

# Region in Focus:

## Western Queensland

With the view to identifying high priority locations, professions and workforce requirements to develop and support evidence-based and effective models of service delivery in remote and rural Queensland, Health Workforce Queensland (HWQ) undertakes an annual [Health Workforce Needs Assessment \(HWNA\)](#).

The HWNA 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 working in Modified Monash (MM 2-7) locations in Queensland.

In 2023, there were 84 responses received from Western Queensland (seven responses from the Central West HHS area, 28 responses from the North West HHS area, and 49 responses from the South West HHS area), with the survey capturing practitioner's perceptions of workforce and services gaps ( $n=68$ ) in the region in addition to their thoughts on factors influencing health staff departures ( $n=67$ ) in the previous 12 months.

In contrast to results seen across the state, **dentistry** was the highest rated workforce gap in Western Queensland, with **psychology**, **general practitioner**, **speech pathology** and **nursing & midwifery** rounding out the top five workforce gaps for the region.

**Community-based rehabilitation (physical)** was the highest rated primary care workforce gap in Western Queensland, followed by **mental health**, **oral health**, **disability** and **aged care**.

There were significant variations in both workforce and service gaps across the three Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) of the Western Queensland region as well as some significant changes in rankings between 2022 and 2023, including:

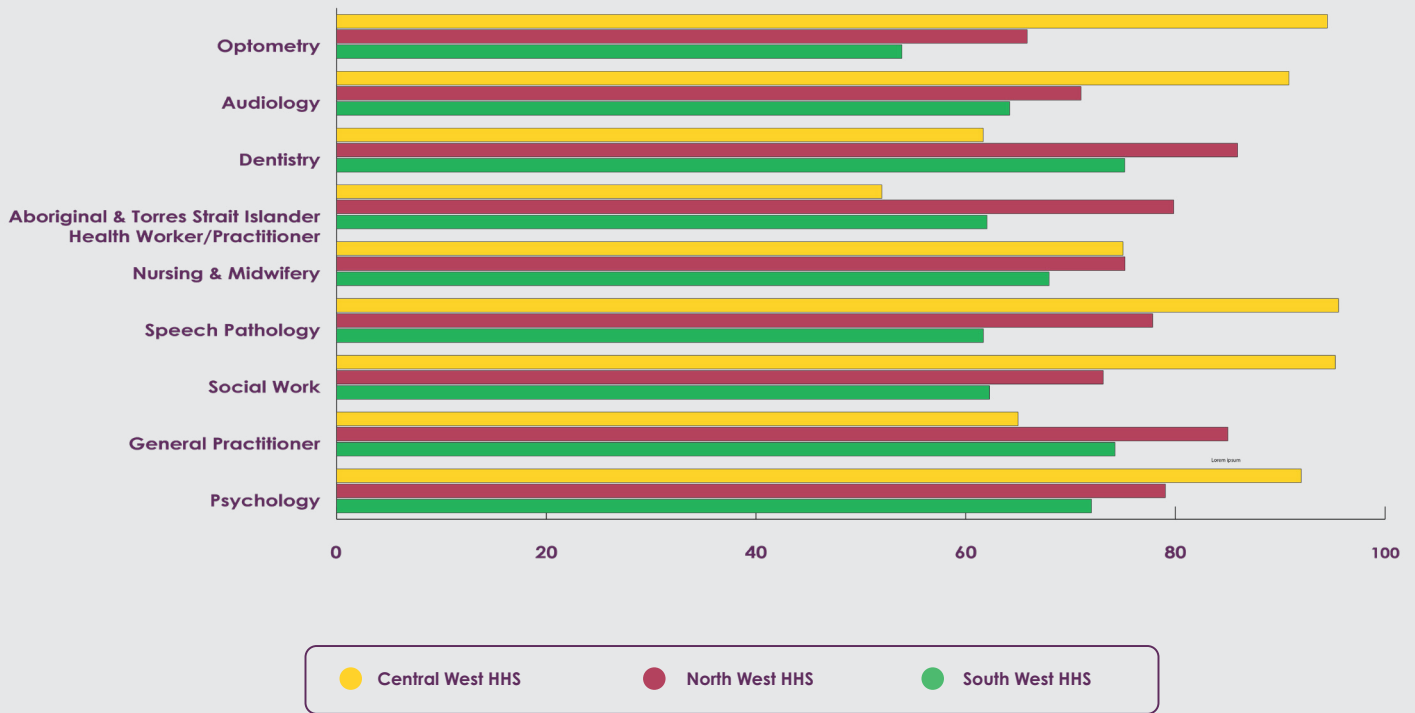
- The top five workforce gaps in the Central West HHS were all above 90 points (on a 0 - 100 rating scale), whilst there were no workforce gaps above 90 points in either of the other HHS regions. The North West HHS recorded two workforce gaps above 80 points whilst in the South West HHS all workforce gap means fell under 80 points.
- Oral health service gap rankings worsened from 2022 changing from 13th and eighth in the North West and South West HHSs respectively, to second and third in 2023. In contrast, in the Central West HHS the oral health ranking improved from fourth in 2022 to 11th in 2023.
- The largest workforce gap rating in the North West and South West HHSs was **dental practitioner**, with the gap ranking increasing from 13th and eighth respectively in 2022.
- In 2023 **speech pathology** was the highest ranked workforce gap in the Central West HHS, up from fifth in 2022.

The variation in results from year to year are perhaps reflective of small survey numbers, but could also reflect the challenge of small workforces where a workforce or service gap can develop or improve with the departure or recruitment of only one or two health practitioners.

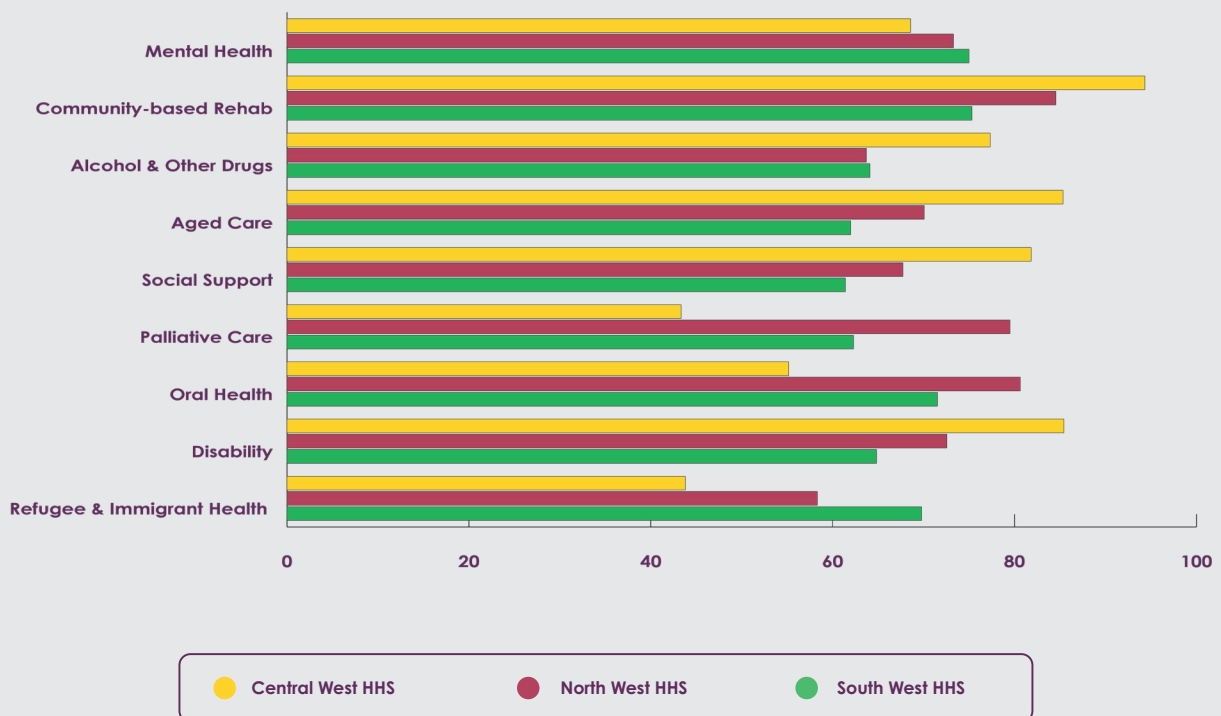
Interestingly, **mental health** remained the highest ranked service gap for the state of Queensland in 2023, but in Western Queensland the mental health services were ranked second to oral health, and in the North West and Central West HHSs mental health service gaps were ranked fourth and sixth respectively.



## Western Queensland PHN Region 2023 Top Workforce Gap Means by HHS Area



## Western Queensland PHN Region 2023 Top Service Gap Means by HHS Area

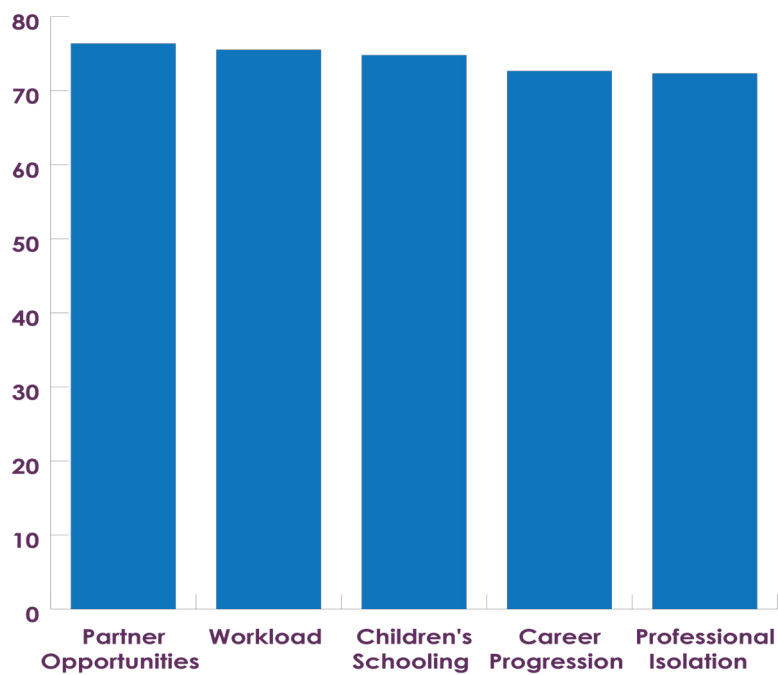


Seeking to understand what is contributing to health staff departure in remote, rural and regional Queensland, survey participants were asked to rate 19 individual and 19 organisational factors, with 67 responses received from Western Queensland.

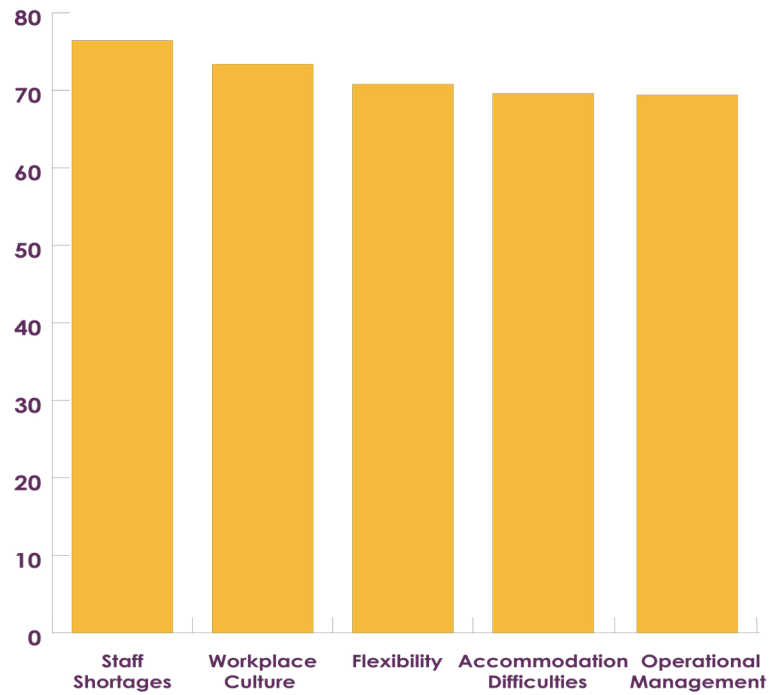
**Partner opportunities, heavy workload/burnout, children's schooling, career progression and professional isolation** were seen as the highest individual factors influencing health staff departures across the region. Children's schooling was the only individual factor that was rated highly across all the HHSs, with Central and North West HHS survey respondents ranking it second and South West survey respondents ranking it third.

The top five highest means for organisational factors influencing health staff departures in Western Queensland were **staff shortages, workplace culture, flexibility, accommodation difficulties and operational management**. **Staff shortages** and **flexibility** were ranked consistently across all three HHS areas and two HHS areas ranked workplace culture and operational management consistently.

### Western Queensland PHN Region 2023 Top Individual Factors Influencing Staff Departures



## Western Queensland PHN Region 2023 Top Organisational Factors Influencing Staff Departures



More detailed results for each of the four mainly rural PHN regions in Queensland can be found in the [2023 HWNA Survey Findings by PHN Region: Addendum Report](#).

