



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

No. 55

WRITTEN QUESTION

K McNamara to the Minister for Health, Hon Steven Edgington MLA:

Funding for Allied Health Practitioners

- 1. What initiatives is the Northern Territory Government making available for allied health practitioners to do additional behaviour support training and become qualified behaviour support practitioners?**

Allied health professionals working with children and people with disabilities require the skills to manage behaviour, such as emotional regulation and sensory processing. With the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the majority of specialist behaviour support occurs through private NDIS providers, not in the public sector.

The Northern Territory Government works closely with the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission to provide contemporary behaviour support guidance and resources to support practitioners.

- 2. What is the Northern Territory Government doing to attract more occupational therapists (specifically forensic occupational therapists, mental health occupational therapists and paediatric occupational therapists), Ear Nose and Throat specialists, psychiatrists, behaviour specialists and full-time carers and other necessary health and education workforce to support youth mental health in the Northern Territory?**

NT Health has a Workforce Action Plan 2023-2025 focussed on developing a compelling employer brand to attract a quality workforce, aligned to models of care. The Workforce Action Plan 2023-2025 aims to grow the local workforce through local education pathways. In addition to the broader workforce attraction strategies, there are activities underway to target specific professions, as detailed below:

a. Occupational Therapists (OTs)

At a national level, work is underway to develop the first National Allied Health Workforce Strategy which aims to address national allied health workforce issues, including shortage of supply and maldistribution of OTs between metropolitan and regional/remote parts of Australia.

In 2024, NT Health launched the One Allied Health Plan 2024-2028, with “Support and develop our workforce” as one of the four key strategic focus areas. This includes the following key activities:

- Implementation of an Allied Health Workforce Pipeline Framework with a focus on growing a local OT workforce, particularly Aboriginal workforce.
- NT Health is partnering with Charles Darwin University to train a local OT workforce to meet the health needs of the Northern Territory population.
- Launched a new graduate program to ensure local graduates have the offer of work in the Northern Territory.

b. Ear, Nose and Throat specialists

There is an Ear, Nose and Throat surgical service in the Northern Territory with NT-based specialists. NT Health has been actively working with the Royal Australian College of Surgeons program on flexible training approaches, including a roundtable recently held in Darwin, to better strengthen local surgical training pipelines.

c. Psychiatrists:

The Northern Territory Government is actively working to attract more psychiatrists to support youth mental health by strengthening psychiatry training, recruitment, and retention efforts. The following initiatives aim to enhance psychiatry training, improve workforce stability, and ensure better access to mental health services for young people in the Northern Territory.

Key Initiatives:

- The Northern Territory offers unique psychiatry training experiences in transcultural psychiatry, Aboriginal healthcare, and rural and remote mental health, as well as specialisations in Consultation Liaison, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Forensic Psychiatry.
- The Territory-wide Directorate of Training was established to provide coordinated support for medical staff in the Psychiatry Training Unit, ensuring effective implementation of the registrar training program and fostering new initiatives to address workforce shortages.
- A Growing Psychiatry Registrar Pool, focused on expanding the number of psychiatry registrars, addressing key priorities in recruitment, retention, and training of local psychiatrists.

- The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists hosts short Psychiatry Interest Forums in the Northern Territory to encourage medical students and early-career doctors to pursue psychiatry.

d. Youth mental health workforce:

A high level strategic approach is in place to increase the youth mental health workforce in the Northern Territory. This includes mutual recognition of qualifications, broadening multi-disciplinary teams and addressing workforce shortages and maldistribution of workforce.

Key activities:

- Develop and deliver recruitment and career pathways to attract a suitably skilled and diverse workforce. This includes a program to develop nurse practitioners in specialty areas of NT Health, such as mental health.
- Paid employment for registered nurses while undertaking 2 years study in Graduate Diploma of Mental Health with any university.
- 12-month program offered for Registered Nurses with 2 years' experience and Graduate Nurses providing the opportunity to work within the mental health inpatient unit, while being supported with monthly education days.

e. Additional Initiatives to support youth mental health

- NT Mental Health Coalition Mental Health Skills Build - a program co-designed with sector and stakeholders to promote social, emotional and physical well-being.
- Social and Emotional wellbeing (SEWB) and health workforce.
- Pilot projects to develop pools of SEWB workers in Gulf Country and Tiwi regions, and integration of SEWB workers into Community Alcohol Planning initiatives.
- Headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation - headspace centres are a one-stop-shop for young people (aged 12-25 years) who need help with mental health, physical health, alcohol and other drugs or work and study support.
- Head to Health Kids is a free confidential service provided by the Australian Government for Aboriginal children (aged 0-12 years) and their families throughout Central Australia. The program aims to connect people to mental health support services they need to maintain their mental well-being.
- Beyond Blue Be You Program provides educators with knowledge, tools and resources to create positive, inclusive and responsive learning communities where every child, young person, educator and family is empowered to achieve their best possible mental health.