

Cross-network Allied Health Assistant workforce Professional Development

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Background

Allied Health Assistants (AHA) are the fourth largest Allied Health discipline at MonashHealth. The award covering them offers no professional development funding or leave. Historically AHAs have worked in the Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Disciplines and as a result their Professional Development has been offered via these disciplines. Across MonashHealth AHAs work in Social Work, Podiatry, Nutrition and Dietetics, Speech Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Interdisciplinary roles in Community and Mental Health. Their professional development needs are far greater than 'unidisciplinary' offerings. Meanwhile the 'Growing through Learning' Education framework was introduced across the Allied Health Disciplines at MonashHealth in 2016 to foster a culture of relevant quality education, reducing duplicity and irrelevance, in line with individual learning goals expressed within disciplines and evaluated against such.

Aim

To improve access for AHAs at MonashHealth to relevant Professional Development opportunities aligned with their learning goals.

Method

A small working party was formed by interested members of the workforce in August 2016.

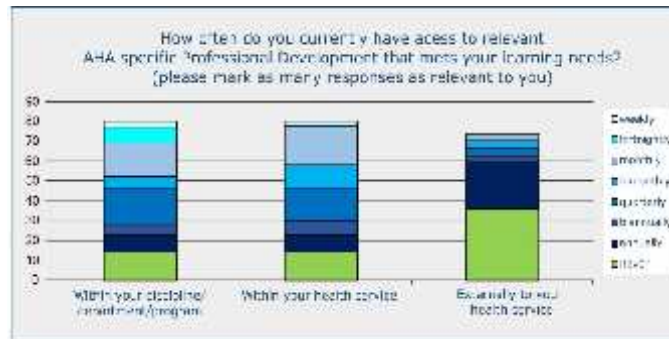
- Lobby Allied Health Executive for Professional Development Leave entitlement (above award).

- A survey for the internal workforce was formulated as was a survey for external benchmarking.

Results

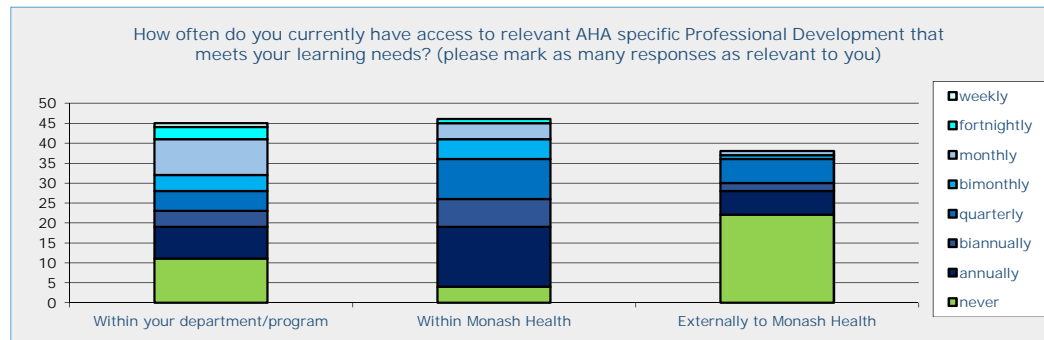
External benchmarking garnered responses from 16 different health services across Victoria in December 2016 and revealed;

- very few opportunities offered to AHAs for meaningful professional development
- large variability in support provided and access to relevant Professional Development
- 93% respondents willing to attend a statewide seminar at MonashHealth in 2017.



Internal survey in October 2016 revealed that the AHA workforce

- is not aligned with the Growing through Learning Education Framework for Allied Health at MonashHealth, despite several common learning goals identified.
- Preferred mode of delivery for professional development is face-to-face due to the practical nature of the role and the 22% of AHAs at MonashHealth never have access to Professional Development that meets their learning needs within their department while 45% never have access to external Professional Development that meets their learning needs. 43% of respondents had quarterly access to some form of Professional Development.



Significance of the findings to Allied Health

The AHA workforce is growing exponentially in numbers and in skill. As a result, it is a workforce which requires ongoing professional development in order to fulfil its potential. Guiding this professional development in a meaningful and evidence based manner means that the workforce feels valued and retention is likely to be maintained. It also ensures that our AHA workforce has the skills we expect of them. Upskilling AHAs to assist AHPs will allow AHPs more capacity for advanced practice.

Key Outcomes

- MonashHealth AHAs now have above award entitlement to Professional Development and Conference Leave equivalent to their Allied Health Professional peers.
- MonashHealth AHAs have quarterly Professional Development seminars aligned with their learning goals offered annually, offering an opportunity to learn and to network.
- Alignment with Growing through Learning Education framework in matching education to learning goals, and evaluating in a standardised manner.
- Establishment of a Centralised Professional Development Calendar.
- Establishment of a Centralised Professional Development database to record all applications, approvals and attendances.
- Facilitation of a statewide AHA Day Professional Development Seminar in line with learning goals identified by internal and external survey.
- Regular supervision for AHAs facilitating better articulation of learning needs.

Reference:
Golder, Janet., Farlie, Melanie K., & Sevenhuysen, S. (2016). Improving quality and reducing waste in allied health workplace education programs: A pragmatic operational education framework approach. *Journal of Allied Health*, 45(4), 259-266.

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