

# Health Industry Workforce Development Plan

Toowoomba SA4 Region



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# introduction



# 1. Introduction

Health care is fundamental to the strength, sustainability and liveability of communities. Within the Toowoomba Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) region, the health care and social assistance industry not only delivers essential care and support services but also contributes significantly to regional economic performance, employment and population retention. As one of the region's largest and fastest-growing industries, health care and social assistance underpins workforce participation, supports broader productivity and enhances the overall wellbeing of the community.

The Toowoomba Health Workforce Development Plan provides an evidence-based framework to strengthen workforce capability, resilience and participation across the region. Developed in partnership between Toowoomba and Surat Basin Enterprise (TSBE) and Jobs Queensland (JQ), the Workforce Development Plan forms part of the Queensland Government's Grow Your Own Regional Workforce Program (GYO), which supports the development of locally driven, industry-led workforce planning initiatives.

As the regional health system evolves, the growing contribution of vocational education and training (VET) qualified and locally trained workers highlights the importance of adopting integrated, place-based models that strengthen pathways between education, training and employment. In regional areas like Toowoomba and Gatton, continuity of care increasingly relies on locally based, flexible workforce models. Addressing these demands requires robust data, cross-sector collaboration and strong alignment between industry, education and government.

The scope of this project is defined by both geography and ANZSIC codes. The geographic focus is the Toowoomba SA4, encompassing Toowoomba city, Highfields, Kingsthorpe and Gatton in the Lockyer Valley as shown in figure 3.

**Table 1** Health industry workforce scope by ANZSIC code

ANZSIC Code	Job Category
840	Hospitals
851	Medical Services
852	Pathology and Diagnostic Imaging Services
853	Allied Health Services
859	Other Health Care Services
860	Residential Care Services

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013). *Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC), 2006 (Revision 1.0)*. Division Q – Health Care and Social Assistance.

Areas outside the Toowoomba SA4 region and industries falling outside the above ANZSIC codes are considered out of scope. Furthermore, the GYO approach is focussed on supporting the development of a sustainable workforce from within the local population, including school-leavers, existing residents, current health workers and individuals reskilling for health roles, rather than focusing on recruitment of external workers.

## 1.1 Governance and consultation

An Industry Advisory Group (IAG) provided governance and expert guidance throughout the project, ensuring outcomes reflect the priorities of the regional health industry. The IAG included representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), Darling Downs Health, Darling Downs and West Moreton Primary Health Network, the Queensland Department of Trade, Employment and Training, Southern Queensland Rural Health, TAFE Queensland – Toowoomba Campus, the University of Southern Queensland and allied health and general practice sectors.

The IAG advised on project direction, facilitated stakeholder engagement and ensured that project outcomes align with regional workforce priorities.

A comprehensive environmental scan provided the evidence base for the Toowoomba Health Workforce Development Plan, examining:

- demographic and labour market metrics
- drivers of health service demand
- current and projected workforce supply and gaps
- education and training provision
- relationships between employers and educators
- workforce training challenges, including clinical placement availability
- underrepresentation of key cohorts, including males, culturally and linguistically diverse populations, and First Nations peoples.

Building on these findings, the Toowoomba Health Workforce Development Plan adopts a GYO approach, a place-based strategy designed to engage, upskill and employ local people in local health roles across nursing, allied health, general practice, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services, aged care and disability support. Through partnerships between local education providers, health employers, primary health networks and community organisations, the GYO model establishes a culturally appropriate and sustainable workforce pipeline. It fosters interest in health careers from school through to employment, strengthens vocational and higher education capacity, and ensures local organisations can provide supervision, clinical placements and mentoring to embed workers into the regional health system.

**Figure 1** Developing the Toowoomba health workforce development plan



The GYO approach is not only a workforce strategy but also a broader economic and social development strategy. It enhances employment and liveability outcomes, particularly for young people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It also strengthens health system resilience by reducing reliance on agency staff, improving continuity of care and building a workforce aligned with community needs.

**Figure 2** Key areas of focus



The following five focus areas form the foundation for the region's workforce development strategy:

- 1. Attract and retain the regional health workforce:** strengthen recruitment, promote local career pathways and support retention.
- 2. Enhance education and training pathways:** align training provision with current and emerging workforce demand.
- 3. Support workforce participation and diversity:** increase inclusion of underrepresented groups.
- 4. Build capability and leadership:** provide upskilling, career progression and leadership development.
- 5. Strengthen coordination, collaboration and data sharing:** improve access to workforce data and facilitate evidence-based decision-making.

The Toowoomba Health Workforce Development Plan reflects the collective insights of engaged regional stakeholders and provides a practical, evidence-based roadmap to grow, retain and sustain a skilled health workforce in the Toowoomba SA4 region. Its implementation will require coordinated action, shared accountability and a long-term commitment to equity, innovation and regional sustainability.

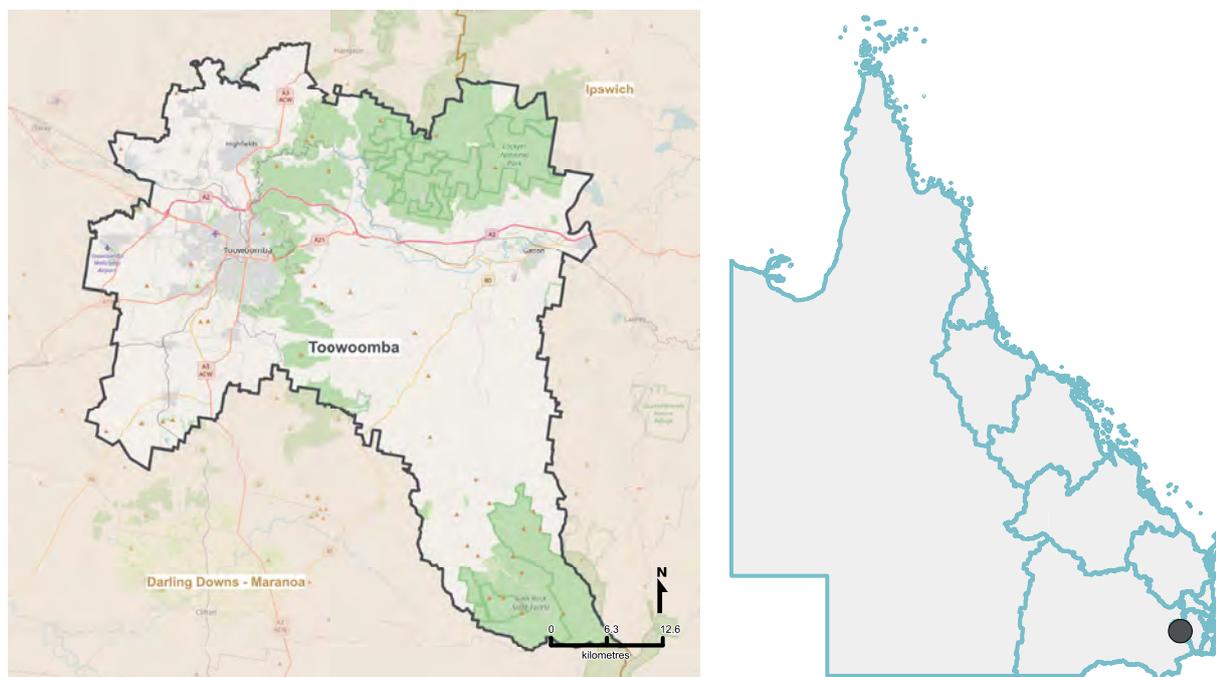
A photograph of three healthcare students walking outdoors on a paved path. On the left, a young woman with long dark hair, wearing a black long-sleeved top and black pants, has a blue stethoscope around her neck. In the center, a young man with short dark hair, wearing a dark blue hoodie and light-colored pants, has a blue stethoscope around his neck. On the right, a young woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a dark blue long-sleeved top and grey pinstriped pants, has a pink stethoscope around her neck. They are all smiling and looking towards each other. In the background, there is a red banner with the text 'UNIVERSITY' and 'School of Medicine'.

# overview of the toowoomba SA4 region

## 2. Overview of the Toowoomba SA4 region

The Toowoomba SA4 region encompasses the Toowoomba city region (including Highfields and Kingsthorpe) as well as the town of Gatton in the Lockyer Valley. Covering a total land area of 2258.8 square kilometres, the region is recognised as a major regional hub for health, education and agriculture in Queensland.

**Figure 3** Map of the Toowoomba SA4 region



Source: QGSO, Queensland Statistical Areas, Level 4 (SA4), 2021 - Toowoomba (ASGS Code 317)

As Queensland's largest inland regional city, Toowoomba stands at a critical juncture in its health workforce development. The region's growing population, rising rates of chronic and complex health conditions, ageing demographic and expanding health infrastructure, including the construction of the new Toowoomba Hospital are driving increasing demand for a skilled, locally embedded health workforce.

Concurrently, national and global health workforce shortages are intensifying, particularly across regional and rural areas. These pressures are being compounded by demographic change, competition between health care sectors and constraints within existing training and qualification pipelines. These challenges are especially evident in the Toowoomba region, where the ability to attract, train and retain qualified health professionals is central to maintaining the sustainability quality and accessibility of local health services.

As a regional hub, Toowoomba's health system also supports smaller communities across the Darling Downs and South West regions, making workforce planning not only a local but a regional imperative. The region's education and training institutions, including the University of Southern Queensland, TAFE Queensland – Darling Downs and South West and Southern Queensland Rural Health, play a critical role in developing local capability, supporting clinical placement opportunities and building a resilient and sustainable health workforce pipeline.

By aligning workforce planning with infrastructure development, education pathways and regional service expansion, the region is well-positioned to strengthen its status as a leading centre for health, aged care and social assistance in regional Queensland.

# regional population and employment characteristics



## 3. Regional population and employment characteristics

Understanding the demographic and employment profile of the Toowoomba SA4 region is essential for effective health workforce planning. Population characteristics directly influence the demand for health services, the availability of local talent and the design of education and training pathways. The region's ageing population, cultural diversity and education profile all shape workforce needs and opportunities.

### 3.1 Population

The Toowoomba SA4 region is a key regional hub with a population profile that directly influences health workforce needs. The population is ageing, with 18.9 per cent of residents aged 65 years and over, compared with 17.2 per cent for Queensland.<sup>1</sup> Toowoomba's appeal as a retirement destination, supported by quality health and aged care services, contributes to strong demand for skilled workers in home-based, residential and community care settings.



Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples comprise 4.8 per cent of the population (median age 20 years), slightly above the state average.<sup>2,3</sup> This younger demographic, highlights opportunities to build culturally inclusive workforce pathways and representation in the health industry.

Cultural diversity is also a defining feature of the region. Approximately 15.3 per cent of residents were born overseas and 1.3 per cent report limited English proficiency.<sup>4,5</sup> Common languages other than English include Indo-Aryan languages, Chinese, Southeast Asian Austronesian, Arabic and Malayalam.<sup>6</sup> These factors reinforce the need for culturally and linguistically appropriate health services and a workforce that reflects the community's diversity.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau Statistics. (2024). *Regional Population by Age and Sex*, Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population-age-and-sex/latest-release>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples profile – I02*. Canberra: Australian Government.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

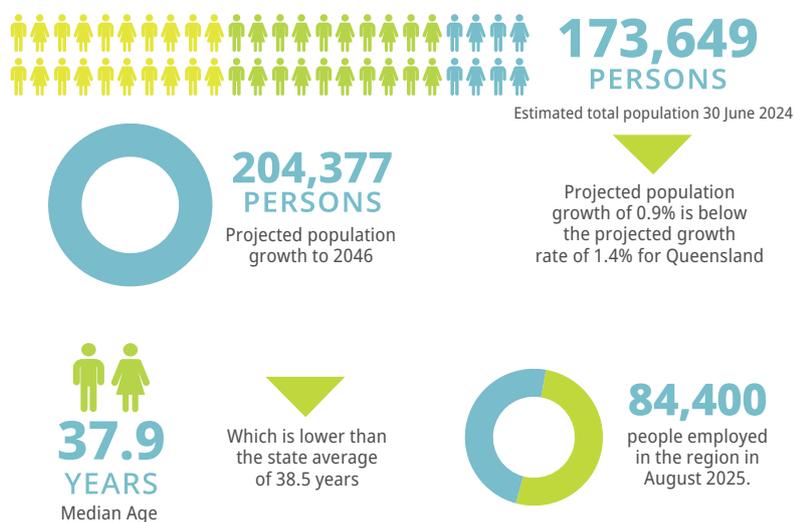
<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, General Community profile – G01 and G09*. Canberra: Australian Government.

<sup>5</sup> PHIDU, Torrens University Australia. *Social Health Atlas of Australia. Data by PHN/LGA*. Release date: December 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *2021 Census of Population and Housing: General Community Profile – Table G13*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/community-profiles/2021/AUS>

Overall, the region's demographic profile, characterised by an ageing population, cultural diversity and underrepresentation of First Nations peoples in health roles underscores the importance of place-based workforce strategies to build a sustainable, skilled and inclusive local health workforce.

## Population Profile



In 2024, there were



Source: ABS, *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, General Community Profiles*

## 3.2 Employment

Understanding the region's workforce and labour market dynamics is central to planning a sustainable health workforce. As of August 2025, the region's total employed persons reached 84,400, an increase of 1.9 per cent over the previous year.<sup>7</sup> Unemployment decreased to 3.8 per cent, slightly below the Queensland average of 4 per cent, while youth unemployment fell to 8.9 per cent.<sup>8</sup>

Health care and social assistance remain the largest employing industry, accounting for 18.7 per cent of the workforce.<sup>9</sup> The industry has a predominantly female workforce (76.2 per cent) and an ageing profile across many occupations, with a significant proportion of employees aged over 50.<sup>10</sup>

Employment growth in the region continues to outpace the Queensland average, with projected growth of 9 per cent in health care and social assistance roles by 2028.<sup>11</sup> This expansion reflects the region's growing role as a healthcare and social services hub and reinforces the need for strategies to attract, train and retain a skilled and diverse workforce to meet future service demand.

<sup>7</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed*. Canberra: Australian Government.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, General Community profile – G54*. Canberra: Australian Government.

<sup>10</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, General Community profile*. Canberra: Australian Government.

<sup>11</sup> Jobs Queensland. (2024). *Anticipating Future Skills, Data Portal*. Ipswich: Queensland Government.

# Employment characteristics



By 2028, there will be



Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2021, General Community Profiles and Jobs Queensland, Anticipating Future Skills, Data Portal.

The combination of an ageing population, cultural diversity and strong employment growth in health care presents both challenges and opportunities. Workforce planning efforts must prioritise:

- expanding training and career pathways to attract younger workers
- increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the workforce
- supporting mature-age workers to extend participation through flexible arrangements
- ensuring workforce supply aligns with anticipated growth in health and social assistance roles.

By addressing these priorities, the Toowoomba SA4 region can build a workforce that is responsive, resilient and reflective of the community it serves.



# business profile



## 4. Business profile

The Toowoomba SA4 region hosts a diverse mix of businesses that underpin its economic strength and shape local labour market dynamics. As at 30 June 2024, there were 14,687 registered businesses across the region.<sup>12</sup> The majority (61.1 per cent) were non-employing enterprises, including sole traders and partnerships, reflecting a strong entrepreneurial base. Small businesses employing 1–4 people accounted for 24.9 per cent, while those employing 5–19 employees represented 10.7 per cent of all businesses.

**Collectively, these small enterprises play a vital role in sustaining the regional economy, providing essential goods and services and creating local employment opportunities.**

Medium-sized businesses with 20–199 employees made up 3.2 per cent of the total, while large businesses with 200 or more employees comprised just 0.2 per cent.<sup>13</sup> Although few in number, larger employers contribute significantly to job creation, investment and economic stability. The overall distribution of business size in the region closely reflects patterns observed across Queensland, illustrating a balanced mix of micro and medium enterprises.

Construction remains the dominant industry, representing 17.6 per cent of all businesses, followed by rental, hiring and real estate services (11.1 per cent), agriculture, forestry and fishing (10.6 per cent) and health care and social assistance (9.4 per cent).<sup>14</sup>

Within the dynamic health care and social assistance industry, local employers range from major hospitals and aged care providers to community health organisations and private practices. The industry has faced a range of challenges, including the residual impacts of COVID-19, changing regulation and increasing workforce shortages. These factors highlight the need for business resilience and capacity-building initiatives to support the region's health employers.

As the region continues to expand its health infrastructure and service capacity, there are opportunities to strengthen small and medium health enterprises through:

- Business continuity and workforce planning support, particularly for smaller providers.
- Professional development for practice managers and supervisors to enhance leadership and management capability.
- Collaborative networks linking employers, educators and regional development agencies to improve recruitment, retention and career progression.

### Link to workforce development

The structure of the region's business community directly influences workforce planning outcomes. The predominance of small enterprises means that many health care employers have limited internal resources for structured training, workforce development initiatives and succession planning. Targeted support for these organisations is critical to ensure they can participate in and benefit from regional workforce development and training initiatives..

A strong, resilient business ecosystem enhances local employment opportunities, fosters entrepreneurship within the health care industry and supports the region's broader goal of building a sustainable, skilled and future-ready workforce.

<sup>12</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits*. Canberra: Australian Government.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Jobs Queensland. (2024). *Anticipating Future Skills, Data Portal*. Ipswich: Queensland Government.

# workforce diversification

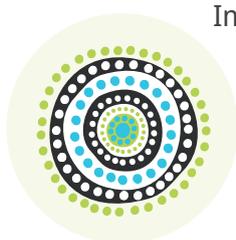


## 5. Workforce diversification

In the Toowoomba SA4 region, a health workforce that reflects the diversity of the local community is essential for delivering effective, equitable and culturally safe care. The region is home to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations and a mix of urban residents and rural families, each with distinct health priorities.

A workforce inclusive of these backgrounds fosters trust, improves communication and strengthens relationships between providers and patients, particularly for groups that have historically faced barriers to care. Diversity within the workforce is not only a matter of representation; it is a key driver of service quality, health equity and community connection.

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce



Increasing the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in the region's health workforce is critical to improving health equity, cultural safety and service accessibility across the Toowoomba SA4 region.

Underrepresentation continues to limit care access, as evidence shows that First Nations patients are more likely to engage with services where staff reflect their cultural background and lived experience.<sup>15</sup> Building representation also helps address systemic racism, improves communication and embeds Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing into clinical practice.<sup>16</sup>

Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council highlights the need to focus on recruitment, retention and career development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers, across clinical and non-clinical roles, as essential to delivering a skilled, valued and empowered workforce and achieving equitable health outcomes.<sup>17</sup> For the Toowoomba SA4 region, this means expanding culturally safe career pathways, mentoring programs and workplace environments that foster belonging and professional growth.

### Culturally and Linguistically Diverse workforce



The region's growing CALD population presents both opportunity and responsibility for employers. In 2021, 15.3 per cent of the region's residents were born overseas, with the largest non-English-speaking background groups originating from Iraq, India, the Philippines, China and Nepal.<sup>18</sup>

Patients from CALD backgrounds often face language barriers, lower health literacy, and cultural misunderstandings that can affect diagnosis, treatment adherence, and outcomes. Employing more CALD health workers enhances the cultural capability of health services, facilitates communication through shared language and cultural understanding, and builds trust with diverse communities.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Cultural safety in health care for indigenous Australians*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/cultural-safety-health-care-framework/contents/summary>

<sup>16</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2025). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/>

<sup>17</sup> Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council. (2025). *Workforce Strategy* Brisbane: Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council [www.qaihc.com.au/media/38509/0840-qaihc-workforce-strategy-doc\\_web.pdf](http://www.qaihc.com.au/media/38509/0840-qaihc-workforce-strategy-doc_web.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, General Community profile – G01 and G09*. Canberra: Australian Government.

<sup>19</sup> Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia. (2021). *Cultural, Linguistic and Religious Diversity in Australia: Information for Service Providers*. Canberra: Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia. <https://fecca.org.au>

Cultural diversity and presence throughout all facets of healthcare are a key driver of equitable, person-centred care and play a critical role in representation, acceptance and progress in patient outcomes. For the region, targeted recruitment, mentoring and leadership development for CALD health professionals, along with language support and recognition of overseas qualifications, will strengthen service responsiveness and workforce capacity.<sup>20</sup>

## Promoting gender diversity in health professions



Encouraging greater male participation in traditionally female-dominated health professions, such as nursing, midwifery and allied health offers a practical opportunity to expand workforce supply and challenge gender norms. Nationally, men occupy only 12.2 per cent of nursing roles and projections suggest only a modest increase to 13.4 per cent by 2035.<sup>21</sup>

Addressing this imbalance through early engagement with male students, male role models and flexible entry pathways can expand the available workforce while diversifying perspectives within the industry. In regional communities such as Toowoomba and Gatton, tapping into this underutilised resource supports workforce resilience and enhances cultural resonance in care, particularly for male patients.

## Flexible work arrangements



Offering flexible work options such as part-time, job-share, remote and staggered shifts can significantly enhance attraction and retention in the region's workforce. Flexibility supports participation by carers, parents, students and those with other commitments, while also reducing reliance on agency staff.

These arrangements can also prevent burnout and support staff wellbeing, ensuring stability and continuity of care.



<sup>20</sup> Stanford F. C. (2020). The Importance of Diversity and Inclusion in the Healthcare Workforce. *Journal of the National Medical Association*, 112(3), 247-249. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnma.2020.03.014>

<sup>21</sup> Department Health and Aged Care. (2023). *Nursing supply and demand study 2023-2035*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://hwd.health.gov.au/resources/primary/nursing-supply-and-demand-study-2023-2035.pdf>



## People with disability



Inclusive recruitment, workplace adjustments and targeted traineeships enable people with disability to participate fully in the health workforce. Practical measures include workspace modifications, assistive technology, tailored professional development and mentorship to support career progression.

By fostering accessibility and inclusion, health services can broaden their talent pool and improve patient care through lived experience perspectives.

## Mature-age workforce



Mature-age health professionals bring valuable experience, clinical expertise and institutional knowledge. Strategies to engage this cohort include flexible or phased retirement options, mentoring roles and re-entry programs that maintain competency in evolving areas such as digital health.

## Return to work programs



Structured return-to-work initiatives, such as refresher courses, bridging programs and supervised practice placements enable professionals to re-enter the workforce after career breaks. Tailored pathways for nurses, allied health professionals and general practitioners ensure returning workers are supported to regain confidence and current practice skills.

**Building a diverse, inclusive, and flexible workforce is central to the region's ability to meet future health needs. By valuing difference and enabling equitable participation across all groups, the region can cultivate a health workforce that is both resilient and reflective of the community it serves.**



# toowoomba SA4 region health industry

## 6. Toowoomba SA4 region health industry

The health care and social assistance industry is a cornerstone of employment, service delivery and economic growth in the Toowoomba SA4 region. The industry comprises around 1398 registered businesses, representing 9.4 per cent of all local enterprises and employs around 14,702 people.<sup>22 23</sup>

As a recognised healthcare hub for surrounding rural and remote communities, Toowoomba delivers a diverse range of services spanning acute care, allied health, aged care, disability support and community-based care. This activity generates significant flow-on benefits across education, training and local supply chains, contributing to the region's social and economic resilience.

### Drivers of workforce demand

**Demographic change remains the most powerful driver of health workforce demand.**

The region's ageing population, combined with its reputation as a preferred retirement destination, continues to increase demand for aged care, home care and chronic disease management services. At the same time, new health infrastructure, including the \$1.3 billion Toowoomba Hospital, is expected to further expand service capacity and clinical workforce requirements over the coming decade.

In parallel, technological advancements and an increased focus on preventative and community-based models of care are reshaping service delivery.

**These shifts are creating demand for health professionals with advanced qualifications, digital literacy and cross-sector collaboration skills.**

### Current workforce pressures

Occupational shortages mirror national trends identified by Jobs and Skills Australia, with critical gaps in medical practitioners, registered nurses, allied health professionals and diagnostic and technical roles.<sup>24</sup> Persistent gender imbalances, particularly within female-dominated professions such as nursing, allied health and aged care, contribute to higher turnover rates and reduce overall workforce resilience.

Recruitment and retention challenges are compounded by competition between public, private and not-for-profit sectors and limited by access to clinical placements and housing availability for staff relocating from other regions. These challenges are especially pronounced in outer areas of the region, where workforce mobility and service coverage can be difficult to maintain.

### Strategic opportunities

Toowoomba's position as a regional service hub offers a strong foundation for workforce innovation and collaboration. Strengthening local education and training pipelines, particularly through partnerships between local registered training organisations (including TAFE Queensland), University of Southern Queensland, Southern Queensland Rural Health and local employers will be vital to sustain workforce supply and capability.

<sup>22</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, Counts of Australian Businesses, including entries and exits*. Canberra: Australian Government

<sup>23</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Census of Population and Housing, 2021, Working Population Profile – W09*. Canberra: Australian Government.

<sup>24</sup> Jobs and Skills Australia. (2025). *Internet Vacancy Index, August 2025*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/internet-vacancy-index>

Opportunities exist to:

- Develop initiatives that engage local school-leavers, mature-age students and existing workers seeking reskilling opportunities.
- Expand allied health and nursing assistant pathways to support the region's multidisciplinary care needs.
- Increase access to clinical placements and supervised practice opportunities across hospital, community and residential care settings.
- Leverage digital health innovation to extend care to rural communities while building local capability in virtual care delivery.

## Looking ahead

With a growing population, expanding health infrastructure and strong tertiary and vocational education presence, the region is well positioned to consolidate its status as a leading regional centre for health and social assistance in Queensland. Continued investment in skills development, digital capability, clinical training and workforce diversification will be essential to:

- meet rising service demand
- enhance local career pathways and retention
- generate long-term economic and social benefits for the region.

A coordinated, data-informed and place-based approach will ensure that workforce strategies remain adaptive and aligned with the region's evolving health and community care needs.



# megatrends

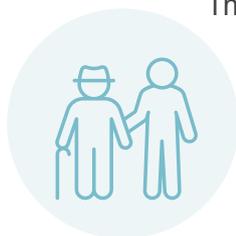


## 7. Megatrends

A megatrend is a large-scale, long-term shift that shapes economies, societies and institutions. For the Toowoomba SA4 region, home to a growing and ageing population with a regional health system supporting much of the Darling Downs and South West, these shifts are already influencing how healthcare is delivered, who delivers it and what skills will be needed in the decade ahead.

Both the Australian Bureau of Statistics and CSIRO describe megatrends as “deep, persistent trajectories of change” that intersect across technology, demography, environment and society.<sup>25</sup> For Toowoomba’s health care and social assistance industry, these megatrends will shape workforce supply and demand through to 2035 and beyond.

### Ageing population and workforce



The region’s population is ageing faster than the Queensland average, with 18.9 per cent of residents aged 65 years and over, compared with 17.2 per cent statewide.<sup>26</sup>

As a recognised retirement destination and referral hub for surrounding rural communities, this demographic shift is driving increased demand for aged care, chronic disease management, rehabilitation and palliative care services.

At the same time, the health workforce itself is ageing, particularly in nursing, general practice and allied health. A significant proportion of local nurses, general practitioners and health professionals are aged over 50, creating a need for succession planning, flexible retirement options and mentoring programs to retain expertise and transfer knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

### Rising burden of chronic disease and mental health conditions



Rising rates of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, respiratory illness and mental health conditions are placing sustained pressure on the regional health system. Chronic disease now accounts for the majority of hospitalisations and primary care demand in the region.<sup>28</sup>

Mental health and suicide prevention remain high priorities, particularly in rural areas where service access is limited. The shift toward integrated and multidisciplinary models of care, linking general practice, allied health, mental health and community services will require a workforce skilled in collaborative, long-term and preventative health approaches.

### Consumer empowerment and digital expectations



Health consumers in the Toowoomba SA4 region are increasingly informed, connected and seeking accessible, personalised and technology-enabled care. This shift is accelerating the move toward shared decision-making, self-management and community-based support.

Initiatives such as social prescribing, which link patients to community-based

<sup>25</sup> CSIRO. (2022). *Our Future World: Global megatrends impacting the way we live over coming decades*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/technology-space/data/Our-Future-World>

<sup>26</sup> Australian Bureau Statistics. (2024). *Regional Population by Age and Sex*, Canberra: Australian Government.

<sup>27</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022). *Nursing and Midwifery Workforce 2021*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/workforce/health-workforce>

<sup>28</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023) *Chronic conditions and multimorbidity*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/chronic-disease/chronic-condition-multimorbidity-2021/contents/chronic-conditions-and-multimorbidity>

activities to address social determinants of health, are gaining traction.<sup>29</sup> To meet these expectations, the regional workforce must develop new capabilities in digital literacy, health communication and patient engagement.

## Economic pressures and system sustainability



Health expenditure continues to rise faster than the broader economy, placing pressure on public and private providers. In the Toowoomba SA4 region, service demand is increasing due to population growth, ageing and rising complexity of patient needs.

To maintain sustainability, health services are adopting value-based care models, focusing on outcomes and efficient use of resources. This shift demands data-driven decision-making, care coordination and innovation in service design.

## Workforce mobility and redesign



Health worker shortages are intensifying nationally and internationally. The region continues to experience recruitment challenges in general practice, nursing and allied health, particularly in outer regional areas.

To address these gaps, health services are exploring role redesign and task-shifting models, expanding the use of nurse practitioners, allied health assistants, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and community-based care navigators.<sup>30</sup> These new models improve flexibility and create structured career pathways for local residents.

## Technological transformation and digital health integration



Digital innovations such as telehealth, electronic medical records, wearable technologies and artificial intelligence are transforming health care delivery. For the Toowoomba SA4 region, these tools expand access to specialist care and reduce travel requirements for rural residents.<sup>31</sup>

However, successful integration depends on a workforce with strong digital capability and change management skills. Local training providers and employers are embedding digital health competencies into education and professional development programs, guided by frameworks such as the Australian Digital Health Agency's Nursing and Midwifery Digital Health Capability Framework.<sup>32</sup>

**Responding effectively to these megatrends will require strategic workforce planning, education partnerships and investment in innovation to ensure a sustainable, adaptable and locally embedded workforce. By anticipating these shifts now, the region can strengthen its health system resilience and continue to deliver high-quality, equitable care to its growing and diverse population.**

<sup>29</sup> Fisher, M, Freeman, T, Mackean, T, and Friel, S. (2021). *Social prescribing in Australia: a systematic scoping review*. Australian Journal of Primary Health, 27 (6), 425-437.

<sup>30</sup> Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. (2029). *Educating the Nurse of the Future*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2019/12/educating-the-nurse-of-the-future.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (2014). *Health Literacy in Australia*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/patient-and-consumer-centred-care/health-literacy>

<sup>32</sup> Australian Digital Health Agency, (2020), *National Nursing and Midwifery Digital Health Capability Framework*. Canberra: Australian Government. [https://www.digitalhealth.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/National\\_Nursing\\_and\\_Midwifery\\_Digital\\_Health\\_Capability\\_Framework\\_publication.pdf](https://www.digitalhealth.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/National_Nursing_and_Midwifery_Digital_Health_Capability_Framework_publication.pdf)

# regional training profile



## 8. Regional training profile

The Toowoomba SA4 region has a well-established education and training ecosystem that plays a critical role in supporting the health and social assistance workforce. The region's mix of vocational, tertiary and professional training providers ensures that pathways exist from entry-level qualifications through to advanced clinical and leadership roles.

Apprenticeships and traineeships are essential pathways into the health care and social assistance industry, providing practical, work-based training that bridges the gap between education and employment. These programs enable employers to develop a pipeline of job-ready workers while offering participants the opportunity to gain nationally recognised qualifications alongside valuable industry experience.

The VET system plays a foundational role in workforce development by delivering flexible, industry-informed programs that align with the specific skill requirements of the industry. For the Darling Downs South West region, this includes qualifications in aged care, allied health assistance, community services and health administration, areas that form the backbone of local service delivery.<sup>33</sup>

In 2024, the region experienced an increase in VET enrolments and completions across TAFE Queensland – Darling Downs and South West and a range of government and private training providers. This growth reflects both rising demand for skilled workers and the success of targeted initiatives designed to attract new entrants to the care economy. Training activity was particularly strong in community services, health support and business administration, indicating that regional training capacity is aligning well with the needs of the health and social assistance industry.<sup>34</sup>

Sustained investment in VET, traineeship and apprenticeship pathways will be vital to maintaining workforce supply and capability in the coming years. Regional strategies are increasingly focused on strengthening collaboration between training providers, health employers, education institutions and government agencies to ensure that qualifications remain relevant and responsive to evolving workforce needs.

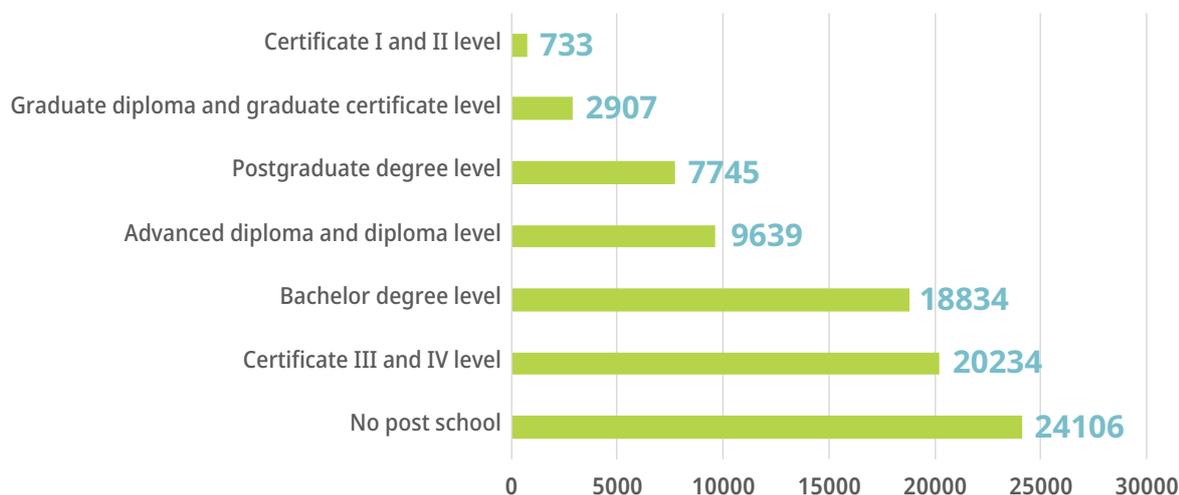


<sup>33</sup> Department of Trade, Employment and Training. (2025). *VET Annual Summary – Data Slicer – Apprentices and Trainees*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/training/docs-data/statistics/apprentices-trainees>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Programs such as Grow Your Own Regional Workforce Program, Regional Jobs Committees and industry-led skills alliances are supporting this coordinated approach. By aligning training programs with workforce planning, these initiatives are helping to ensure that the local health workforce is equipped with the skills, flexibility, and resilience required to meet the future health and social care needs of the Toowoomba SA4 region.

**Figure 4** Health industry in scope occupation numbers by qualification level in the Toowoomba SA4 region, 2024-2025



Source: Jobs Queensland, *Anticipating Future Skills data portal*

Strong partnerships with educational institutions are essential to ensuring the future health and social care workforce possesses the skills needed to address current and emerging service demands. On-the-job training, structured placements and practical vocational programs not only enhance the appeal of careers in health and social assistance but also support workforce diversification across the region.

However, vocational education alone cannot equip workers with all the skills and capabilities required for a lifelong career in health care. Over their professional lives, individuals may transition between roles, specialties and even industries. Lifelong learning enables these individuals to continuously develop their skills, whether through formal qualifications, short courses or informal learning opportunities.<sup>35</sup> This ongoing development ensures that workers acquire both foundational and transferable skills, supporting their effectiveness across multiple roles and settings.

**A commitment to lifelong learning is strengthened by strategies that promote continuous professional development within organisations that value knowledge, skill growth and innovation. Positive organisational cultures encourage staff to engage in professional development, mentorship programs and collaborative learning initiatives, fostering motivation and sustained growth.**

Employers who implement strategies such as structured career pathways, access to diverse training resources, recognition of achievements and opportunities for cross-disciplinary experiences help create an adaptable and capable workforce. By investing in continuous learning and professional development, organisations not only enhance individual capabilities but also strengthen the resilience and responsiveness of the health care and social assistance workforce in the Toowoomba SA4 region, ensuring it is well-prepared to meet the evolving needs of the community.

<sup>35</sup> Jobs Queensland. (2021). *Lifelong learning. The foundation of future work*. Ipswich: Queensland Government. [https://jobsqueensland.qld.gov.au/\\_resources/files/pdf/lifelong-learning-report.pdf](https://jobsqueensland.qld.gov.au/_resources/files/pdf/lifelong-learning-report.pdf)

## 8.1 Youth engagement and career pathways

Initiatives that inspire and develop the next generation of health professionals are vital to building a sustainable local workforce in the Toowoomba SA4 region. Programs such as the Gateway to Industry Schools Program – Health and Aspire2Health provide students with hands-on experiences, mentoring and structured pathways into vocational education and university health programs. By fostering early exposure to careers in nursing, allied health, medicine and support roles, these initiatives help embed future professionals within the community.



Regional programs include:

- **Gateway to Industry Schools Program – Health:** Links high school students with workplace experiences, mentoring, and structured pathways into vocational education and university health programs (CheckUP, 2024; Queensland Government, 2023).
- **Aspire2Health:** Provides Year 9 and 10 students with opportunities to explore health careers across multiple settings, supported by a collaboration of RuralMedEd, Southern Queensland Rural Health, Griffith University, University of Southern Queensland, University of Queensland Rural Clinical School, Toowoomba Surat Basin Enterprise and Darling Downs West Moreton Primary Health Network.
- **Boots to Scrubs:** Inspires rural women to pursue careers as doctors by offering guidance on entrance exams, university pathways and scholarships. ([amsa.org.au/initiativegroups/bootstoscrubs](https://amsa.org.au/initiativegroups/bootstoscrubs)).

These programs encourage local students to consider health careers, helping to address workforce shortages and ensuring the region has a pipeline of skilled, locally trained professionals prepared to meet future community needs.

## 8.2 Training the future workforce: Grow Your Own health workforce approach

Addressing workforce shortages in health care requires targeted strategies to attract, develop, support and retain skilled personnel. The GYO health workforce approach offers a sustainable, place-based strategy that focuses on building a local workforce pipeline by engaging residents from the Toowoomba SA4 region. The GYO health workforce model operates through two complementary approaches:<sup>36</sup>

1. Outside-in: recruiting individuals from the local community into health training programs or entry-level health roles.
2. Inside-up: providing existing employees with opportunities for skill development and career progression.

This dual strategy ensures a continuous, locally embedded workforce tailored to the specific health needs of the community, creating both social and economic benefits. Benefits of the approach include:<sup>37</sup>

- Workforce stability, as locally sourced workers are more likely to remain in the region.
- Support for a diverse workforce representative of local demographics.
- Promotion of culturally safe care through training of under-represented groups, including Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Reduced recruitment costs and reliance on locum or temporary staff.
- Enhanced workforce capacity, job satisfaction and morale.
- Encouragement of collaboration between local educators and health employers.
- Strengthened community capital and regional liveability through local employment.

Figure 5 Grow your own approach<sup>38</sup>

### Grow Your Own (GYO) Approach

A place-based strategy to build and sustain the local workforce

#### OUTSIDE-IN STRATEGIES

(Attraction & Inclusion Hiring)



Attract locals into the workforce



Inclusive recruitment  
(all ages, backgrounds)



Barrier-free employment pathways



Development programs for new hires

#### INSIDE-UP STRATEGIES

(Retention & Growth)



Succession planning



Mentoring and coaching



Training and upskilling



Career progression opportunities

<sup>36</sup> CheckUP Australia. *Grow Your Own Workforce*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. <https://www.gyoworkforce.com.au>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> CheckUP Australia. *Grow Your Own Workforce*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. <https://www.gyoworkforce.com.au>

### 8.3 Allied health assistants

Allied Health Assistants (AHAs) are an integral part of workforce expansion. By supporting qualified practitioners, AHAs improve patient access and service capacity while gaining practical experience that may lead to further study. Structured pathways from Certificate IV in Allied Health Assistance to allied health degree programs (e.g. physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology) strengthen the local workforce pipeline and help retain talent within the region.



### 8.4 Aligning qualification levels with workforce needs

The GYO approach recognises the dual demand for:

- University-educated professionals: nurses, doctors, allied health.
- VET-qualified workers: aged care, disability support, allied health assistants, dental assistants.

The Toowoomba SA4 region requires aligned investment in both tertiary and vocational training pipelines to ensure local workforce supply meets current and future health service needs. By leveraging the Grow Your Own Health workforce approach, local training providers, employers and industry partners can collaboratively build a skilled, resilient and sustainable health workforce. This workforce will be capable of meeting the evolving health needs of the Toowoomba SA4 community, while strengthening local retention, enhancing cultural safety and fostering long-term social and economic benefits for the region.

## 8.5 Workforce development strategies

Inside-up strategies include identifying career pathways for employees aligned with personal development plans, providing a clear understanding of current and future workforce needs and increasing awareness of education and training opportunities. Employers are encouraged to maintain up-to-date workforce data, provide current job descriptions and training access (including in-house programs) and ensure processes for supervision, delegation and clear career progression pathways.

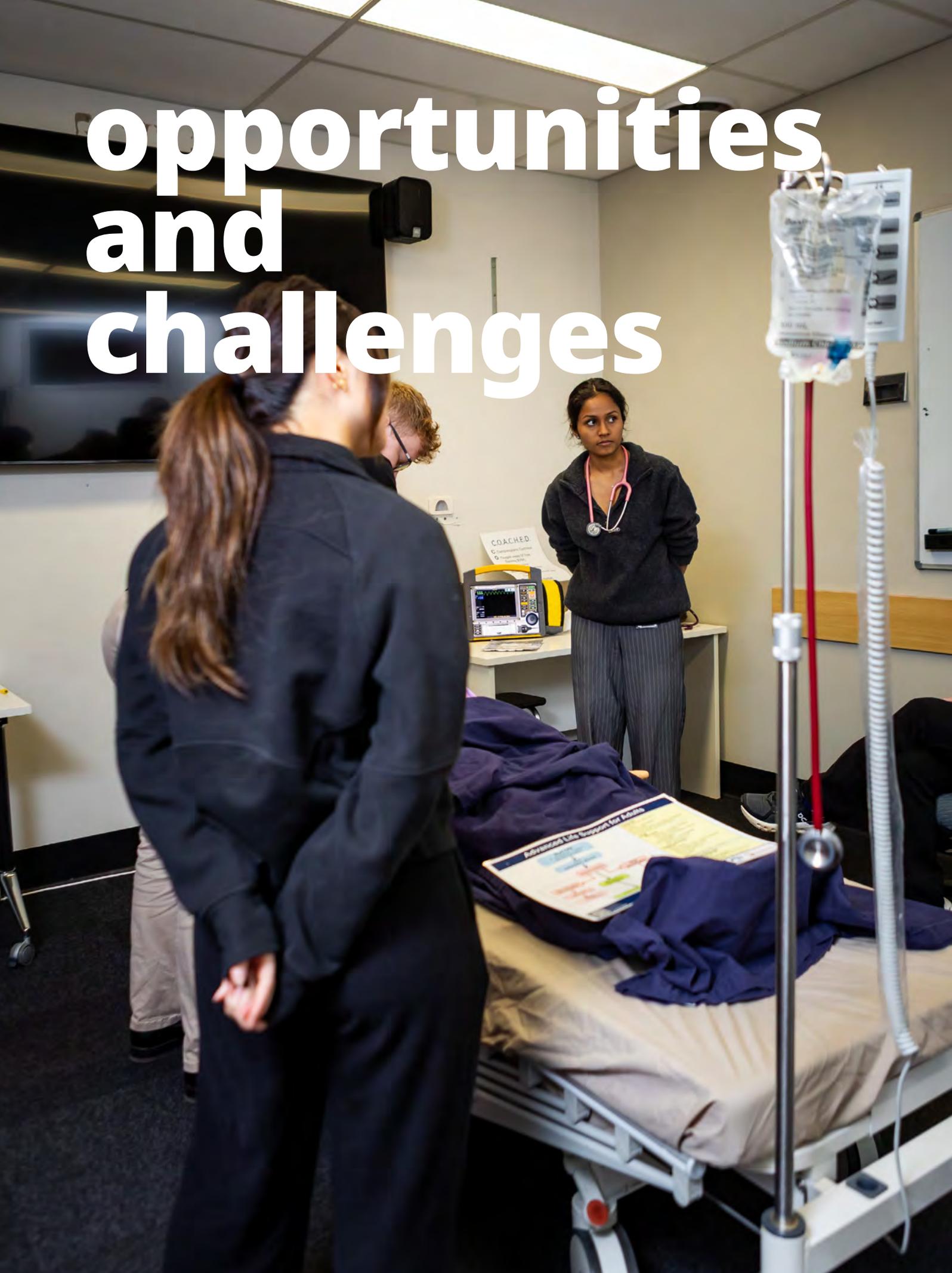
Clear pathways from VET qualifications to undergraduate degrees, including recognition of prior learning (RPL) are essential to support career progression. Structured pathways, such as those for Allied Health Assistants progressing from Certificate IV to allied health degrees, strengthen the local workforce pipeline and help retain talent within the region.

By aligning qualification levels with workforce needs, both university-educated professionals (registered nurses, doctors, allied health) and VET-qualified workers (aged care, allied health assistants, dental assistants) the Toowoomba SA4 region can ensure workforce supply meets current and future health service demands.

Through a combination of strong partnerships with educational institutions, youth engagement programs, lifelong learning strategies, local training providers, employers and industry partners can collaboratively build a skilled, resilient and sustainable health workforce. This workforce will be capable of meeting the evolving health needs of the Toowoomba SA4 community while strengthening retention, enhancing cultural safety and fostering long-term social and economic benefits for the region.



# opportunities and challenges



## 9. Opportunities and challenges

The Toowoomba SA4 health care and social assistance industry faces a range of workforce challenges and opportunities identified through analysis of labour market data, education and training activity and consultation with employers, training providers and professional associations. Understanding these factors is critical to developing a targeted and responsive regional workforce plan.

### 9.1 Attraction and recruitment

#### **Challenges:**

The industry continues to experience difficulty attracting qualified health professionals, particularly in nursing, allied health, general practice and aged care. Competition from metropolitan areas and other regional centres, combined with limited short-term accommodation, contributes to persistent shortages locally.

#### **Opportunities:**

There is strong potential to promote the industry's career progression opportunities and creating career pathways to transition workers through the industry and opening up entry level roles. In addition to this 'inside-up' approach, promoting the region's quality of life, and cost of living advantages as part of a concurrent regional attraction strategy will complement the GYO health workforce approach. Building on existing local initiatives, employers can enhance outreach to graduates, international students and returning professionals, supported by relocation incentives, professional support networks and improved onboarding processes.

#### **Workforce implication:**

Developing a coordinated regional attraction campaign and strengthening employer branding will be essential to address skill shortages and position the region as a destination of choice for health professionals to complement the GYO health workforce model.

### 9.2 Education, training and career pathways

#### **Challenges:**

Despite a strong education network, workforce supply is constrained by limited clinical placement availability, educator shortages and fragmented pathways between VET and higher education. Employers also note difficulties providing supervision due to workload and staff turnover.

#### **Opportunities:**

Expanding GYO initiatives will enhance local training and employment pathways. Improved collaboration between TAFE Queensland, University of Southern Queensland, Southern Queensland Rural Health and health employers can strengthen clinical placement capacity, streamline transitions between qualifications and support local progression from entry-level roles to advanced practice.

#### **Workforce implication:**

Embedding integrated education-to-employment pathways will build a sustainable local workforce and reduce reliance on external recruitment.

### 9.3 Allied health workforce development

#### **Challenges:**

The allied health workforce is experiencing persistent shortages in occupational therapy, speech pathology, psychology, dietetics, podiatry and social work. Contributing factors include competition from metropolitan employers, limited supervision capacity and professional isolation in smaller centres.



**Opportunities:**

The region’s strong tertiary and training infrastructure provides a foundation for targeted allied health workforce development. The Southern Queensland Rural Health network supports student placements and professional mentoring, while collaboration between UniSQ, TAFE Queensland – Darling Downs and South West and Darling Downs Health offers opportunities to strengthen supervision capability and transition-to-practice programs.

Emerging service models, such as multidisciplinary care, telehealth and allied health assistant roles can help increase service reach and workforce efficiency. Expanding these models will improve access in rural communities while creating structured career pathways within the local workforce.

**Workforce implication:**

Developing a coordinated regional strategy for allied health workforce development will enhance supervision, retention and professional support, ensuring services remain sustainable and accessible across the region.

## 9.4 Workforce participation and diversity

**Challenges:**

The region’s health workforce remains highly feminised, with men representing less than 15 per cent of the industry. Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) also remain underrepresented, particularly in senior and clinical roles.

**Opportunities:**

Increasing workforce participation among underrepresented cohorts, such as young people, men, CALD populations and First Nations peoples, can expand the labour pool and improve the cultural responsiveness of local health services. Local employers can collaborate with schools, community organisations and ACCHOs to deliver targeted outreach, mentoring and traineeship programs.

**Workforce implication:**

A diverse workforce that reflects the community’s demographics will improve care outcomes, strengthen inclusion and support long-term workforce stability.

## 9.5 Retention and workforce wellbeing

### Challenges:

Workforce turnover is a significant issue across aged care and hospital services. Contributing factors include workload pressures, limited professional development, housing constraints and burnout following the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Opportunities:

Investing in retention and wellbeing strategies can significantly enhance workforce stability. These include flexible work arrangements, structured career pathways, leadership development and mentoring for early-career staff.

### Workforce implication:

Establishing region-wide retention initiatives, such as cross-sector leadership programs, peer networks and health and wellbeing supports, will reduce churn and strengthen workforce resilience.

## 9.6 Digital transformation and skills

### Challenges:

Digital capability across the workforce is uneven, with some providers lacking confidence and infrastructure to adopt new technologies. Barriers include limited training access, outdated systems and resistance to change among parts of the workforce.

### Opportunities:

Investing in digital health literacy, telehealth delivery and data analytics will improve access and efficiency across services, particularly in rural and remote communities. Partnerships with local education providers can embed digital skills in both VET and university curricula, supported by ongoing professional development.

### Workforce implication:

Developing a region-wide digital capability framework will enable consistent adoption of technology and support workforce adaptability.

## 9.7 Regional collaboration and data sharing

### Challenges:

While collaboration between employers, education providers and health networks is strong, workforce data is fragmented. This limits the region's ability to track **graduate outcomes, workforce flows and emerging gaps**.

### Opportunities:

Developing a shared data framework, will enable evidence-based planning and investment. Strengthening collaboration through the IAG and regional health workforce networks will ensure workforce strategies remain responsive and coordinated.

### Workforce implication:

Improved data sharing and collaboration will enhance forecasting, reduce duplication and enable a collective response to workforce needs.

Addressing these challenges through targeted strategies will allow the Toowoomba SA4 region to fully leverage opportunities in workforce growth, training pathways, allied health expansion and digital innovation.

# health industry workforce plan strategies



## 10. Health industry workforce plan strategies

The analysis of the region's health workforce has highlighted both the challenges and the significant opportunities available to strengthen regional capability and resilience. Building on the insights from the environmental scan and extensive stakeholder consultation, this section outlines the strategic priorities and actions that will guide workforce development across the Toowoomba SA4 region over the next five years.

These strategies are underpinned by the principles of the GYO model, which focuses on engaging local people, providing accessible training and creating sustainable employment within their own communities. The approach recognises that long-term workforce sustainability in health care relies not only on attracting new workers but also on retaining and developing those who already live and work in the region.

The workforce development plan emphasises collaboration across industry, education training and government partners to ensure that health workforce initiatives are locally relevant, data-informed and outcome-focused. Together, these strategies provide a clear and practical roadmap to support a skilled, inclusive and future-ready health workforce that can adapt to emerging needs and deliver high-quality care across the Toowoomba SA4 and the wider Darling Downs region.



**Goal 1: Inspire and connect**  
Build strong, inclusive pathways into health careers for local residents.

	<b>Priority:</b>	<b>Actions:</b>
<b>1. Promote health careers early and effectively</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure schools have current, region-specific career materials covering health career options, training requirements and future workforce needs.</li> <li>• Provide students with hands-on exposure to health careers.</li> <li>• Address gender stereotypes and promote male role models in nursing, allied health and paramedicine.</li> <li>• Increase awareness of health career opportunities for inward migration candidates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and distribute digital and print career toolkits for teachers and career advisors.</li> <li>• Expand regional initiatives (Aspire2Health, scrub camps, job shadowing).</li> <li>• Run social media and local media campaigns showcasing local health role models.</li> <li>• Organise annual school visits, career fairs and health-experience days.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Integration with service delivery:</b> Ensure all career initiatives highlight how these pathways meet regional health service needs, including access, quality and patient safety outcomes.</p>		
<b>2. Engage under-represented groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in health careers.</li> <li>• Support CALD communities with culturally appropriate pathways and bridging programs.</li> <li>• Promote inclusion of women returning to work, people with disability and other under-represented groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and schools to deliver culturally safe workshops and traineeships.</li> <li>• Develop language-supported training programs and bridging courses for CALD communities.</li> <li>• Advocate for targeted scholarships, internships and mentoring programs.</li> <li>• Implement workshops and mentoring for women returning to work and people with disability.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Integration with service delivery:</b> Link participation in these programs to future workforce supply for regional health services and community health outcomes.</p>		
<b>3. Re-engage the dormant health workforce</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and encourage inactive but qualified health professionals to return to work.</li> <li>• Provide flexible, supportive pathways for re-entry into health roles.</li> <li>• Promote flexible, family-friendly work arrangements to increase workforce retention.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a local “Return to Health” register with a dedicated coordinator.</li> <li>• Deliver refresher courses and accelerated re-entry programs.</li> <li>• Promote flexible rostering, part-time and job-sharing options.</li> <li>• Conduct targeted campaigns to attract qualified professionals from outside the region.</li> <li>• Provide relocation and professional transition support for returning professionals.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Workforce sustainability planning:</b> Include succession planning and leadership pipeline development for key clinical roles to ensure long-term workforce sustainability.</p>		

**Goal 2: Develop and upskill**  
Expand training, skills development and career progression opportunities.

	<b>Priority:</b>	<b>Actions:</b>
<b>1. Strengthen school-to-health pathways</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand Health Gateway program participation.</li> <li>• Increase school-based traineeships in key health support roles.</li> <li>• Align school-to-work pathways with projected regional service needs (hospital expansions, aged care, community hubs).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support uptake of Health Gateway program locally and encourage tracking of participation rates inform program improvements.</li> <li>• Organise annual competitions or health hackathons for students.</li> <li>• Promote school-based traineeship programs in high-demand health roles.</li> <li>• Engage local employers in shaping school-based programs to meet service demand.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Integration with service delivery:</b> Align pathways to service delivery priorities, demonstrating impact on workforce availability, patient access and quality of care.</p>		
<b>2. Build clear education and training pathways</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate seamless progression from VET to higher education.</li> <li>• Expand local delivery options of priority courses (nursing, midwifery, medicine, allied health).</li> <li>• Support flexible “earn while you learn” models.</li> <li>• Prepare the workforce for emerging technologies and future health roles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formalise articulation agreements between registered training organisations and universities.</li> <li>• Deliver targeted short courses addressing workforce gaps (aged care, mental health, digital health).</li> <li>• Develop dual enrolment and flexible progression pathways linking school, VET, university and workplace training.</li> <li>• Integrate AI, telehealth, robotics and virtual hospital modules into training programs.</li> <li>• Monitor emerging health workforce trends and update training offerings annually.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Workforce sustainability planning:</b> Include leadership pipelines and succession planning for educators and clinical trainers to ensure continuity in training programs.</p>		
<b>3. Improve access to clinical placements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase availability and diversity of clinical placements across the region.</li> <li>• Ensure high-quality supervision and training capacity for placements.</li> <li>• Link placement opportunities to regional service expansions and emerging care models.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a regional placement consortium across hospitals, primary care, community health providers and non-government organisations.</li> <li>• Advocate for introduction of placement coordinators and additional support for supervisors.</li> <li>• Explore non-traditional placements, including telehealth, aged care, disability services and virtual hospitals.</li> <li>• Implement simulation-based and virtual placements to expand capacity.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Integration with service delivery:</b> Placement programs should be linked to service delivery outcomes, ensuring students contribute to patient care and health system needs.</p>		

**4. Accelerate upskilling and digital capability**

- Address workforce gaps in high-demand areas (mental health, aged care, digital health).
- Embed digital health, telehealth and emerging technologies into training.
- Prepare the workforce for innovation and transformation in healthcare.
- Map workforce skills gaps and align micro-credential programs.
- Expand stackable and simulation-based training offerings.
- Link training programs to projected service expansions (hospital beds, aged care, community hubs).
- Provide continuous professional development in artificial intelligence, telehealth, robotics and virtual care.
- Engage with technology providers to deliver future-focused training solutions.

**Workforce sustainability planning:** Incorporate future workforce modelling to anticipate new roles and technology requirements.



**Goal 3: Empower and sustain**  
 Retain the health workforce by improving culture, career pathways and wellbeing

	<b>Priority:</b>	<b>Actions:</b>
<b>1. Understand and address workforce attrition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify causes of workforce turnover, burnout and attrition.</li> <li>Establish employer-level structures to reduce attrition.</li> <li>Monitor workforce sustainability and progress toward service alignment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collect workforce data on turnover, burnout and exit interviews.</li> <li>Establish "Workforce Retention Taskforces" at major employers.</li> <li>Implement evidence-based interventions targeting high-risk roles.</li> <li>Develop an annual "Workforce Scorecard" to monitor progress, report publicly and inform continuous improvement.</li> </ul>
<b>Workforce sustainability planning:</b> Succession planning for key roles should be informed by turnover and retention data.		
<b>2. Strengthen leadership and culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build management and leadership capability.</li> <li>Embed cultural safety, team-based care and inclusive practices.</li> <li>Recognise and reward staff contributions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver management and leadership development programs.</li> <li>Implement cultural safety, team-based care and inclusion initiatives.</li> <li>Conduct staff engagement surveys and establish continuous feedback loops.</li> <li>Introduce recognition programs for innovation, teamwork and contribution.</li> </ul>
<b>Workforce sustainability planning:</b> Develop leadership pipelines to ensure continuity in management roles.		
<b>3. Support career development and progression</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide clear career pathways for clinical and non-clinical staff.</li> <li>Develop internal capability through structured mentoring and training.</li> <li>Support lifelong learning and professional development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for employers to support ongoing professional development and upskilling via micro-credentials, postgraduate study options and professional development leave.</li> <li>Establish clinical educator roles with protected mentoring time.</li> <li>Implement mentoring and career coaching programs across all health disciplines.</li> </ul>
<b>Workforce sustainability planning:</b> Include succession planning for specialist and senior roles to maintain capability.		
<b>4. Promote flexibility and wellbeing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support workforce retention through flexible work options.</li> <li>Improve staff wellbeing, safety and work-life balance.</li> <li>Promote diversity and inclusion across the workforce.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand flexible rostering, job-sharing and remote work where operationally feasible.</li> <li>Implement wellbeing initiatives, safe staffing levels and childcare supports.</li> <li>Include targeted programs for women returning to work, people with disability and males entering female-dominated roles.</li> </ul>
<b>Workforce sustainability planning:</b> Ensure flexible and wellbeing initiatives contribute to long-term retention and succession readiness.		

## 10.1 Overarching governance group

To drive the implementation of the Toowoomba Health Workforce Development Plan, a dedicated governance or advisory group is essential. Led by TSBE such a group could provide oversight, accountability and strategic direction, bringing together representatives from health services, education providers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, primary care and government.

By coordinating across these sectors, the governance group can align training pipelines with workforce demand, monitor progress against key performance indicators and ensure resources are deployed effectively. Importantly, it also acts as a forum for shared decision-making, enabling local voices to guide solutions and ensuring that initiatives remain responsive to community needs.

With strong governance in place, the workforce development plan's strategies can be implemented in a consistent, transparent and sustainable way, reducing duplication and driving long-term workforce resilience. The governance group will also play a critical role in reviewing progress, sharing data and lessons learned, and adjusting strategies to ensure alignment with changing service and workforce priorities.



# conclusion



# 11. Conclusion

The Toowoomba Health Workforce Development Plan provides a comprehensive, evidence-based roadmap to strengthen the capability, diversity and sustainability of the region's health workforce. It recognises that the challenges facing health care in regional Queensland, including population growth, an ageing demographic, technological change and skills shortages, require locally driven, collaborative and forward-thinking solutions.

By engaging residents, strengthening education and training pathways and fostering inclusive and flexible workplaces, the region can develop a self-sustaining pipeline of skilled health professionals who are deeply connected to their communities. The inclusion of targeted strategies for allied health development, training expansion and workforce retention ensures that the region's health services are prepared to meet both current and future demands.

Ultimately, the success of the Toowoomba Health Workforce Development Plan depends on the collective commitment of all partners, industry, government, education and the community to work together toward a common vision: a skilled, resilient and inclusive health workforce that delivers high-quality, person-centred care for every member of the Toowoomba SA4 region.

**By investing in local people, strengthening regional partnerships and aligning workforce development initiatives with service delivery, the region can secure a sustainable health workforce that supports both economic growth and community wellbeing for generations to come.**

