

# **NATIONAL HEALTH WORKFORCE ACTION PLAN**

## **ACRONYMS**

<b>ACCC</b>	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
<b>AHWAC</b>	Australian Health Workforce Advisory Committee
<b>AHWOC</b>	Australian Health Workforce Officials Committee
<b>AMWAC</b>	Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee
<b>DEST</b>	Department of Education, Science and Training
<b>MTRP</b>	Medical Training Review Panel
<b>NACOH</b>	National Advisory Committee on Oral Health
<b>RACS</b>	Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
<b>NMHWG</b>	National Mental Health Working Group
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education and Training

## Introduction

### *A National Health Workforce Action Plan*

The National Health Workforce Action Plan has been developed to implement the National Health Workforce Strategic Framework.

The National Health Workforce Strategic Framework was endorsed by Health Ministers on 23 April 2004.

The centrepiece of the framework is a direction setting vision for the Australian health workforce and a set of guiding principles for government and all workforce stakeholders to apply to the development of health workforce policy.

*Australia will have a sustainable health workforce that is knowledgeable, skilled and adaptable. The workforce will be distributed to achieve equitable health outcomes, suitably trained and competent. The workforce will be valued and able to work within a supportive environment and culture. It will provide safe, quality, preventative, curative and supportive care, that is population and health consumer focussed and capable of meeting the health needs of the Australian community.*

The Framework's principles highlight key areas for investment as:

- Ensuring and sustaining supply;
- Workforce distribution that optimises access to health care and meets health needs for all Australians;
- Health environments being places in which people want to work;
- Ensuring the health workforce is always skilled and competent;
- Optimal uses of skills and workforce adaptability
- Recognising that health workforce policy and planning must be informed by the best available evidence and linked to the broader health system; and
- Recognising that health workforce policy involves all stakeholders working collaboratively with a commitment to the vision, principles and strategies outlined in this framework.

The framework has been written against the backdrop of health workforce shortages and continued maldistribution; and it identifies demographic change, technology change and empowered consumers as the major influences on the future health workforce. These influences will impact on obtaining, retaining and training the workforce, distribution, service provision, and maintaining and updating skills.

Leadership, strategic thinking, and management ability will be key skills required of all stakeholders.

It is expected that the Framework will enable stakeholders to work with much more cohesion and that actions will be better coordinated across jurisdictions, service settings, professional groups, consumer and carer organisations and the education, training, regulation and industrial sectors to maximise the nation's investment in its health workforce and to improve the health and well being of the Australian community.

The National Health Workforce Action Plan will provide a leading example, by documenting health workforce initiatives, communication and stakeholder engagement as a springboard for action by national health workforce committees, jurisdictions and other stakeholders. The ultimate purpose of the National Health Workforce Action Plan is to contribute to ensuring that Australia has a health workforce in place in accordance with the vision for the health workforce outlined in the Strategic Framework.

The National Health Workforce Action Plan was endorsed by Health Ministers at their meeting in Hobart on 29 July 2004. It details the agreed nationally funded projects for 2004/05.

The Action Plan will be complemented by the work announced by the Council of Australian Governments following their meeting on 25 June 2004. The communiqué for the meeting stated:

*COAG today discussed the issue of health and reiterated the importance of moving ahead on improving health services.*

*COAG agreed to commission a paper on health workforce issues, including supply and demand pressures over the next 10 years. The paper will take a broad, whole-of-government perspective, including health and education considerations, and will cover the full range of health workforce professionals. In considering these issues, the paper will look at the particular health workforce needs of rural areas.*

*It was also agreed that the paper will address the issue of general practitioners in or near hospitals on weekends and after hours.*

*This paper will be considered by COAG within 12 months. Within coming weeks governments will agree and announce who will undertake this work and set out the detailed terms of reference for this paper.*

The National Health Workforce Action Plan will also be supplemented by a range of Australian Government and State and Territory Action Plans and health workforce initiatives.

# NATIONAL HEALTH WORKFORCE ACTION PLAN

## to implement the National Health Workforce Strategic Framework

<b>Principle 1 - Australia should focus on achieving, at a minimum, national self-sufficiency in health workforce supply, whilst acknowledging it is part of a global market.</b>	
<b>Strategies</b>	<b>National actions</b>
a) To achieve long-term national self sufficiency of supply, align education and training supply with projected workforce requirements and health service needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforce Challenge: the future scenario: an overview of the medium to longer term challenges that are likely to be relevant to securing a sufficient health workforce into the decade 2020.</li> <li>• Identifying improved measures of Workforce demand: examine issues relating to demand for health services and the health workforce, particularly in the context of future issues and trends over the next 10 – 20 years.</li> <li>• Health Workforce Education and Training interface: work to improve the linkages between the health and education and training sectors .</li> <li>• Extending workforce participation project: examine strategies to address the ageing of the Australian health workforce, consider options for extending working life and explore issues around retirement and exit from the health workforce.</li> <li>• Workforce Reviews: project the future workforce requirements in the following professions and service delivery areas: Cardiology, surgical specialties, radiation oncology, emergency care, general practice, perioperative support, maternity services.</li> <li>• Hospital medical workforce report: describe the current hospital medical workforce in Australia, noting variations among states and territories.</li> <li>• Medical careers survey: study to gain information about the factors influencing the career choice and workforce participation decisions of doctors in vocational training and enable career tracking of participants.</li> <li>• Medical Training Review Panel: an annual overview of vocational training placements, outcomes of medical college examinations and an overview of new college fellows.</li> <li>• VET Sector Opportunities: opportunities to increase training places in the vocational sector in response to workforce need.</li> <li>• Implementation of AMWAC recommendations, including specific projects such as the Pathology Working Party on implementing AMWAC recommendations to address pathology workforce shortages.</li> <li>• Innovative approaches to clinical training: map jurisdictional developments in clinical education and innovative approaches to clinical placements</li> <li>• Through AHMAC's National Health Workforce subcommittees, provide a forum to regularly identify the need for undergraduate places and discuss approaches for engaging the education and training sector</li> </ul>
b) Reduce immediate shortages through short-term strategies including improving workforce reentry and overseas recruitment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Return of service schemes: An overview of the issues associated with return of services for public sector supported education and training.</li> <li>• RACS Overseas Trained Surgeon Assessment review: a review of RACS overseas trained surgeon assessment processes.</li> <li>• International recruitment program for anaesthetists: a national approach to the overseas recruitment of anaesthetists.</li> <li>• Public Sector Dental Workforce Scheme – a scheme to streamline entry into Australia of appropriately qualified overseas-trained dentists to work in the public sector and reduce shortages.</li> </ul>
c) Support domestic supply through a multifaceted and sustainable approach to recruitment and retention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health nursing recruitment and retention project: a joint AHMAC/NMHWG project to identify strategies to improve mental health nursing attraction and retention.</li> <li>• Recruitment and retention - best practice examples: identify best practice recruitment and retention initiatives.</li> <li>• Extending workforce participation: examine strategies to address the ageing of the Australian health workforce, consider options for extending working life and explore issues around retirement and exit from the health workforce.</li> </ul>
d) Promote retention and effective service delivery through innovative education and training models.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovative and/or fast-track approaches to qualifications – review of any current jurisdictional or university plans to streamline health education and fast-track new workforce entrants</li> <li>• Innovative approaches to clinical placements - map jurisdictional developments in clinical education and innovative approaches to clinical placements</li> </ul>

**Principle 2 - Distribution of the health workforce should optimise equitable access to health care for all Australian, and recognise the specific requirements of people and communities with greatest need**

Strategies	National actions
<p>a) Explore innovative approaches to address distribution issues, including incentives and disincentives to practise in areas and sectors of greatest need and workforce shortage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint AHWOC/NACOH Oral Health Working Group – work to address oral health workforce shortages</li> <li>• Pathology Working Group – work to implement the recommendations of the AMWAC report on the Pathology Workforce (identified need for an additional 100 pathology training places)</li> <li>• RACS Review on Accreditation of Hospitals and Hospital Posts for Training – review required by the ACCC as a condition of its determination on RACS</li> <li>• Return of service schemes: An overview of the issues associated with return of services for public sector supported education and training.</li> </ul>
<p>b) Target training and education where the need is greatest.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RACS Review on Accreditation of Hospitals and Hospital Posts for Training – review required by the ACCC as a condition of its determination on RACS</li> <li>• Health Workforce Education and Training interface: work to improve the linkages between the health and education and training sectors.</li> <li>• Joint AHWOC/NACOH Oral Health Working Group - work to address oral health workforce shortages</li> <li>• Implementation of AMWAC recommendations, including specific projects such as the Pathology Working Party on implementing AMWAC recommendations to address pathology workforce shortages</li> <li>• ACCC's review of the other medical Colleges - review of the other medical Colleges in line with principles drawn from the ACCC's determination in relation to the selection, training and examination processes of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons</li> </ul>
<p>c) Use innovative models of service delivery to improve access to areas of geographic and cultural need and specialties in shortage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Return of service schemes: An overview of the issues associated with return of services for public sector supported education and training.</li> <li>• Public Sector Dental Workforce Scheme – a scheme to streamline entry into Australia of dentists with comparable qualifications to Australian-trained dentists to work in the public sector</li> </ul>

**Principle 3 - All health care environments regardless of role, function, size or location should be places in which people want to work and develop; where the workforce is valued and supported and operates in an environment of mutual collaboration.**

Strategies	National actions
a) Explore and develop flexible working environments that reflect the changing needs and profile of the workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health nursing recruitment and retention project – a joint AHMAC/NMHWG project to identify strategies to improve mental health nursing attraction and retention</li> <li>• Recruitment and retention - best practice examples – identify best practice recruitment and retention initiatives</li> </ul>
b) Explore and develop models that enable articulated, multiple career pathways to provide lifelong career opportunities in the health sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VET Sector Opportunities - opportunities to increase training places in the vocational sector in response to workforce need</li> <li>• Aged care workforce scoping paper – an overview of recent and forthcoming reports relating to the aged care workforce, issues raised, workforce linkages, and issues which remain to be addressed as the basis for future work</li> </ul>
c) Continue and enhance initiatives aimed at promoting supportive cultures, leadership and collaboration in work environments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health nursing recruitment and retention project – a joint AHMAC/NMHWG project to identify strategies to improve mental health nursing attraction and retention</li> <li>• Recruitment and retention - best practice examples – identify best practice recruitment and retention initiatives</li> </ul>

**Principle 4 - Cohesive action is required among the health, education, vocational training and regulatory sectors to bring about an Australian health workforce that is knowledgeable, skilled, competent, engaged in life long learning and distributed to optimise equitable health outcomes.**

Strategies	National actions
a) Identify a formal mechanism for the effective engagement of the health and education and training sectors such as the establishment of a National Health and Education Training Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health and education and training sector interface – work to improve the linkages between the health and education and training sectors.</li> </ul>
b) Align education and training programs with health service needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RACS/ACCC decision implementation – work to implement the outcomes of the ACCC’s conditional determination on RACS and involve jurisdictions in RACS processes</li> <li>ACCC’s review of the other medical Colleges - review of the other medical Colleges in line with principles drawn from the ACCC’s determination in relation to the selection, training and examination processes of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons</li> <li>National Nursing and Nursing Education Taskforce – Health Ministers established the Taskforce to implement key recommendations of the National Review of Nursing Education</li> <li>Joint AHWOC/NACOH Oral Health Working Group – work to address oral health workforce shortages</li> <li>Implementation of AMWAC recommendations, including specific projects such as the Pathology Working Party on implementing AMWAC recommendations to address pathology workforce shortages</li> </ul>
c) Continue to develop new and innovative ways to deliver health education and training, which facilitates accelerated entry to the workforce and flexible delivery of clinical training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Innovative and/or fast-track approaches to qualifications – review of any current jurisdictional or university plans to streamline health education and fast-track new workforce entrants</li> <li>Innovative approaches to clinical placements - map jurisdictional developments in clinical education and innovative approaches to clinical placements</li> </ul>
d) Promote initiatives that encourage practitioners to maintain a level of skills, knowledge and competence that aligns with evolving health consumer needs and changes in service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nationally consistent medical registration – work to develop draft intergovernmental agreements and model legislation to implement nationally consistent medical registration</li> </ul>



**Principle 5 - To make optimal use of workforce skills and ensure best health outcomes, it is recognised that a complementary realignment of existing workforce roles or the creation of new roles may be necessary. Any workplace redesign will address health needs, the provision of sustainable quality care and the required competencies to meet service needs.**

Strategies	National actions
<p>a) Explore opportunities to link service development and workforce development and maximise the flexibility of the workforce, including innovative approaches to skill mix and new workforce roles and changes to scope of practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforce impact statement: develop a health workforce impact statement which can be applied when considering changes to health service provision or service delivery planning.</li> <li>• Sustainable specialist services: update the previous AMWAC report on sustainable specialist services. The report will outline population catchment and infrastructure requirements across the main medical specialties in a range of different settings, and examine other health workforce support for sustainable specialist services.</li> <li>• Models of care study - diabetes care: advise on the optimal supply and appropriate distribution for the workforce associated with diabetes care. diabetes is a national health priority area for Australia and an area of recognised workforce need.</li> <li>• Regulatory issues in workforce reform and redesign: explore regulatory issues and approaches to health workforce reform and redesign</li> <li>• Joint AHWOC/NACOH Oral Health Working Group: work to address oral health workforce shortages</li> <li>• Implementation of AMWAC recommendations, including specific projects such as the Pathology Working Party on implementing AMWAC recommendations to address pathology workforce shortages</li> <li>• New health workforces: an overview of alternative workforce roles including hospitalists</li> </ul>
<p>b) Develop workplace, professional and education and training practices that facilitate team approaches and multidisciplinary care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health nursing recruitment and retention project – a joint AHMAC/NMHWG project to identify strategies to improve mental health nursing attraction and retention</li> <li>• Recruitment and retention - best practice examples – a project to identify best practice recruitment and retention initiatives</li> </ul>
<p>c) Explore regulatory arrangements that facilitate workforce supply and innovative solutions to work design and the recognition of knowledge and skills.</p>	<p>Regulatory issues in workforce reform and redesign – explore regulatory issues and approaches to health workforce reform and redesign</p>

<b>Principle 6 - Health workforce policy and planning should be population and consumer focused, linked to broader health care and health systems planning and informed by the best available evidence.</b>	
<b>Strategies</b>	<b>National actions</b>
a) Establish shared health workforce planning methodologies that include comprehensive workforce planning as part of any capital, service or infrastructure planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health workforce planning tool kit – develop a common health workforce planning package for use by organisations that need to develop health workforce plans</li> <li>• Models of care health workforce planning – document processes and methods that could be used in models of care workforce planning</li> <li>• Documentation of national planning methodologies as a basis for future discussions (nursing and models of care)</li> </ul>
b) Lead, encourage and support a health workforce research, planning and policy development agenda, including national supply and demand studies, to meet the population and consumer health care needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nursing workforce planning study – an overview of recent workforce planning projects and projections, to provide an overall picture of future nursing workforce requirements</li> <li>• Allied health workforce planning study – a supply and demand study on physiotherapy or podiatry building on the allied health data project undertaken in 2003-04</li> <li>• Profile of the nursing workforce – profile the nursing workforce in Australia, including the unregulated workforce, to provide a collection of baseline information</li> <li>• Workforce challenges - future scenarios – an overview of the medium to longer term challenges that are likely to be relevant to ensuring a sufficient health workforce into the decade 2020</li> <li>• Assessment of the impact of technology on health workforce planning – consider the impact of technological change on the health workforce and ways in which this impact could be assessed and better incorporated into health workforce planning</li> <li>• Surgical workforce planning studies – advise on the optimal supply and appropriate distribution of each of the surgical workforces, including projections for future requirements and supply</li> <li>• Emergency care workforce study – advise on the future supply and requirements for emergency care workforce</li> <li>• Perioperative workforce review – advise on the optimal supply and appropriate distribution of the perioperative workforce including projections for future supply and requirements</li> <li>• Radiation oncology workforce review – advise on the optimal supply and appropriate distribution of the radiation oncology workforce</li> <li>• Hospital medical workforce – describe the current hospital medical workforce in Australia, noting variations amongst states and territories, including the number, composition and workforce characteristics of clinicians employed in the hospital sector</li> <li>• GP workforce study – advise on general practice workforce supply and requirements, the structure, balance and geographic distribution of the workforce, the number and distribution of vocational training places needed to meet expected future requirements as suggested by patterns of supply, population health status, practice developments and changing models of care</li> </ul>
c) Continue to develop health workforce information sharing – both data and information about potential solutions to challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health workforce intelligence newsletter, AMWAC &amp; AHWAC Annual Reports</li> <li>• Health Workforce Clearinghouse – a web-based information clearing house for information on health workforces, health workforce initiatives and health workforce planning</li> </ul>

**Principle 6 - Health workforce policy and planning should be population and consumer focused, linked to broader health care and health systems planning and informed by the best available evidence.**

Strategies	National actions
<p>d) Continually improve health workforce data collections; putting in place common language, minimum data sets, and consistent collection and processing arrangements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central processing of nursing labour force survey – arrangements for central processing of the nursing labour force survey to expedite availability of survey results</li> <li>• Continued support of the AIHW national medical and nursing and midwifery labour force surveys</li> <li>• Improving allied health data collections – audit existing allied health data collections, advise on a possible minimum data set for allied health workforce data, an overview of allied health workforce issues, priorities and jurisdictional investment</li> <li>• Health workforce data – national minimum data set and common terminology –develop a national minimum data set for the Australian health workforce, including data items to be collected, common terminology and collection processes</li> <li>• Development of a collaborative approach to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce data collection               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Minimum datasets for GPs – collaborative work between AMWAC and the Divisions of General Practice to improve general practice data collections and develop a standard minimum data set for collection by Divisions of General Practice</li> <li>▪ DEST data on health disciplines - in collaboration with DEST and the University and VET sectors consider how to establish accurate data on students enrolling in, and competing health courses. Initially focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data, but could expand to a broader project covering all health students and graduates</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**Principle 7 - Australian health workforce policy development and planning will be most effective when undertaken collaboratively involving all stakeholders. It is recognised that this will require: cohesion among stakeholders including governments, consumers, carers, public and private service providers, professionals, and the education, training, regulatory, industrial and research sectors; stakeholder commitment to the vision, principles and strategies outlined in this framework; a nationally consistent approach; best use of resources to respond to the strategies proposed in this framework; and a monitoring, evaluation and reporting process.**

Strategies	National actions
a) Develop national and jurisdictional plans to action this framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Health Workforce Strategic Framework – development of national and jurisdictional action plans to implement the Framework</li> </ul>
b) Establish the monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes to support the framework, including AHWOC reporting annually on progress to AHMAC and Australian Health Ministers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AHWOC to establish and lead the monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes for the National Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Action Plan</li> </ul>
c) Develop inclusive, consultative processes around health workforce policy and planning that engage all stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AHWOC and National Health Workforce Secretariat to develop processes that satisfy these requirements, including the development of Reference Groups for national health workforce initiatives</li> <li>• Document National planning processes to enable greater stakeholder engagement</li> </ul>
d) Promote discussion and awareness of health workforce issues and action amongst stakeholders and the general community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jurisdictional projects of national significance</li> <li>• Health Workforce Clearinghouse – a web-based information clearing house for information on health workforces, health workforce initiatives and health workforce planning</li> <li>• Participation of AHWOC Chair and members and National Secretariat staff in health workforce forums</li> <li>• National Health Workforce Secretariat website, Health workforce intelligence newsletter, AMWAC &amp; AHWAC Annual Reports</li> </ul>

## **Monitoring**

The Australian Health Workforce Officials' Committee is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the Strategic Framework and National Action Plan.

### *Monitoring and reporting*

The Strategic Framework and Action Plan will be the subject of formal reporting to AHMAC and Health Ministers through annual reporting mechanisms for AHMAC's Health Workforce Committees.

However, informal monitoring and reporting will also be a feature through regular updating of information on the National Health Workforce website and the Health Workforce Clearinghouse (when established) about:

- the progress of National Action Plan projects
- jurisdictional projects of national significance
- highlighting successful health workforce projects and achievements at the national and jurisdictional level
- links to Jurisdictional Action Plans and any updates or information bulletins