

3. HEALTH WORKFORCE

3.4. Psychiatrists and mental health nurses

At any point in time, about 10% of the adult population will report having some type of mental or behavioural disorder (WHO, 2001). People with mental health problems may receive help from a variety of professionals, including general practitioners, psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers, specialist nurses and others. This section focuses on two categories of mental health service providers, psychiatrists and mental health nurses, as the availability of comparable data for other providers is more limited. Psychiatrists are responsible for diagnosing and treating a variety of serious mental health problems, including depression, learning disabilities, alcoholism and drug addiction, eating disorders, and personality disorders such as schizophrenia. A mental health nurse has usually completed a formal training in nursing at a university level and work in mental health care services (WHO, 2011e).

In 2011, there were 15.6 psychiatrists per 100 000 population on average across OECD countries (Figure 3.4.1). The number was by far the highest in Switzerland, with 45 psychiatrists per 100 000 population. Following Switzerland were Iceland, France and Sweden, with 22 psychiatrists per 100 000 population. In most OECD countries, the number was between 10 and 20 per 100 000 population. There were fewer than ten psychiatrists per 100 000 population in Mexico, Turkey, Chile, Korea and Poland.

The number of psychiatrists per capita has increased since 2000 in most OECD countries for which data are available (Figure 3.4.1). The rise has been particularly rapid in Switzerland, Austria, Poland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. There was a slight decrease in the number of psychiatrists per capita in the United States, as the increase in the number of psychiatrists did not fully keep up with the increase in the population.

As is the case for many other medical specialties, psychiatrists may be unevenly distributed across regions within each country. For example, in Australia, the number of psychiatrists per capita was two times greater in certain states and territories compared with others in 2009 (AIHW, 2012b).

The role of psychiatrists varies across countries. For example, in Spain, psychiatrists work in close co-operation with general practitioners (GPs). Hence, although the number of psychiatrists is relatively low, consultation rates of psychiatrists by people with mental disorders are higher than in many other countries that have more psychiatrists, because of higher referral rates from their GPs (Kovess-Masfety, 2007).

In many countries, mental health nurses play an important and increasing role in the delivery of mental health services in hospital or outside hospital. In 2011, the Netherlands, Ireland and Japan had the highest rates (with over 100 mental health nurses per 100 000 population), and Turkey, Mexico and Hungary the lowest rates (under ten per 100 000 population). The number of mental health nurses is also relatively low in Portugal and Korea, with between ten and 15 nurses per 100 000 population. The OECD average was 50 mental health nurses per 100 000 population (Figure 3.4.2).

Some countries such as Australia have introduced new programmes to improve access to mental health care by extending the role of mental health nurses in primary care. Under the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program launched in 2007, mental health nurses in Australia work with general practitioners, psychiatrists and other mental health professionals to treat people suffering from different mental health conditions. A recent evaluation of this programme found that mental health nurses have the potential to make a significant contribution to enhance access and quality of mental care through flexible and innovative approaches (Happell et al., 2010).

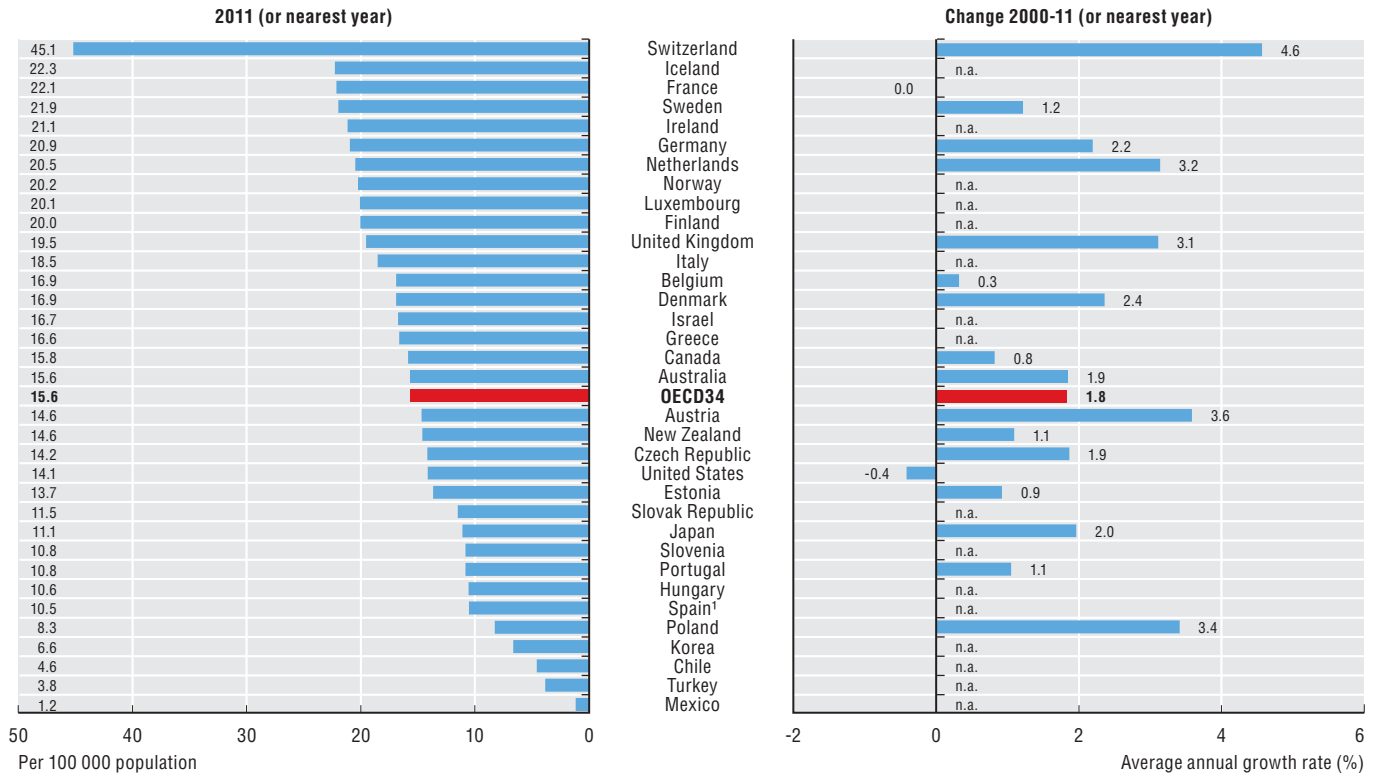
Definition and comparability

Psychiatrists are medical doctors who specialise in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. They have post-graduate training in psychiatry, and may also have additional training in a psychiatric specialty, such as neuropsychiatry or child psychiatry. Psychiatrists can prescribe medication, which psychologists cannot do in most countries.

The figures normally include psychiatrists, neuropsychiatrists and child psychiatrists. Psychologists are excluded. The numbers are presented as head counts, regardless of whether psychiatrists work full time or part time. In Spain, the number of psychiatrists only includes those working in hospital.

A mental health nurse is usually defined as a nurse who has completed a formal training in nursing at a university level and work in mental health care services in hospital, in primary care or other settings (WHO, 2011e).

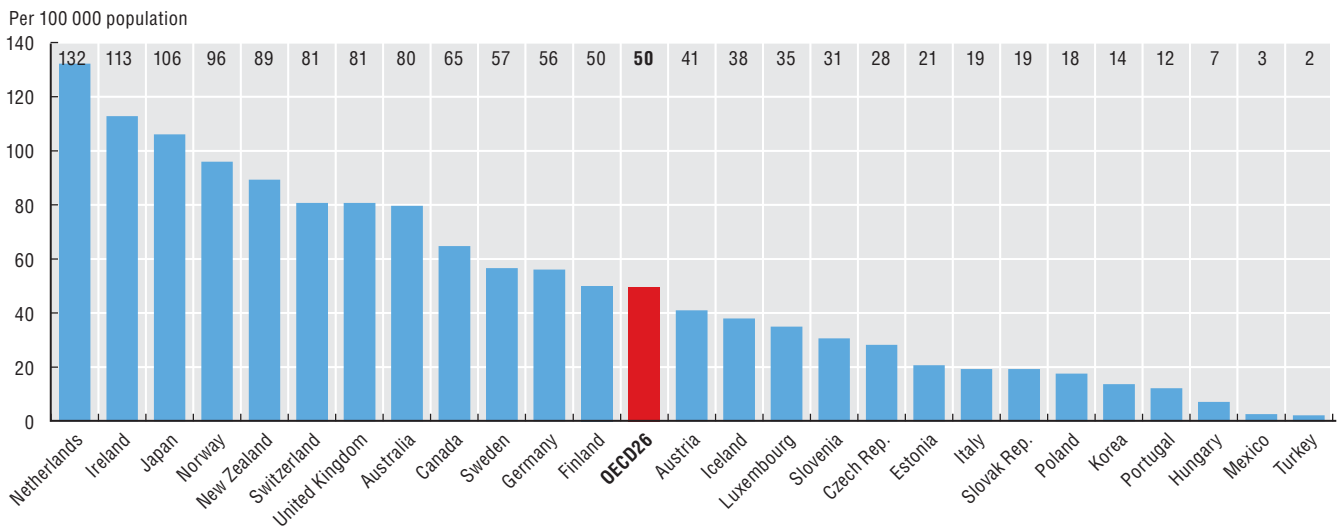
3.4.1. Psychiatrists per 100 000 population, 2011 and change between 2000 and 2011



1. In Spain, the number of psychiatrists only includes those working in hospital.
Source: OECD Health Statistics 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/health-data-en>.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932916933>

3.4.2. Mental health nurses per 100 000 population, 2011 (or nearest year)



Source: OECD Mental Health Questionnaire 2012, WHO Mental Health Atlas 2011.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932916952>



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