Who wouldn’t want to work on the Gold Coast? With its enviable lifestyle and a rapidly expanding economy, the Gold Coast surely has a competitive advantage in the war for talent. But there are demographic and economic forces at play that can’t be ignored if the city is to have a workforce that can cope with the burgeoning health and wellbeing needs. The hunt is on for new ways of finding and keeping the right mix of workers.

What is meant by Workforce Innovation?

Workforce innovation is about being flexible and innovative enough to adapt to new economic, technological, environmental and social conditions. Designing such a workforce is an urgent priority in many industries.

Skill shortages, an ageing workforce and generational differences in work expectations, have sparked unprecedented workforce challenges. These have deeply affected the health and community services industry, and had flow-on affects on the health of the population. The industry needs to be proactive to avoid a situation where labour is insufficient, misemployed or insufficiently skilled to be able to promote and protect the health and wellbeing of the community.

What is known about Workforce Innovation?

The community services and health industry faces grave shortages in both vocationally and professionally trained occupations including nursing and medicine. This workforce is also the third-oldest of any industry, with 46% of workers over 45 years old and, as in other industries, workers are less inclined to work the long hours of years gone by.

A recent national workforce planning exercise concluded that the focus needs to be on training people to work in the more skilled occupations, such as nursing and medicine, because they take longer to train.

To get people into the relevant training they need to be attracted to the industry in the first place. This means employers and policy-makers need to take note of changing attitudes about work and redesign jobs to attract the right staff. Research shows, for example, that Generation Y (born 1980 to 1994) are more interested in work/life balance, flexibility, flat structures, social environment, fun culture, and access to information. To attract new employees, employers need to adapt their management approach, rather than expecting this new generation to conform to traditional ways of working. Employers need to also modify work place environments to meet these changing needs of employees.

In an ageing population and workforce, employers also need to think about how to accommodate older workers. Issues important to older workers include workplace health and safety and flexible working conditions, including part-time work, sub-contracting, consulting and life-of-project work.

Addressing the diversity of the multi-generational employee mix is surely going to be a challenge of any employer.

Benefits could also be found if we explore the untapped potential amongst people not in the workforce or underemployed, including people with a disability and people from different cultural backgrounds. Research in the community services and health sectors has found that ill-informed employer attitudes, such as the perception that people with a disability were more costly employees, could be hindering recruitment from this pool.
Reviews of the health workforce have concluded that, by itself, the approach of demanding more doctors, more nurses, and more allied health workers cannot succeed. The expanding health needs of our growing and ageing community will continue to outstrip production of health professionals. We need to embrace fundamental workforce innovation, changes to scope of practice, and job redesign. New approaches that have promise for broader application include:

- offering multidisciplinary team-based care to provide access to a range of health professionals
- using self-management approaches for managing long term conditions
- adopting new job specialities and professions including new first-contact health care roles, such as nurse practitioners
- trialling new models of consultation including email and telephone consulting, and web-based services.

What is the Situation on the Gold Coast?

The Gold Coast is in the top 10 regions in Australia with an over-concentration of ‘red-alert’ or high vulnerability to job loss suburbs. All Gold Coast suburbs are either at high or medium to high risk.

Some population groups on the Coast are particularly vulnerable. While at the time of the census, the employment rate on the Gold Coast was 72.7%, for Indigenous people it was 62.8% and for people born overseas in non-English speaking countries it was only 59.5%. People with a disability are in an even more difficult situation – the national labour force participation rate was 53.2% in 2003.

On the other hand, large scale employment growth is expected in the community services and health sectors when the new public hospital opens its doors in 2012. An additional workforce pool needs to be developed quickly otherwise there is a risk that hospital staff will be drawn from existing organisations on the Gold Coast, leaving these organisations severely understaffed.

The Gold Coast is already home to a large TAFE provider, four universities and a number of private providers of health and community services training. It is anticipated that the new hospital will provide first class complex care, clinical support and teaching and research facilities. This institutional capacity, combined with its sought-after lifestyle, gives the Coast a good basis to grow, foster and retain its health and community services workforce.

Capitalising on this capacity and making use of the potential of people currently not in the workforce requires a concerted and innovative approach to workforce planning. The Coast’s rapid growth and unique societal and demographic profile has already resulted in some serious gaps in the workforce that, without urgent intervention will lead to serious problems in the next few years.

- Between 2004-07, the supply of Gold Coast General Practitioners grew by around 2.4% per year, but the population increased at a rate of 3.7%. To maintain the balance between supply and demand, 25-30 new GPs would need to be recruited each year for the next 15 years. This is particularly evident in the Northern Growth Corridor where General Practice Gold Coast estimate the population to GP ratio was up to nine times higher than the average for the Gold Coast.
- Gold Coast Health Service District workforce projections on nurses needed by 2012 identify the need for 800 additional nurses. This represents a huge demand and a significant challenge for both General practice and the Non Government sector in the Gold Coast.
• In 2006, a quarter of community services said that they could meet less than 75% of demand. The sectors under most stress were housing support, community education, and mental health.xix

• Services for families with children in the early years are stretched. For example, there are few public sector speech pathologists. This is of particular concern in light of recent finding that several Gold Coast suburbs have very high numbers of children with language and cognitive difficulties.xx

• Other gaps or shortages continue to be identified by service providers with respect to services for youth, drug and alcohol, chronic conditions self management, prevention and promotion.

A city with a thriving economy, which concentrates on making sure there is a wide variety of employment and business opportunities with a focus on education and research and development.

The headline target here is for the Gold Coast to be the employment destination of choice by 2040, with the most diverse and rewarding local employment opportunities.

Gold Coast City Council Bold Future Vision Statement

Implications for Partnerships

✓ Collaborate in planning
  o Combine knowledge and expertise across agencies and sectors to plan regionally
  o Identify common areas of need/ skills which may be effectively addressed through working together across agencies

✓ Increase flexibility
  o Share experiences of what works for different sections of the workforce
  o Agree on common priorities that may be addressed by working together across sectors

✓ Identify common workforce needs and grow the local workforce by improving local training, mapping effective career pathways and succession planning
  o Create pathways to employment for people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds and people with a disability

✓ Develop and implement a regional approach to maximise resources
  o Jointly recruit professional positions to the Gold Coast area.
  o Explore ways to overcome the differing workplace awards and implement shared positions and job rotations that promotes job satisfaction and facilitates professional development.
  o Support and extend existing examples of sharing training across organisations.

If you have examples or ideas about how to make a difference by working in partnership for the Gold Coast, the Primary Care Partnership Council would like to hear about it.

For further information about the Gold Coast Primary Care Partnership Council, to promote your partnership successes or to explore your ideas to make a difference for the people and communities of the Gold Coast- contact Marcia Dwonczyk at marciad@gpgc.com.au.

The Gold Coast Primary Care Partnership Council (GCPC) is a voluntary collaboration of Government and non Government organisations on the Gold Coast. It first came together in 2006 in order to share information and improve coordination for the achievement of positive health and wellbeing outcomes for the Gold Coast Community.

The GCPC receives funding from Queensland Health to support partnering as part of the Connecting Healthcare in Communities initiative (CHIC). It does this by linking together key health and community stakeholders and working with them to integrate planning, delivery and evaluation of services, activities and strategies.
References:


