

The real cost of training health professionals in Victoria – retention is important.

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Background

Efficient delivery of a skilled multidisciplinary workforce is critical to providing best practice and cost effective care across a range of conditions. Losses to the workforce during and following training mean an increase in the real cost of training per working health professional, reducing the return for the training dollar and potentially threatening access to multidisciplinary care. We explored the real cost of training the health workforce by occupational group to contribute to the debate on retention as a core contributor to achieving the optimal workforce mix.

Method

We estimated the cost to train an entry-level health professional in a range of professions by considering university fees, proxy measures for the cost of clinical placements and the cost of internship, where required. Census data was used to describe retention of qualified professionals and create a model to estimate mean years in the given occupation. This data was combined to estimate the mean cost of training a health professional per year of service in their occupation.

Results

General medicine is identified as the most expensive both in the cost of training (\$451,000 per completing student) and cost per year in practice (\$18,400). Dietitians cost of training per year of practice is estimated at \$9,110, only 18% lower than that for dentists at \$11,160. This is despite a much higher cost of training dentists because the workforce retention is low in dietetics and high in dentistry. The cost of training the podiatry workforce is comparatively low at an estimated \$5,200 per year of practice, reflecting a long expected working life of over 30 years.

Discussion

Return on investment in training across professions is highly variable, with expected time in the profession as important as the direct training cost. It highlights where investment in retention strategies is most required and could have the greatest impact. The approach is valuable in workforce planning and suggests the need for a far greater focus on the retention of skilled workers.