

**Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association**

**2021 Pre-budget Submission**

The Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA) is the peak professional body for nurses working in primary health care. APNA champions the role of primary health care nurses; to advance professional recognition, ensure workforce sustainability, nurture leadership in health, and optimise the role of nurses in patient-centred care.

APNA has strong solutions to contribute to a healthier Australia.

- **Next generation nurses** will promote primary health care as a future career option for student nurses;
- **Powerful data** will inform primary health care research and policy-planning;
- **Rebrand, revamp and retain** will enrich the primary health care workforce with a diverse range of new nurses.
- **Keeping Australia healthy in a post-Covid-19 era** highlights key lessons from the pandemic and Royal Commission into Aged Care

All these proposals help deliver a healthier Australia through best practice primary health care nursing.

## Next Generation Nurses \$24.2M over 4 years

### A springboard to a great career

With the predicted shortfall of nurses, increasing rates of chronic disease and an ageing population, Australia needs more primary health care nurses. The building blocks now exist to establish a national system providing student placements in primary health care, influencing their future career choices. The system can increase the number of placement opportunities for undergraduate and postgraduate students by 8,000 placements nationally in metro, urban, rural and remote settings.

## Powerful Data \$5.4M over 10 years

### Today's research informing tomorrow's policy

Nurses are the largest health workforce but the work they do in primary health care is absent from national datasets. APNA's Workforce Survey of Australia's largest primary health care workforce can be expanded to contribute comprehensive data to inform six national health strategies and priorities.

## Rebrand, Revamp, Retain \$7.2M over 4 years

### Where great nurses go to do more.

A campaign to show how diverse and challenging a career in primary health care nursing can be will attract new student nurses, more men and more culturally and linguistically diverse Australians. This will support a primary health care workforce that better reflects the diverse and contemporary needs of Australian communities.

## Keeping Australia Healthy

APNA calls on the Commonwealth Government to respond to a number of key lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and issues highlighted by the Royal Commission into Aged Care including policy reform around funding models and workforce skills mix.

# Next Generation Nurses

## Invest \$24.2m Over 4 Years in a New Generation of Primary Health Care Nurses

- Establish a national primary health care nursing placement system for undergraduate and postgraduate students
- Create 8,000 primary health care nursing placement opportunities nationally in metropolitan, urban, rural and remote communities

### The Problem

Nurses cannot graduate without completing a mandated number of clinical placement hours (800 hours for a registered nurse) and more than 17,000 undergraduate nursing students graduate each year. Placements are generally harder to source in primary health care so most nursing students do not experience primary health care as part of their studies. This results in fewer nursing students choosing primary health care nursing as a profession.

Prior to COVID-19, placements were increasingly difficult to secure due to significant demand. The impact of COVID-19 has exacerbated this, creating a backlog in placements. This could result in students being unable to complete their course, graduate and enter the workforce.

### The Solution

An online national placement system, capitalising on APNA's database and experience, will provide a greater number of clinical placement options for students. It will provide students with practical experience of primary health care nursing and increase capacity in primary health care.

APNA has experience running placement programs with Monash University including placing 175 students in 2020 with multiple primary health care providers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project design ensures quality placements with continuous evaluation and support of student and supervising nurse.

APNA, in consultation with universities, TAFEs, PHC employers, Rural Workforce Agencies and other professional peak groups, will build on this model to develop a flexible online primary health care placement system.

APNA's extensive primary health care nursing database can provide 8,000 additional nursing placements and match nursing students to high-quality placements with experienced registered nurses and nurse practitioners.

Such a system would be able to help match prospective graduate students with a range of placement opportunities using criteria such as location. This would provide students with an opportunity to experience primary health care settings in a range of urban, regional, rural or remote settings.

Nursing supervisors will have access to a support service to ensure the facilitation of quality student placements. The service will include a comprehensive supervisor training package and regular access to support service staff for personalised advice and support.

Both supervisors and students will have the ability to rank their placement experience via the online placement platform. The data will

be used by the support service team to work with placement providers and supervisors to enhance their placement experiences.

Cost is a barrier to regional nursing placements as students must pay their own expenses.

*"I was able to learn so much more at a GP clinic and perfect some clinical skills a lot more than I would have been able to in a hospital where your buddy nurse is generally very busy and you aren't given as many learning opportunities."*

*"Hospitals are great for time management and learning to work in a team but I found that having 1:1 learning allowed me to practise my actual clinical skills and to take in more knowledge."*

**Monash student on placement at Yarra Valley Clinic**

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## Next Generation Nurses

Given that medical students have regional placement travel and accommodation costs covered, APNA believes this opportunity should be extended to nursing students and has included rural placement financial support as part of this placement system model.

The placement system will assist in addressing current and future nurse workforce shortages, securing a

pipeline of next generation nurses equipped with broad skillsets able to serve communities across Australia including in rural and remote areas.

This meets the objectives of the Australian Government's Long Term National Health Plan to make the Australian health system the best in the world.



APNA has also recently teamed up with the NSW Rural Doctors Network (NSWRDN) and Health Workforce Queensland to explore opportunities to attract and retain nurses in rural and remote locations.



# Powerful Data

## Invest \$5.4M Over 10 Years to Inform Future Policies

- Increase the amount of reliable data on Australia's largest primary health care workforce
- Contribute comprehensive data to six national health strategies

### The Problem

The 82,000 nurses working across Australia are the largest workforce in primary health care but the scope of work they do is absent from current national datasets. This limits effective policy making and the ability to fully utilise their skills to the benefit of the health system and the community.

Robust longitudinal data on this workforce is needed to inform strategy that will underpin the Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan, Nursing 2030 Strategy, Aged Care Workforce and broader population health workforce strategies.

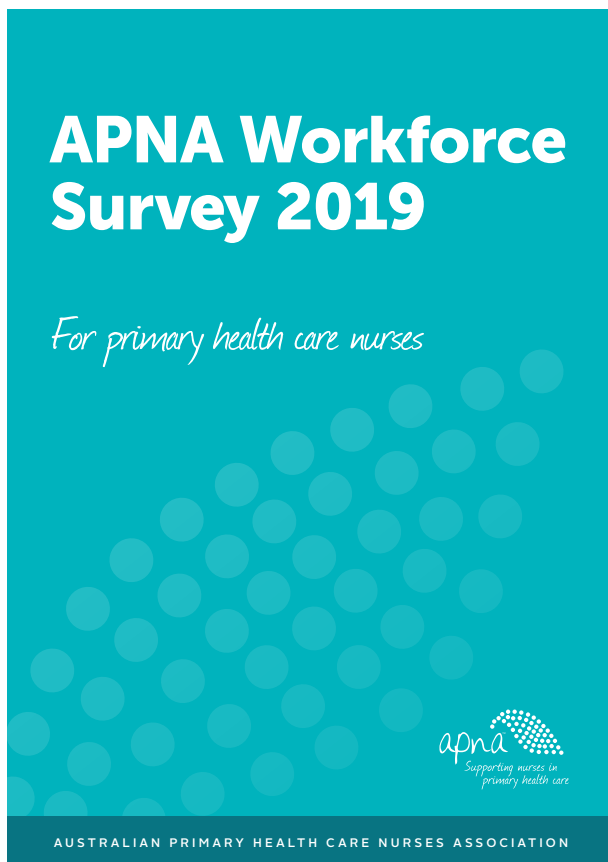
### The Solution

APNA has collected data on the primary health care nursing workforce via an Annual Workforce Survey since 2004. It has a data collaboration agreement with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the collaboration has resulted in the 'A profile of PHCN report.'

*"Today's research is tomorrow's health care."*

**Pillar Four, Australian Long-Term National Health Plan**

Funding would allow APNA and Monash University to establish a collaborative partnership to strengthen the existing survey and deliver a decade of quality data and insights on primary health care nurses.



This dataset can inform current and future health workforce planning and contribute to and expand the scope of the National Primary Health Care Data Asset.

It would make a significant contribution to the primary health care nursing evidence base. This is more important than ever as the country builds capacity and reliance on primary health care.

Reliable and robust data will contribute to policy initiatives and reforms including the Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan; the National Preventive Health Strategy; the Stronger Rural Health Strategy; the Aged Care Workforce Strategy; and Nurse 2030 Workforce Strategy.

A fully-funded annual survey would better inform strategies to expand the primary health care nurse workforce and increase workforce satisfaction and retention.

This solution will be delivered in partnership with Monash University and is supported by QUIT and NSW RDN.



# Rebrand, Revamp, Retain

## Invest \$7.2M Over 4 years on a National Campaign to Recruit Nurses to Primary Health Care

- Rebrand primary health care nursing to retain current members of workforce
- Broaden the diversity of the workforce to better meet Australia's myriad community and health needs.

### The Problem

The health system needs to attract new nurses, particularly from under-represented groups, to primary health care to offset a looming shortage. This is vital if the primary health care workforce is to be able to deal with the rising number of ageing Australians of differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Nursing needs a makeover. Primary health care nursing has expanded into areas of practice that have traditionally or historically been assumed to be the responsibility of other medical professionals. Outdated perceptions need to be corrected. Attitudes by other health professionals and employers about the role of primary health care nurses limit the ability of nurses to work to their full scope of practice.

### The Solution

APNA has developed a marketing campaign concept built on the findings of the Annual Workforce Survey and APNA's Career and Education Framework. The campaign aims to illustrate the varied and extensive skillset of a

primary health care nurse and the rewarding career that can be provided in primary health care.

APNA works with nurses on the ground and can provide the people and stories for a national campaign. This could highlight the incredible diversity of work a primary health care nurse does, in a range of settings from rural and remote to busy city community centres or a prison.

Showcasing the benefits and rewarding career of primary health care nursing may draw younger nurses to the profession as well as new groups, such as men and Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse groups, who may not have considered it as an option. This will put the workforce in a better position to meet Australia's diverse community and health needs.

Increasing the profile of primary health care will also keep the current workforce motivated and in a position to provide leadership to a new generation. In the long term, the campaign will contribute towards addressing the impending nurse workforce shortage and the objectives of the government's 10-year health plan.



This campaign concept is supported by DANA and ACNP.

# Keeping Australia Healthy in a Post-COVID-19 Era

- A blended funding model is needed in general practice — one that includes bundled payments for preventative health activities; flexibility in the way care is delivered (face to face, in-home and virtual); incentivises comprehensive data management activities and ensures integration with the broader health system.
- A mandated appropriate skill-mix in aged care settings which considers staff requirements in relation to patient needs.
- The primary health care nursing curriculum needs to be strengthened so that university and college students acquire the right experience and skills.

A year ago, hospitals were overwhelmed, borders slammed shut and governments scrambled to protect their communities from COVID-19. But in the midst of this fast-moving crisis, even during a pandemic of unprecedented scale, frontline workers like primary health care nurses were losing their jobs.

In March 2020, as Australia shut down to halt the spread of COVID-19, 29 percent of APNA's members reported they had had their hours reduced as patients fearful of contracting COVID-19 avoided health services. Seven percent said they had lost their jobs.

Primary health care nurses are trained to adapt. So when telehealth — 10 years in the making — was rolled out in just 10 days, nurses embraced the technology. Health Minister Greg Hunt called the scheme a "revolution in health".

As Australia combatted the pandemic, there were signs of improvement for primary health care nurses, with nurses getting access to some telehealth items and patients returning to practices.

But the risk of further cuts remains. In APNA's August survey of its members, 15 percent reported their hours had been reduced and nearly 20 percent said their employers had discussed a potential further loss of hours or job termination.

## The Problem

Under the current funding system, a nurse must provide services "for and on behalf of" a doctor so that a practice can bill the MBS. While nurse telehealth access was welcomed it is limited to a few MBS item numbers, despite the breadth of roles and tasks undertaken by nurses.

Australia's healthcare system is expanding exponentially as a result of a growing population and increases in acute and chronic health conditions. Limited access to telehealth could result in reduced access to health care, particularly for vulnerable patient groups. It is critical that the primary health care system is staffed and equipped appropriately and adequately to encourage sustainability of primary health care workers to meet patient needs.

## The Solution

A blended funding model is needed in general practice — one that includes bundled payments for preventative health activities; flexibility in the way care is delivered (face to face, in-home and virtual); incentivises comprehensive data management activities and ensures integration with the broader health system.

Not every patient needs to see a doctor every time they visit the practice. Many patients can and are managed by the nurse as part of the healthcare team. This includes chronic disease management, lifestyle and self-care support visits, immunisation, dressings, and care coordination catch-up.

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## Keeping Australia Healthy in a Post-COVID-19 Era

Telehealth has the power to bring a nurse into every Australian home. Telehealth needs to become the new normal so patients have a choice in how they access health care.

Widespread use of adequately funded bundled payments for people with or at risk of chronic complex health issues could better support team-based care and enable nurses to use their full range of skills. This systematic approach to preventative health can contribute to alleviating the burden on hospitals, facilitate a more

sustainable business model for general practice and ultimately reduce the financial burden on the health system.

The Australian Government has recognised change is required. It has appointed a Primary Health Care Reform Steering Group to oversee the development of a National 10-Year Primary Health Care Plan and look at how we can tailor our health system to be more person-centred, integrated, efficient and equitable.

Funding model reform will be essential to achieving this.





# The Special Case of Aged Care

## The Problem

The Royal Commission into Aged Care has highlighted evidence that suggests workforce issues have contributed to substandard care within the aged care sector. These include challenges in attracting, training and retaining nurses. This has resulted in workforce pressures such as limited trained workers and inadequate staffing levels which have impacted care standards for older Australians.

This has been amplified during the past year as many older Australians in aged care facilities found themselves at risk of COVID-19 – and a number succumbed to the virus.

Practical policy solutions and reform are needed to ensure Australia's aged care sector is one which is accessible, safe, efficient, integrated and of high quality. This will be particularly important given the predicted increase in Australians accessing aged care services.

## The Solution

We need a workforce with the right skills to support vulnerable patients in aged care settings. Nurses are integral to patient quality and safety. There is a need for a mandated appropriate skill-mix in aged care settings which considers staff requirements in relation to patient needs.

The primary health care nursing curriculum in tertiary education also needs to be strengthened so that students acquire the right experience and skills to meet the needs of older Australians.

The Royal Commission has highlighted that lack of aged care specific education and training has resulted in clinical and functional knowledge and experience gaps.

Ensuring quality and safety of care and services provided to older Australians requires the current nursing workforce to have access to adequate and ongoing professional development. Support from aged care employers will be critical to ensuring the workforce is upskilled.

The benefits of these reforms are self-evident: higher job satisfaction for aged care nurses through the promotion of sound work conditions and adequate training; and quality care for all older Australians.



APNA is bold, vibrant and future-focused. We reflect the views of our membership and the broader profession by bringing together nurses from across Australia to represent, advocate, promote and celebrate the achievements of nurses in primary health care.

Our vision is a healthy Australia through best practice primary health care nursing. Our mission is to improve the health of Australians through the delivery of quality, evidence-based care by a bold, vibrant and well-supported primary health care nursing workforce.

## Contact us

APNA welcomes further discussion about this submission.

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