

Nursing

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN NURSING HEALTH AND AGEING

Nurses comprise 50% of the health workforce and play a major role in providing care to sick Australians. Indeed, Australia's health system would not be able to function without the many and varied contributions that nurses make.

Australians hold nurses in high regard. They are highly skilled individuals that not only give much needed day to day care but also provide vital medical services that require expert judgements and extensive training. Nurses advocate for their patients, help them negotiate the often complex health system, educate people about their health needs, as well as provide necessary medical care.

Our Action Plan

- Create the position of a chief nursing officer at a national level
- Medicare rebates for nurse practitioner consultations for an agreed range of conditions and services
- Long range nursing workforce planning
- Development of new models of care, which are underpinned by multidisciplinary cross-professional collaboration and include greater autonomy, involvement in clinical decision making for nurses
- Improved working conditions for nurses, including better pay; mentoring of new staff; more developed career pathways; flexible rostering and family friendly work practices and better access to child care
- Increase the number of fully funded HECS undergraduate nursing places
- Provide 200 scholarships a year for nurse practitioner trainees
- Expand re-entry and refresher programs
- Expand nurse practitioner outreach services to rural areas
- Specific incentive measures to encourage nurses to take up positions in rural areas, such as sign-on bonuses, assistance with appointment and relocation expenses, accommodation assistance, increased recreation and professional development leave and salary packaging options
- Provide support mechanisms, such as mentors, roving nurse specialists and clinical nurse consultants, for nurses working in isolated locations
- Initiatives that encourage greater participation in the nursing workforce by Indigenous Australians
- Develop and implement measures that accurately reflect the time and skills necessary to provide appropriate levels of care in different settings
- Wage parity for nurses working in all sectors

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The Issues

Australia is facing shortages in nursing staff in many settings and this is predicted to become worse over the coming decades.

47% of the nursing workforce is over the age of 45 and many nurses are likely to retire in the next 10-20 years.

Australia urgently needs additional nursing places in our universities if we are to meet future needs.

It has been estimated that over the next ten years Australia will require up to 13 500 new registered nurses each year but less than half of that are completing training every year.

9669 prospective student nurses were not able to access a university place between 2004 and 2006.

Government support for nursing as a career has declined in recent years and nurses are leaving the workforce for many reasons including lack of autonomy, safety, limits to nurses' capacity to function professionally as nurses with current staffing shortages, limited recognition of nurses' skills and knowledge, lack of access to child care, shiftwork, and conditions of pay.

There are at least 23, 000 registered and enrolled nurses who are not working as nurses.

Maternal and child health nurses play a particularly vital role in providing young families with a good start in life and in picking up early problems with learning and socialisation yet their work is often overlooked by the Federal Government.

Nurses in aged care are paid less than nurses in other sectors and are facing increasing workloads as skilled staff move into other settings where work conditions are more favourable. It is not currently possible for personal carers to upgrade their qualifications to nursing without exiting aged care.

Nurses work in many different settings and specialisations such as hospitals, schools, doctor's surgeries and in the community and are often close to the needs and wishes of the people they care for.

Highly skilled nurses are under-utilised in preventive and primary health care because there are no rebates for their services through Medicare or other public funding. This represents a lost opportunity, particularly in those areas where GPs and bulk billing are in short supply.