

Why this is important

The delivery of quality health services relies on the availability of sufficient numbers of appropriately skilled staff working where they are needed. A shortage of staff available for employment, including new graduates, makes it more difficult to provide the required services and can limit consumer access. This is increasingly the situation being experienced in parts of the NSW public health system. The growing gap between demand for services, and the supply and distribution of staff, cannot be addressed by continuing with the current workforce arrangements which have contributed to this problem.

What we are aiming for

We are striving for a health system that values its workforce as a vital resource and treats all workers fairly and with respect. The health workforce must be planned, prepared, organised, and deployed creatively and intelligently, focusing on the needs of health consumers, carers and the population more generally. We must ensure an adequate supply and distribution of high quality practitioners, and all staff must be equipped with the right education and skills for the different roles they may be asked to perform.

Redesign and reinvigorate the health workforce

What needs to happen

Support health practitioners

- Invest in the training and development of health practitioners as valued resources
- Provide working conditions, flexible work arrangements and career paths in the public health system which assist in attracting and retaining skilled staff
- Provide the right tools and technology to reduce the administrative load on health practitioners and enable them to work more efficiently in providing patient care
- Pursue initiatives to promote staff health and wellbeing, and ensure their safety in the workplace.

Reshape the workforce

- Rethink current health practitioner roles, the skill mix of health teams, and the organisation of work to:
 - meet the increasing demand for health care and address emerging health needs that require new models of care and service delivery
 - improve flexibility, responsiveness and continuity of care as part of a sustained focus on quality, safety and outcome
 - ensure a consumer-centred approach to the provision of health services

- Involve key stakeholders in comprehensive health workforce planning
- Harness technology to help match the supply of skilled health practitioners to the demand for services in rural and remote areas.

Change health practitioner education and training

- Expand the options available for people wanting to work in the public health sector
- Develop common educational experiences for different health practitioner groups to address those knowledge and skill requirements which are shared
- Redesign health education curricula and training opportunities to ensure that the health practitioners of the future are well-equipped for new roles and responsibilities working as members of health teams within new models of care and service delivery.

We all have a role to play ... here are some suggestions:

Individuals

- Consider opportunities to participate in volunteer work assisting people with health needs
- Be open to different approaches to the provision of care as health practitioner roles change.

NSW public health system

- Maintain a strong focus on workforce planning at national, state and regional levels, and across the human services sector
- Provide the right working arrangements, professional development and career opportunities to attract and retain skilled staff
- Pursue targeted recruitment, training and mentoring programs to attract and develop workers drawn from disadvantaged groups and areas
- Rethink current assumptions and structures to improve the flexibility of the health workforce to respond to changing demands
- Review health practitioners' roles and responsibilities in light of changing health needs and system pressures, and work with the education sector and in clinical settings to support staff in acquiring new knowledge and skills
- Encourage and assist practitioners to adopt consumer-centred approaches to care.

Health practitioners

- Maintain and develop skills and expertise through participation in clinical training programs
- Build expertise in communication to share knowledge and skills with consumers, carers and members of the community as well as other health practitioners
- Participate in planning and pursuing initiatives to provide more flexibility in the workforce to meet changing patterns of demand
- Take a lead in advocating and implementing new work practices based on research evidence and first-hand experience.

NSW and Australian Governments

- Collaborate across levels of government in both the health and education sectors to ensure the availability of sufficient numbers of appropriate skilled staff to meet the population's changing health needs
- Implement policy initiatives to attract, support and retain health practitioners working in or with the public sector, particularly in locations and areas of workforce shortage
- Support innovative programs exploring new ways of preparing and deploying the health workforce
- Adopt national approaches which remove barriers to health workforce mobility and improve work standards
- At a state level, ensure a good fit between policies aimed at developing the health workforce and those designed to build a sustainable workforce across the human services sector as a whole.

Educators

- Work with health managers and practitioners to map future service needs and the skills which will be required by health practitioners
- Review and regularly update post-secondary courses and training for health practitioners to reflect changing roles and expectations.

Non-government and private sectors

- Work with government agencies to ensure that non-government and private sector workforce policies and practices (including the education and training of health staff) assist in meeting the community's overall health needs
- Ensure that staff are kept up-to-date and well-equipped to provide high quality, effective health and care services.