

## Allied health: leaders in health care reform

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The allied health workforce is currently in a very exciting and unique position to demonstrate leadership in health care and health workforce reform. Much has been documented regarding the challenges that the healthcare system is currently facing and is likely to face in the coming decades. We know we have an aging population, higher incidents of chronic disease and predicted workforce shortages. The answer is simple: we need to reform!

Well, that may be easier said than done; however, I believe the allied health workforce is primed to meet this challenge and lead some of the changes that need to occur. The allied health workforce is renowned for providing holistic patient-centred care and may well have some of the answers we are seeking.

One of the many strengths of the allied health workforce is the focus on prevention, health promotion and restoration or rehabilitation. If you think of health care as a sandwich, I believe the acute system is the filling in the middle, with the prevention and rehabilitation being the bread on either side. In my opinion this is where the allied health workforce has greatest bang-for-buck and greatest impact on patient care. We have an opportunity to capitalise on these strengths and start to lead the way in shifting the focus out of the acute setting and into the community and home environments. This will lead to a more sustainable health-care system in the decades to come.

Furthermore, the allied health workforce is a leader in workforce reform. We have successfully implemented allied health

assistant models as well as advanced practice roles to ensure all elements of the workforce are working to their maximum scope. This reformed structure not only provides a cost-effective model, but also enhances the quality and safety of care provided to patients and supports a strong career structure in health. There are many existing examples of allied health-led services and clinics that have proven to enhance patient outcomes, reduce wait lists for medical or surgical interventions and provide high-quality outcomes. In addition to this, advanced practice roles support either the delegation of tasks or the substitution of roles from our medical and nursing colleagues so that all areas of the health workforce are focusing on the skills that are unique to them.

Consumer-centred care and consumer engagement in the healthcare journey are recognised as critical elements to providing a positive healthcare experience. Allied health provides holistic care that ensures the patient or the client is at the centre of everything we do. This is just another example of how allied health can demonstrate leaders in reform.

If we consider all these key elements of leadership, workforce model changes, a focus on prevention and early intervention, then allied health is in the front seat to lead the changes that the health system is screaming out for. Now is the time for allied health leaders and clinicians to step up and take an active role in leading reform.