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# Taking a snapshot of the addiction workforce in Aotearoa New Zealand

## Dapaanz review of the addiction workforce in Aotearoa

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As the membership association representing the professional interests of people working in addiction treatment, dapaanz is dedicated to supporting its members in their mahi and careers, and to fostering excellence in addiction practice.

Dapaanz oversees the registration of a large part of the addiction workforce and, as kaitiaki of Tikanga Matatika, upholds the code of ethics for the sector.

In 2023, dapaanz commissioned a review of the addiction workforce in Aotearoa to better understand its size and scope, as well as to gain insights into working conditions, factors contributing to poor retention, and opportunities to develop and grow the workforce. This was partly a response to challenges facing the sector, including recruitment and retention of staff for current models of care, and the prospect of potential shortages of qualified personnel in the future.

## Objectives and methodology

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The review set out to establish an accurate profile of the addiction workforce and their working conditions, especially the challenges they currently face and the specific factors that contribute to poor retention. In addition, it sought to identify opportunities for development and growth of the addiction workforce.

Dapaanz commissioned specialist research and evaluation company Dovetail to take a multi-faceted approach to the review. This included a project design workshop to confirm scope, key areas of investigation, existing data sources, and the data collection approach.

A systematic review was undertaken of available data sets and secondary material regarding the addiction workforce in Aotearoa, synthesising relevant insights. Data were drawn from a range of sources, including Te Whatu Ora, Te Pou, and dapaanz. A literature scan was undertaken regarding national and international responses to addressing workforce issues within the addiction sector. This included a review of publicly available literature, as well as a range of datasets, both published and unpublished. The relevant data were then organised into a coding framework, which was triangulated to identify overlapping patterns and create a high-level profile summary of the workforce.

As a means of gathering feedback on the findings and to elicit additional insights, a series of reflective discussions was undertaken with sector representatives identified with assistance from dapaanz.

## A qualified, specialist workforce with an exclusively addiction focus

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For the purposes of the review, dapaanz defined the addiction workforce as comprising those specialist addiction practitioners who work exclusively with people seeking support and treatment to manage addiction related issues, inclusive of drug, alcohol, problem gambling and smoking, as well as those who care for them to help make recovery possible.

By this definition, addiction practitioners are health professionals who are qualified and competent to independently provide the continuum of addiction interventions, including comprehensive assessment, treatment planning and delivery. These specialist addiction professionals require a qualification before being employed and must attain or maintain a professional registration while working. The workforce also includes both the paid and unpaid, including peer support workers, varied allied health professions, nurses, medical practitioners and cultural workers.

Dapaanz acknowledges that there are many professionals who encounter individuals with addiction challenges as part of their work, but for whom it is not their primary role. This broader range of workers from multiple sectors, including healthcare, welfare, law enforcement and education, lies outside the remit of this review.



## Overcoming challenges to create an accurate high-level workforce profile

Inevitably, there were complicating factors in measuring and profiling the specialist addiction workforce in Aotearoa, not least the conflation of mental health and addiction services, with data collected by various health organisations often reporting on mental health and addiction as a single service type.

Furthermore, while it is not compulsory to register with dapaanz, the national addiction registration body, to become an addiction practitioner, most employers do require addiction practitioners to have, or be working towards, a professional registration. In some cases, registration is with other health professional associations. Therefore, while the data held by dapaanz are detailed and wide-ranging, it does not provide a complete understanding of the size and makeup of the addiction workforce, which is an ongoing challenge.

In addition, specialist addiction practitioners work across a range of organisations including the public and private health systems, multiple non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as in self-employment. Consequently, there is no single data source that monitors the addiction workforce across these different areas, and much of what is known about the NGO workforce is based on point-in-time survey data.

The absence of an agreed sector definition of the workforce, the conflation of mental health and addiction services, along with disparate data management practices across the wider sector make the overall addiction workforce particularly challenging to profile and monitor.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the triangulation of key information distilled from the multi-faceted review process provided a current general overview of what is known about the specialist addiction workforce in New Zealand.

For an estimated profile of the addiction workforce in diagrams and charts, please see snapshot 1a of this series.



### Other snapshots in this series:

1. The addiction workforce in Aotearoa | **1a. Profile of the addiction workforce** | 2. Unpacking the workforce shortage
3. Why are people leaving? | 4. Ways to improve workforce retention | 5. Opportunities for growing the addiction workforce
6. Growing the workforce: Recruitment ideas and challenges | 7. Growing the workforce: New entrants and early career professionals

### About dapaanz and the 2023 addiction workforce review

Dapaanz represents the professional interests of people working in addiction treatment. We are dedicated to supporting our members in their mahi and careers, while fostering excellence in addiction practice.

We oversee the addiction intervention competency framework, which defines the addiction scope of practice, and we are kaitiaki of Tikanga Matatika, the code of ethics for the sector.

Our current focus is ensuring our members feel supported and nurtured so that they are excited about being addiction practitioners today and in the future.

In 2023, dapaanz commissioned a mixed methods review of the addiction workforce in Aotearoa. Drawing on multiple datasets, both published and unpublished, from a range of sources including Te Whatu Ora, Te Pou, and dapaanz, the data were organised into a coding framework and triangulated to identify overlapping patterns. A series of workshops and discussions were undertaken with sector representatives to gather additional insights and further feedback on the data findings. The review also distilled a number of findings from national and international literature.



**dapaanz**