



Health and Community Services Workforce Council Submission

Productivity Commission Issues Paper: Geographic Labour Mobility

August 2013

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About the Health and Community Services Workforce Council

The Health and Community Services Workforce Council (Workforce Council) is a peak body for Queensland's health and community services workforce. The Workforce Council is a not-for-profit peak body that leads workforce planning and development in the Health and Community Services Industries in Queensland. We have extensive experience in facilitating regional networks, coalitions and alliances of employers across Queensland to build workforce capacity, prioritise regional workforce development needs and respond accordingly. We work with a range of employers, education and training providers, government agencies, peak bodies, and professional associations to develop a sustainable workforce for the future.

Though our role as the Industry Skills Body for Health and Community Services in Queensland the Workforce Council provides advice and services to Government and to industry on a range of workforce development and skills matters across the vocational education and training and higher education sectors. This includes the identification of emerging skills needs, skills investment advice, and sector and regional workforce planning and development activities.

The Health and Community Services Workforce Council welcomes the Productivity Commission's study into geographic labour mobility in Australia. This study will provide an insight into a people's ability to work in a particular physical location from a political, economic and social perspective. Geographic labour mobility has important implications for the Australian economy in areas such as increasing supply of labour and productivity. As geographic labour mobility improves, so do the lives of people around Australia. People are able to find better paying jobs and improve their living situations. At the same time, businesses improve because employees receive better training and the right employee can be hired.

Health and Community Services industry role in labour mobility ...

Labour mobility is critical if structural shifts in economic activity are to be facilitated effectively. In particular, labour mobility is critical to meeting skills and labour shortages in regions, particularly in regions where activity may ebb and flow in response to significant projects such as mines. It is said that people will move to regional communities for employment, but they will stay for liveability and will leave where there is a lack of accessible services. Provision of human services is a critical enabler of labour mobility.

Health and Community Services is one of the few industries that has a strong representation across all regions. Our economic and employment contribution is spread across all communities and our ongoing presence in each of these communities provides stability and sustainability.

Regional presence is important for a number of reasons – provision of employment opportunities encourages retention of population, and encourages new growth. Health and community services workers both work and live in the local community. Wages earned are spent locally, and individuals support local communities.

Employers in the Health and Community Services Industry are critical players in local supply chains, supporting a range of enterprises. This has the added result of broadening the economic base of regional economies especially in resource intensive regions, helping to protect against the hollowing out of these economies.

The social contribution of the Health and Community Services is critical to maintain community health and wellbeing, supporting liveable communities. Liveability is a critical element in encouraging population and therefore economic growth.

Challenges....

One of the biggest challenges facing the Health and Community Services industry in Queensland is the attraction and retention of high quality workforce in rural and remote regions.

The shortages in health and community services workforces in regional, rural and remote Queensland remain acute. The Workforce Council has previously reported that despite the Industry's size and ongoing growth of its workforce, its contribution to the economy and to the health and well-being of Queenslanders, it is not constructively involved in regional planning particularly for rural and remote areas. This is of growing concern as the workforce sustainability, skilling and liveability issues which already exist in rural and remote areas continue; in some regions they are being exacerbated by the transient workforces of the resource and mining industries (for example, Fly-in Fly-out).

The rural and remote workforce is also ageing and in some occupations retiring earlier than its south-east Queensland counterparts. As mentioned previously in this report, the

ageing of the health and community services workforce has serious implications for sustainable health service delivery and implications for attracting and retaining a younger workforce. These issues are prevalent throughout Queensland but are even more pressing for health and community services workforces in rural and remote areas¹.

Self-directed models of care will increase casualisation of work and consequent decreased ability, particularly for smaller organisations, to offer permanent, full time work². In regional Queensland, the Health and Community Services Industry is already facing challenges related to recruitment and retention in resource intensive regions, in part due to competitive salaries and employment opportunities by other Industry employers. These are challenges that must be overcome if we are to retain strong regions.

A regional workforce planning response...

Considering the role robust Health and Community Services infrastructure has in ensuring liveable communities for employees of all industries, planning for a sustainable Health and Community Services workforce needs to be elevated in the strategic regional and workforce planning and approaches of organisations, industries and regions.

Despite the evidence of its size and growth, the Health and Community Services Industry is often overlooked in planning and by programs designed to improve productivity and create employment outcomes to benefit the economy.

Policy and planning approaches that value investment in building the capacity of all industries to undertake workforce planning and development collaboratively will result in legitimate industry led systems to determine supply and demand factors and drive effective policy and purchasing interventions across all industries.

In addressing these challenges, the Health and Community Services Industry needs to become an integral part of the planning processes in a more strategic and intentional way than it has been to date to ensure that the Industry is equipped with a workforce skilled and ready to sustain economic and social prosperity.

¹ Health Workforce Australia (May 2013), National Rural and Remote Health Workforce Innovation and Reform Strategy, p11.

² NDS (March 2013) State of the Sector Report, p.11

In conclusion, there is an urgent need to investigate models of integrated workforce planning for communities in regional areas in Australia. Regional development programs tend to focus on developments taking place in other industries, for example retail and mining, while overlooking those in the health and community services. There is a need to raise the awareness of opportunities development in the Health and Community Services Industry can provide to support local sustained employment, improve local service delivery and boost local economies.

Data Sources...

The Productivity Commission should draw on the following primary data sources (including long-distance commuting, telecommuting and working from home):

- ABS Census of Population and Housing
- ABS Labour Mobility
- ABS Migration
- ABS Labour Force
- Household, Income and Labour Dynamics (HILDA) survey
- NCVET Longitudinal Surveys of Youth (LSAY)

The Census of Population and Housing is the largest statistical collection undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and one of the most important. Census statistics are used as the basis for estimating the population at the national, state and local government levels, for electoral purposes and the distribution of government funds. They are used by individuals and organisations in the public and private sectors, for planning, administration, research, and decision making. One of the important features of the Census is that it allows different characteristics of an individual, family or household to be related. While information on some characteristics is available from other sources, only a Census can provide information on a standard basis for the country as a whole, as well as for small geographic areas and small population groups.

The ABS Labour Mobility survey provides information on people who either had a change of employer/ business in their main job, or had some change in work with their current employer/ business, for who they had worked for one year or more. However, the ABS Migration survey brings together statistics on international migration into and out of Australia, internal migration within Australia (including interstate and intrastate) and information on overseas-born residents of Australia. The ABS Labour Force surveys collect estimates of the civilian labour force derived from the Labour Force Survey component of the Monthly Population Survey. The conceptual framework used in Australia's Labour

Force Survey aligns closely with the standards and guidelines set out in Resolutions of International Conferences of Labour Statisticians.

HILDA covers a range of topics including, but not limited to, such things as: life satisfaction, health outcomes, fertility, neighbourhood characteristics, time usage and work-family balance. The primary objective of the HILDA Survey is to support research questions falling within three broad areas:

1. income dynamics - with a particular focus on how households respond to policy changes aimed at improving financial incentives, and interactions between changes in family status and poverty
2. labour market dynamics - with a focus on low-to-middle income households, female participation, and work to retirement transitions and
3. family dynamics - focusing on family formation, well-being and separation, along with post-separation arrangements for children and links between income support and family formation and dissolution.

The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) track young people as they move from school into further study, work and other destinations. It uses large, nationally representative samples of young people to collect information about education and training, work, and social development. Information collected as part of LSAY covers a wide range of school and post-school topics, including: student achievement, student aspirations, school retention, social background, attitudes to school, work experiences and what students are doing when they leave school. This includes vocational and higher education, employment, job seeking activity, and satisfaction with various aspects of their lives.

The advantages of different data sources will improve the overall comprehensiveness of the assessment. Different data sources also help minimise possible data gaps, however, the disadvantage of using different data sources will be a reduction in comparability and appropriateness. The limitation of the data sources will be timeliness and geographic scope (i.e. What ASGS/geographic level?). Apart from available data sources, the Commission should also consider exploring statistical data integration which involves combining information from different administrative and/or survey sources to provide new datasets for statistical and research purposes. Statistical data integration creates new opportunities to use existing data for research, reducing the need to collect additional information from people and organisations.

The Health and Community Services Workforce Council believes that one of the outcomes of the Commission's study should be the conceptualisation of a geographic labour mobility framework (similar to the ABS Labour Mobility Framework) which can be

compared over time and also against other countries. Thus the use of reliable and timely data sources will be important in developing a strong conceptual framework.