

Region in Focus: Central Queensland, Wide Bay & Sunshine Coast, and Darling Downs & West Moreton Regions

In this edition of Health Works we highlight some key findings of the rural and remote workforce in the Central Queensland, Wide Bay & Sunshine Coast and Darling Downs & West Moreton regions drawn from the [2023 Health Workforce Needs Assessment \(HWNA\)](#).

The HWNA, undertaken annually by Health Workforce Queensland (HWQ), includes an online survey targeting General Practitioners (GP), practice managers, primary health care nurses and midwives, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers/Practitioners and allied health practitioners (AHPs) working in Modified Monash (MM 2-7) locations in Queensland.

The survey captured practitioners' perceptions of workforce and services gaps in their region in addition to their thoughts on factors influencing health staff departures.

The [Addendum Report](#) supplements the state-wide report and provides an overview of health workforce needs in the four mainly rural PHN regions in Queensland broken down to Hospital & Health Service (HHS) level.

Central Queensland, Wide Bay & Sunshine Coast Region

There were 201 survey participants from the Central Queensland, Wide Bay & Sunshine Coast region with the majority from the Central Queensland HHS area, followed by the Wide Bay HHS area.

Workforce Gaps

Psychology was rated as the highest workforce gap across all three HHS areas, with Central Queensland HHS area recording the highest mean of 86.25 points. The **general practitioner, social work and speech pathology** workforces ranked in the top five workforce gaps for all three HHS areas, with **occupational therapy** appearing in the top five for both Central Queensland and Wide Bay HHS areas.

Interestingly, **nursing & midwifery** ranked as the third highest workforce gap for the Sunshine Coast HHS area yet sixth in the Wide Bay HHS and seventh in the Central Queensland HHS.

Pharmacy, optometry and audiology workforces recorded some of the lowest workforce gaps across all three HHS areas with physiotherapy also rating lower in two of the three areas.



Central Queensland, Wide Bay & Sunshine Coast PHN Region Top Workforce Gaps by HHS Area



Service Gaps

The highest service gap rating across all three HHS areas was **mental health with community-based rehabilitation** and **alcohol & other drugs** also appearing consistently in the top five service gaps.

Notable differences were observed in the service gap ratings across HHS areas for social support, palliative care and oral health. Whilst ranking as the fourth highest service gap for the Sunshine Coast HHS, **social support** ranked at number 11 (of 13) for the Central Queensland HHS area. Wide Bay HHS ranked **palliative care** as having the areas third highest service gap whilst it was ranked lowest by the Sunshine Coast HHS area. **Oral health** recorded the third highest gap in the Sunshine Coast HHS with Central Queensland ranking it 12th.

Child health, refugee & immigrant health and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander health services all ranked as having lower service gaps across all three HHS areas.



Staff Departures

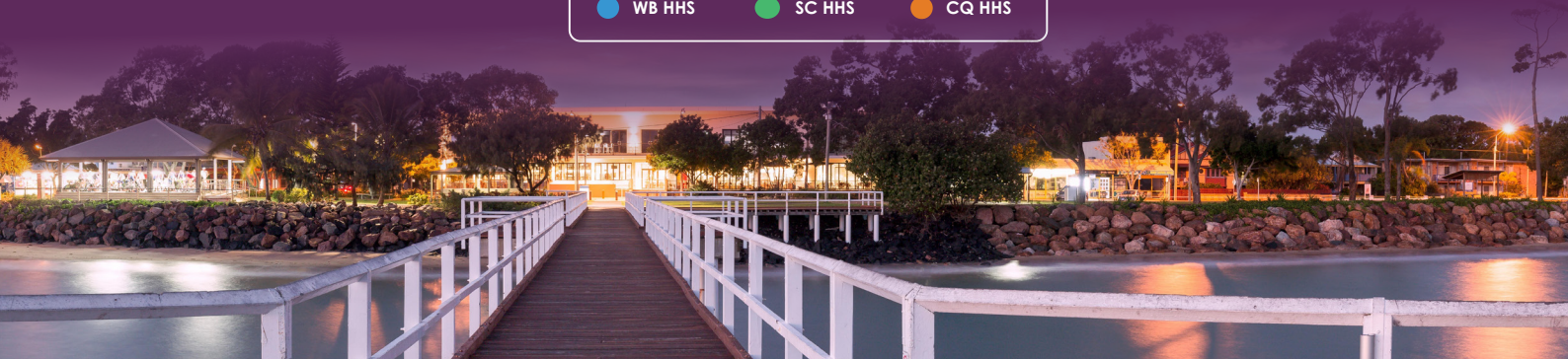
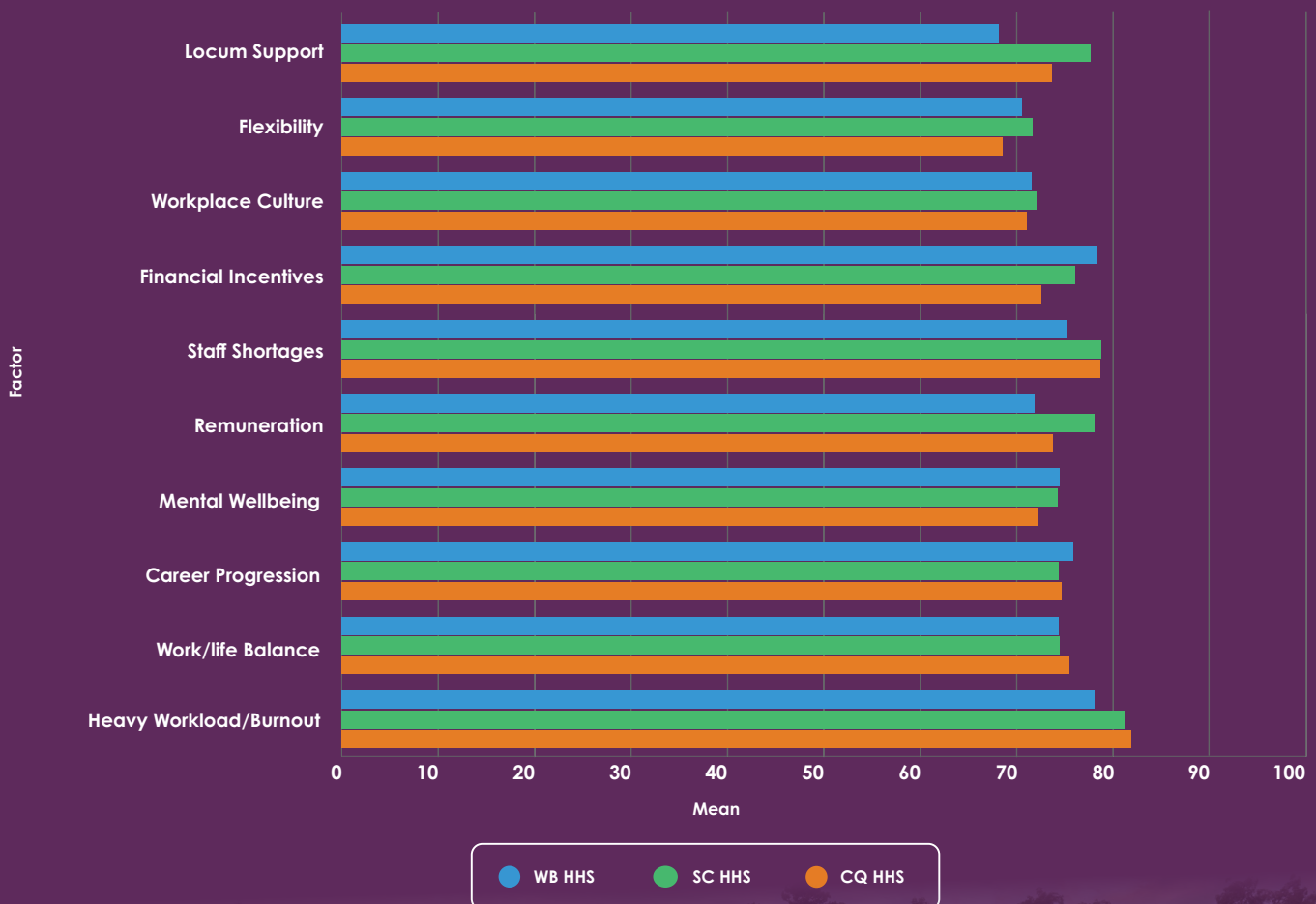
Staff departures were assessed by 164 survey participants in the Central Queensland, Wide Bay & Sunshine Coast region. **Heavy workload/burnout, work/life balance, career progression** and **remuneration** featured in the top five individual factors influencing staff departures across all three HHS areas. A lack of required generalist skills, job security and workplace bullying were rated as less influential.

Professional and personal isolation were rated as having a greater impact on staff departures in the Central Queensland and Wide Bay HHS areas compared to the Sunshine Coast, as was **accommodation** and **job satisfaction**. The 8th highest reason for staff departures in the Sunshine Coast HHS area was a **lack of opportunity to use specialised skills**; a factor rated 15th and 16th for Wide Bay and Central Queensland HHS areas, respectively.

When considering the impact of organisational factors, **staff shortages** and **financial incentives** were rated as having a significant impact on staff departures in all three HHS areas. **Workplace culture, flexibility** and **accommodation difficulties** rounded out the top five factors for Wide Bay HHS whilst ranking lower for Central Queensland and Sunshine Coast HHS areas. **Inadequate healthcare in region** rated highly in both Central Queensland and Sunshine Coast (5th and 4th, respectively) whilst rating 10th for Wide Bay. **A lack of integration with other services** rounded out the top five for the Sunshine Coast HHS whilst rating 9th for Central Queensland and 12th for Wide Bay HHS.

Factors less likely to influence health staff departures in the three Central Queensland, Wide Bay & Sunshine Coast region HHS areas were roster entitlements, communication technology, community facilities, scope of practice, and workplace infrastructure.

Central Queensland, Wide Bay & Sunshine Coast Region Top Individual & Organisational Factors Influencing Staff Departures



Darling Downs & West Moreton Region

One hundred and fifty survey responses relevant to workforce and service gaps were received from within the Darling Downs & West Moreton region with the majority from the West Moreton HHS area.

Workforce Gaps

Similarities in the top five workforce gaps were observed across the two HHS areas, with **psychology** rated as the highest workforce gap along with **social work**, **speech pathology** and **nursing & midwifery**.

Despite rating as the third highest workforce gap in the Darling Downs HSS area, the **general practitioner** workforce came in at tenth for the West Moreton HHS area. The other main difference noted was **podiatry** which rated as the seventh highest workforce gap rating for Darling Downs West Moreton, yet 17th for West Moreton HHS area.

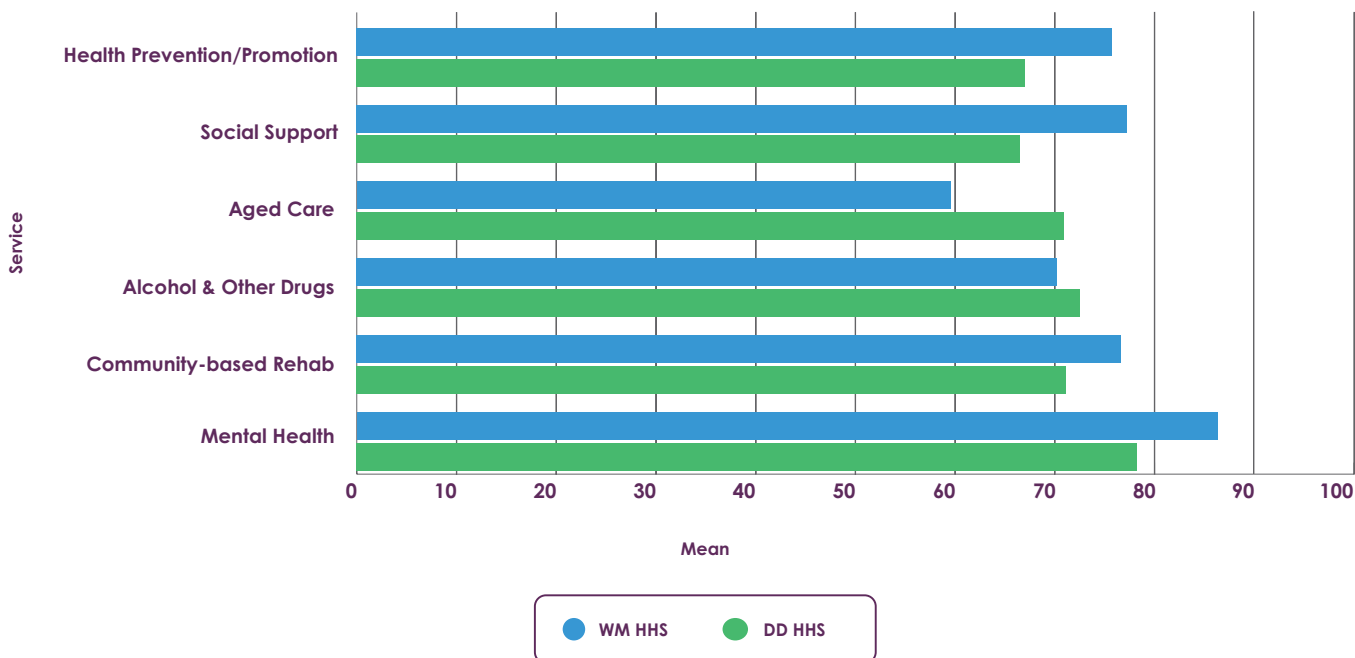
Physiotherapy, optometry, pharmacy and exercise physiotherapy all had lower workforce gap ratings.

Service Gaps

Mental health, **community-based rehabilitation**, and **health prevention/promotion** rated in the top five service gaps across both the Darling Downs and West Moreton HHS areas whilst palliative care, refugee & immigrant health and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander health services were ranked as having the lowest service gaps across both HHS areas.

Service gap ratings of notable difference between the HHS areas include **aged care** (4th highest for Darling Downs, 12th highest for West Moreton), **alcohol & other drugs** (2nd highest for Darling Downs, 8th highest for West Moreton), **social support** (2nd highest for West Moreton, 6th highest for Darling Downs), **child health** (4th highest for West Moreton, 8th for Darling Downs) and **maternal health** (rated 6th highest for West Moreton whilst 13th for Darling Downs).

Darling Downs & West Moreton Region
Top Service Gaps by HHS Area



Staff Departures

A total of 146 survey responses were received from within the Darling Downs & West Moreton region on factors influencing staff departures with the majority (86.3%) being from the Darling Downs HHS area.

When looking at the impact of individual factors on staff departures, findings were relatively consistent across the two HHS areas with **heavy workload/burnout**, **work/life balance**, **career progression** and **mental wellbeing** rating in the top five factors. Whilst ranking as the fourth highest factor for West Moreton HHS, **remuneration** rated 9th for Darling Downs. **Partner opportunities** was the second highest factor influencing departures in Darling Downs whilst only ranking 8th for West Moreton.

A lack of perceived professional respect, lack of required generalist skills, job security and workplace bullying were identified as having less of an influence on staff departures.

Darling Downs & West Moreton Region
Top Individual & Organisational Factors Influencing Staff Departures



Despite some similarities seen in workforce and service gaps as well as factors influencing staff departures, there are also unique differences across and within regions. Employing a place-based approach to workforce and service planning alongside attraction and retention strategies is fundamental to ensure the individual needs of remote, rural and regional Queensland communities are met.

