

A summary of Health Workforce 2025 – Volumes 1 to 3

Health Workforce 2025 (HW 2025) provides Australia's first major, long-term national projections for the health workforce out to 2025. HW 2025 Volumes 1 and 2 dealt with doctors, nurses and midwives. HW 2025 Volume 3 examines individual medical specialties in Australia and is the final volume in this series.

The reports found we cannot afford to continue business-as-usual approaches and that reform is essential to ensure a sustainable, affordable health workforce for the future.

Modelling applied to professions throughout Volumes 1, 2 and 3 clearly shows that service and workforce reforms will have the most significant and positive impact on workforce numbers.

Key findings - Volume 3

The number of medical specialists is increasing, but the workforce is not evenly distributed:

- there are not enough general practitioners and some other medical specialists in regional and rural Australia
- some medical specialties are more popular than others from a career perspective
- a growing trend towards specialisation and sub-specialisation means we don't have enough generalists.

The specialties that will be in shortest supply by 2025 if reform does not take place are:

- obstetrics and gynaecology
- ophthalmology
- anatomical pathology
- psychiatry
- diagnostic radiology
- radiation oncology.

Psychiatry and radiation oncology are particularly at risk as we already do not have enough specialists in these fields.

The supply of cardiology, gastroenterology and hepatology, neurology and surgical specialties is currently adequate, but projections show there will be more of these specialists coming through the training pipeline than we need.

Identified issues – Volume 3:

- Some specialties are highly reliant on international medical graduates, particularly general practice, psychiatry and obstetrics/gynaecology.
- The medical training pathway is poorly coordinated, contributing to:
 - uneven distribution of numbers between specialties
 - increasing the length of time to produce specialists
 - lost opportunities to address issues around geographic distribution and promote a better balance between generalist, specialist and sub-specialist training
 - uncertainty for medical graduates in knowing which specialty to choose for their career pathway
 - some level of wastage in training specialists in fields that may not match community needs.

Key findings – Volumes 1 and 2

HW 2025 Volume 3 supports earlier findings that reform is essential to ensure a sustainable, affordable workforce for the future. Volumes 1 and 2 found that without change:

- there will be a highly-significant shortage of nurses (109,000 by 2025)
- the supply of doctors is stable now but there will be a shortage of 2700 doctors by 2025
- there will be insufficient postgraduate medical training places for the number of graduates seeking them
- the current training system is creating bottlenecks and is inefficient
- there is uneven distribution of the medical workforce across Australia affecting rural and regional communities
- Australia will continue to remain highly dependent on migration of international health professionals.

Response

To address the findings of Health Workforce 2025, a clear set of actions is needed. The work to be undertaken will require a coordinated national approach involving governments, professional bodies, colleges, regulatory bodies, the higher education system and training providers. These actions are:

- improved coordination of medical training by working with trainees, employers, educators and government through a new National Medical Advisory Training Network
- ensuring our training pathways are as efficient as possible to maximise opportunities for increasing numbers of medical graduates
- development of national training plans or strategies to improve alignment between changing health system workforce requirements, the higher education and training sectors activities, and broader workforce distribution programs
- analysis of state and territory health workforce industrial arrangements (government and non-government employers) to identify barriers and enablers to workforce reform
- analysis of relevant health industry legislation to identify barriers and enablers to the flexible use of the workforce, distribution, profession-specific demarcation and restrictions on health professionals working to their full scope of practice
- investigating the implications of increasing self-sufficiency in the medical workforce
- focus on national implementation of targeted workforce reform once models are developed
- responding to the projected nursing crisis, specifically retention and productivity
- streamlining clinical training funding.

Next steps

The projections contained in HW 2025 show us that unless we start doing things differently, Australia is going to experience continuing health workforce shortages.

To build a health workforce that is able to meet the health needs of the Australian community in a sustainable way, the next steps will involve seeking national agreement on the actions identified, progressing outcomes through collaboration and consultation and implementing the results across the health and higher education sectors.

Accessing the report

All three volumes of the Health Workforce 2025 reports are available for download from the Health Workforce Australia website at <http://www.hwa.gov.au/health-workforce-2025>