

Building a sustainable health workforce for rural NSW

Objective

To attract and retain health workers in rural NSW with the right mix of skills and type of health professionals to meet the needs of rural communities.

Right people, right skills, right place.



Summary

The *NSW Health Professionals Workforce Plan 2012-2022* is a strategic framework that aims to address the long-term workforce needs of NSW Health.

The Plan outlines strategies to grow the rural workforce, support rural education and training, improve rural workforce planning capacity and provide support to health professionals working in rural areas.

The Plan is aligned with the *NSW Rural Health Plan* which includes a strategy focusing on enhancing the rural health workforce in NSW. *The NSW Rural Health Plan* recognises the role of all members of the workforce in enabling the delivery of services in rural communities, and supports initiatives to attract, retain and support health professionals in rural and remote areas.

This includes supporting the Aboriginal health workforce, targeting recruitment and promoting development and training.

Figure 1 illustrates the foundations and building blocks of the *Health Professionals Workforce Plan 2012-2022* that provide the platform to realise the vision of right people, right skills, right place.

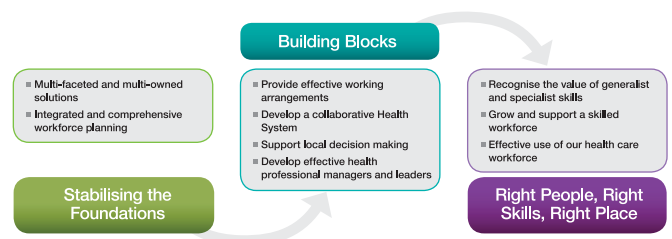


Figure 1

Local health districts are developing workforce plans to support their service plans. These planning processes have been completed or are underway throughout NSW Health.

NSW Rural Health Network

The NSW Agency for Clinical Innovation has established the **Rural Health Network** to support the delivery of rural healthcare. This Network acts as an advisory body to the NSW Ministry of Health to inform the development of policy, models of care and clinical pathways for rural communities. Membership includes local health districts, consumers and other rural health service providers and representatives from medicine, nursing and allied health.

Medical Workforce

NSW Health delivers several strategies aimed at ensuring the distribution and skills of the medical workforce are aligned with the service needs of rural NSW.

Improving rural workforce planning

NSW Health has undertaken **workforce modelling** for a range of medical specialties to identify the workforce growth required to meet future service needs. The modelling also considers the distribution of the medical workforce across NSW. This information has been brought together in succinct factsheets that are available on the NSW Health website to guide policy decisions and local health district service plans and to assist junior doctors with their career planning.

Supporting rural medical training

NSW Health provides a networked model of medical training, providing opportunities for junior doctors to experience rural practice. In NSW, medical prevocational training takes place in 144 training facilities which are grouped together into 15 **prevocational training networks**. These networks link large metropolitan hospitals with smaller metropolitan, regional and rural hospitals to enable junior doctors to train in a range of settings during their first two-years of practice.

The NSW Health Education and Training Institute (HETI) also manages **vocational training networks** for emergency medicine, psychiatry, medical administration, paediatric medicine and basic physician training. These networks link large teaching hospitals with rural training positions to provide doctors in these specialty training programs with a diversity of training experiences and an experience of rural practice.

The **Rural Preferential Recruitment Program** is the only such scheme in Australia. It supports rural career-pathways by enabling junior doctors who are interested in rural practice to do the majority of their first two-years of postgraduate training in a rural hospital.

129 *Rural Preferential Recruitment positions will be available for interns across 12 regional and rural hospitals in NSW for the 2015 clinical year.*

Medical students interested in a medical career in rural NSW can receive scholarships through the **NSW Rural Resident Medical Officer Cadetship Program**. In return for the scholarship, students agree to do two of their first three years of hospital training, upon graduating from medical school, in an eligible NSW rural hospital (coastal locations are not eligible).

12 *scholarships are available per year for medical students who are interested in practising medicine in rural NSW, including two scholarships for Aboriginal students.*

The **Building Capacity for the Aboriginal Medical Workforce Initiative** helps Aboriginal medical graduates transition from medical school to their first year of hospital training. Under the initiative, eligible Aboriginal graduates are guaranteed allocation to the training network of their first preference.

11 *Aboriginal medical graduates were offered internship positions in their preferred training network in 2014. A further 19 applicants were allocated an internship position for 2015.*

Funding for rural positions

NSW Health provides funding for vocational training positions in medicine. Since 2011, NSW Health has funded **20 new training positions in rural areas** in specialties such as general medicine, paediatrics, rehabilitation medicine, medical oncology, psychiatry and general surgery.

NSW Health also funds fellowship positions located in rural NSW to provide opportunities for newly qualified specialists to experience rural practice for one to two years. In 2012-13, NSW Health funded **11 rural fellowship positions** in anaesthetics and surgery.

Developing generalist skills

NSW Health supports several medical generalist training programs. Doctors with generalist skills can help address medical workforce shortages in rural areas, and provide medical services that meet the needs of rural communities.

The **NSW Rural Generalist Training Program** provides a structured training pathway for doctors wishing to become general practitioners (GPs) in rural NSW. The Program enables trainees to provide primary care to a rural community while being credentialed at the local health service to provide advanced skills in obstetrics, anaesthetics and emergency medicine.

30 *full time Rural Generalist training positions are available at rural facilities in Tamworth, Maitland, Griffith, Wagga Wagga, Tweed, Moruya, Nowra, Orange, Dubbo and Bathurst.*

The **NSW Rural General Practice Procedural Training Program** provides opportunities for rural GPs and GP registrars to acquire additional procedural skills that are matched to the healthcare needs of the community in which they practice.

15 *full time Rural General Practice Procedural Training positions are available each year in a range of specialties including anaesthetics, obstetrics and gynaecology, surgery, mental health and emergency medicine.*

The **Dual Physician Training Pathway** is a structured training program that supports doctors to obtain specialist qualifications in general medicine and another specialty. The training in general medicine provides expertise in the management of patients with undifferentiated illnesses and complex, multisystem disorders and the training in an additional physician specialty extends the scope and skill of the physician to manage specific, complex illnesses.

2 *pilot training positions in Orange and Dubbo have been funded by NSW Health. This initiative will see one doctor gain qualifications in general medicine and endocrinology and the other doctor gain qualifications in general medicine and respiratory medicine. The program is now expanding to other sites including Wagga Wagga and Port Macquarie, and other sub-specialties.*

The NSW Health **Senior Hospitalist Initiative** encourages the growth of a skilled and experienced medical workforce to work alongside specialists to provide coordinated, safe and effective patient care across disciplines. It is supported by an education program, the Master of Clinical Medicine (Leadership and Management), which is a joint innovation between NSW Health and the University of Newcastle and one of the first of its kind in Australia. The course is designed to equip non-specialist doctors for broader roles in coordinating patient care and clinical leadership in hospitals.

29 *candidates enrolled in the Master of Clinical Medicine (Leadership and Management) in 2014.*

10 *Senior Hospitalist positions across nine local health districts funded by NSW Health in 2014.*



Barb Cameron, GP Trainee, Wagga Wagga Base Hospital

Barb Cameron is currently working as a

GP trainee at Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. Barb has completed terms in obstetrics and gynaecology, emergency medicine and anaesthetics. Her goal is to live and work as a GP in the town of Gundagai.

Barb discusses the challenges and rewards of working as a GP in a small town:

“I grew up in Bourke, western NSW. Dad was the local GP, and from an early age watching him work, I knew that was what I wanted to be as well.

The challenges of working in a small town are mostly to do with isolation from family and peers, as well as what my mother refers to as 'life in the fish bowl', where everyone knows you and all your activities. The rewards are greater though the opportunity to be a part of a community and to be of service to that community. The ability to be a GP in a small practice but also to be on call for the local hospital gives me a huge rush. You never know what will come next: a child with a cough; a home visit to the nursing home to see an elderly patient who has fallen; or an MVA from the Hume. Anyone who says you're 'just a GP' has never seen that life!”

Nursing and Midwifery Workforce

Supporting rural undergraduate training

The **Rural Grow Your Own Initiative** targets undergraduate nursing or midwifery students and links these students to a rural health facility in close proximity to the students' local preference. The health facilities targeted are those who have historically had difficulty attracting new graduate nurses and midwives. During their undergraduate years the student will work for up to 12 weeks in their paired rural facility and will be offered employment upon successful completion of their course and subsequent registration as a nurse or a midwife. In return for service, the recipient will also receive a scholarship that will contribute toward the cost of their tuition.

8 *nursing and midwifery students have been offered scholarships under the Rural 'Grow Your Own' Initiative in 2014. Up to 10 scholarships will be awarded each year.*

The **Enrolled Nurse scholarships** is a joint initiative of NSW Health and the Department of Education and Communities. NSW Health provides clinical placements for students who receive a scholarship as well as the option of a position in a NSW Health facility on successful completion of the course.

300 *Enrolled Nurse scholarships were offered in 2012-13, of which around 175 were located in rural and regional local health districts.*

Supporting nurses and midwives working in rural NSW

The **Rural and Remote Midwifery Reconnect Program** connects rural and remote midwives with regional or metropolitan maternity units, to assure that rural midwives can:

- ▶ maintain recency of practice
- ▶ augment skills and knowledge



- ▶ receive mentoring and support at regional or metropolitan maternity facilities, and
- ▶ form networks with midwifery colleagues.

Funding is provided to replace the salary of the rural midwife for two weeks and to cover their travel and accommodation costs to the regional/metropolitan hospital. The regional/metropolitan hospital is also provided with funding to support the supervision and mentoring of the placement midwife.

In the **Metro-Rural Exchange Program**, newly graduated nurses and midwives have an option to work for six months in a rural and six months in a metropolitan facility in their new graduate year. The program provides an opportunity for these nurses and midwives to gain work in two very different environments and to experience practice in rural areas.

22 newly graduated nurses and midwives participated in the Metro-Rural Exchange Program in 2014.

NSW Health provides **Rural Postgraduate Student Midwifery Scholarships** for applicants who are currently employed within a small rural maternity service. At the completion of their midwifery training, the applicant is offered employment as a registered midwife once registration and employment criteria are met.

30 postgraduate student scholarships were awarded to rural maternity workers, including two to Aboriginal nurses to train as midwives in their local community between 2011 and 2014. A further 10 scholarships will be offered in 2015.

Allied health workforce

NSW Health has committed funding to expand the number of **pre-registration radiography and nuclear medicine** positions, with six positions funded in rural Local Health Districts.

The **Allied Health Assistant (AHA) Framework** was released in 2013, and defines the roles and responsibilities that AHAs have in the delivery of patient care; provides a structure for allied health professionals to effectively supervise and delegate to AHAs; and provides information to assist with growing this workforce safely and effectively. This initiative builds on successful pilots in Western and Southern Local Health Districts.

Rural Allied Health Scholarships provide financial support of up to \$2000 for rural allied health professionals to develop knowledge and skills in their relevant area through attendance at education events. In 2013, 284 scholarships were awarded in 15 allied health professions.



Simulated training for rural nurses

The Sister Alison Bush Mobile Simulation Centre travels to rural and remote locations to provide education and training to staff at their workplace. The Centre, which primarily targets nursing staff, uses the latest technology to conduct practice scenarios tailored for situations likely to be seen in rural locations. Between deployment in August 2012 and the end of January 2014, the centre provided education to 1614 participants and travelled 18,191 km.

Allied Health Cadetship

Yasmyn-Shay Parkinson, Social Work Student, Coffs Harbour

Soon after Yasmyn-Shay moved to Coffs Harbour in 1999 she discovered her great grandfather was Aboriginal, and was subsequently accepted into the Gumbayngirr community. Yasmyn Shay's desire to enrol in a Bachelor of Social Work at Charles Sturt University stemmed from her discovery of her great grandfather's history of being part of the stolen generation.

"...it ignited my passion for wanting to assist people of the stolen generation to heal their pain and suffering."

Yasmyn-Shay enjoys living in Coffs Harbour and loves its proximity to the beach and to nature. Having been raised in the bush she always wanted to settle in a rural location.

"...it is an ideal location to raise children and work."

Yasmyn-Shay was attracted to the Allied Health Cadetship as it enables her to gain valuable work experience in her chosen profession while completing her studies. She says her long-term career goal is to:

"...one day have my own practice which will allow me to assist the Aboriginal and wider community address the issues of disadvantage."

Aboriginal workforce

There is a need to increase the representation of Aboriginal staff in NSW Health to improve the delivery of respectful, responsive and culturally sensitive services to Aboriginal people living in urban, regional and rural areas.

The Good Health - Great Jobs: Aboriginal Workforce Strategic Framework 2011 - 2015 commits NSW Health to increasing the Aboriginal workforce in clinical, non-clinical and leadership roles to a minimum of 2.6 per cent by 2015. Some rural local health districts have already met this target and have set new targets.

To help achieve the 2.6 per cent Aboriginal employment target, the NSW Ministry of Health and local health districts are committed to the following Aboriginal recruitment initiatives:

- ▶ Twenty Aboriginal cadetships in nursing and midwifery per annum
- ▶ Ten Aboriginal cadetships in allied health per annum for students enrolled in degrees leading to allied health qualifications
- ▶ two rural resident medical officer cadetships for Aboriginal medical students per annum
- ▶ five Aboriginal cadetships in oral health per annum.

More Information

The *NSW Health Professionals Workforce Plan 2012-2022* is available at www.health.nsw.gov.au/priorities

The *NSW Rural Health Plan* is available at www.health.nsw.gov.au/rural/rhp/Pages/default.aspx



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