



6 June 2014

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Level 11, 257 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
PO Box 38
Flinders Lane VIC 8009
T: (03) 8662 3300
F: (03) 9663 6177
www.psychology.org.au

To whom it may concern

Re: Health Workforce Australia (Abolition) Bill 2014

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) wishes to express concern at the potential consequences of the Health Workforce Australia (Abolition) Bill 2014. The APS is particularly keen to ensure that the gains made by Health Workforce Australia (HWA) in relation to the health workforce are not lost in the transfer of operations to the Department of Health (the Department).

One of the most important actions undertaken by HWA has been to raise the importance of collecting quality workforce data to guide workforce capacity building and reform. HWA has conducted a number of important workforce studies and projects for the various health professions, including psychology. However, there is still a considerable amount of work to be done to improve the quality of this data collection so that it can be of assistance to workforce planners. This work must continue in order for Australia to be able to address the critical health workforce issues facing the nation.

HWA has also been seminal in approaching health workforce reform from a whole-of-workforce perspective. That is, while much of their work has focused on the medical and nursing workforce, action has occurred across the spectrum of health professions. This has included a broad range of allied health professions and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers. This whole-of-workforce approach is vital to build the capacity of the health workforce to meet the emerging health needs of the population, particularly in relation to the management of chronic illness. This broad focus on reform must continue.

HWA has adopted a comprehensive consultative approach to all their activities and this intensive engagement with stakeholders will need to be continued by the Department in order to achieve effective and sustainable outcomes. This consultative approach must continue to be applied to the legacy projects that will be inherited by the Department as well as to newly commissioned projects. The APS is concerned that there is a possibility that intensive engagement with stakeholders may be in jeopardy given the increased workload on the Department.

The APS is also concerned about the impact of the transferral of HWA to the Department on clinical education. It is critical that the work commenced by HWA in this area is continued and expanded in order to meet the continuing crisis in accessing clinical placements. There is potential for the focus on clinical education to be reduced as a result of the cessation of funding for the Clinical Training Funding (CTF) Programⁱ. The APS

understands that the CTF program is designed to expand clinical training opportunities especially in the aged care, mental health and primary/community care sectors. The cessation of the CTF program may exacerbate workforce shortages in these sectors. The focus on growing opportunities for clinical education, particularly for these sectors, must continue given that the demand for services for the aged, people with mental illness and chronic illness are rapidly expanding.

It is hoped that transferral of the functions of HWA to the Department will facilitate strategic alignment between workforce research, policy development and implementation. To this end, the APS urges the Australian Government to continue to consult with professional bodies such as the APS in the collection, analysis and evaluation of workforce data and trends. Issues such as workforce distribution, models of education and training are best resolved through collaboration between policy makers, regulators and professional bodies. This is particularly so for professions such as psychology, whose services are in growing demand.

Please do not hesitate to contact Professor Lyn Littlefield if you require further information on any matters raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely

Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM FAPS

Executive Director

¹ 2014-2015 Budget Papers No. 2, retrieved from http://www.budget.gov.au/2014-15/content/bp2/html/bp2_expense-14.htm