AUSTRALIA’S FUTURE HEALTH WORKFORCE REPORTS – ORAL HEALTH

KEY/issues

• Following COAG Health Council (CHC) agreement, the Australia’s Future Health Workforce – Oral Health reports (an overview and detailed report) were released 17 December 2014 on the Department of Health website.

• Oral Health workforce projections presented show that under all scenarios modelled there is ‘excess capacity’ in the oral health workforce by 2025.

OUR POLICY

• The projections are based on current utilisation and service delivery patterns, so do not reflect unmet demand in the community.

• A high demand scenario has supply for the total oral health workforce exceeding demand by 6.9% at 2025, while the comparison scenario (reflecting current policy settings) shows a 27.5% excess supply above demand by 2025.

• There is unmet demand for dental treatment required by children and adolescents, older people, low income and socially disadvantaged people, people with special needs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and people living in rural and remote areas.

• The projections show that the current and projected workforce could deliver an increase in services to these populations.

• Whilst the reports indicate an oversupply of the oral health workforce, there are still too few dentists and other oral health workers in rural and remote Australia. The projections also do not reflect unmet demand in the community.

• Increased supply of dentists may result in reductions in cost for dental services and more people being able to access dental care, particularly where there is currently unmet demand which is not factored into the projections.
BACKGROUND

- The AFHW Oral health reports (overview and detailed) were prepared by Health Workforce Australia prior to its closure on 6 August 2014 and are the first workforce projection reports produced on the entire oral health workforce.

- The overview report provides projections at a national level for the total oral health workforce, and the detailed report provides projections by profession, that is: Dentists, including specialists; Oral Health Practitioners as one segment, comprising dental therapists, dental hygienists and oral health therapists; and Dental Prosthetists.

- Seven alternative workforce planning scenarios all show to varying degrees a workforce in which supply exceeds demand.

- The reports acknowledge that projections of the oral health professions are difficult as modelling is based on limited data available on Australians currently seeking and receiving dental services.

- It is important to note that references throughout the report to ‘supply exceeding demand’ are a reference to supply exceeding current demand, not unmet demand.