



SHPA response to the Workforce Analysis on HumanAbility's sectors of focus draft report, May 2024

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is the national, professional organisation for the 6,100+ Hospital Pharmacists, and their Hospital Pharmacist Intern and Hospital Pharmacy Technician colleagues working across Australia's health system, advocating for their pivotal role improving the safety and quality of medicines use.

SHPA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the HumanAbility's draft Workforce Report. SHPA has a long and proud history as the only professional organisation in Australia that embraces pharmacists and pharmacy technicians as members. SHPA is currently in the process of changing its Constitution to permit Technician Members to nominate for and be nominated to become an Elected Pharmacy Technician Board Director. This inclusion of a pharmacy technician voice at the highest level of SHPA's strategy and programs is another step toward SHPA embracing the entire profession across its membership as a truly representative peak body for advanced pharmacy practice in Australia, and recognising that scope of practice is advancing for pharmacy technicians as well as pharmacists.

SHPA also convenes a Technicians and Assistants Specialty Practice Group with SHPA members who are technicians or work closely with technicians and are interested and invested in recognising, developing and optimising the crucial role of technicians and assistants in hospital pharmacy. SHPA would welcome the opportunity to support HumanAbility in advancing education and workforce development relevant to pharmacy technicians and fostering connections with the leading experts in the sector.

The Leadership Committees of the Technicians and Assistants, and Leadership and Management Specialty Practice Groups have provided the following feedback on the draft report.

4.7 Technicians support Services

Workforce profile and issues (pg. 80)

According to the Report, Pharmacy Technicians, numbering 5,600, represent approximately 15.8% of the broader Medical Technicians cohort, totalling 35,400 individuals. Extrapolating from these figures, the Report suggests a requirement for slightly over 1,000 additional pharmacy technicians by November 2026 to meet projected workforce demands.

However, insights gathered from SHPA members indicate that this projection represents merely the baseline requirement for the upcoming years, especially given the expansion in scope of practice and leadership and management opportunities. SHPA foresees a heightened demand for pharmacy technicians by November 2026 to address emerging vacancies adequately.

In light of these projections, SHPA advocates for a comprehensive workforce survey to be conducted. This survey would serve the dual purpose of gaining deeper insights into the evolving needs of the pharmacy sector and facilitating more accurate forecasting of workforce growth. Such proactive measures will be instrumental in ensuring the workforce is sufficiently equipped to meet the evolving demands of the healthcare landscape.



The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia

PO Box 1774 Collingwood Victoria 3066 Australia

(03) 9486 0177 | shpa.org.au | shpa@shpa.org.au | ABN: 54 004 553 806

Skills training priorities (pg. 81-82)

Certificate III and IV Hospital or Health Services Pharmacy Support qualifications

In order to meet the anticipated growth in the pharmacy technician workforce, it is essential to have accessible qualifications. While updated versions of Certificate III and IV Hospital or Health Services Pharmacy Support qualifications were approved in November 2022, access to these qualifications has been hindered by delays in their rollout, and the extremely limited number of institutions that offer this course.

Although some Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) have begun offering the new Certificate III, availability of the Certificate IV remains limited. Unfortunately, even those who provide access to Certificate IV do not currently offer the full list of approved units of competency.

Of particular concern is the absence of RTOs offering units related to manufacturing and compounding. Whilst these are elective units within the course, two of the three units were offered by RTOs in previous versions of the qualifications, and these units are considered essential by many organisations for pharmacy technicians involved in manufacturing chemotherapy and other high-risk items. These units are;

- FBPPHM3020 – Apply Good Manufacturing Practice requirements (new)
- HLTPHA014 – Conduct small-scale compounding and labelling of pharmaceutical products (preexisting)
- HLTPHA016 – Conduct small-scale compounding and labelling of aseptic pharmaceutical products (preexisting)

This shortfall in training opportunities is negatively impacting both training processes and organisational support for technician qualification attainment.

As more individualised therapies, chemotherapies and biologics become available, it is expected that the number of pharmacy technicians sought to participate in medication manufacturing will also increase, and the lack of RTO supported training in this area will be a barrier to this growth.

Advanced pharmacy technician roles

Additionally, the profound repercussions of the pandemic, compounded by mounting strain on the healthcare system due to factors such as surging patient volumes and heightened complexity, have precipitated a significant shift in the responsibilities of technicians. As the demand for healthcare services intensifies amidst workforce shortages on a national scale, technicians are increasingly being expected to undertake more advanced roles within hospital pharmacy departments. Amidst these evolving dynamics, it becomes imperative that skills training continually evolves to ensure the technician workforce remains agile and adequately prepared to effectively fulfill the demands of their advancing roles in healthcare delivery.

Currently, the training and credentialing process for these advanced roles typically occur at the site level, acknowledging the diverse contextual nuances that can exist across different healthcare settings. However, despite the imperative to recognise and accommodate these site-specific differences, there is currently a lack of a national system that standardises and evaluates the equivalency of training programs, and that uniformly recognises the credentials obtained by technicians as they transition between work sites or assume similar roles elsewhere. SHPA advocates for a cohesive framework that ensures consistency and portability of qualifications, thereby facilitating seamless transitions and optimising workforce mobility within the healthcare sector.

In response to this pressing need for consistency, SHPA is currently in the process of developing a National Competency Framework for Technicians. This initiative aims to establish a robust framework that fosters standardisation across the country. This will be out for consultation in the second half of 2024.

