

IMPROVING PRIMARY HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE RETENTION IN SMALL RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES – HOW IMPORTANT IS ONGOING EDUCATION & TRAINING?

SCHOOL OF RURAL HEALTH, MONASH UNIVERSITY
CENTRE FOR REMOTE HEALTH, FLINDERS UNIVERSITY & CHARLES
DARWIN UNIVERSITY

Humphreys J
Wakerman J
Wells R
Kuipers P
Jones J
Entwistle P
Harvey P

POLICY CONTEXT

Many small, rural and remote communities in Australia experience a shortage of health workers, high levels of staff turnover and significant problems in recruiting new health workers. Measures which retain existing health workers by slowing the 'separation' rate and attracting back some who have left the health workforce provide an important opportunity to increase workforce numbers.

Some reports claim the provision of effective ongoing education and training may improve retention and lower turnover rates of health workers in small rural and remote communities.

This study examines the contribution of continuing professional development (CPD/CPE) to enhancing workplace attractiveness and improving retention of primary health care workers in small rural and remote communities, the best way of providing effective education and training, and the costs and benefits associated with providing education and training.

KEY FINDINGS

- It is important to differentiate between recruitment and retention issues
- CPD is important to retention, but not as important as other retention factors
- CPD ensures an adequately skilled and professionally satisfied health workforce
- Retention strategies should target the specific needs of different primary health care professions
- Retention strategies should be built on a sound understanding of the determinants of turnover and interventions most likely to improve retention.
- The rural and remote context affects the relative importance of [professional and non-professional factors](#) impacting on workplace retention
- A workforce retention 'package' may be the best retention strategy
- A paucity of quality literature evaluating rural and remote retention initiatives
- Benchmark retention rates are required for different primary health care professions working in rural and remote communities
- A strategic approach involving all players is required to facilitate workforce retention and minimise avoidable turnover

For more details, go to the [three page report](#).

The research reported in this paper is a project of the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute, which is supported by a grant from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing under the Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development Strategy. The information and opinions contained in it do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.