# Looking Into Sydney's Care Economy: A Policy Position Scoping Report

Policy position contributions || Ethos Urban (Social Strategy)

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# 1.0 Overview

The care economy is fast becoming a key focus area for national and state governments. Demographic shifts towards an aging population, increasingly complex long-term health conditions, increases in childcare demand, and an uptick in use of mental health services, have highlighted the growing importance of the care economy.[1] The care economy is complex, encompassing a diverse range of support services as well as unpaid work.[2] This includes fields such as healthcare, disability support, childcare, mental health and aged care.[3]

For the purposes of this scoping report, the term 'care sectors' will be used to describe all paid work within the care economy. Demographic analysis has been conducted to provide insights into the composition of the care sector workforce across Greater Sydney.

This report's demographic analysis uses data form the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census, which defines care work employment through five sub-categories:

- Health care and Social Assistance
- Hospitals
- Medical and other health care services
- Residential care
- Social assistance services

## 1.1 Objectives and structure

This scoping report aims to provide insights into the care economy to help identify areas for future research and policy development which many be of interest to Committee for Sydney. It provides a baseline profile of Greater Sydney's care sector workforce, honing in on two focus areas impacting the care economy. Attending to two focus areas works to narrow the report's scope, *vis-à-vis* the complex and sprawling nature of social, economic, and demographic entanglement influencing the care economy. The focus area areas are:

- Population aging trends influencing the care economy.
- Potential spatial inequalities relating workplace access of age care sector workers.

The structure of this report is as follows:

- A breakdown of the care sector workforce across greater Sydney showing prominent characteristics which may be useful for future research and policy development considerations.
- Analysis of Sydney's population profile highlighting population aging as a demographic trend, supported by relevant literature.
- Identification of spatial inequality trends affecting care sector workers across Greater Sydney.
- A brief discussion of future policy research area raised by this scoping report. These ideas have the potential to contribute to policy development to work towards a sustainable and equitable care economy future.

## 1.2 Scoping report declaration

This scoping report has been provided to the Committee for Sydney by Ethos Urban (Social Strategy) as a pro bono contribution to forthcoming policy research being undertaken by the Committee.



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| **This document was prepared by:** | Solomon Charles | 18 March 2025 |



[1] Micah Peters, "The Care Economy: A Catalyst for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth," *Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing* 41, no. 2 (June 7, 2024), https://doi.org/10.37464/2024.412.1808; Australian Institute Of Health And Welfare, "Australia's Health 2014," 2014, https://doi.org/10.25816/5EC1E4122547E.
[2] Ito Peng, "The Care Economy: A New Research Framework," 2019, https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03456901v1.
[3] Australian Government, National Skills Commissions, "Care Workforce Labor Market Study" (2021).

## 2.0 Greater Sydney's care worker profile

This section provides an overview of Sydney's care sector workforce with reference to the Greater Sydney's general population profile. Notable demographic trends are identified as points of interest which may be considered in future policy research. The findings provided below are based on 2021 ABS Census of Population and Housing data. A detailed demographic profile is provided in the **Appendix**.

### 2.1 Care worker quickstats

The care economy is the largest employment sector in Greater Sydney. The sector has seen significant growth as a proportion of total population between 2016 to 2021 and is predominantly comprised of younger working aged women. Overseas-born Sydneysiders make up a larger proportion of the workforce compared to the Greater Sydney average and generally have lower salaries than white-collar industries such as technical and professional services.

**319,725 workers are employed in the care sector**

A total of 13.4% of all workers across Greater Sydney work in the care sector. The second largest sector is professional and, scientific and technical services (11.2%), followed by retail trade (8.9%). The care sector has experienced substantial growth, increasing as a proportion of total worker population by 1.7% since 2016. The breakdown of the care worker sector by ABS subgroup is shown below.

**1.6%** - Health Care and Social Assistance

**31.4%** - Hospitals

**29.3%** - Medical and Other Health Care Services

**14.7%** - Residential Care Services

**23.0%** - Social Assistance Services

**Care workers typically make between $52-65K per year.**

The median individual income for care workers in Greater Sydney is between $52,000-$65,000 per year. This figure is higher than Greater Sydney's median income of $45,930. However, it is substantially lower than science and technical service workers where median income is between $91,000-$103,999

**75.8% of care workers are women.**

Women compromise the overwhelming majority of the care sector workforce.

The median cohort is 30-39 years, representing 24.3% of the total care sector workforce.

**1.5% of Care workers are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.**

This figure is slightly lower than Greater Sydney average where in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples comprise 1.8% of the population.

**49.5% of care worker were born overseas.**

The proportion of care sector workers born overseas is considerably higher than the average across Greater Sydney (39.9%). The top three regions of origin for overseas-born care workers are Southern and Central Asia (12.0%), followed by South East Asia (9.2%).

The prominence of the care sector as the leading sector of employment highlights the importance of engaging in research and policy development work to understand how Greater Sydney's economic and social climate impact the sector's overall strength and the condition of the workforce. The demographic makeup of the sector indicates a that future analysis would greatly benefit for applying gender and multicultural lenses, inviting the use of intersectional social research methodologies and policy considerations. This will likely contribute to the development of a proactive posture facing increasing pressures on the sector caused by an ageing population.

## 2.2 Population ageing

Greater Sydney's population is progressively aging. Younger age cohorts are projected to shrink as a total proportion of population, while older age cohorts are anticipated to grow. **Figure 1** shows the difference in age cohort sizes as a proportion of total population between 2025 and 2041. The 80-84 years age cohort is projected to experience the most growth, increasing from approximately 2% to nearly 3% of total population by 2041. Correspondingly, younger groups are anticipated to shrink, with the 10-14 years age cohorts anticipated to decline from a little over 6% today to just below 5.5% by 2041. All age cohorts below the 41-40 are anticipated to decline, while all cohorts aged 45 and over are projected to increase as a proportion of Greater Sydney's total population.

Population age projections shown in **Figure 1** have been sourced with reference to Transport for NSW Population Projections and have been rebased to the latest ABS estimated resident population.

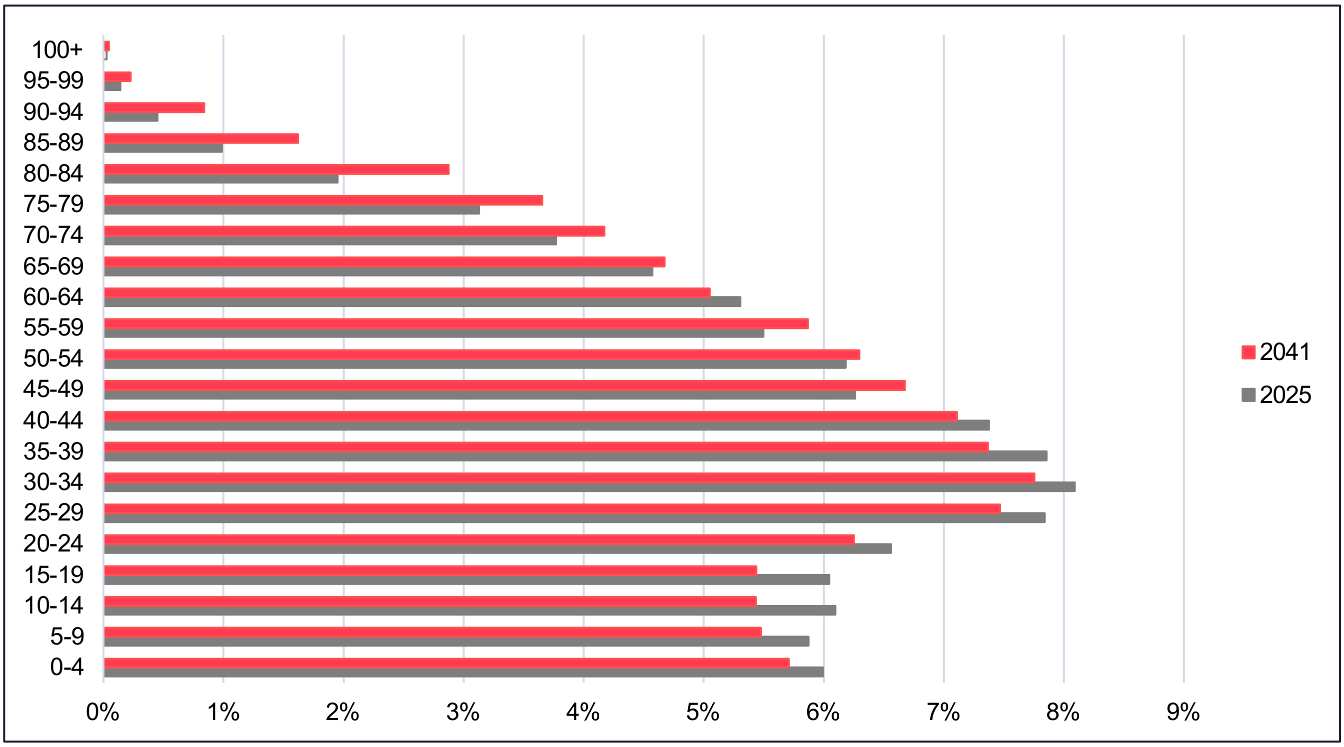


*Figure 1 Great Sydney population structure 2025-2041*

Source: ABS 2021, TfNSW 2024

An increasing proportion of people aged over 75 years will likely increase pressure on the care sector.[4] This will likely be driven by increased demand for aged care, as well as more patients with age related long-term health considerations in the healthcare system.[5] Understanding how the sector's workforce can be supported to provide high levels of service whilst dealing with increasing pressure is an important consideration for future research.

[4] Dominik Lange, Gert Stockmans, and Hush Naidoo Jade Photography, "DUTY OF CARE: AGED CARE SECTOR IN CRISIS," *CEDA*, 2022.
[5] Australian Institute Of Health And Welfare, "Australia's Health 2014."

# 3.0 Spatialising care work

This section shows spatial trends relating to care worker place of residence and occupation again a backdrop of socioeconomic (dis)advantage across and uneven distribution of age care facilities.

## 3.1 Comparing where care workers live and work

2021 ABS Census data showing the density of care worker places of occupation and places of residence by Local Government Area (LGA) has been mapped below in and **Figure 2** and **Figure 3**.

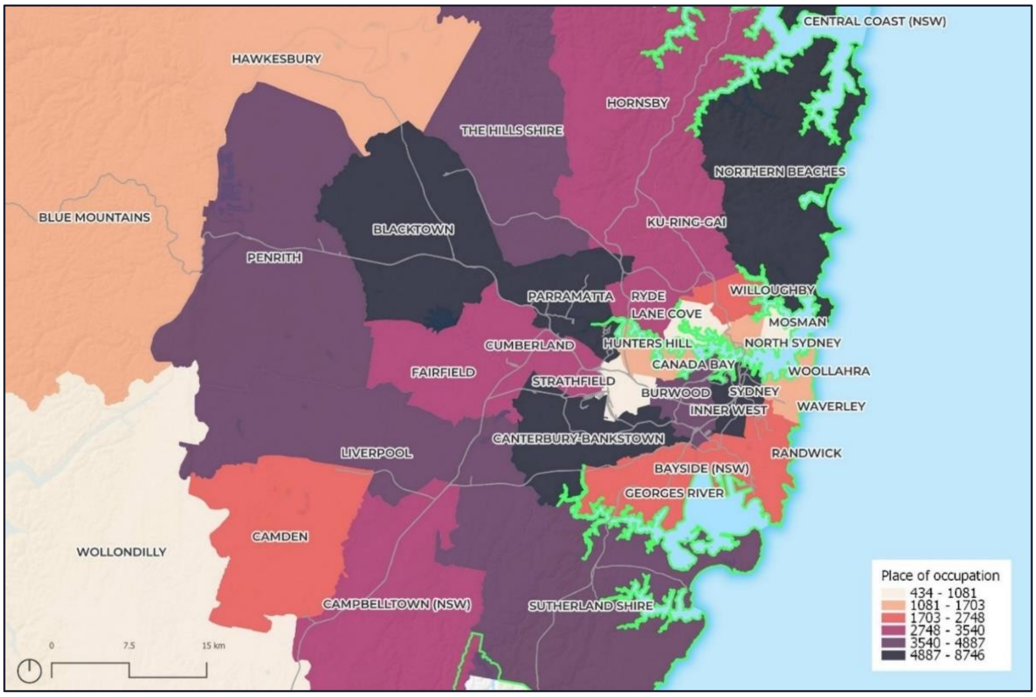


*Figure 2 Care worker place of occupation*

Source: 2021 ABS Housing and Population Data

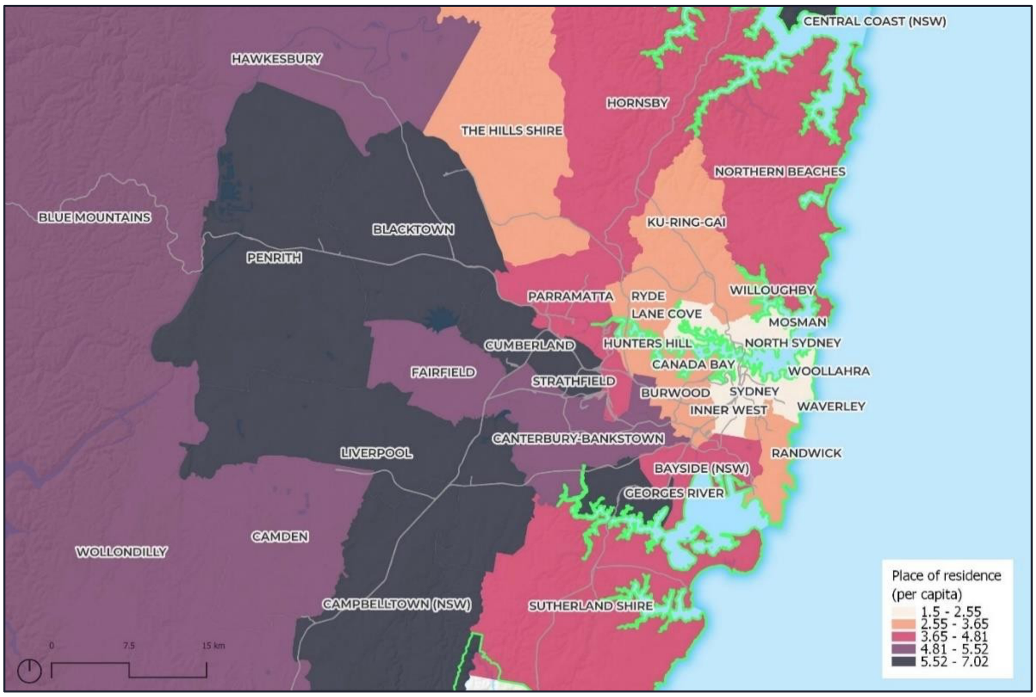


*Figure 3 Care worker place of residence*

Source: 2021 ABS Housing and Population Data

**Figure 2** show density levels of care worker occupations throughout Greater Sydney. Areas with the highest levels occupation density are located in the Northern Beaches, Sydney, Canterbury Bankstown, Parramatta, and Blacktown. **Figure 3** shows a degree of overlap between where care workers predominantly live and work, with both Blacktown and Parramatta showing a strong spatial association between care worker places of occupation and residents. However, the overall trend also shows a disconnect between areas with the highest levels of residential density and places of occupations. In particular, most more care workers live within Western Sydney LGAs (Penrith, Liverpool and Campbelltown), contrasted with Sydney, Inner West, Northern Beaches, Ku-Ring-Gai and The Hills Shire, which has high levels of care worker employment, but low levels of residential density.

### 3.1.1 Comparing age care facilities with care workers live

**Figure 4** shows the distribution and density of age care facilities across Greater Sydney using a heat map. Areas with the greatest density of aged care facilities have some of the lowest densities of care workers residences. Woollahra, Waverley, Sydney, Canada Bay, Inner West and Lane Cove characterise this trend.

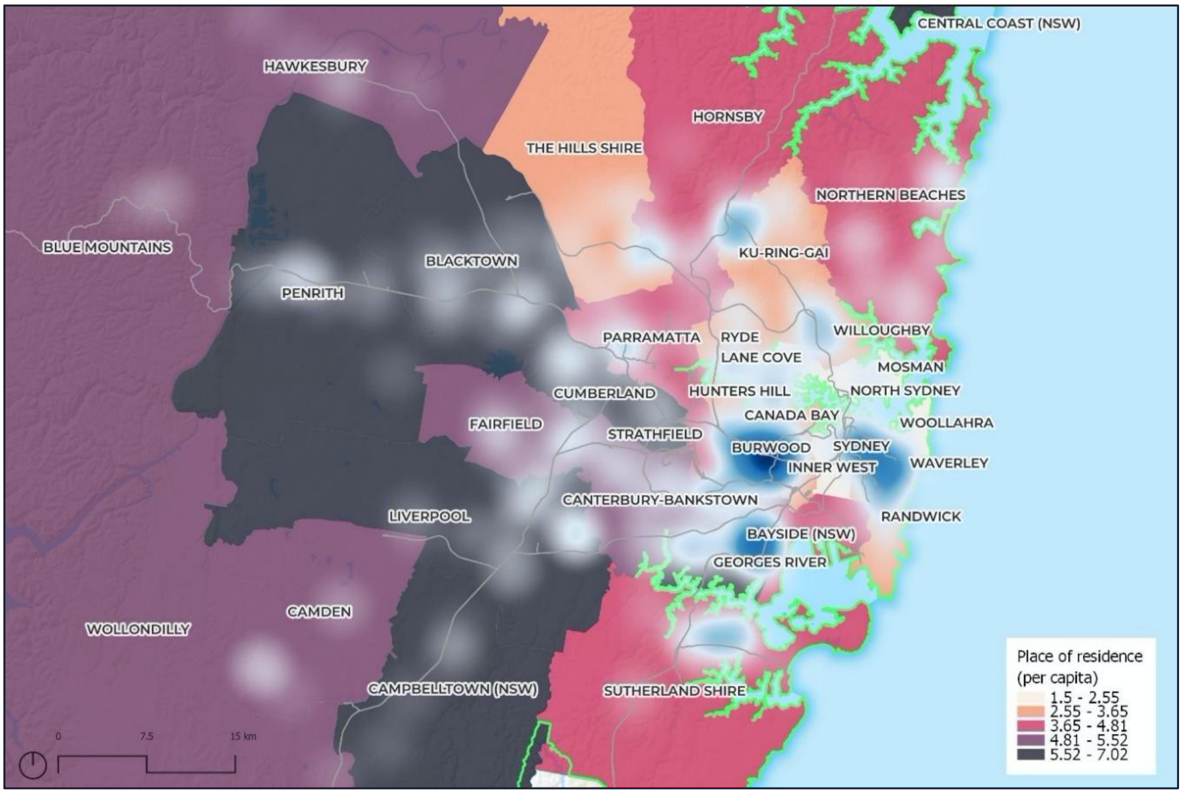


*Figure 4 Age care density compared with care worker places of residence*

Source: 2021 ABS Housing and Population Data, NSW Government SEED NSW Points of Interest (2024)

This emerging pattern raises questions about care work access to their places of employment, alluding to potential structural disadvantages.

### 3.1.2 Socioeconomic implications

2021 ABS SEIFA data shown below in **Figure 5** highlights a strong spatial association between LGAs with high levels of care worker residents and higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage. This trend is clearest across Western and South Western Sydney with Penrith, Blacktown and Liverpool showing high levels of disadvantage and care worker residential density. Correspondingly, areas with the highest levels of socioeconomic advantage have the lowest levels of care worker density, notably Sydney, the Eastern suburbs and North Shore.

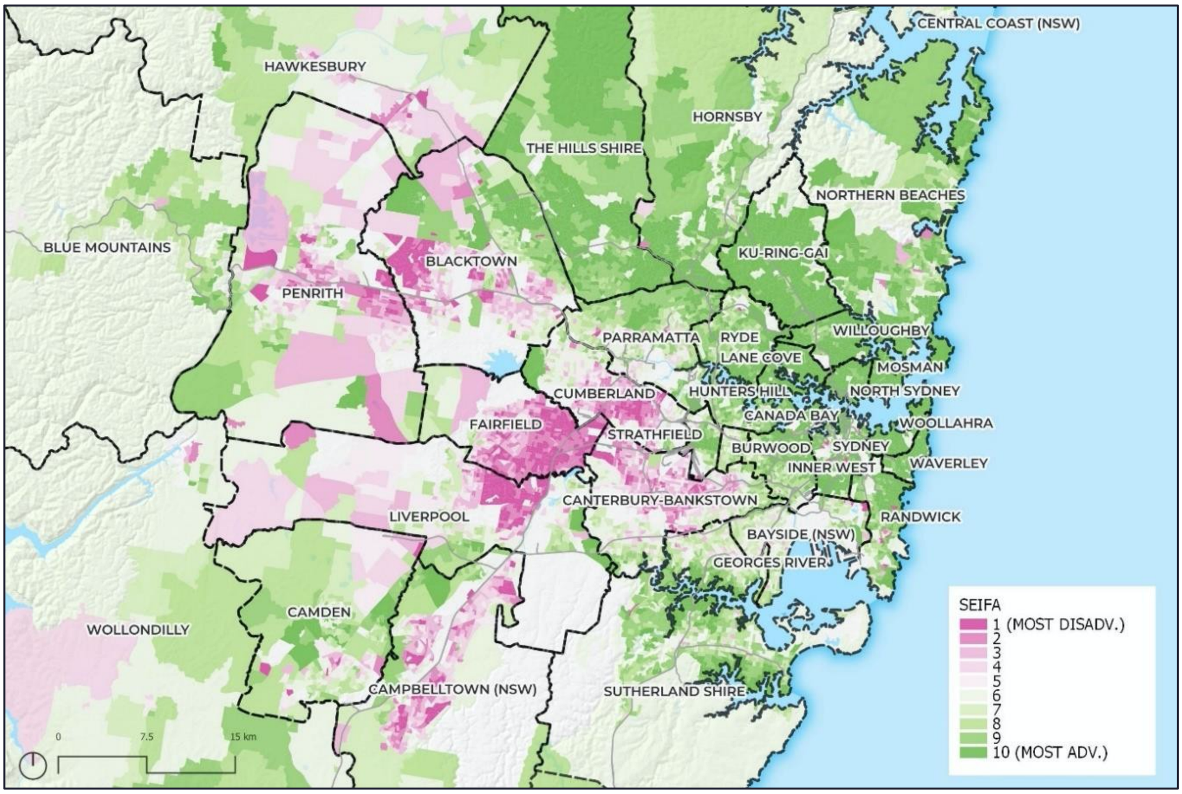


*Figure 5 2021 ABS SEIFA data showing levels of advantage and disadvantage*

Source: 2021 ABS SEIFA

# 4.0 Conclusions

This scoping report has looked at the demographic characteristics of the care economy workforce across Greater Sydney against the backdrop of an aging population. The report has sketched out a spatial disconnect between where care workers live and work, contributes to growing discourses on access to the city for everyday working people. This scoping report's mapping exercise shows high-level trends of disadvantage facing care workers across Greater Sydney, which may serve as an starting point for future research. Areas of interest for future work include (but are not limited to):

1. A more detailed breakdown of the care sector workforce to provide data on pay gaps between women and men by sub-sector, and people born overseas from multicultural backgrounds. This could be further spatialised to test if disadvantage by background and place of residence is a prevalent issue. This could be further be supported by qualitative social research the experiences of different care workers according to their cultural background, gender, income status and place of work/residence.
2. Further investigation of anticipated demand on the care economy caused by an ageing population. This may include research into the size and configuration of the workforce, as well as strategies to improve wellbeing outcomes for workers and older people (e.g., aging in place with community).
3. Research into long-term systemic approaches to addressing patterns of structures disadvantage impacting care sector workers. Important topics to consider may include long commute times, housing pressures, and longer working hours, particularly given the potential for intersections of disadvantage faced by women of colour who, comprise workforce's second largest cohort in Great Sydney.

# Appendix

*Table 1 W12 industry of Employment by Occupation for Greater Sydney (employed aged over 15 years)*

| | Managers | Professionals | Technicians and Trades Workers | Community and Personal Service Workers | Clerical and Administrative Workers | Sales Workers | Machinery Operators and Drivers | Labourers | Inadequately described/ Not stated | Total | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing | 3,532 | 617 | 956 | 41 | 812 | 316 | 618 | 2,588 | 112 | 9,604 | 0.4% |
| Mining | 1,029 | 1,091 | 963 | 11 | 478 | 41 | 1,395 | 134 | 47 | 5,198 | 0.2% |
| Manufacturing | 26,618 | 17,982 | 26,108 | 1,369 | 14,761 | 6,763 | 17,297 | 19,988 | 1,566 | 132,458 | 5.6% |
| Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services | 3,950 | 4,906 | 3,013 | 79 | 2,840 | 497 | 3,124 | 1,342 | 300 | 20,055 | 0.8% |
| Construction | 30,831 | 14,828 | 67,133 | 389 | 21,672 | 2,780 | 9,954 | 20,431 | 2,240 | 170,260 | 7.1% |
| Wholesale Trade | 21,871 | 17,889 | 4,713 | 173 | 13,638 | 9,415 | 9,510 | 2,995 | 880 | 81,087 | 3.4% |
| Retail Trade | 37,756 | 17,947 | 10,779 | 1,579 | 14,364 | 98,767 | 13,853 | 16,516 | 1,583 | 213,145 | 8.9% |
| Accommodation and Food Services | 25,545 | 3,491 | 19,421 | 32,741 | 5,220 | 17,874 | 3,336 | 23,167 | 996 | 131,787 | 5.5% |
| Transport, Postal and Warehousing | 13,906 | 10,418 | 4,828 | 2,864 | 25,524 | 5,133 | 48,846 | 6,565 | 1,771 | 119,859 | 5.0% |
| Information Media and Telecommunications | 11,765 | 29,669 | 5,839 | 243 | 6,343 | 3,207 | 673 | 534 | 592 | 58,864 | 2.5% |
| Financial and Insurance Services | 34,961 | 74,606 | 1,649 | 577 | 51,301 | 4,837 | 104 | 204 | 3,142 | 171,397 | 7.2% |
| Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services | 8,140 | 7,918 | 1,164 | 313 | 7,929 | 18,672 | 776 | 989 | 722 | 46,614 | 2.0% |
| Professional, Scientific and Technical Services | 42,808 | 162,134 | 16,584 | 622 | 35,084 | 4,576 | 789 | 1,291 | 2,399 | 266,290 | 11.2% |
| Administrative and Support Services | 11,498 | 13,702 | 3,903 | 4,809 | 8,940 | 1,811 | 3,329 | 22,537 | 708 | 71,233 | 3.0% |
| Public Administration and Safety | 20,397 | 34,501 | 8,622 | 29,123 | 31,603 | 791 | 2,302 | 4,341 | 2,655 | 134,337 | 5.6% |
| Education and Training | 19,555 | 125,141 | 4,149 | 31,472 | 21,051 | 523 | 540 | 2,662 | 1,162 | 206,260 | 8.6% |
| Health Care and Social Assistance | 21,469 | 137,012 | 10,522 | 89,619 | 44,865 | 1,934 | 2,229 | 9,772 | 2,293 | 319,725 | 13.4% |
| Arts and Recreation Services | 7,317 | 9,641 | 3,146 | 7,576 | 3,963 | 1,364 | 254 | 1,897 | 508 | 35,673 | 1.5% |
| Other Services | 8,923 | 10,357 | 27,634 | 11,309 | 9,255 | 1,497 | 1,060 | 4,767 | 624 | 75,428 | 3.2% |
| Inadequately described/Not stated | 18,416 | 20,536 | 10,819 | 4,058 | 14,624 | 6,758 | 11,152 | 9,544 | 21,079 | 116,987 | 4.9% |
| **Total** | **370,298** | **714,391** | **231,959** | **218,972** | **334,272** | **187,571** | **131,150** | **152,265** | **45,382** | **2,386,255** | **100.00%** |

Source: ABS Housing and Population Data, 2021

*Table 2 Change in care sectors size as percentage of total Greater Sydney workforce*

| | 2011 | 2016 | 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Change in care sector workforce** | 11.3% | 11.7% | 13.4% |

Source: ABS Housing and Population Data 2011, 2016, and 2021

*Table 3 Greater Sydney care sector workforce profile*

| Profile category | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|

| Workforce Breakdown | | |
|---|---|---|
| Health Care and Social Assistance | 5081 | 1.6% |
| Hospitals | 100330 | 31.4% |
| Medical and Other Health Care Services | 93693 | 29.3% |
| Residential Care Services | 47043 | 14.7% |
| Social Assistance Services | 73575 | 23.0% |
| **Income** | | |
| $3,500 or more ($182,000 or more) | 18031 | 5.69% |
| $3,000-$3,499 ($156,000-$181,999) | 7549 | 2.38% |
| $2,000-$2,999 ($104,000-$155,999) | 36059 | 11.38% |
| $1,750-$1,999 ($91,000-$103,999) | 24228 | 7.64% |
| $1,500-$1,749 ($78,000-$90,999) | 32278 | 10.18% |
| $1,250-$1,499 ($65,000-$77,999) | 37429 | 11.81% |
| $1,000-$1,249 ($52,000-$64,999) | 47522 | 14.99% |
| $800-$999 ($41,600-$51,999) | 38123 | 12.03% |
| $650-$799 ($33,800-$41,599) | 29130 | 9.19% |
| $500-$649 ($26,000-$33,799) | 20751 | 6.55% |
| $400-$499 ($20,800-$25,999) | 10665 | 3.36% |
| $300-$399 ($15,600-$20,799) | 7472 | 2.36% |
| $150-$299 ($7,800-$15,599) | 5411 | 1.71% |
| $1-$149 ($1-$7,799) | 2306 | 0.73% |
| Median | | $52,000-$64,999 |
| **Age** | | |
| 15-19 years | 5084 | 1.6% |
| 20-29 years | 67773 | 21.2% |
| 30-39 years | 77804 | 24.3% |
| 40-49 years | 66331 | 20.7% |
| 50-59 years | 61863 | 19.3% |
| 60-69 years | 34705 | 10.9% |
| 70-79 years | 5753 | 1.8% |
| 80-89 years | 393 | 0.1% |
| **Gender** | | |
| Male | 77413 | 24.2% |
| Female | 242310 | 75.8% |
| **Indigenous Status** | | |
| Non-Indigenous | 319002 | 98.50% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Aboriginal | 4687 | 1.45% |
| Torres Strait Islander | 80 | 0.02% |
| Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander | 83 | 0.03% |

*Table 4 Greater Sydney Care worker region of birth breakdown*

| Region of birth | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Australia | 163279 | 50.52% |
| **Oceania** | | **3.73%** |
| New Zealand | 6154 | 1.90% |
| Melanesia | 411 | 0.13% |
| Micronesia | 10 | 0.00% |
| Polynesia (excludes Hawaii) | 5486 | 1.70% |
| **North-West Europe** | | **5.81%** |
| United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man | 13591 | 4.21% |
| Ireland | 2153 | 0.67% |
| Western Europe | 2533 | 0.78% |
| Northern Europe | 506 | 0.16% |
| **Southern and Eastern Europe** | | **2.48%** |
| Southern Europe | 1918 | 0.59% |
| South Eastern Europe | 3447 | 1.07% |
| Eastern Europe | 2649 | 0.82% |
| **North Africa and the Middle East** | | **3.27%** |
| North Africa | 2361 | 0.73% |
| Middle East | 8201 | 2.54% |
| **South-East Asia** | | **9.19%** |
| Mainland South-East Asia | 8043 | 2.49% |
| Maritime South-East Asia | 21656 | 6.70% |
| **North-East Asia** | | **7.27%** |
| Chinese Asia (includes Mongolia) | 17791 | 5.50% |
| Japan and the Koreas | 5720 | 1.77% |
| **Southern and Central Asia** | | **11.99%** |
| Southern Asia | 37847 | 11.71% |
| Central Asia | 910 | 0.28% |
| Americas | | 2.71% |
| Northern America | 2913 | 0.90% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| South America | 5300 | 1.64% |
| Central America | 469 | 0.15% |
| Caribbean | 90 | 0.03% |
| **Sub-Saharan Africa** | | **3.02%** |
| Central and West Africa | 2396 | 0.74% |
| Southern and East Africa | 7353 | 2.28% |

Source: ABS Housing and Population Data, 2021

*Table 5 Greater Sydney demographic characteristics*

| Category | Greater Sydney |
|---|---|
| **Income** | |
| Median individual income (annual) | $45,930 |
| **Country of Birth** | |
| Australia | 61.1% |
| *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders* | *1.8%* |
| Other Major English Speaking Countries | 7.1% |
| Other Overseas Born | 31.8% |
| *% speak English only at home* | *61.0%* |

Source: ABS Housing and Population Data, 2021