

Supporting nurses in primary health care



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The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
Legislation Committee
Via: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

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

The Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA) is the national professional association supporting and representing nurses delivering front line care in general practice and other primary health care settings.

APNA makes the following comments in response to the Health Workforce Australia (Abolition) Bill 2014.

We note that the intent of the Bill is to disestablish Health Workforce Australia (HWA), and that the functions and programmes of HWA will be moved to the Commonwealth Department of Health.

It is critical that in this change process, the important work undertaken by HWA in relation to the nursing workforce, including the primary health care nursing workforce, continues under the leadership of the Commonwealth Department of Health.

The nursing workforce is the backbone of the healthcare system. Ensuring an adequate, well-trained and well supported nursing workforce is key to meeting the rapidly increasing healthcare needs of an ageing Australian population with an increasing burden of chronic disease.

HWA has led some very important work in relation to the nursing workforce, two of the most significant areas of focus being:

- Analysis and modelling of future health workforce demand and supply, including the nursing workforce, as exemplified in *Health Workforce 2025: Doctors, Nurses and Midwives* and the update to this publication (currently in progress), *Australia's Future Health Workforce – Nurses*. Such modelling and planning is absolutely critical to enable well informed policy and programs, which ensure we will have the skilled workforce necessary to meet the future health needs of Australians.
- The Nurse Retention and Productivity Project, which responds to the finding of *Health Workforce 2025*, that the projected shortfall of nurses cannot be met by training initiatives alone, but relies on keeping trained nurses in the workforce, and ensuring they can be as productive as possible.

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The focus on nursing workforce issues must not be lost in the transition of the HWA functions and programmes across to the Commonwealth Department of Health.

There is a particular need to focus on primary health care nursing workforce issues, given that a great deal of the burden of chronic disease in particular will need to be dealt with at primary care level.

Nurses are a substantial component of the primary health care workforce, and make an increasingly important contribution to primary health care in Australia, working alongside doctors and other health professionals. Primary health care nurses play a major role in improving health outcomes through their role in delivering quality chronic disease management, immunisation services, and other preventative care, as well as curative care and improvements in primary health care systems.

There is a critical need for a plan to improve recruitment, retention and productivity in the primary health care nursing workforce. Such a plan relies on defined educational pathways into primary health care nursing, and a defined career structure with related training and scope of practice, to enable nurses to develop within the profession and contribute to their optimal level.

The development and implementation of a primary health care nursing workforce plan should be prioritised in the work undertaken by the Commonwealth Department of Health following the transfer of functions and programmes from HWA.

As the national association for primary health care nurses, APNA is ready and willing to participate in and support future initiatives in this area.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this Inquiry. We would be happy to provide any further information on request.

Yours sincerely

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