A Framework for the classification of the Health Professional Workforce

_Summary statement_

Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health
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How is ‘allied health’ defined?

SARRAH recognises that allied health professionals are:
- Tertiary qualified health professionals who apply their skills and knowledge to restore and maintain optimal physical, sensory, psychological, cognitive and social function. They are aligned to each other and their clients.

Professions may include, but are not limited to:
- Audiology, Nutrition & Dietetics, Exercise Physiology, Medical Radiation Science (Medical Imaging, Radiation Therapy, Nuclear Medicine), Occupational Therapy, Optometry, Orthoptics, Orthotics, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Podiatry, Psychology, Social Work, and Speech Pathology.

What is a profession?

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<th>The Collins Dictionary of Business(^{(13)}) defines 'professional' as:</th>
<th>A person with a recognized set of skills and knowledge which qualifies them to practise a certain occupation. Usually this knowledge is gained from lengthy training and is certified by examination, often by a professional association. This pattern of entry to an occupation is similar to that of apprenticeships; however, the professions are usually understood to be those occupations which are located at the top of the occupational structure in terms of status, for example doctors, architects, lawyers etc. In so far as professional associations (for example the Dietetics Association of Australia) stipulate the form and content of training and examination, they define the nature of the job tasks and the work standards that should be achieved and they control entry into the profession. Once individuals have been admitted to the profession it is customary in most instances for them to join the association.</th>
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**SARRAH works with the following framework to classify the Australian Health Professional Workforce**

Planning to meet the health needs for the Australian ageing population both now and in the future is high on the national agenda. Health workforce reform is part of the Council of Australian
Government national agenda\(^1\) as they move to implement recommendations from their Productivity Commission Research Report on the Australian Health Workforce\(^2\). To facilitate workforce planning and reform, there is an urgent need to further categorise the disciplines within the broader health professional workforce.

SARRAH has written a discussion paper to put forward the following framework to classify the Australian Health Professional Workforce\(^3\).

The Australian Health Professional Workforce comprises the following categories:

(i) **Medical Professions**

Health professionals must meet the following criteria in order to be part of the medical health professional workforce:

- *Health professionals who have obtained an entry level medical degree from a recognised university;*
- *Health professionals who are required to obtain specific qualifications to obtain State or Territory registration.*

(ii) **Nursing Professions**

Health professionals must meet the following criteria in order to be part of the nursing health professional workforce:

- *Health professionals who have obtained an entry level nursing degree from a recognised university;*
- *Health professionals who are required to obtain specific qualifications to obtain State or Territory registration.*

(iii) **Allied Health Professions**

Health professionals must meet the following criteria in order to be part of the allied health professional workforce:

- *Tertiary qualified health professionals who apply their skills and knowledge to restore and maintain optimal physical, sensory, psychological, cognitive and social function;*
- *Health professionals who use best available evidence and clinical reasoning skills whilst working directly with patients to restore and optimize function on an individual basis*
- *Health professionals who have obtained an accredited entry level degree from a recognised university;*
- *Health professionals who are required to obtain specific qualifications to obtain State or Territory registration; license or accreditation to practice; or to join the relevant professional association;*

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Health professionals who are ‘allied’ or aligned to each other, other members of the health professional workforce, health consumers, the consumer’s family and others carers, and with the community, working together as part of a multidisciplinary team to achieve best practice outcomes for the client across the health system;

(iv) Oral Health Professions

Health professionals must meet the following criteria in order to be part of the oral health professional workforce:

- Health professionals who are involved in dental and oral health services incorporating both direct and indirect patient care;
- Health professionals whose core activity is working with clients/consumers/patients on a direct, individual basis;
- Health professionals who have obtained an accredited entry level degree from a recognised university;
- Health professionals who are required to obtain specific qualifications to be registered or to join a professional association.

(v) Public Health Professions

Health professionals must meet the following criteria in order to be part of the public health professional workforce:

- Health professionals who work with communities and other organisations to create circumstances that promote and protect health, and prevent injury, ill health and disease;
- Health professionals who work with health consumers on a population rather then individual basis;
- Health professionals who have obtained an accredited entry level degree from a recognised university;
- Health professionals who monitor health and implement services to improve life expectancy and the quality of life, disease and injury prevention measures; promote and educate on healthier lifestyles; and protect health through disease prevention services and legislation.
- Health professionals who develop, maintain and report upon health data sets.

(vi) Health Workers and Assistants

Health care workers who meet the following criteria:

- Do not have a tertiary undergraduate degree, may have advances diploma, diploma or certificate level qualifications;
- Health care workers and assistants who are generally trained within the vocational sector;
- Health care workers and assistants provide both direct and indirect client care;
- Will generally work under the guidance of a tertiary trained health professional;
- Health care workers and assistants work with members of the tertiary trained health professional workforce;
• Health care workers and assistants may provide a variety of health services in regions where there is limited access to allied health professions.

(vii) Clinical Support Health Professions
Health professionals must meet the following criteria in order to be part of the support health professional workforce:
• Health professionals who have obtained an accredited entry level degree from a recognised university;
• Health professionals who are involved indirectly with consumer care, providing support services to clinicians in areas such as quality client records, health information management systems, hospital libraries, e-health, research and development, and technical support.

(viii) Complementary/Alternate/Natural Therapy Health Professions
Health professionals must meet the following criteria in order to be part of the complementary health professional workforce:
• Health professionals whose training is primarily managed through private vocational training institutions, but may be part of traditional university sector;
• Health professionals who are involved in direct client contact providing individual treatment, assessment, patient management and education;
• Health professionals who maintain that their service provision is directed towards the philosophy of a holistic approach to health and wellbeing;
• Health professionals who do not work as part of a recognised multidisciplinary team and are not recognised as ‘allied’ or ‘aligned’ to other members of the health professional workforce.

The health workforce also comprises professions that are multi-sectoral:

(ix) Administrative Professions
• Professionals who are involved primarily with the administration and management of health services;
• Professionals whose involvement with the community involves the planning of health services.

(x) Other Professions
• Professions or artisans with or without a recognised tertiary qualification who provide motivational, psychological and rehabilitation support services for clients.

To develop such categorisations within the broader health workforce would clearly assist with future policy development and workforce planning and support. Policy and programs would be more able to be targeted at a specific category within the broader health workforce. This would give clarity, target and purpose to policy development and assist in the implementation and administration of any support programs. Such an approach would remove the current situation of all health professionals and health workers who do not fit within medicine and nursing being considered as allied health.

The health disciplines themselves are required to identify the category to which they best fit. The ability to specifically target and recognise the role and value of the different groups within health service delivery and to generate programs and policy directed
SARRAH Background Paper

towards a specific group or groups will remove much of the current debate surrounding allied health workforce planning – the who, what and which professions are to be included and excluded.

This summary comes from Lowe S, Adams R, O’Kane A; 2007; A framework for the categorization of the Australian Health Workforce – a discussion paper, SARRAH.