

Health Workforce

Australia's healthcare system relies heavily upon the skills, knowledge and professionalism of its health workforce comprising a large and diverse mix of participants, including 610,000 registered health practitioners working across 18 professions, and large numbers of support staff and volunteers. Adequate health workforce supply is necessary to ensure that consumer needs are met through effective, efficient and equitable health services.

A global health workforce shortage has been recognised by the WHO, with calls for countries to actively strengthen their health workforce through adequate measurement, forecasting, planning and funding. These shortages are reflected in modelling of Australian's Health Workforce with a deficit by 2025 of 109,500 nurses and 2,700 doctors.

The health workforce is ageing, reducing the working hours undertaken by healthcare professionals. The geographic spread of the health workforce does not reflect the distribution of the population, nor the level of healthcare need. Workforce shortages exist across many professions, particularly in outer metropolitan, regional and remote areas and in disadvantaged populations.

Future demand for health services are projected to increase for a variety of reasons including the ageing population, increasing rates of chronic disease, changes in consumer expectations and the emergence of models of care that better respond to these needs. The health workforce also needs to be able to respond to changes in historic models of care based on communicable disease that influence current funding and treatment models and reinforce short-sighted health management practices.

Increasing healthcare demand will continue to provide challenges to the health workforce with a need for continued growth, and also changes in the required skill-mix resulting from evolving models of care.

AHHA POSITION:

- ✧ Australia's health workforce is an essential component of the Australian health system.

- ✧ Workforce supply and distribution must ensure access to healthcare that meets the needs of all Australians, particularly in recognised priority areas such as outer metropolitan, regional, and remote areas, as well as communities with special needs.
- ✧ Ensuring an appropriate workforce includes pathways for rural and regional education and training, providing incentives and retention strategies.
- ✧ A cross-jurisdictional planning approach is required to address the long-term challenges of providing a health workforce that is adequate in numbers, capable, responsive and sustainable.
- ✧ The focus and supply of the health workforce must move beyond specialist care models, and instead focus on generalist skills and holistic care, including primary health care and multi-disciplinary community care, to better support chronic disease prevention and management.
- ✧ A greater emphasis is needed on retention and re-entry of healthcare workers.
- ✧ While a reduced reliance on international recruitment is supported, changes to visa programs must be part of longer term planning and not impact negatively on health service availability in rural and regional areas.
- ✧ Innovative models of care are necessary to improve workforce productivity, including reforming scope of practice and job design.
- ✧ Effective programs are needed to increase the Indigenous health workforce and to improve the capacity of the health workforce to address the needs of Indigenous Australians.
- ✧ National registration of health professionals and accreditation of training providers and healthcare organisations must be responsive to changes in best-practice.

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