

Areas for further workforce development investment:

A profile of the specialist alcohol, tobacco and other drug workforce in the ACT

In 2014, the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA) conducted the fourth profile of the specialist alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) workforce in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). This profile monitors and demonstrates outcomes relating to workforce capacity, and identifies areas for further development and investment. The profile is also a means of measuring the progress and implementation of the ACT ATOD Qualification Strategy (Qualification Strategy) that aims to ensure the development and maintenance of a workforce that is competent, professional, and that has a shared minimum knowledge and skill base.

Method

The 2014 workforce profile involved administering two surveys:

- » a Workers' Survey at nine specialist ATOD services in the ACT (that administer thirty-two programs); and
- » an Organisation Survey completed by a manager at each of the nine participating services.

Within the nine organisations the workforce is estimated to be 239 people in total¹ (up from 204 in previous surveys). Of these, 51.5% (n=123) completed the Workers' Survey.

Results and implications for the development of the workforce

Workforce retention

- » On average, there is reasonably high retention of workers within the sector (6.5 years); changing jobs between and within ATOD organisations occurs slightly more frequently (on average, workers were in their current organisations for 4.8 years and in their current positions for 3.5 years).
- » A large proportion of the workforce (46%) held their last position outside the ATOD sector.
- » 66% of workers stated that they reach the minimum qualification.

In contrast to other health and community sectors in the ACT, the ATOD sector's Qualification Strategy is fully-funded. Such investment in sector-wide training has a benefit that extends across the entire sector. Clearly, it is important to continue delivering the Qualification Strategy as there are continuously people moving from other sectors into the ATOD sector.

The perception that a worker requires a minimum qualification could be a barrier to recruitment beyond

the ATOD sector. Offering these (fully funded) qualifications could be an incentive to attract people to, and retain them within, the ATOD sector. Clearly, the Qualification Strategy should continue to enable a balance between supporting people to stay in the ATOD sector (by keeping their qualifications relevant to their work activities), and supporting people to move from other sectors.

Skills and roles

- » Of workers providing direct services, over one-third indicated that part of their work duties involved one or more of: crisis support, referrals, assessment, counseling, group work, brief intervention, health promotion, intake, general support, and administration.
- » While the attainment of Certificate IV as a minimum qualification enables consistent basic knowledge and skills throughout the workforce, 45% of the workforce felt that it no longer sufficiently reflects the complexity of the work that they do.

The Qualification Strategy curriculum broadly matches the work duties identified by the ATOD workforce (e.g. brief intervention, assessment, group work), and the core business of delivering the current Certificate IV training should be maintained. At the same time, however, the sector should consider renewing and expanding the training currently provided.

For example:

- » developing refreshers to ensure the currency of the information;
- » extending support for further qualifications, for example diplomas and undergraduate training;
- » innovation within, and expansion of, accredited training for sub-groups (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific) or responses to specific issues (e.g. methamphetamine)

Remuneration levels

- » Remuneration levels have increased by 12% since the 2011 survey, but are still lower than other workers in the ACT.

- » There is no relationship between the levels of remuneration of the workers, and their levels of experience or qualifications.

Strategies are needed to develop career or professional development pathways within the sector that respond to the needs of the sector and client groups, and where remuneration is more closely matched to experience and qualifications.

Professional development needs

- » Workers reported a wide range of professional development needs specific to their employment categories, and these matched those identified by managers as being available to their staff

There was general agreement between workers and management about professional development needs. It is important for the sector to build capacity to respond to, and to articulate a vision for, workforce development that acknowledges and manages the diverse needs and relative priorities of the three domains of: individual workers; ATOD organisations; and the broader ATOD workforce.

Job satisfaction

- » Most respondents (89%) were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their jobs.

The reasonably high levels of worker retention within the ATOD sector are likely to be linked to high levels of satisfaction with their jobs. As remuneration levels are relatively low in the ATOD sector, other aspects of their job roles and employment conditions are likely to contribute to this job satisfaction.

Conclusion

Further policy work is needed to build career and professional development pathways, and to ensure remuneration is more closely matched to experience and qualifications. Offering and enhancing a sector-wide Qualification Strategy enables workers to move between ATOD organisations, and facilitates attracting workers from beyond the ATOD sector.

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September 2015

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1. This estimated total does not include six specialist ATOD workers in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services that did not participate in the surveys. The complete ACT ATOD workforce is therefore estimated at 245 people.