

01 September 2023

Dear Universities Accord,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Universities Accord Interim Report, on behalf of the **Psychology Training and Public Health Workforce Alliance**, which comprises representatives from:

- The Australian Psychological Society (APS)
- University psychology senior staff and training program staff from clinical psychology, clinical neuropsychology, and forensic psychology training programs across Australia
- Public health service psychology leaders in Victoria, NSW, SA and WA

Our original submission, “Addressing the shortage of psychologists in public health services”, addressed significant issues in postgraduate psychology training that have caused the major workforce shortage of psychologists in public health services (particularly those with advanced training, including clinical psychologists, clinical neuropsychologists, counselling psychologists, educational and developmental psychologists, forensic psychologists and health psychologists).

The interim report responds to some, but not all, of the issues raised in our submission. Psychology is mentioned in the following sections of the interim report:

2.2.4 Supporting students to undertake placements

*The Review has heard that difficulties supporting sufficient placements in healthcare (particularly nursing, allied health and **psychology**) and education are exacerbating shortages in these critical professions (with similar effects in other professions). These occupations are also facing challenges of attrition, which further reduces the ability of the workforce to support increasing placements. The cost to universities of providing placements is increasing faster than funding. Without addressing these issues, initiatives to boost the number of students entering the system in critical health workforce areas will fail.*

The Review will explore the possibility of requiring some form of financial support for students undertaking mandatory placements.

While we agree that support for students would be helpful, particularly for students for whom financial barriers preclude participation, such as indigenous or regional/rural students, or students on rural and regional placements. However, in psychology, the lack of sufficient placements is substantially more impacted by:

- i) The lack of available registered placement supervisors. Supervisor availability is one of the key limiting factors preventing higher student intake in postgraduate psychology training programs. Provision of funding to support supervisor training and registration for more psychologists would have a significant impact. The Australian Psychological Society recently received government funding to train 200 psychologists as supervisors. The uptake of this has been enormous, and **further funding is sought to widen the pool of available supervisors**, with some apportioned to **public health services**. As mentioned in our original submission, access to clinical placements can be improved by reliable, government-funded access to supervisor training and masterclasses for psychologists in public health.
- ii) The fact that universities must pay for placements in public health services in some states (including Victoria). Postgraduate training programs already run at a loss, therefore this additional financial burden disincentivises universities from increasing student training places, due to the added expense of paying for more placements. **Providing support to public health**

services to enable them to offer placements without charging fees to universities would be highly beneficial.

- iii) The absence of overarching Psychology Workforce plan that cohesively identifies current and future workforce needs for Psychology, including in public health. Placements are provided on the goodwill of the supervisor and organisations, resulting in insufficient placements to meet demand. Funding and MOU arrangements between the university sector and public health sector need to be addressed. **Development of a workforce plan in collaboration with the tertiary education and health sectors** would allow targeted workforce development by providing sufficient placements to areas of workforce growth and need.
- iv) Insufficient resourcing of university psychology clinics. These not funded independently of course fees and therefore do not have sufficient funding or infrastructure for development or growth. University clinic placements are crucial for preparing students for external placements public health services. **Direct funding for university clinic expansions**, with a MOU requirement for place growth is required to overcome this shortfall.

3.3.3 The Job-ready Graduates (JRG) package

...Through consultation and submissions, the Review has noted substantial and overwhelming criticisms of the JRG package and the current funding system.

*Various stakeholders have pointed out that base funding reductions to several priority fields (such as education, mathematics, science, engineering, nursing, **psychology** and allied health) have made teaching them financially unsustainable. This is due to the high costs associated with teaching these fields not being covered by the base funding rates. This is of critical concern given the importance of these disciplines to meeting current skills needs.*

Thank you for acknowledging this key major issue. In our original submission, we argued that the number 1 priority is to **lift the funding band for postgraduate psychology training to align with General Practice, Medical Studies, Agriculture and Veterinary Science (Funding Cluster 4)**, to support universities to increase the number of advanced training programs & graduates by covering the full costs of delivery. We would like to reiterate the importance of this for ensuring universities are able to train sufficient numbers of psychologists to meet the needs of the workforce.

Importantly, lifting the funding band for postgraduate psychology, together with **increasing the number of Commonwealth Supported Places** in these programs (also recommended in our original submission), would reduce the need for universities to charge full fees to students. The current practice of charging full fees to the majority of postgraduate psychology students exacerbates inequity. Already, as a profession we have embarrassingly low numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists; and psychology practices are over-represented in affluent, largely metropolitan areas. **To reduce inequity**, which is a major focus of the Universities Accord, **we need to make psychology training affordable for students and for universities.**

Many thanks for your consideration of the issues raised in this response letter.

Yours sincerely,

A/Prof Dana Wong, La Trobe University: [REDACTED]
Dr Jo Wrench, Director of Psychology, Austin Health: [REDACTED]

- On behalf of the Psychology Training and Public Health Workforce Alliance.