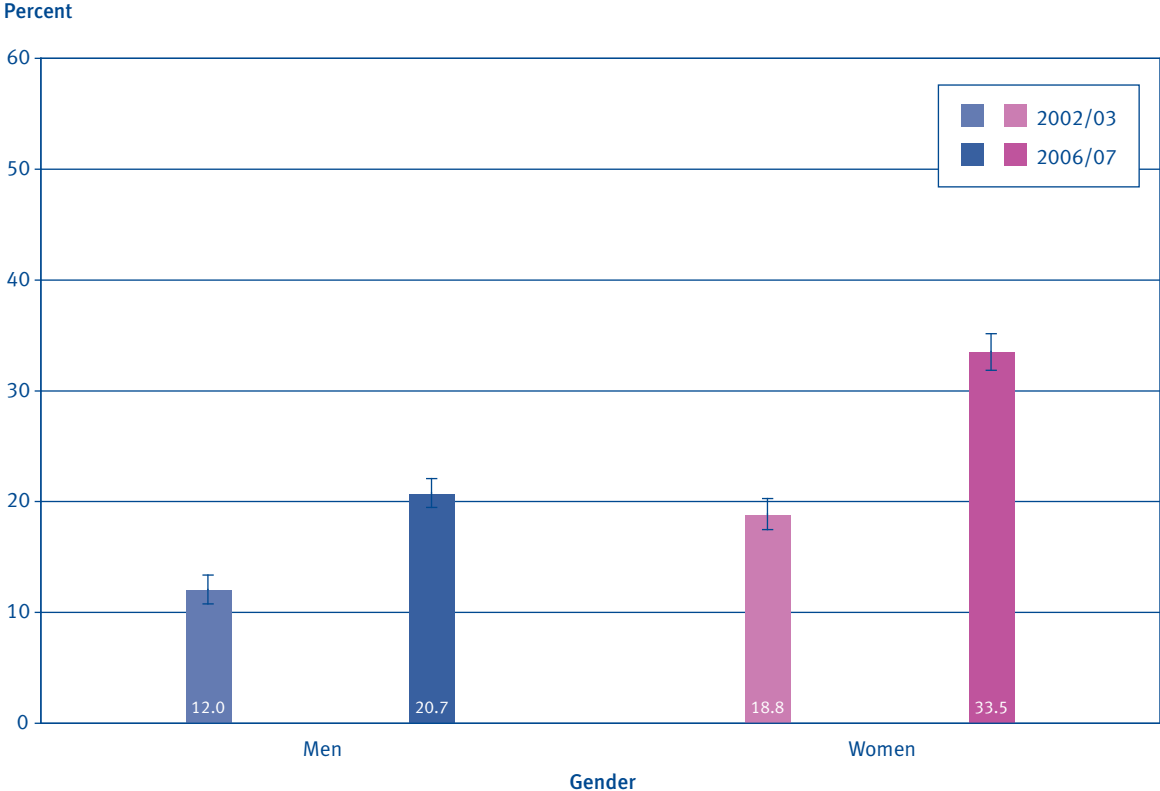


Source: 2002/03 and 2006/07 New Zealand Health Surveys

Note: Data from previous years have been reanalysed to allow for comparability.

Between 2002/03 and 2006/07 there was a large increase in the proportion of men and women who saw a primary health care nurse alone (without seeing a GP at the same time) in the previous 12 months, adjusted for age (Figure 6.30). This increasing trend was also seen for Māori adults (graph not shown).

Figure 6.30: Adults who saw a primary health care nurse alone in previous 12 months, by gender, 2002/03 and 2006/07 (age standardised prevalence)



Source: 2002/03 and 2006/07 New Zealand Health Surveys

Note: Data from previous years have been reanalysed to allow for comparability.