

Health Information Workforce Capacity Building National Action Plan

© Commonwealth of Australia 2003

This work is copyright. You may download, display, print and reproduce this material in unaltered form only (retaining this notice) for your personal, non-commercial use or use within your organisation. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, all other rights are reserved. Requests for further authorisation should be directed to the Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Intellectual Property Branch, Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, GPO Box 2154, Canberra ACT 2601 or posted at <http://www.dcita.gov.au/cca>.

Purpose

1. This paper provides an introduction to issues surrounding the need to build the skill and knowledge base of the Australian health workforce with regard to information technology and information management. The paper also details a set of priorities, objectives and schedule of activities to be undertaken in order to initiate work at the national level in this area.

Introduction – What is Health Information Workforce Capacity Building?

2. The use of information technology and subsequent need for information management is increasing in all areas of the health sector, including administration, clinical settings, health education and research. It is apparent that the effective use of information and technology in the health care setting, and in health administration and policy setting, contributes directly and indirectly to staff and systems efficiency, and to the quality of patient care and clinical outcomes. As a result, there is a need to increase the information technology and information management skill and knowledge base of workers across the sector. This includes:
 - Information and communication technology staff in roles such as network management, IT and help desk support, application and systems development, security and IT staff training;
 - Health records staff;
 - Knowledge management staff such as health librarians;
 - Information management staff in roles such as business and data analysis, research, clinical audit, data protection and confidentiality, planning and performance management;
 - Senior managers and directors of health services; and
 - Clinical staff including doctors, nurses, pathologists, pharmacists and other clinical professionals.
3. The skills to be developed cross the continuum from basic computer skills and information technology skills to specialist clinical information use, information management and health informatics expertise.

The current situation

4. The availability of health sector workers with the above mentioned skills and knowledge base is a critical issue in health systems worldwide. Anecdotal evidence strongly indicates that there is a need to build the information technology and information management capacities of the Australian health workforce. However, there is little substantive information on the current skills base, and without such information capacity building, workforce planning as well as projections of the skill levels and skill sets that may be required in the future, are virtually impossible.

A national approach

5. There are a number of reasons for taking a national approach to health information workforce capacity building.
6. Variations in approaches to information technology and information management between the jurisdictions can hinder the flow of information, people and skills. There are a number of health information related initiatives currently underway to facilitate a consistent approach to

information in the health sector. These include (but are not limited to) the development of the proposed National Health Privacy Code and the work of the AHMAC Working Group on Nationally Consistent Medical Registration to achieve national public access to medical registers.

7. A number of health information/health informatics groups already take a national perspective, undertaking action and representing constituents at the national level. These include (but again are not limited to) the Health Informatics Society of Australia, the Australian College of Health Informatics, the AMA Medical Information Taskforce, Standards Australia IT/14 Health Informatics Committee. A national approach to health information workforce capacity building could both facilitate and take advantage of the work of groups such as these to maximise the effectiveness of any capacity building initiatives.
8. Government responsibility for health service is shared by the Australian Government, and by the State and Territory governments. Health workforce planning and capacity building is currently undertaken at both the national and state and territory levels. In addition, the Australian Government and the states and territories work collaboratively to share methodologies for health workforce planning through the national health workforce committees that answer to the AHMAC and through that to Health Ministers.

Outcomes of consultations

9. In July 2003 the Department of Health and Ageing conducted a Health Information Workforce Capacity Think Tank. This event brought together representatives from the health and health information technology sectors, academia, and government. The aim of the Think Tank was to:
 - investigate issues surrounding health information workforce capacity building;
 - to identify areas of need;
 - to propose strategies to promote the effective development and use of information and information technology in the health sector;
 - to provide a forum for open discussion of current and future issues and priorities; and
 - to provide a first step towards the development of a national strategy to address health information workforce capacity issues.
10. The Think Tank participants identified a number of priorities for action. Priorities include:
 - leadership;
 - the business case;
 - planning;
 - support for research;
 - education; and
 - development and retention of staff.

The National Action Plan

11. The priorities identified by the Think Tank have informed the development of this Action Plan. This document links these priorities to objectives and actions. The actions will initiate and coordinate activities that will provide the basis of future workforce capacity planning and building. They also aim to support communication and collaborative activity between

stakeholders, to promote and support research, and to address issues in education and professional development.

12. The actions identified are primarily to be undertaken by the Australian Department of Health and Ageing, however, the majority of the actions involve establishing networks, facilitating information exchange and fostering policy development across a wide range of stakeholders with an interest or role in health workforce capacity building. These stakeholders include (but are not limited to) AHMAC and its workforce planning committees, AHIC, Australian Government Departments, the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Australian Research Council, the Australian Medical Association, Professional Colleges and Divisions of General Practice, the Health Informatics Society of Australia and other health informatics organisations.

Priorities and Objectives and Actions

Priority	Objective	Proposed Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Progress to date
1. Leadership	To give direction to the health informatics capacity building policy agenda nationally.	Release the report on the Think Tank to participants and stakeholders.	Australian Department of Health and Ageing	Release Think Tank report November 2003	Report prepared and submitted to executive for clearance
	To foster a positive policy environment for the consideration of e-health workforce issues.	Establish and provide secretariat support for a Workforce Development Steering Group. This group would answer to AHIC. The purpose of this group would be to provide specialist advice and to oversee the workplan attached to the National Strategy.	Australian Health Information Council (AHIC) AHIC Secretariat Australian Department of Health and Ageing	November 2003 Ongoing	Proposal to AHIC November 2003
		Establish and support a Department of Health and Ageing Workforce Capacity Building Officers' Group in order to strengthen cross-divisional linkages within the department and coordination and cooperation between areas with interests in health workforce issues.	Australian Department of Health and Ageing	Commence December 2003 then ongoing	
		Liaise with the AHMAC health workforce committees, including the Jurisdictional Health Workforce Planners Group in order to draw on their workforce planning methodologies, processes, strategies, projects and data, for use in the development of the National Strategy, and ongoing workforce capacity building activities.	Australian Health Information Council Australian Department of Health and Ageing	Commence December 2003 then ongoing	

<p>2. Business Case & 4. Planning</p>	<p>To establish a body of reliable and relevant data which will provide a foundation for workforce capacity planning and building, to inform investment and to support evidence-based policy.</p>	<p>Undertake a scoping exercise to determine the current IT&IM skill base of the health workforce, and to make projections on future workforce needs.</p> <p>Survey health information technology and management capacity of medical specialists</p>	<p>Australian Department of Health and Ageing</p> <p>AMA for Australian Department of Health and Ageing – National e-Health Policy Section</p>	<p>January – April 2004</p> <p>November 2003 – June 2004</p>	
<p>3. Support for Research</p>	<p>To promote the conduct of research relevant to the use of IM&T in the health sector</p> <p>To encourage research that is aligned with national priorities for health</p>	<p>In consultation stakeholders, establish a research plan for e-Health.</p> <p>Make representations to NH&MRC and ARC regarding national research priorities and research funding for Health Informatics.</p>	<p>Australian Department of Health and Ageing – National e-Health Policy Section</p>	<p>March – April 2004</p>	
<p>5. Education 6. Development and retention of staff</p>	<p>To develop and promote a national curriculum and agreed core competencies to inform education and professional development in health informatics</p> <p>To improve access by current and future health workers to health informatics education and ongoing professional development</p>	<p>In consultation with the health and education sectors, develop a set of agreed core competencies and curriculum priorities and different pathways.</p> <p>Explore the role that DEST might play with improving incentives for people to enrol in these programs.</p> <p>Facilitate cooperation between Professional Colleges, the AMA, and health informatics education providers and health informatics organisations concerned with the development of ongoing training for health and clinical workers.</p> <p>Where possible, support individual professional development initiatives.</p>	<p>AHIC Secretariat</p> <p>Australian Department of Health and Ageing</p> <p>AHIC and Australian Department of Health and Ageing</p>		