

# Health Workforce Australia Bill 2009

## Additional Comments The Australian Greens

The Australian Greens support the need for a more sustainable and responsive approach to the co-ordination and leadership of training for Australia's health workforce. There has long been a need for more effective, streamlined and integrated clinical training arrangements and workforce reform initiatives. The Health Workforce Australia Bill provides the mechanisms to oversee funding, planning and co-ordination of clinical training and we welcome the proposed \$1.3 billion which could substantially improve the availability and effectiveness of clinical education placements. However, we are concerned by the lack of clarity in some parts of the Bill. In particular we have concerns around the lack of detail with reference to stakeholder engagement; overlap and conflict with existing professional training associations and colleges; mechanisms for the maintenance of accurate and timely workforce data and definitions of powers and authority which lack sufficient reference to stakeholder engagement and consultation with the existing professions.

### Stakeholder engagement

The Greens understand this is essentially a structural Bill, providing the legislative framework in which Health Workforce Australia will be established. In setting out its 'functions' the Health Workforce Australia Bill refers to the provision of support for clinical training and the development and evaluation of strategic advice on matters relating to the health workforce. However, the Greens believe that the role played by existing professional associations and colleges should be given greater acknowledgement in the Bill. In its current form, we are concerned that the invaluable knowledge within these stakeholders groups may be lost in unnecessary duplication or separation of functions.

### Workforce Data

The use of data to model and improve levels of workforce planning is to be welcomed however the Greens believe the Bill needs to include greater detail about data collection, storage, types of data to be collated and other aspects of the data process which should be agreed by the key stakeholders.

### Definition of Power

The Greens welcome the need for a national focus to oversee multiple jurisdictions to provide a consistent approach to the provision of a health workforce. However, we are concerned by the broad definition of 'power' in the Bill and would like to see some assurance that the needs of local stakeholders are not subsumed by unnecessary bureaucracy. We agree with the Australian Nursing Federation that it would be a mistake to cut out those who 'both professionally and industrially have the best interests of their professions and their consumers at the forefront of [their] minds'.

**Recommendations**

1. More effective governance arrangements for institutional and regulatory structures for the health workforce should be established in collaboration with existing education providers to ensure their knowledge and expertise is not lost, duplicated or ignored.
2. Data management to ensure improved levels of understanding of the needs of workforce and the demands placed upon the health system should be agreed among all stakeholders with particular emphasis on the need for timely and accurate information.
3. When determining power and authority the Bill needs to be clear about hierarchies so that existing professional associations and colleges are clear on lines of communication and accountability.

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Australian Greens