

The Principal Research Officer
Education and Health Standing Committee
Western Australian Legislative Assembly

Dear Dr Worth

Inquiry into the Adequacy and Appropriateness of Prevention and Treatment Services for Alcohol and Illicit Drug Problems in Western Australian.

The Western Australian Branch of the Australasian Chapter of Addiction Medicine would like to make a submission relating to terms of reference (c) the adequacy of the current education and training of medical and allied health professionals in the alcohol and drug field.

The Australasian Chapter of Addiction Medicine was established by the Royal Australasian College of Physicians in 2001. Currently there are 204 Fellows of the Chapter of whom 12 are Western Australian and live in the Perth metropolitan area. There are seven Fellows of the Chapter employed at Next Step, one in Mental Health Services and four are in private practice.

The Chapters primary purpose is to promote the study of and advancement of knowledge in the field of Addiction Medicine. The Chapter conducts a training program over 3 years to train consultants in the field of Addiction Medicine. The first trainee was accepted 2004 and 11 trainees have now graduated as Fellows of the Chapter.

Addiction medicine has been recognised by the Australian Medical Council as a specialty and the Chapter is now in discussions with the Commonwealth Government about Medicare Benefits Reimbursement for Fellows.

The Chapter believes that Western Australia needs an Addiction Medicine workforce of at least 20 consultants working across the public and private sectors. Currently there are no Addiction Medicine consultant positions in the Western Australian Country Health Service and no specialists in private practice outside of Perth. There is a need for specialist services in Bunbury, Kalgoorlie, Geraldton, and Broome. These doctors would provide a range of services including: specialist clinical care; clinical consultation and liaison; and support for public health and health promotion programs. The positions would be best located within existing multidisciplinary mental health or drug and alcohol services.

In comparison to most other jurisdictions Western Australia has very few resources allocated to hospital based drug and alcohol services. There is a need to establish at each of the tertiary hospitals consultant led drug and alcohol services. These services would provide clinical liaison and consultation across the hospital, develop and support models of care for brief intervention, withdrawal management and pharmacotherapy, facilitate post discharge D&A follow up as appropriate and provide continuing education for hospital staff.

Increasing the health workforce to 20 Fellows of the Chapter is going to be very difficult and will require a very proactive effort over the next 5 years. Only 2 of the current Chapter Fellows are less than 50 years of age and retirement will halve the existing specialist addiction medicine workforce over the next 5-10 years.

To meet the current shortfall in Fellows and replace doctors when they retire the Chapters training program needs to be increased. Next Step is accredited to provide training in addiction medicine and has one funded trainee position. The Chapter believes that a least three training positions are needed to meet workforce requirements. Provision also needs to be made for the supervision of trainees by a consultant and the coordination of the training program.

The Chapter would be pleased to discuss these issues in greater detail and could also provide information on the other terms of reference of the Inquiry.

Yours Sincerely

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