



Cancer Nurses Society of Australia (CNSA) Submission to the National Nursing Workforce Strategy Consultation

18 October 2024

INTRODUCTION

The CNSA represents nearly 1,800 cancer nurses across Australia. As the peak national body for cancer nursing, the CNSA strives to promote excellence in cancer care through the professional contribution of cancer nurses. To achieve this mission, CNSA acts as a resource to cancer nurses, and all nurses who provide care to individuals living with cancer around Australia, regardless of geographical location or area of practice. We are the critical link between cancer nurses in Australia, the consumers of cancer services, and other health services and providers involved in cancer control.

The CNSA welcome the opportunity to address the Department of Health and Aged Care National Nursing Workforce Strategy by participating in this consultation process. Acknowledging the importance of a national-level strategy to inform nursing policy and workforce planning to ensure the nursing profession is equipped, enabled, and supported to deliver person-centred, evidence-based, and compassionate care to all Australian communities.

Our Vision: Best possible outcomes and experiences for all people affected by cancer.

Our Mission: Promoting excellence in cancer care and control through the professional contribution of cancer nurses.

CNSA acknowledges and pays respect to the First Nations people as the traditional owners of the land. We pay our respects to the elders past present and emerging and acknowledge the different nations across Australia on which we all live and work. CNSA will continue to work together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples to shape a health system that responds to the needs and aspirations of our community.

This submission was authorised by:

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SUBMISSION

QUESTION ONE

What changes to the *Vision* would you suggest?

CNSA would recommend changing the vision to the following: "The nursing workforce is recognised for its critical role in leading and advancing equitable healthcare, especially for underserved populations, and is empowered to innovate, excel, and shape our healthcare system across dynamic and diverse settings." This vision better supports the LEADS framework developed in Australia in 2014 as a healthcare leadership model, recognising the role of nurses in leading themselves, engaging others, achieving outcomes, driving innovation and shaping systems.¹

1. Health LEADS Australia: The Australian health leadership framework / Health Workforce Australia. Adelaide, SA: Health Workforce Australia, July 2013.

QUESTION TWO

What changes would you suggest for each of these Outcomes?

Sufficient supply and distribution of nurses to meet the diverse health needs of the Australian community.

- CNSA recognises the importance of this action and the role of different models of care (e.g., nurse-led care) that could support safe patient care and staffing to meet the diverse needs of the Australian community. It is important to acknowledge that supply and distribution challenges are different in regional, rural and remote areas and models of care appropriate to that setting.
- To understand these challenges CNSA recommends the need to map nursing roles in different areas to support equity of access to care in underserved populations and support collaboration across health professions to support the needs of these communities.

Nursing roles enable the workforce to work to optimum scope of practice and improve access to and experience of person-centred care.

- CNSA recommend that this action be re-worded to the full scope of practice – rather than the optimum scope of practice. It is difficult to define the 'optimum scope of practice' and it is not as widely adopted internationally as the 'full scope of practice'.
- This action requires a whole health system approach that supports nurses to work to their full scope of practice. This will require an understanding of the scope of practice across all health professions to support the right professional to undertake the right task at the right time.
- This action should promote individual accountability for the delivery of person-centred care by all health professionals, rather than emphasise this as the role of nurses. How can the health system best support transformational change to ensure the delivery of patient-centred care.

Improved retention of the nursing workforce

- CNSA calls for this action to be about achieving a sustainable nursing workforce – highlighting the need to address recruitment and retention to meet demand.
- CNSA recommends the urgent need for a comprehensive review of workforce issues impacting recruitment and retention – understanding this will help formulate ways to address this action. Understanding the generational factors and needs of a highly feminised workforce will help address this action. There should be consideration of how to support flexibility in the workplace, retain mature aged workers and leverage them to support the experience-complexity gap.

Positive practice environments which foster diversity, cultural safety and wellbeing.

- CNSA supports this action as a positive practice workplace environment that is open, respectful, collaborative and safe for health professionals, so they feel supported and empowered to do their roles, is important to address workforce sustainability.
- CNSA recommends that to address this action there is a need for wellbeing strategies that are meaningful and driven from the bottom up as well as top down.
- CNSA recommends the need for ongoing assessment of practice environments to enable strategies to be developed at local, state and national levels to support nurse satisfaction and engagement.

Nursing management and leadership engaged in effective decision-making and policy at all levels, in all contexts and valued for its contribution.

- CNSA supports this action, and the valuable role nurses can play in leading policy and decision-making that impacts the future of the healthcare system.
- CNSA recognises the importance of representation of nurses at all levels in policy development and all levels of healthcare governance at an organisational, state and national level.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population parity achieved within the nursing workforce.

- CNSA support this action and would recommend a review of how the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031 (National Workforce Plan) launched in 2022 – has contributed to representation in the health sector. What are the key learnings and challenges identified. This action should build on the work in that strategy.
- What can also be learnt from AHPRA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 2020 – 2025 – how has this strategy addressed workforce representation.

Career and education infrastructure enable nurses to progress their careers and lead and participate in research and innovation in the way they choose.

- CNSA support the importance of this action to support nurses' career progression goals and their ability to contribute to the development of innovative models of care.
- CNSA recommends that changes to the infrastructure include addressing the need for protected dedicated time to participate in research and academic work in nursing roles. This is required to help nurses balance clinical and non-clinical time and support their ability to participate in academia and research. This also recognises the complexity of contemporary care delivery and promotes longevity in roles/retention.
- CNSA recommends that career and education infrastructure enable self and managerial assessment of capabilities required to drive skill and knowledge development in clinical, managerial, research, education and informative nursing roles.

QUESTION THREE

What changes would you suggest for each of these actions?

1.1 Invest in nurse leadership

- CNSA supports this action as it is important to ensure the representation of nurses at all levels of leadership within the healthcare system, including research, policy and advocacy to shape future healthcare reform.
- CNSA recommends the need for investment in strategies that support nursing leadership at all levels of nursing, with clear expectations, skills and competency development and career leadership pathways that empower nurses to take on roles in their workplace and provide leadership and mentorship to their peers and colleagues.

1.2 Grow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurse leadership

- CNSA recommends examining the key learnings from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031 and AHPRA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 2020 – 2025 and how these initiatives have impacted nursing leadership. This action should align with these strategies and the objective of growing the workforce to enable greater representation in leadership roles.

1.3 Adopt anti-racism initiatives in nursing

- CNSA supports this action and the importance of anti-racism initiatives in all health sectors and across all healthcare professions. This action is not just the responsibility of nurses. Education regarding anti-racism and culturally safe care should be provided for all health professionals.
- CNSA recommends that this action be re-framed to address the need for equity for all. There is a need to address other areas of discrimination in the healthcare system, for instance, gender and disability, which affect equity of access to care and outcomes. The aim should be to deliver culturally safe and appropriate care for all people (e.g., LGBTIQ+ people and people with disability) who experience discrimination in the healthcare system.

1.4 Support internationally qualified nurses to transition into Australia's health and aged care system

- CNSA recognise that there is a place for internationally qualified nurses as a component of Australia's healthcare system. However, this should not be the only initiative to address workforce sustainability.
- CNSA recommends consideration of the responsibility of the Australian profession to nursing worldwide, and the unintended consequences of this action, such as the impact on other countries' healthcare systems and international student caps.

1.5 Modernise the identity of nursing

- CNSA support this action but would re-word to 'elevate' or 'contemporise'. The aim of this action should be to raise the profile of nurses among members of the public, policymakers, and other health professionals. There is a need to address current perceptions and stereotypes that impact how nursing is valued in the healthcare care system and community.
- This action should also address the need for recognition of the diversity of nursing roles and individual value to the healthcare system. There is a need to address this from the undergraduate level, empowering future nurses to have a professional voice and engage as role models within the profession.

QUESTION FOUR

What changes would you suggest for each of these actions?

2.1 Implement nationally coordinated nursing workforce data, modelling and planning

- CNSA recognises the importance of this action to support our understanding of the issues of workforce recruitment and retention. A comprehensive national nursing workforce dataset is needed to effectively model and plan for the future needs of the population. Currently, the National Health Workforce Dataset does not collect sufficient information on the diversity of job titles/qualifications, role vacancies, absenteeism, employment of agency/ casual staff, job satisfaction, retention rates and the number of nursing graduates.
- CNSA recognises the importance of this data being collected consistently across all states and territories to provide an accurate and details picture of the workforce and enable modelling and planning to address the specific challenges faced in areas such as remote and regional healthcare settings to deliver targeted actions. There is also a need to consider how data can be linked from both private/public settings.
- CNSA also calls for improved data on progress to clinical specialities and the challenges faced by undergraduates progressing to advanced practice.

2.2 Implement strategies that enhance workforce mobility and flexibility.

- CNSA recommends the need for tailored strategies that address workforce issues of retention and recruitment as they relate to the setting, for instance, these may be different in rural and regional areas to metropolitan centres of excellence.
- This action should also recognise the differences in working conditions of nurses in metropolitan vs regional healthcare systems and how differences in state and territory regulations impact the flexibility and mobility of the workforce.
- CNSA recommends the need for improved partnerships and infrastructure to support nurse exchanges and transfers to address shortages in specific services.
- CNSA would support greater national consistency in nursing job titles and role descriptions to support workforce mobility and the transferability of skills across the workforce.

2.3 Grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing workforce.

- CNSA would recommend examining the impact of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031 and AHPRAs Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 2020 – 2025 and aligning with these strategies.

2.4 Investigate and implement the most contemporary structure of pre-registration courses.

- CNSA would like more information about what is defined by a 'contemporary' structure.

- CNSA recognises the importance of academic institutions working with the healthcare system to understand the needs of the workforce and healthcare system in terms of course content reflecting modern practices.
- Consideration should be given to how best to leverage different learning modalities to fit the needs of the workforce and healthcare system. For instance, finding the right mix of delivery mechanisms, such as online, virtual, face-to-face, simulation and practical to support equity of access for nurses across Australia.

2.5 Facilitate students to access and complete nursing education.

- CNSA recognises the need for supporting student nurses to drive increased recruitment. However, there is a need to also address access to quality postgraduate education for nurses at all stages of their careers to support workforce retention.
- There is a need to consider how to support professional development to allow nurses to undertake further education towards specialisation. This should align with the National Education Quality Framework. There is a need for a novice to proficient pathway for newly qualified nurses and infrastructure to support this in general and specialist settings.

2.6 Adapt student employment models for all health and aged care settings.

- CNSA recognises the importance of this action as it is important to consider how best to support students as they transition to the workforce to ensure retention.
- CNSA recommends that the implementation of this action considers the role of clinical placements, as part of the transition to employment and a pathway to supporting workforce shortages in specific areas. This should be implemented with sufficient financial support for students to complete placements without jeopardising their education. This would enable healthcare socialisation and prepare their readiness to work to their full scope of practice.

2.7 Increase transparency and timeliness of regulatory processes and outcomes.

- CNSA recognises the importance of this action and should involve nurses at all levels in the development of regulations and processes that impact their roles and responsibilities in practice.

2.8 Develop and implement a nationally consistent accreditation process for post-graduate nursing education.

- CNSA recognises the urgent need to invest in postgraduate education of the nursing workforce to ensure the health system benefits from a skilled workforce.
- The implementation of this action should be done in consultation with academic institutions and accrediting bodies to ensure alignment in how this is achieved.
- Consideration should be given to establishing consistent standards for accreditation across different areas of specialty practice in nursing.
- Consideration should also be given to how to support nurses to undertake post-graduate education throughout their career, for instance, financial support and time or leave for study as a protected part of nursing roles.
- CNSA recommends this action be supported by a framework for developing career pathways to specialisation that could help nurses understand the requirements for post-graduate accreditation to help their career progression.

QUESTION FIVE

Which actions in *Priority 3* would you change?

3.1 Prepare and engage the nursing workforce in the innovation and use of emerging technologies.

- CNSA recognises the importance of this action to support the workforce not only to use new technologies in practice but also to play a key role in shaping the development and implementation of new technologies in clinical practice.
- To support the implementation of this action consideration should be given to how best to support the education and training of the workforce to meet the needs of the healthcare system.
- To support the implementation of this action consideration should also be given to how these technologies will impact current models of care and the need for a change management approach to prepare the workforce for the impending impact.

3.2 Grow nurse leadership and involvement in the design and delivery of innovative models of care.

- CNSA supports this action and the important role of nurses in co-designing new models of care as they are best placed to provide insights into current best practices and the impact of innovative technologies.
- CNSA recognises the need for the provision of training in systems thinking, co-design and stakeholder engagement to support nurses in leading the design and delivery of innovative models of care.

3.3 Empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing communities to design workforce initiatives that suit local conditions and community situations.

- CNSA recognises the importance of co-designing an implementation plan for this action with relevant community organisations. In cancer, organisations such as NACCHO and ACCHOs should be involved in developing workforce initiatives to suit the community needs of nurses working in cancer.

3.4 Create and embed funding models that drive evolution and enhancement of nursing practice.

- CNSA supports this action and the need for increased funding for research that could support the development of nurse-led models of care and drive innovations in nursing practice.
- Consideration should be given to how this can be achieved given state and territory funding is siloed within different healthcare systems.

3.5 Enable nurses to work to their optimum scope of practice in all settings.

- CNSA supports this action and supports the role of nurse-led models of care within the healthcare system to deliver clinically focused, autonomous, holistic, comprehensive nursing care in a variety of contexts of practice.
- Consideration should be given to the use of the word 'optimum' as this is not well defined or used internationally, compared to the full scope of practice.
- CNSA recommends the need for a national professional capability matrix that allows for the transferability of skills and knowledge across different roles in any setting.

3.6 Mobilise the nursing workforce to lead and contribute to a sustainable and climate-resilient health and aged care system.

- CNSA recognises that nurses have a role in addressing the impact of climate change on health, but this is not an area nurses should be required to lead and may not be realistic to expect nurses to lead this reform in all healthcare settings.
- CNSA recommends that nurses are represented in sustainability initiatives at a local and organisational level and can provide insights into clinical practice and the impact on patient safety.

QUESTION SIX

Which actions in *Priority 4* would you change?

4.1 Develop a nationally consistent framework for transition to practice.

- CNSA supports this action, and consideration should also be given to the need for a nationally consistent framework for transition to advanced practice not just focussing on the transition from novice to proficient.
- CNSA recommends that health services require a better understanding of the expectations of a newly qualified nurse and how to empower them to succeed and address poor retention due to misalignment in expectations.

4.2 Develop a national professional development framework.

- CNSA recognises that professional development frameworks are needed for different specialist practice nursing pathways. This framework should go beyond clinical specialties to consider how to support nurses in different roles (e.g., manager, leader, health policy, research, and education).
- The implementation of this action should help nurses identify opportunities for career progression by showing different pathways to specialisation of practice and help improve national flexibility and mobility of the workforce. This could be achieved through the development of a national capability matrix.

4.3 Adopt positive practice environment standards in all settings.

- CNSA supports this action as a positive practice workplace environment that is open, respectful, collaborative and safe for health professionals, so they feel supported and empowered to do their roles, which is important to address workforce sustainability.
- CNSA recommends the need to develop validated tools to measure the impact on the workforce and enable strategies to be implemented successfully.

4.4 Develop a national career framework.

- CNSA recognises the need for a national career framework and suggests each area of nursing practice/ specialisation should be responsible for developing a framework to reflect the education and career pathway relevant to that workforce. For instance, CNSA is currently developing a Cancer Nursing Career/Education Framework this could be used as an example for other specialities to build on this framework.
- The implementation of this action would be best supported by a nationally consistent approach to nursing job titles, roles and awards. Current discrepancies are an issue that directly impacts workforce mobility, flexibility and the development of a national career framework. Discrepancies across different healthcare systems and jurisdictions in nursing job titles and qualifications lead to discrepancies in pay rates in inequities. There is now an opportunity to contemplate the need for consolidating nursing job titles and role descriptions to elucidate their value and function and the benefits of a cohesive professional development pathway.

4.5 Build and grow nurse clinical-academic/research career pathways.

- CNSA supports the importance of supporting nurses to pursue academic and research careers. It is important to emphasise that all nurses should be aware of the importance of academia and research in driving nursing specialisation and how their experience and expertise can contribute.
- To achieve this action there is a need for a significant shift in the workforce and healthcare system culture to support clinical academic and research nursing career pathways and overcome the challenges nurses experience in engaging in these roles. The development of a research career framework for nurses would help build recognition of these career pathways.
- CNSA recommend that this action will require an understanding of the shortfall in academic/research nursing positions in the higher education sector, identify opportunities for sustainable funding of research roles and support the transition from clinical roles, such as mentor programs and scholarships.

4.6 Develop a dedicated rural and remote recruitment and retention strategy (inclusive of students).

- CNSA recognises the importance of this action and the need for strategies that support increased workforce recruitment and retention in these areas.
- CNSA recommends investment in clinical placements, financial incentive programs, and secondments for nurses to work across different healthcare system settings as part of their career development and pathway to specialisation. This will also require partnerships across regional/metro healthcare services to support skills and expertise building and potential secondments.

QUESTION SEVEN

What could be changed to ensure the actions can be applied/implemented to your sector or area of work?

CNSA is concerned that the role of nurses in research and academia is not adequately addressed but should be considered fundamental to achieving many of the goals outlined in this strategy. Nursing is a science-based healthcare profession, but there are insufficient actions to address the current lack of funding and support for nursing research to drive innovations in healthcare.

QUESTION EIGHT

Can you see the link between the actions and the strategy's vision to improve the health and wellbeing of all Australians?

Yes

QUESTION NINE

Please provide any further feedback you may have in the text box below.

CNSA recognises the significant amount of work that has gone into developing this strategy to accurately reflect the needs of the nursing workforce and is encouraged by the progress made to date.

CNSA understands the urgent need for an implementation plan to support this strategy and is keen to continue to participate in this work and understand how the nursing workforce can shape this plan. This implementation plan must be a system-wide approach that is developed with a clear understanding of the current system and be informed by consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including the government, workforce, healthcare system administrators, consumers, and academic institutions.

CNSA recognises the importance that an implementation plan should be transparent and clearly outlines the process for monitoring key performance indicators and measurable outcomes aligned to the proposed actions outlined in the strategy and how this will be reported back to the workforce and the public. It is also important that there is clarity around national initiatives and the responsibility of states/territories to undertake specific elements to ensure they are appropriate at the local health system level and the health needs of the population.