The role of nurses in delivering primary health care and in meeting the future health care needs of the Australian community will be strengthened under the Stronger Rural Health Strategy. This includes a central role for nurses in the delivery of team-based and multidisciplinary care, particularly for patients with chronic and complex conditions, and in rural and remote settings. Nurses will be supported to move into primary health care and to test new ways to deliver care. Better education about primary health care will also be provided to the nursing workforce.

This initiative is made up of three components:

1. Nursing in Primary Health Care (NiPHC program)
2. Raising Awareness of the Role of the Nurse Practitioner project
3. An independent review of the current preparation of nurses entering the workforce in Australia.

**Investment**

From July 2018, funding of approximately $8.3 million over four years is allocated to the NiPHC program, to be delivered by the Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA). The Raising Awareness of the Role of the Nurse Practitioner project provides around $300,000 over 12 months to the Australian College of Nurse Practitioners (ACNP) to conduct an awareness campaign to increase the profile of nurse practitioners. Funding is also available over two years for the review of the nursing education programs, with findings to be publicly released.

**Nurses in primary health care**

Primary health care is often the first point of contact people have with the health care system. The nursing workforce – including nurse practitioners – has a breadth of skills and experience in caring for the health needs of the Australian community. Making wider use of the nursing workforce in frontline delivery is a more effective use of skills, and gives GPs time to focus on complex care needs.

There is strong evidence that shows strengthening the role of nursing in the primary health care setting enhances the delivery of health care in general practice. These benefits are clinical and economic:

- **Clinical** – improved access, longer consultations, improved case management and care coordination and enhanced team work across the practice
- **Economic** – cost effective and removes unnecessary duplication of work.

The NiPHC program will include the provision of training and mentoring for nurses to transition to primary health care, and support for nurses in regional and rural areas through training in clinical areas of need. Health care organisations, including those in regional and rural locations, will implement nurse delivered models of care that target local patient population health care needs.
**Nurse practitioners**

A nurse practitioner is a registered nurse with experience and expertise to diagnose and treat people. They have completed additional university study at Master’s degree level and are considered some of the most clinically expert nurses in our health system.

Raising the Awareness of the Nurse Practitioner Role project will promote the benefits, profile and role of the nurse practitioner workforce within primary health care service settings.

Consumers and health professionals will benefit from gaining a greater understanding of the role of the nurse practitioner, particularly in primary health care, through a number of communication activities. Making better use of nurse practitioners, and the nursing workforce in general, will be a more efficient use of their skills while giving GPs the time to focus on more complex care needs.

**3,000 additional nurses in rural general practice**

Over the coming 10 years, an additional 3,000 nurses will be supported to work in rural general practice through changes to the way in which general practices in rural and remote areas are incentivised to employ practice nurses.

**Independent review of nurse education**

An independent review will look at how current educational preparation in Australia equips nurses to meet the future health needs of the Australian community. The review will consider national and international trends and consult extensively with consumers and representatives from the health, aged care, disability, education and regulatory sectors. It will also look at student selection factors and how pathways can shape future careers. The review may result in a renewal of educational preparation.

**Further information**

Updates on progress of the reform and further information:

- Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association website [www.apha.asn.au](http://www.apha.asn.au)
- Australian College of Nurse Practitioners website [www.acnp.org.au](http://www.acnp.org.au)