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6 June 2014

Ms Jeanette Radcliffe
Secretary
Standing Committee on Community Affairs Legislation Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

By Email to: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Re: Inquiry into the Health Workforce Australia (Abolition) Bill 2014

The Australian Dental Association Inc. (ADA) welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on the *Inquiry into the Health Workforce Australian (Abolition) Bill 2014*.

The ADA understands that functions of Health Workforce Australian (HWA) are to be absorbed into the Department of Health. HWA has provided a single point of focus on national health workforce matters since it was established in 2010 and served many important functions to support health care in Australia, including workforce research, planning and development, and funding clinical placements for eligible students. With the absorption of these functions into the Commonwealth Department of Health, there is a significant risk that the impetus on national health workforce planning and development will be lost.

The Department of Health has always had a primary focus on the medical workforce in isolation to other health professional groups. This is predominantly reflective of the various grants and scholarship programmes targeted to the medical workforce that are funded through the Commonwealth. In recent years, there has been some greater investment by the Commonwealth in dental, nursing and allied health programmes with staffing to support these programmes. However staff allocation to these areas falls well short of those working on medical related programmes or policy development. The allocation of dedicated staff to dental workforce issues is less obvious.

HWA was conducting an in-depth review of the oral health workforce – ‘Health Workforce 2025 – Oral Health’, which gathered valuable data concerning the current oral health workforce and made projections about workforce supply and demand through to 2025. Substantial resources were invested in this study, which has already been completed. Preliminary briefings from HWA representatives indicated that their findings reflected that of the ADA – the oral health workforce is, and will continue to be, in oversupply. Having accurate information in relation to the dental workforce is critical to the development of the National Oral Health Plan 2014 -2023 which is currently in its final stages of development.

Health Workforce 2025 – Oral Health report would have provided an authoritative source to support changes to workforce education, training and migration policies that might have helped to stabilise the oral

health workforce oversupply. Without changes to the current workforce model, a great deal of resources will continue to be invested in education and training, both by individuals and the government, without reaping the maximum benefits. In the best interests of the public, the ADA urges the Commonwealth Government to ensure that this important piece of work is not lost in the transition of HWA's work in to the Department of Health and that immediate steps are taken to publish the Health Workforce 2025 – Oral Health final report.

If you seek any further information or wish to discuss in more detail any of the issues raised in this submission, please contact Mr Robert Boyd-Boland

Yours sincerely,

Dr Karin Alexander
President