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## Opportunities for growing and developing our addiction workforce

**A collaborative approach is required to develop, grow and maintain a sustainable addiction workforce. Our sector is experiencing multifaceted issues – individual, organisational and structural – that present challenges for the workforce and contribute to ongoing recruitment and retention problems.**

Many of the issues will require the involvement of a range of stakeholders across the sector to support workforce growth and sustainability. This includes addiction service providers, government agencies, the tertiary sector and workforce development centres, as well as dapaanz. The research identified some key areas of focus for stakeholders:

### Create a comprehensive strategy and implement workforce planning

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*“If we don’t have a plan or a road map we don’t know where it is that we’re going. We’ve got workforce bodies that have different tasks and responsibilities, but no overreaching strategy. It’s about having the resources to start mapping that out, to get all the information together so we can make decisions about where we need to head towards.”*

A comprehensive strategy is needed to underpin and inform future sector developments. This will ensure there is sufficient capability and capacity to deliver services and meet future demand.

#### Workforce planning should incorporate:

- The development of local and regional workforce plans
- Proactive planning to address future workforce gaps
- Input from service providers and people with lived experience
- High-quality workforce and population data.

Other priorities for workforce planning include reliable modelling of future service delivery need, focusing on priority populations, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

### Preparedness for new models of care

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With an increased focus on wellbeing, resiliency and recovery, new models of care in addiction treatment are being conceptualised and formulated. These will lead to new roles within the profession as the tasks and functions required of the workforce are considered. Communication between affected stakeholders to plan for and adopt changes is important to ensure existing specialist workforces are not unintentionally depleted and training providers have adequate time to adjust or develop programmes.

#### Examples of these new roles include:

- Health/lifestyle coaches
- Digital support mentors for youth
- Non-clinical staff who can support adults requiring accommodation or employment support.

### Support our leaders

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*“There’s a range of leadership: strong clinical practice leadership, Māori leadership, lived experience leadership, whānau peer leadership - we need to support all of these.”*

As noted in other snapshots in this series, the review points to a need for quality leadership at various levels within the sector to address sector challenges, including by:

- Facilitating workplace cultures that support diversity in the people joining the workforce
- Supporting worker wellbeing
- Countering potential negative workplace experiences.

By providing strong and effective leadership, senior managers promote innovation, provide meaningful performance measures and deploy resources effectively to achieve better services.

**Growing Māori, Pasifika and peer leadership was identified as a priority** to help retain staff, build capacity and support culturally appropriate models of service delivery.

## Listen to kaimahi to improve workforce retention

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*“If people are not feeling valued on a whole lot of levels ...then we’re not going to get them committing long-term to addictions as a career.”*

Kaimahi have provided clear feedback on many occasions about what matters to them. Workforce retention can be improved by providing:

- More pathways for career progression
- More flexible working arrangements (particularly as kaimahi approach retirement)
- Better preparation (particularly in training new kaimahi in the models of practice they may encounter).

Feeling valued, through opportunities for greater responsibility or progression, as well as being fairly remunerated for knowledge and experience also contribute to kaimahi remaining in the addiction workforce.

In addition, providing a more diverse range of services to tāngata whai ora has been suggested as a means of fostering retention as the workforce extends its learning and practice through involvement in new services and programmes.

## Enhance workforce wellbeing

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*“We make sure there’s a really strong team culture ...We do staff check-ins, where they get to check in with each other, so that their own psychological and emotional needs are being met ...We make sure we’re not overloading them.”*

Addiction treatment professionals work within a huge and varied range of workplace settings. Worker wellbeing initiatives need to be tailored and supported, so that the needs of individual workers are met, and the environmental context of the workplace is taken into account. Leaders are required to be innovative and responsive to their workforce need.

Worker wellbeing strategies are not only important for addiction workers themselves, but also support client outcomes and organisational functioning.

## Strengthen professional development

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*“Give them the time to feel confident about their practice before they have to coach others.”*

Improving access to appropriate professional development will increase staff confidence, job performance and job satisfaction, ultimately contributing to stronger workforce retention. This includes:

- Providing senior staff with skill and aptitude training, to become better mentors for those who are beginning their journey as addiction workforce professionals
- Explicit training for early career professionals who have moved quickly into leadership roles, often because of staff vacancy.

## Build a robust workforce pipeline

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*“How do you get people into the workforce? Don’t make it difficult to get there, remove all the barriers ...People don’t even know about addictions as a specialisation, so get out there out and be present.”*

Growing and strengthening the workforce pipeline requires a number of strategies, starting with raising the profile of the addiction workforce in general, and making it easier for new applicants to enter the workforce.

This is particularly important for priority workforces such as Māori, Pasifika, Asian, youth and the peer workforce. This will involve working closely with tertiary educators and addiction service providers as they support new staff entering the sector.



### 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

