

## PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION DRAFT REPORT –OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS – OCTOBER 2019

This response to the consultation has been prepared in collaboration with the Victorian Chief Nurse and Midwifery Officer, Adjunct Associate Professor Ann Maree Keenan and Victorian Chief Mental Health Nurse, Anna Love.

The joint position supports in principle the draft recommendation 11.3 - the need for more specialist mental health nurses. There is incongruence between the Productivity Commissions (PC) report and the Victorian Royal Commission (RC) interim report on how to achieve this recommendation. Victoria's position is to support registered nurses to undertake specialised post graduate training, ensuring the workforce has the necessary skill mix and knowledge to care for patients with mental health conditions across all clinical settings.

The Victorian RC interim report recommends an increase in fully funded post graduate scholarships (140 scholarships) to support an increase in specialised knowledge and skills to support mental health care delivery<sup>1</sup>. It also calls for 120 additional funded places in the field of mental health for graduate registered nurses (p530). These actions will help to achieve an increase in specialist mental health nurses.

The recently released review undertaken by Emeritus Professor Steven Schwartz AM, *Educating the Nurse of the Future* recognised the increasing prevalence of mental health problems (p 57)<sup>2</sup>. It calls out that our workforce must reflect the national health priorities and specialist mental health nurses are not alone in encountering people with mental health issues. It also highlights that people with mental health problems have a high incidence of other health problems and are cared for in acute non mental health settings (hospitals).

The report recommends due to the complexity of nursing, exploration should occur to extend nursing education to a four-year degree. This would provide greater opportunity to strengthen the mental health component of the undergraduate course (recommendation 12 and 18). This will further strengthen all nurses are adequately prepared to care for mental health problems.

Both recommendations not only offer increased time to deliver a more robust mental health curriculum, they also allow undergraduate nurses greater exposure to the speciality of mental health nursing. It has the potential to foster registered nurses to continue onto post graduate studies in the field of mental health, while also producing registered nurses who are better equipped to care for patients with mental health conditions in the acute (hospital) setting.

22 January 2020.

<sup>1</sup> Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, Interim Report 2019

<sup>2</sup> Educating the Nurse of the Future, Report of the Independent Review of Nursing Education. 2019