



ACT
Government

ACT Health

ACT Health Workforce Strategy: Student Round Table Forum

Report on Findings: April 2023



Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. ACT Minister for Health Opening Remarks.....	3
3. Attraction and Retention of Students in ACT Institutions: Issues and Opportunities Discussion Forum.....	4
Nursing and Midwifery	5
Allied Health Professions.....	5
4. Recommendations	6
4.1 Standardised information for graduate employment in the ACT.....	6
4.2 Exploration of Enhanced Scope of Practice	6
4.3 Clinical Placement Financial Support.....	7
5. Closing Remarks.....	7
Appendix 1: Attendees.....	8
Students in Attendance from Canberra’s Educational Institutions.....	9

1. Introduction

The ACT Government released the ACT Health Workforce Strategy 2023-2032 (the Strategy) on 4 May 2023. The Strategy provides the vision, principles, priorities, and early actions to build and retain a sustainable health workforce for the ACT and surrounding regions. It forms the basis for medium and long-term strategic workforce planning to be undertaken in a structured and informed manner across Canberra and the surrounding region. It will enable a focus on a culture of learning and development, leadership, innovation, and inclusiveness.

Currently, there is a shortage of the health workforce locally, nationally, and internationally, and this is expected to grow. With a growing and ageing population, increased demand for services, significant intervention is required to ensure we have sufficient healthcare professionals to meet the demand. To ensure the ACT remains competitive within a contested marketplace, significant investments must be made into workforce intelligence, attraction and retention strategies, and programs, to support and build our health workforce. A key aspect is making sure the ACT is a place of employment which is rewarding and meets career aspirations for all healthcare professionals.

As part of the early actions in Strategic Priority six, a Student Roundtable Forum, was convened on Wednesday 26 April 2023. The aim was to understand the career aspirations of health workers training in the ACT. The insight gained from final year health discipline students about their training journey and any issues and challenges they have faced will help to inform workforce planning.

This is a report from the Forum.

2. ACT Minister for Health Opening Remarks

The ACT Minister for Health (the Minister), Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, opened the forum by acknowledging the traditional custodians, the Ngunnawal People, and welcomed all invited guests, ACT Health Directorate executives, staff, and students. She confirmed the Government's commitment to supporting education, training, and career pathways to attract a high-quality and motivated workforce to train, study and work in the ACT.

The Minister emphasised the importance of anticipating the structure, size, and function of our health workforce so that we will be able to match the needs arising from a population that is both growing and ageing. She cautioned that while this is no easy task, the Government has placed a priority on workforce planning which recognises these are other factors such as the growth in technology, the emergence of more sophisticated and effective practices and the need for a better focus on prevention and primary care. Key to achieving this goal is to ensure our health workers are

both engaged and valued so that our health system can be constantly learning to ensure it stays both modern and world-class.

The Minister reported on how the Government is working to refresh its entire health and hospital infrastructure across the ACT. This includes commissioning the new state-of-the-art critical care building as part of the Canberra Hospital Master plan which includes a new pathology building; the brand new Northside Hospital, through to a range of new patient services delivered at the community level and closer to where people live in a multi-disciplinary approach which combines research and technology with services.

With a growing community and additional physical infrastructure, the Minister referred to a greater need for healthcare professionals. This means we need new and more innovated ways to educate and train future healthcare professionals including enabling employment in the system while completing training.

The Minister referred to the contributions of students to service delivery through the 6,000 clinical placements in 2022. In addition, the employment of an additional 400 health professional positions as testimony of the Government's ongoing commitment to building the workforce in the ACT.

The Minister affirmed her commitment to listening to the student voice as part of effective workforce planning in the ACT and encouraged all participants to fully participate in the facilitated discussion forum.

3. Attraction and Retention of Students in ACT Institutions: Issues and Opportunities Discussion Forum

In a series of guided questions to facilitate discussion the following feedback was received.

Culture was a focus for some students, particularly whether staff feel valued which has influenced students in deciding to remain in the ACT as a graduate. The Minister acknowledged there were pockets where according to the staff surveys, work is necessary to address poor culture. She also pointed to unprecedented pressures brought about by COVID-19, accreditation preparation, the fires, generalised wellbeing impact, all of which can impact poorly on staff culture.

Nursing and Midwifery

Placing a focus on clinical placements, the students were invited to discuss how to enhance their experience so that they both enjoyed the training and felt workplace ready. The feedback was that in general the experience was good however the placements should not be outside of the ACT because it caused financial strain especially towards the latter part of the training. More information on employment pathways through facilitated forums was agreed as useful, and it was noted that more forums will be convened by the ACT Chief Nursing and Midwifery Office.

There are several factors that would make Canberra the employer of choice for nursing and midwifery such as:

- Acknowledging the culture has improved in midwifery and that work is occurring in relation to maternity services, a Midwifery Continuity of Care program would assist in embedding the positive changes.
- A one-year experiential rotation at the Canberra Hospital would be a good start to enable continuity of care / person-centred care to occur.
- Positive clinical placement experiences with trained clinical educators leads to positive notions of remaining as graduate nurses.
- For paramedicine more clinical placement hours will help them feel work ready.
- Support for clinical placements – see recommendations.

Allied Health Professions

Many allied health professionals have both public and private sector employment opportunities and the discussion turned to seeking the student views about preferences and issues and opportunities that could be further explored.

Certain allied health courses are not provided in the ACT institutions and for some that are, there is a lack of clinical placements available which means the students must travel interstate for their required training. There are also instances where interstate students undertake clinical rotations within ACT institutions.

For many students the issues affecting their study and future work intentions relate to a combination of support and access to training whereby even if there was a preference to go to the public sector, there was limited support, equally if they had to undertake clinical placements interstate this influenced where they would subsequently look to find employment.

Some profession specific feedback included:

- Psychology: It is difficult to complete the required training due to limited numbers in the post graduate courses; there is also a lack of information on pathways for psychology employment in both the ACT and Australia. Students were encouraged to reach out to either the Australian Psychological Society or Allied Health Professional Association.
- Sonography: It is difficult for students to complete the required 2,200 hours of clinical placement for course completion, further complicated by having to source own placements and this may result in a decision not to remain in the course.
- Radiographers often also undertook sonography with approximately half of all radiographers also trained as sonographers however it is the latter which is in shortage. OCAHO are to examine clinical placement expansion, more qualified supervisors, and other factors to grow the available sonography health workforce here in the ACT.
- Dental Assistants – Dentistry – Oral Health: Low pay for dental assistants, lack of career pathway and poor information concerning clinical placements affects training and employment opportunities. Third year Oral Health students undertake clinical placements in Canberra and a discussion occurred in relation to opening a course at CIT.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Standardised information for graduate employment in the ACT

A key driver to attracting and retaining students into the ACT public health system would be a standardised facilitated new graduate support program and more easily accessible information available on the website with linkages where relevant to associated institutions, employers, and regulators. This would be applicable to international and domestic trained health students. Use of social media to facilitate the student voice amongst students and within the broader strategic policy platform was seen as a positive – for example a page that allows for sharing of news and information and to stimulate peer support.

4.2 Exploration of Enhanced Scope of Practice

Enhanced scope of practice and working to the full scope of practice were considered important by students. For paramedicine it was suggested that extended care practitioners would be a great career pathway, and it could also reduce pressure on hospitals by enabling people to be cared for at home. The Minister acknowledged that advanced practice needed further exploration across all healthcare professions and noted work is underway nationally on this.

4.3 Clinical Placement Financial Support

Clinical placement poverty arising from a lack of financial support throughout training impacted on the student's experience and is seen as a key driver to remaining in courses. The students voiced concern about the challenges they face in affording to live in the ACT where there is a high cost of living, a lack of accommodation on campus and generally within the ACT. Meeting the clinical placement requirements often caused financial pressure especially if the placements were outside of the ACT, and most particularly towards the end of training as the placement blocks are longer. Often students have part-time jobs to support themselves and at times the length of placement or location put their jobs at risk.

Some recommendations to reduce the financial pressure and keep students in the ACT include all placements occurred in the ACT where possible; that more focus was given to better managing preferences for placement locations; better access to clinical educators who facilitate training, and financial assistance. The type of financial assistance considered to be the most beneficial, and where it would result in a reduction of student attrition, could be in the form of clinical placement grants, on-call assistance for midwives, and for the funding to be titrated to the length of clinical placement time. Students indicated they were motivated by financial assistance as influencing where they studied and would prefer knowing they had a guarantee of employment once graduated.

5. Closing Remarks

The ACT Health Director-General Ms Rebecca Cross closed the forum. She remarked on the significant benefits and opportunities that working in the ACT can bring because of the diversity of employment opportunities. Referring to the Strategy as a demonstration of the commitment the ACT Government has, to providing rewarding careers for graduates, the information gained from this forum (such as better streamlining clinical placement management and communicating between the universities and employers to students, as well as looking at ways to improve financial support) will help to inform the workforce planning process.

The Forum closed at 6pm.

Appendix 1: Attendees

ACT Minister for Health – Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith

Rebecca Cross – Director General, ACT Health Directorate

Robyn Hudson – Deputy Director General, ACT Health Directorate

Professor Michelle Lincoln – Executive Dean Faculty of Health, University of Canberra (UC)

Professor Cathy Dickson – Head of School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedicine (ACT/NSW), Australian Catholic University (ACU)

Linda Willington – A/g Director Health Community & Science, Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT)

Mr Anthony Dombkins – Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer, ACTHD

Ms Rosalind Knox – A/g Chief Allied Health Officer, ACTHD

Ms Mary Brunton – Senior Nursing and Midwifery Adviser, ACTHD

Ms Catherine Trevorrow – Senior Director, Office of the Chief Medical & Psychiatry

Ms Naomi Mahon – ADON, Manager- Clinical Placement Office, ACTHD

Ms Marisa Bialowas – Senior Director, Health Workforce Planning Team, ACTHD

Ms Angela Magarry – Director Health Workforce Planning, ACTHD

Ms Clare Williams, Assistant Director, Health Workforce Planning

Students in Attendance from Canberra's Educational Institutions

Australian National University:

- Health Science
- Psychology

Australian Catholic University:

- Paramedicine and Nursing

University of Canberra:

- Counselling
- Nursing
- Medical Imaging
- Medical Ultrasound Midwifery
- Pharmacy
- Social Work

Canberra Institute of Technology:

- Allied Health Assistant
- Dental Assistant

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

ACCESSIBILITY

If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like an alternative format, please phone 13 22 81.



If English is not your first language and you need the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS), please call 13 14 50.

For further accessibility information, visit: www.health.act.gov.au/accessibility

www.health.act.gov.au | Phone: 132281

© Australian Capital Territory, Canberra Month Year