

Timely data is key for planning the future of oral health workforce

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For many years, South Australia's oral health sector has faced obstacles to the recruitment and retention of clinical staff in both the public and private sectors, especially in regional, rural, and remote areas.

'Opinions differ over the exact cause of these issues, however, the need for accurate and timely workforce data is clear in order to project workforce requirements and provide quality oral health care to South Australians regardless of where they live,' says AHHA Chief Executive Kylie Woolcock.

Released today by AHHA's Deeble Institute for Health Policy Research, the Perspectives Brief '[South Australia oral health workforce projections barriers: The importance of data](#)' is authored by Paulina Lee of the South Australia Oral Health Plan Monitoring Group.

'Current methods of data collection and the quality and timeliness of this data have not provided the complete picture we need of the South Australian oral health workforce.'

'Without timely data, we can't begin to start accurately projecting and planning for our future workforce needs and how to best provide appropriate oral health care to people and communities, particularly in rural and remote areas who typically have less access to these services,' continued Ms Woolcock.

'This Perspectives Brief highlights the need to reexamine how we can plan better and use data to make more educated and time-efficient decisions.'

'Key to this are two main priorities for policymakers to consider, long-term term planning and immediate problem-solving.'

'There is a need to invest in data collection and infrastructure, as current data based on surveys and workforce registrations can be inconsistent and outdated. By investing in appropriate and centralised data collection methods, policymakers can encourage more accurate data, greater insights, and better workforce long-term planning.'

'There is also the more immediate issue of the uneven distribution of oral healthcare clinicians to regional, rural and remote regions and to the public sector.'

'This Brief recommends initiatives such as collaborating with the Department of Education, universities and the VET sector to develop tailored training programs that address the specific needs of and identify and foster local oral health practitioners.'

'It also recommends the establishment of targeted initiatives to attract and retain talent in regional areas, as well as investing in digital infrastructure and technology to bridge geographical gaps and provide more telecommuting opportunities for regional oral health workers.'

The online version of this [media release](#) can be found on the AHHA website. **The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) is the independent peak membership body and advocate for the Australian healthcare system and a national voice for universally accessible, high-quality healthcare in Australia.**

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