

## Community Pharmacy

### Industry Overview

The community pharmacy industry is a major health care provider which is continuously evolving in order to relieve some pressures on the health system. Pharmacies are a multi-disciplined provider of health care services.

Community Pharmacy is a people facing industry and as such is a labour intensive business which has experienced growth over the past 5 year and is expected to experience growth by 6.4% to June 2022. Industry revenue rose by 1.4% to 16.3 billion in 2017<sup>1</sup>

Technology will continue to drive down operating costs, which should in turn free up pharmacists to provide greater value-added advice to customers.<sup>2</sup> However Industry reports that technology has in fact increased the work flow for pharmacies as the checking process of multiple agencies linked to pharmacies and the legal requirements is very labour intensive for the pharmacist and the staff.<sup>3</sup>

### Supply and demand

The continual turnover of staff in this industry and the expansion of services by Pharmacists means a greater requirement for qualified and skilled dispensary technicians and pharmacy assistants. There are many factors as to why the uptake in this industry is problematic some of the reasons identified are thought to be in part due to low wages and long working hours.

A qualified pharmacist after 5 years of study is paid around the same level as a senior shop assistant while dispensary technicians and pharmacy assistants are paid around the same rate as a shop assistant. Changes to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) saw revenue for dispensing decline by 1.2%<sup>4</sup> and this may also be a contributing factor for wages being low in this industry.

Clearly the supply and demand for industry are not being met for a range of reasons.

### Skills demand and shortages

The industry has identified that there is a shortage of pharmacists, dispensary technicians and pharmacy assistants and this will remain a medium to long term issue.

There is a shortage of pharmacists and pharmacy assistants in the regional areas and in particular the Great Southern has been identified as a priority area.

The current requirements for training in this sector are as follows.:

Any person working in a pharmacy at the restricted medicines counter is required to have the S2 and S3 units of competence under compliance requirements of the Quality Care Pharmacy Program (QCCP).

Pharmacy staff employed in QCCP accredited pharmacies, who supply *Pharmacy Medicines and Pharmacists Only Medicines*, must complete:

- mandatory initial training via a recognised course in the supply of these products
- ongoing refresher training: at least three hours per year<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bankwest Future of Business: *Focus on Pharmacy 2018*

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Pharmacy Guild of Australia (WA)

<sup>4</sup> Bankwest Future of Business: *Focus on Pharmacy 2018*

<sup>5</sup> Pharmacy Guild of Australia

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### Pharmacist

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Pharmacists are required to be qualified and registered with the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (APHRA). The lead time to become a pharmacist is 5 years, 4 years' full time university study and a 1-year full time internship. While pharmacists are in short supply and while places are available at the universities there is currently a low take up rate. It has been suggested there is a high attrition rate after the first year as a qualified pharmacist, some suggest as high as 70%.

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### Dispensary technicians

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WA does not require dispensary technicians to hold a qualification to dispense however advice from the Pharmacy Guild (WA) is that this may soon change. The lead time for training will be 1-year full time in a pharmacy under the direct supervision of the pharmacist

It is worth noting that when dispensary technicians are required to hold the SIR40216 Certificate IV in Community Pharmacy Dispensary qualification in WA consideration will need to be given to a management program as current technicians will be existing workers and training will be an issue which will affect the whole of the industry in WA.

Currently no pharmacy workers within the WA workforce holds the SIR40216 Certificate IV in Community Pharmacy Dispensary qualification and as such a comprehensive workforce development plan would need to be developed to upskill the existing workforce in this qualification. It is anticipated that much of the SIR40216 Certificate IV in Community Pharmacy Dispensary qualification for existing workers would include a high proportion of RPL.

This qualification would be difficult to deliver institutionally due to the requirements of the training package. It would be cost prohibitive for an RTO to meet the regulatory requirements of pharmacy and operational dispensary areas as an industry workplace. The dispensary and operational areas must also meet Pharmacy Board of Australia standards for dispensary operations. The training package is specific regarding supervisory requirements by a pharmacist and how dispensing is required to be demonstrated across a work period. The qualification for dispensary technicians would be recognised as a compliance requirement under QCCP.

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### Pharmacy assistants

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Pharmacy assistant - Certificate II and III qualifications vary in delivery time but as a traineeship generally 1 year for each qualification.

The State may need to consider employer assistance and funding for Certificate II entry level training. This is the level of entry employers require for this industry however, with the current economic climate which shows no sign of recovery in the short to medium term, employers are seeking financial support and assistance to encourage employment and training at this level. Certificate II is the commencement of a career pathway.

The pharmacy industry is well aware of the VET and University courses available and accepts university graduates due to the stringent training requirements both on and off the job and due to the current shortage there is no problem with graduates being immediately employed.

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The same cannot be said for graduates of VET courses. The level of competency attained by institutional graduates is not acceptable for work in an industry that is primarily health care based. Employers in this industry have stated they will not employ institutional VET graduates unless it is with a quality RTO.

There has been no identified decline in job roles or skills rather an emerging role for dispensary technicians due to changes in the sixth Community Pharmacy Agreement with the Federal Government.

While there has been a serious decline in the uptake of traineeships in this industry, it has been identified that a Certificate II traineeship is the preferred pathway for community pharmacy employers this in turn translates into a shortage of pharmacy assistants.

The community pharmacy industry has embraced technology to the extent that it can at this time. Medication management Apps and digital health services such as My Health Record system have in fact increased the work flow for pharmacies as the checking process of multiple agencies linked to pharmacies and the legal requirements is very labour intensive for the pharmacist and the staff. Ultimately community pharmacy is a people facing industry that deals with people and their health needs and as such there will always be a demand for workers.

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### Changes in policy

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It has been identified that changes to the state migration policy is causing concern for some employers. Visa holders who have been trained in the pharmacy as dispensary technicians and who have additional skills from overseas, cannot gain residency in WA but must leave and go to Tasmania where dispensary technicians are on the skilled migration list. While this is not a wide spread issue it is anticipated that due to shortages within the state it may well increase. This policy may well prove to be detrimental to an industry which is already experiencing a critical shortage of skilled dispensary technicians.

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### Industry workforce priorities for the next four years

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- Existing worker training will be a priority particularly for dispensary technicians
- Extend probation times. 3 months is too short a time to accurately measure a person's suitability for the job.
- Employer funding/assistance for Certificate II entry level training
- Establish a strong career pathway for industry workers
- Funded skill sets the ensure staff have the necessary and relevant skills to meet the needs of the business
- To engage and train qualified and experienced staff for the future benefit of the industry and the health and wellbeing of the public.
- There is only one RTO in WA delivering pharmacy qualifications via a traineeship and should the Dispensary Technicians role become regulated and a traineeship established then the volume of trainees could prove to be problematic.