

27 January 2011

Budget Policy Division
Department of the Treasury
Langton Crescent
PARKES ACT 2600

Email: prebudgetsubs@treasury.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

2012-13 Federal Budget Submission

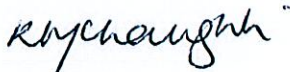
Royal College of Nursing, Australia (RCNA) is pleased to provide a submission for consideration in the preparation of the Australian Government 2012 – 2013 Budget.

RCNA is the peak professional organisation for nurses in Australia. RCNA represents nurses across all areas of practice throughout Australia. RCNA has members in all states and territories of Australia, and internationally. A not-for-profit organisation, RCNA provides a voice for nursing by advocating on health issues that affect nurses and the community. With representation on government committees and health advisory bodies, RCNA is recognised as a key centre of influence in the health policy arena in Australia. When health policy decisions are made, RCNA presents a professional nursing perspective, independent of political allegiance.

The attached submission outlines a number of priority areas for funding allocation that reflects the centrality of the nursing and midwifery professions in the provision of health care for all Australians. The predominant role of the professions across the health system and their direct influence on community health outcomes requires that much greater strategic resource investment is directed to initiatives that will secure the workforce capacity of nursing and midwifery into the future.

Thank you for considering RCNA's views. Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information or discussion. I look forward to release of the Federal Budget later this year.

Yours sincerely



Kathleen McLaughlin FRCNA
Deputy CEO
Director, Operations

Attachment

Federal Budget submission 2012-13

Priorities

1. Workforce

A National Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Strategy does not currently exist and is critical for future health workforce planning.

Strategic investment in primary health care (PHC) nursing and midwifery roles, services and service infrastructure outside the general practice environment must be provided to enable national PHC reform.

Structured, flexible and dedicated mentoring support mechanisms for graduates and early career nurses and midwives across the health system is vital for sustainable nursing and midwifery workforces.

2. Environment

E-health teaching, training and change management and IT Infrastructure support, particularly in aged care, community health services outside general practice, and sub-acute services is urgently required.

The aged care workforce must not only be of adequate size to meet needs but must be appropriately skilled and educated. Professional development for the entire aged care workforce must be available and accessible.

An increased number of specialised advanced practice nurse and nurse practitioner positions across aged care environments is urgently required.

A national practice framework for unlicensed care workers to establish practice, career and education pathways into nursing is required.

Rural nursing and midwifery work environments and lifestyles must be assessed to support the recruitment and retention of rural nursing and midwifery workforces required by rural communities.

3. Research

A national research repository for the nursing and midwifery professions is critical to support evidence-based practice.

An exclusive nursing and midwifery research fund must be established.

Priorities

1. Workforce

Development of a National Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Strategy

Recommendation: That funding be allocated for the development of a National Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Strategy to be commissioned by the Australian Government.

Issue: Nursing and midwifery workforce planning in Australia lacks national coordination which is a key and limiting factor in the scope of system-wide health care service reform. A National Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Strategy that extends beyond workforce numbers is urgently required to secure appropriately prepared and skilled nursing and midwifery workforces for the future.

A primary focus of the strategy would need to address workforce retention. As part of this, the strategy must acknowledge the need for the nursing and midwifery professions to be well supported into the workplace, mentored and retained if future workforce demands are to be met. The strategy must also examine opportunities to work with and support other levels of health care workers.

Way forward: Targeted funding for the development of a national workforce strategy exclusively for the nursing and midwifery workforces would strengthen the development of flexible, sustainable nursing and midwifery workforces that are educationally prepared to meet changing population health care needs and predicted nurse workforce shortages.

Investment in primary health care nursing and midwifery roles, services and service infrastructure outside general practice

Recommendation: Strategic investment in primary health care (PHC) nursing and midwifery roles, services and service infrastructure outside the general practice environment be provided to enable national PHC reform.

Issue: There is a need to build capacity within PHC nursing and midwifery services, service infrastructure and within the PHC nursing and midwifery workforces to prepare the nursing and midwifery professions to better meet the health care needs of underserved communities and to deliver more responsive

services designed to support the national health care reform agenda.

There has been a lack of long-term strategic investment in PHC nursing and midwifery over recent years. This, coupled with an ageing nursing and midwifery workforce, presents a major challenge to ensuring the supply of PHC nursing and midwifery expertise and services into the future. There is a clear case for priority investment in PHC nursing and midwifery to secure the supply of these specialised professional groups as the unique services they deliver will form a key part of the future PHC system. Strategic investment to develop new and existing nursing and midwifery roles and service delivery options within PHC is central to realising the patient and family centred Australian health care system envisaged by the Australian Government.

It is critical that any future national investment in PHC nursing and midwifery must not be limited to the provision of funding through general practice as this model imposes significant limitation on the reach, accessibility and flexibility of nursing and midwifery services. Resources must be allocated to PHC nursing and midwifery services outside general practice to ensure effective and much needed holistic preventative health and health promotion services are provided.

Way forward:

Investment in PHC nursing through:

- establishing funding for community-based and interdisciplinary clinical educational experiences
- strategic scoping and development of new and expanded roles for nurses and midwives within the PHC sector
- undertaking a national examination of nursing and midwifery services and infrastructure to identify opportunity for service alignment and service development
- integrating nursing and midwifery services with other health services through communication, referral and infrastructure supports
- funding the establishment of new nursing and midwifery roles within the sector.

Embedding nursing and midwifery mentorship across the health system

Recommendation:

Resources be allocated to provide structured, flexible and dedicated mentoring support mechanisms for graduates and early career nurses and midwives across the health system.

Issue:

In 2008, the Australian Government through COAG recognised the critical need for clinical leadership to support undergraduate nursing students and the link this has with workforce satisfaction and retention, when it committed funds to help train 18,000 nursing supervisors over four years. This commitment must be followed by a commitment to fund effective mentorship programs for graduates and early career nurses and midwives. Such programs will promote personal and professional development

and support the retention of nurses and midwives in the health care system.

Providing structured, flexible and dedicated support mechanisms for graduates and early career nurses and midwives to support a professionally rewarding transition from university or TAFE to the workplace, is an essential and pro-active retention strategy. In order to attract and retain graduates and early career nurses and midwives, nursing and midwifery services need the resources to establish formalised, effective and robust mentorship programs that include access to nurse educators.

Way forward: Mentoring programs within nursing and midwifery are valuable professional development and workforce recruitment and retention tools. Allocating funds to a national initiative to formalise and embed nursing and midwifery mentoring programs across the health sector, including primary health care and aged care, presents an important workforce reform opportunity.

2. Environments

Information technology

Recommendation: Adequate funding and resources be made available to health care service providers to support e-health teaching, training and change management and IT infrastructure support, particularly in aged care, community health services outside general practice, and sub-acute services that have received insufficient investment to date.

Issue: The advancement of e-health opportunities to support health care delivery requires health professionals to have access to IT infrastructure, improved IT literacy, and professional development for the uptake of and implementation of e-health initiatives. Without full engagement from health professionals across a diverse range of models and settings, the potential successes of e-health initiatives will not be realised in the health care reform agenda.

Way forward: RCNA recommends the introduction of national standards relating to information technology and computer skills to ensure future e-health systems are optimised and funding for infrastructure and training be provided.

Incentives for specialised nursing roles across aged care

Recommendation: Funding incentives be provided to establish an increased number of specialised advanced practice nurse and nurse practitioner positions across aged care environments.

Issue: Current approaches to managing health care needs within aged care are not keeping pace with demand. Resources must be allocated to promote the expansion of nursing roles to manage the prevention of health breakdown, rehabilitation, palliative care, mental health and support for the general frailty associated with ageing. Nurses have developed expertise in holistic aged care and have the systems knowledge and clinical skill-base to lead interdisciplinary and cross-sector teams to provide world class aged care services. To date, however, the health system has failed to capitalise on the opportunity to make better use of this body of expertise.

Specialised advanced practice nurses and nurse practitioners are able to provide a holistic approach in the provision of aged care with an emphasis on illness prevention. Greater utilisation of their skills would significantly assist in easing the burden of managing aged care through public hospitals and general practice.

Way forward: The development of specific incentives for health providers to create new and expanded nursing roles within the aged care sector. This will help to provide aged care services where currently none exist, or are difficult to access, as well as ease the pressure experienced by hospitals and general practices, which are attempting to meet the service needs of ageing communities. These incentives should expand choices for ageing and older people.

Development of aged care workforce

Recommendation: The Australian Government promote skill development through an expansion of accredited courses to provide aged care workers at all levels with the skills they need, including; advanced clinical courses for nurses, vocational training for care workers entering the sector and looking to upgrade their skills, and management courses for health and care workers entering management roles.

Issue: As recommended in the Productivity Commission 2011, *Caring for Older Australians* significant reform to the aged care system is needed if it is to meet the challenges of an older and increasingly diverse population. The aged care workforce must not only be of adequate size to meet needs but must be appropriately skilled and educated. Professional development for the entire aged care workforce must be

accessible and available. The Productivity Commission has made such recommendations that require government investment.

RCNA recommends that the professional development and up-skilling of registered nurses in aged care needs focus and investment, including funding for education

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- Way forward:** The professional development of the aged care workforce must be based on evidence-based practice. There is also a need for culture change:
- There is a need to look at cutting-edge approaches for professional development opportunities to broaden its reach.
 - There must be appreciation that professional development is about the development of the workforce as a group not only of the individual.

Framework for unlicensed care workers

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- Recommendation:** Funding be allocated to scope and develop a national practice framework for unlicensed care workers to establish practice, career and education pathways into nursing.

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- Issue:** RCNA continues to stress the importance of investment in this area. There are currently no requirements that vocational qualifications are necessary for employment. Aged care facility staff without qualification heighten the responsibility of employers to ensure safe work practices. In order to protect the health and safety of the public, there is a need to ensure that unlicensed care workers are appropriately qualified and skilled to undertake tasks associated with supporting nursing care. A practice framework would support unlicensed care workers and the nurses to whom they report in the delivery of competent and safe care.

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- Way forward:** A nationally endorsed practice framework for unlicensed care workers (both qualified and not) that includes codes of ethics, codes of conduct and competency standards would assist and guide unlicensed care workers and the nurses to whom they report in the delivery of competent and safe care.

Assessment of rural nursing and midwifery work environments and lifestyles

Recommendation: Funding be allocated for a national rural nursing and midwifery work environments and lifestyles assessment to be undertaken in 2012.

Issue: There are a range of attractive national incentives targeting the recruitment of medical professionals into rural health care settings. However, due to the relative stability of the nursing and midwifery workforce, there are currently no equivalent measures in place to attract the best possible nursing and midwifery workforce to rural areas.

As the peak representative body for nurses and midwives working and living in rural areas, RCNA is continually advised that the rural workforce is not only under great pressure in the professional environment, but also suffers sub-standard living arrangements and lifestyle options.

Professionally, poor access to continuing professional development programs, pressure to diversify and expand services in the absence of additional resources and a lack of professional support are common concerns, and in relation to lifestyle, poor accommodation and few social options are regularly reported. Investment must be made now to ensure a sustainable rural nursing and midwifery workforce into the future.

Way forward: Through robust assessment, form a comprehensive understanding of the professional and lifestyle experiences of nurses and midwives working in rural Australia to ensure policy development appropriately responds to the needs of the workforce. This is an important step towards securing the best possible health workforce to meet the growing needs of rural communities and to ensure an adequate workforce supply to deliver on anticipated national health care reforms.

3. Research

Establishment of a national research repository for nursing and midwifery

Recommendation: Funding be allocated to scope the establishment of a national research repository for the nursing and midwifery professions.

Issue: Currently there is no single nationally centralised repository for nursing and midwifery research. The result of this is poor information sharing and knowledge transfer relevant to nursing and midwifery within and across the health and education sectors.

It is essential that nursing and midwifery policy and practice development is supported by a strong evidence base. Such evidence must be easily accessible and promulgated to promote continual improvement and quality and safety of health care throughout health services.

As the peak national professional organisation for nurses in Australia, RCNA is best placed to scope the establishment of a research repository for nursing and midwifery. RCNA is also suitably experienced in national program management and it is, therefore, proposed that the future repository be held within and administered by RCNA.

Way forward: A national repository for nursing and midwifery research will improve the collection, dissemination and communication of research findings and effectively strengthen the knowledge base of nurses and midwives.

Dedicated funding for nursing and midwifery research

Recommendation: A national funding initiative be developed exclusively for nursing and midwifery research.

Issue: Nursing and midwifery research is currently significantly underfunded. Accessing funding is a major barrier as nursing research is often situated within the health services research category, as is the case with National Health and Medical Research Council grants, and this category only represents 2% of allocated funds.

Lessons can be learnt from international experience. For example, over the past 10 years there has been dedicated nursing research funding in Canada that has resulted in a significant boost in nursing research output and has had a positive impact on generation of evidence and knowledge for better patient care.

Way forward: The future Australian health care system will be less dependent on curative models and more contingent upon enhanced nursing, midwifery and allied health roles within services. This new environment must be supported by quality nursing and midwifery research and data to promote the development of nursing and midwifery expertise and to ensure reflective practice and continual improvement. Dedicated nursing and midwifery research funding is required to ensure the professions are able to undertake research.

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