

# Mental Health Workforce Reform Program



## Mental Health Workforce Reform Program Overview

Mental illness is among the ten leading causes of disease in Australia and demand for mental health services is increasing. Mental illness and mental health difficulties can have a significant impact on people and communities, and come at a considerable economic and social cost. People with serious mental illness often have poor overall health, and experience exclusion from housing, employment, and other areas of social participation.

A skilled and sustainable workforce is a key element of effective mental health service delivery. Health Workforce Australia (HWA) is undertaking a Mental Health Workforce Reform program to make the best use of the skills and expertise of the mental health workforce, supporting positive health outcomes for people using these services.

The program will:

- Improve understanding of the current workforce to inform planning.
- Establish agreed mental health workforce capabilities.
- Identify steps to strengthen the current peer workforce.

For consumers, families and carers, the program will support a flexible mental health workforce that is better prepared to deliver recovery-focused services and better uses emerging roles, including peer workers.

**The Mental Health Workforce Reform Program aims to deliver integrated workforce reform initiatives to improve the productivity, distribution and capacity of the mental health workforce.**



Art Therapy Group run by peer workers at Uniting Care Wesley, SA

The program consists of three distinct projects:

### National Mental Health Core Capabilities

The National Mental Health Core Capabilities (NMHCC) are designed to:

- Articulate and define requirements for work across mental health services and the workforce continuum.
- Provide a supporting mechanism for workforce planning, redesign and development priorities.
- Contribute to workforce innovation, reform and capability development across the mental health sector.

The NMHCC will identify and describe expected workforce behaviours across mental health services, at different levels. Behaviours will vary with the level of training, experience and responsibility of the worker. The capabilities will include a range of different workforce groups, including nurses, occupational therapists, peer workers, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers. The capabilities will complement HWA's National Common Health Capability Resource and the National Practice Standards for the Mental Health Workforce.

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### Mental Health Workforce Study

The Mental Health Workforce Study will:

- Produce a mental health workforce data inventory.
- Develop profession specific workforce projections and descriptive reports where projections cannot be developed.
- Enable sector workforce planning (dependent on the release of National Mental Health Service Planning Framework, a project funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, and being led by the NSW Ministry of Health in partnership with Queensland Health and other jurisdictions).

### Mental Health Peer Workforce Study

Benefits for using mental health peer workers range from increased understanding and empowerment for people using the services to decreased hospital admissions. The Mental Health Peer Workforce Study will make recommendations to strengthen and develop this workforce as an important component of quality, recovery-focused mental health services.

The project has included a number of site visits and telephone interviews with organisations across Australia employing mental health peer workers. The meetings and interviews have enabled a greater depth of understanding about mental health peer work, and the many different roles and services that are currently operating. Issues discussed with peer workers and managers included roles, responsibilities, benefits and challenges and future requirements for the workforce.

In addition to the site visits and telephone interviews, HWA conducted a literature scan and a mental health peer workforce online survey. The survey received 305 responses and provided valuable information on the current mental health peer workforce in Australia.

The mental health peer workforce study report is currently being developed and will contain a number of recommendations to support the development of the mental health peer workforce role in the future. It is expected that the report will be made available in late 2013 following consideration by the HWA Board.

To find out more:

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