National Skills Commission
Care Workforce Labour Market Study
June 2021

Improve the mental health of communities
About the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) is responsible for training, educating and representing psychiatrists in Australia and New Zealand. The RANZCP has more than 6900 members, including around 5100 qualified psychiatrists.

Key findings

- The aged care workforce faces several key challenges, including a lack of capacity and training to meet the mental health needs of older Australians.
- There is an opportunity to invest in the development of a well-trained, adequately resourced, sufficiently staffed and remunerated workforce.
- The representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is an area which needs additional investment.
- This study provides an opportunity to plan for future demographic changes in population to future-proof the workforce for 2050.

Introduction

The RANZCP welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the National Skills Commission’s Care Workforce Labour Market Study.

The recommendations contained within this submission are based on extensive consultation with the RANZCP Faculty of Psychiatry of Old Age, Section of Psychiatry of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Military, and the Veterans' and Emergency Services Personnel Mental Health Network which are made up of community members and psychiatrists with direct experience working in the areas of intellectual disability, veteran care, aged care and the mental health sector in general. As such, the RANZCP is well positioned to provide assistance and advice about this issue due to the breadth of academic, clinical and service delivery expertise it represents.
Submission response

The RANZCP submission is structured in response to the key consultation questions below:

1. What observations do you have about the job roles in the care and support workforce?
2. Over the past five years, how have you seen the care and support workforce change?
3. How do you expect the workforce to change in the near-term and out to 2050?
4. What do you consider to be the key drivers of change to the care and support workforce into the future? How will the workforce need to adapt?

1. What observations do you have about the job roles in the care and support workforce?

The Royal College of Australian and New Zealand Psychiatrists (RANZCP) welcomes the opportunity to focus on the development of a well-trained, sufficiently staffed, mental health workforce which is able to provide evidence-based, person-centred support for those with mental health conditions, older persons, persons living with disabilities and veterans.

The RANZCP recognises the importance of the care workforce and the crucial role they play in caring, treating, and supporting our most vulnerable. A core part of addressing shortfall challenges, is to ensure that the health and wellbeing of workers is prioritised by monitoring staffing levels and screening for burnout in the workplace. The RANZCP is supportive of initiatives that ensure our care workers are well-trained, adequately remunerated with sufficient staffing.

The RANZCP recognises the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoying long healthy lives that are centred in culture, with access to services that are prevention-focussed, responsive, culturally safe, trauma-informed and drive equity. Achieving this vision will require a care workforce that is representative of the people it serves, within a mental health system that is culturally safe and responsive.

The RANZCP notes there is an opportunity to improve the health outcomes for those in rural and remote communities by developing a locally integrated health workforce. As referenced in the RANZCP Rural psychiatry roadmap 2021-31, change is needed to address the existing inequalities in mental health status and service provision that exist between rural and metropolitan areas, to redress severe workforce shortages in rural areas and raise the profile of rural training opportunities.

The RANZCP emphasises that older people require the same full spectrum of health interventions as other people, from prevention to early intervention and clinical care. As described in the RANZCP’s submission to the Productivity Commission, there is an ongoing need to appropriately commission residential aged care and older adult community health services. The provision of mental health related training for the aged care workforce is ad-hoc and fragmented, with significant cross-over between different education providers. These findings are supported by a number of reports on the aged care workforce and exacerbate issues around staff turnover and inadequate staffing numbers.

The RANZCP recognises the importance of sufficient training and education for care workers in supporting persons living with a disability. As noted in the Productivity Commission’s NDIS costs review, the workforce – in the short-term – is unfit to provide services and support to those in need. Sufficient education and training which includes a focus on those with intellectual and developmental disability, is needed to increase access and reduce barriers to healthcare and support services.
2. Over the past five years, how have you seen the care and support workforce change?

The RANZCP has no further comment.

3. How do you expect the workforce to change in the near-term and out to 2050?

The RANZCP response to the Productivity Commission highlighted significant demographic changes will occur in the future. The proportion of older persons in Australia, will increase to 8.8 million people which is equivalent to 22% of the current population. The RANZCP emphasises that significant investment in the residential aged care sector is required to provide safe and high quality care to all individuals. As the proportion of older persons with mental health conditions increase, if appropriate services do not exist, the responsibility of care falls to the community including families and carers. The RANZCP suggests providing hands-on care for aged care workers including continuing professional development for staff working in residential aged care facilities.

The RANZCP is strongly supportive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers, who provide insights into communities and customs and actively engage with Elders and community members to enhance service quality. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be involved in the development of job descriptions, recruitment, and retention strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers.

As referenced in the RANZCP Position Statement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers, due to the complexity of the history, conceptualisation and experience of mental health in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers have an important role to play in providing direct, holistic care to consumers and communities.

The RANZCP emphasises that the mental health needs of people with a disability require the development of appropriate policies that clarify the roles and responsibilities of conventional mental health services with additional training for staff and access to expert advice and opinion.

4. What do you consider to be the key drivers of change to the care and support workforce into the future? How will the workforce need to adapt?

The RANZCP highlights there is an opportunity to implement significant investment in residential aged care to ensure that the workforce is appropriately trained, staffed, resourced, and remunerated. The aged care workforce requires appropriate training to manage mental health presentations, including the behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia. In addition to incorporating mental health competencies into training programs, there must be continuing professional development measures to ensure care workers retain their competency in managing mental health symptoms in aged care.

The RANZCP emphasises peer workers are an important component of mental health services. Peer workers can provide effective support in mental health services and programs, particularly when they have a clearly defined role, appropriate training and professional development resource, and are part of a multidisciplinary team. People with lived experience of mental illness have a valuable role to play in supporting the recovery of others by providing empathy, insight, advocacy and hope. An important element of assistance provided by peer workers is the shared experience of navigating the mental health system as a consumer with a mental health condition. Including peer workers in the care workforce could provide an additional layer of support to patients and their family.

The RANZCP submission to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Project Reference Group on the draft National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic
Framework and Implementation Plan highlighted two key priorities for increasing the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in the health sector: championing cultural safety and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the workforce. The RANZCP affirms the importance of targeted initiatives to ensure the workforce is both representative and provides culturally safe care.

The RANZCP recognises that service provider support staff are an important part of the NDIS and the disability sector. Appropriately trained, supported, and remunerated staff will ensure people with disability receive quality care and can access and utilise support services effectively. The RANZCP supports the development and implementation of a coordinated strategic workforce development plan for the disability sector workforce.

The RANZCP highlights that there are opportunities for creativity and development of disability sector service provisions in many areas. For example, establishing opportunities and incentives in rural and remote areas for local educational institutions to provide courses in disability services may help build an appropriate, trained, local workforce as well as create much needed employment opportunities.