Background

In February and March 2019, Northern Territory PHN hosted meetings and workshops in 5 locations across the Northern Territory to obtain stakeholder input into the type of responses needed to address the challenges identified in the 2018/19 Health Workforce Needs Assessment.

The Health Workforce Needs Assessment is an activity under the Rural Health Workforce Support Activity funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and managed by Northern Territory PHN.

This ongoing activity takes place with support from the Health Workforce Stakeholder Group. The group, made up of industry representatives and experts, supports Northern Territory PHN / Rural Workforce Agency NT with the identification of health workforce needs through a needs assessment, the development and application of a priority setting framework and contribution to an Activity Work Plan that aims to:
1. Improve access and continuity of access to essential primary health care workforce
2. Build health workforce capability
3. Grow the sustainability of the health workforce.

The 2017/18 Health Workforce Needs Assessment focused on general practitioners and remote primary health care workforce (primarily remote area nurses and Aboriginal health practitioners). In 2018/19 this scope was extended to include allied health professionals.

In undertaking the needs assessment, Northern Territory PHN have, to date:
- collated a range of existing data, policies, reviews and literature
- begun to develop an understanding of the scope of current national and local primary health care workforce initiatives
- undertaken a base level consultation with stakeholders
- obtained feedback from the Health Workforce Stakeholder Group
- reviewed priorities for primary health care workforce in the Northern Territory
- circulated the Health Workforce Needs Assessment for broad contribution and feedback.

The workshops were attended by 39 participants representing the Aboriginal community controlled sector, NT Government, private and NGO sectors as well as tertiary education and others. A wealth of knowledge was combined to provide valuable insights into the potential solutions to the supply, quality and sustainability of the NT primary health workforce.

This, combined with knowledge developed through the 2017/18 Health Workforce Needs Assessment and workshops will contribute to an Activity Work Plan which will be endorsed by the Health Workforce Stakeholder Group for approval by the Northern Territory PHN board and submission to the Australian Government Department of Health.

This Activity Work Plan will drive the activity of the Rural Workforce Agency NT in 2019/20.
Workshop Participation

Workshops were held over late February and early March 2019 in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Darwin, Nhulunbuy and via Webex. The table below summarises participation in these workshops.

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Emerging Themes

In 2017/18, the Health Workforce Stakeholder Group identified four priority areas which broadly categorised the key workforce needs in the Northern Territory primary health workforce. These priorities were reviewed in relation to the 2018/19 Health Workforce Needs Assessment and it was determined that they remain relevant. The ideas presented by participants in the workshops have been summarised below under these priorities.

**PRIORITY AREA 1: DEVELOP THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WORKFORCE – CLINICAL AND NON-CLINICAL**

- VET in schools targeting young Aboriginal people. Encourage delivery of VET qualifications in Allied Health (Cert 2,3 & 4)
- Support and potentially expand the Aboriginal Health Academy
- Financial and emotional support for school leavers moving interstate to study
- Exposure of Aboriginal school students to health careers and mentoring from allied health professionals
- Employing an education and training project officer to support training in Aboriginal community controlled health services
- Ensure cultural respect and safety in the workplace, equal payment and employment conditions commensurate with other health staff
- Lobby for Aboriginal scholarships in allied health degrees
- Locally delivered training
- Offer courses at CDU campus of Tennant Creek
- Support APHRA requirement for cultural awareness training
- Provide skills and cultural awareness for health professionals to support the development of their Aboriginal colleagues
- Increase awareness of systems challenges to supporting Aboriginal employees: i.e. HR approaches, job design, supervision, and skills development
- Clearly define pathway roles for Aboriginal health staff and understand the demand for workforce in these areas in order to advocate for VET sector funding of training opportunities.
PRIORITY AREA 2: DEVELOP PATHWAYS FROM SELECTION AND EMPLOYMENT TO RETENTION

Future Workforce
- Grow our own NT allied health workforce
- Promote health careers in school starting in years 7-9
- Encourage & lobby for universities to offer a wider range of allied health courses in NT
- Improve partnerships with universities and offer student exposure through placements and programs in remote communities
- Build cultural competence and confidence early in career pathways
- Provide adequate infrastructure to support allied health placement and pathways
- Support work experience opportunities
- Encourage NT students studying interstate to return to the NT after graduation
- Participate in career expo days
- Remote allied health professionals to do presentations to university and school students
- Offer shadowing opportunities for students in university breaks (less strain on health professionals than formal placement)
- Provide opportunities for university students to participate in educational activities i.e. to dial in to allied health grand rounds
- Develop relationships with rural health clubs.

Pathways
- Encourage universities to offer a broader range of allied health undergraduate courses using creative approaches to achieving viability including joint programs with interstate universities and relationships with the sector to access resources and offer placements in the NT
- Offer rural/remote post graduate programs with appropriate supports
- Facilitate availability of supervisory support within profession (creative approaches)
- Share resources for supervision and continuing professional development across NT Government, NGO, Aboriginal community controlled health services, private practice (shared professional development events calendar for Alice Springs)
- Define clear career opportunities and pathways, linking new graduates with understanding of potential career pathways
- Encourage universities to incorporate rural and remote practice in undergraduate courses and work with universities to ensure graduates are ready for rural and remote practice.
PRIORITY AREA 3: ATTRACT, MAINTAIN AND RETAIN EXISTING WORKFORCE WITHIN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY WITH CONSIDERATION OF GAPS AND EMERGING NEEDS.

Recruitment
- Advocate for adequate program funding to support competitive wage offers
- Offer locum exchange opportunities for allied health professionals to enable them to try remote practice before committing to long-term role
- Offer recruitment grants and incentives/relocation assistance
- Advocate for longer term funding arrangements to support longer employment contracts and job stability
- Provide honest and location specific marketing
  - not a tourism approach,
  - not all areas/roles are remote (Katherine)
- Support work opportunities for family members accompanying health professionals
- Take a sectoral, collaborative marketing approach to attracting people to the NT
- Undertake marketing through social media, YouTube videos, highlight good news stories to increase NT health sector profile & piggy back on larger initiatives like ‘boundless possible’
- Clearly define the NT value proposition and our competitive advantage over other states
- Design attraction activities to target more experienced allied health professionals
- Develop relationships with interstate hospitals, universities, peak bodies, etc. to advertise roles on their websites, newsletters and other platforms
- Use existing health professionals to refer potential recruits
- Talk to long-term health professionals to understand what motivates them to stay
- Increase Northern Territory PHN / Rural Workforce Agency NT visibility and profile to ensure candidates are aware of the service before committing to a recruitment agency
- Increase Northern Territory PHN recruitment resources to compete more aggressively with private recruitment firms.

Retention
- Offer travel incentives and retention bonuses, flights for family to visit, flights home and additional leave
- Advocate for longer funding periods to support job security
- Support health professionals to manage work stresses, achieve work-life balance and prevent burnout, develop resilience, emotional intelligence and confidence
- Improve access to continuing professional development and provide assistance to participate in further study
- Offer locum support (similar to general practitioner) or holiday relief partnerships.
- Support social networks & connections to integrate health professionals into the local community
- Offer formal and informal mentorship and support
- Support access to secondment opportunities to work on projects, policies and strategies
- Support job rotations between organisations to develop networks and an understanding of referral pathways, service system, etc.
- Recognise the contributions of allied health professionals
- Ensure cultural awareness and cultural support
• Ensure health professionals receive a comprehensive NT/local orientation and an awareness of the social determinants of health
• Orientate health professionals to the professional support networks available to them through an up-to-date list of health professionals in the NT and their areas of expertise
• Provide opportunities to connect with other local health professionals
• Link new health professionals with NT branches of their professional bodies, other health professional groups (e.g. HPANT) and networking opportunities
• Involve the whole community in embedding and retaining health professionals including the possibility of offering a social buddy system
• Increase opportunities to connect with visiting health professionals – knowing who they are and when they are coming
• Focus recruitment efforts on achieving the right fit of personality to the role.

**Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**

• Improve access to CPD and education without leaving the NT
• Increase webinar access to CPD
• Share CPD resources and opportunities across NTG, NGO, ACCHS, private practice (i.e. a shared CPD calendar for Alice Springs)
• Promote allied health rural generalism and associated training
• Ensure health professionals receive orientation to the role and scope of practice of Aboriginal health practitioners
• Link with universities to support & expand access to CPD
• Support post graduate training positions and opportunities
• Offer CPD grants and free training
• Enable groups to seek funding to run a course that will benefit a number of health professionals
• Offer multi-disciplinary training.
PRIORITY AREA 4: DEVELOP LOCALLY RESPONSIVE, SUSTAINABLE MODELS OF CARE

- Identify and support providers to implement workforce models that are attractive to health professionals
- Improve flexibility of work conditions, including the ability to go part-time
- Support private practice to develop sustainable business models. Define and promote personal and organisational business opportunities
- Offer ongoing quality managerial and organisational support
- Assist primary health care services to understand the clinical governance & scope of practice requirements of allied health as they move more into employing and supervising allied health professionals whilst not having allied health in management structure
- Identify and encourage creative approaches to support primary health care services with clinical governance and supervision of allied health staff
- Encourage flexibility with sharing workforce across NTG / NGO / AMS, sharing FTE across providers
- Offer health professionals the ability to move within the NT, between roles and organisations, and keep their benefits (such as long service leave)
- Support managers to provide good internal systems of support (HR practices).

Next Steps

The workforce strategies identified in these workshops will build on those identified in the 2017/18 Health Workforce Needs Assessment and strategies workshops. An Activity Work Plan will be developed for 2019/20 and will include activities to address the needs and opportunities identified over the past two years.

Northern Territory PHN continues to consult with the industry through it’s working groups and workshops to refine specific initiatives and ensure that these activities, in their implementation, represent practical, sustainable, collaborative and integrated solutions appropriate to the needs of our stakeholders.