

MEDIA RELEASE

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Forum hears primary care nurse workforce a priority

An ageing population, increases in chronic disease and a shortage of nurses are some of the biggest challenges facing Australia's health system.

Acknowledgement, support and continued investment in Community and Primary Health Care is needed to address recruitment and retention issues of nurses as well as measures to promote continued training and career development, attendees at the Australian College of Nursing's National Nursing Forum heard today.

Figures from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show Australia has an ageing population and an increasing chronic-disease burden.

"This puts significant pressure on the health workforce, of which nurses make up the largest proportion," Australian College of Nursing Chief Executive Officer, Kylie Ward FACN, explained.

"Yet research tells us that almost a third of Australia's nurses are thinking of leaving the profession because they are overworked, undervalued or in danger of burning out."

Retention of nurses working in general practice was the subject of a recent survey led by Professor Elizabeth Halcomb FACN of the University of Wollongong, the results of which were shared today at the Forum.

"While nurses working in primary care are generally quite satisfied with their jobs, just over 14 per cent of respondents indicated they would leave general practice as soon as practicable," Adjunct Professor Ward said following the presentation.

"We must explore the changes needed to keep these nurses in primary care specifically and in the health system more broadly, as we already face significant and projected nurse shortages in this country."

Other speakers at the Forum have explored the potential for nurse-led clinics to contribute to community health care and the benefits of investing in an education and career framework for nurses in primary care.

“Community and primary health care nurses are enrolled nurses, registered nurses and nurse practitioners who work in hospital-affiliated clinics, community health centres, homes, schools, prisons, maternal and child health centres and a range of other health service settings,” Adjunct Professor Ward said.

“I was very pleased to see our Forum highlight the volume of nurse-led research being undertaken and we will ensure the findings inform future decision-making.

“Australia’s health care system has always relied on the wide range of community and primary health care nursing roles to provide health promotion, rehabilitation, education, and direct care to individuals, families and communities, often in the hardest to reach places and to the most marginalised people.

“Therefore, it is imperative that this fundamental area of nursing continues to receive the rightful acknowledgement, support and funding to ensure that it continues to be a pillar of our national health landscape.”

The Australian College of Nursing supports career development of community and primary health care nurses and offers a Graduate Certificate in Community and Primary Health Care Nursing. The certificate is designed for nurses working in a variety of community, primary health and general practice settings and aims to enhance nurses’ knowledge and skills in prevention, early intervention and management of a range of often complex illnesses.

The Australian College of Nursing will be holding Community and Primary Health Care Nursing Week from 18-24 September, to raise awareness of the contribution that community and primary health care nurses make to the health care system. For more information, go to <https://www.acn.edu.au/community-and-primary-health-care-nursing-week-2017>.

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For interviews contact ACN Executive Assistant Narelle Barrie on 0450 908 920 or Kristen Connell on 0400 054 227.

Notes to Editors: The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is the national professional organisation for all nurse leaders and its aim is to ensure that the Australian community receives quality nursing care now and in the future. ACN is a membership organisation with members in all states and territories, health care settings and nursing specialties. ACN is also the Australian member of the International Council of Nurses headquartered in Geneva. An organisation not afraid to challenge industry issues affecting the nursing profession or Australia’s health care, ACN is a well-connected



and educated national body that drives change with people of influence to enhance the delivery of health services to the Australian community. ACN's membership includes nurses in roles of influence, including senior nurses, organisational leaders, academics and researchers.

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