

The current state of advanced practice in allied health in Victoria

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Background

Better using the skills and full scope of practice of allied health professionals is a key reform priority for the Department of Health and Human Services. Allied health advanced practice service models have been demonstrated to improve patient outcomes, reduce patient waiting lists, increase retention of experienced allied health practitioners, and reduce acute hospital admissions.

Methods

To support organisations to consider current and emerging advanced practice opportunities, the department distributed the Allied Health Advanced Practice Mapping and Prioritisation Tool, developed by Monash Health, to key stakeholders including hospital and community health services across Victoria. Data was collected on existing advanced practice roles, including stages of implementation and future priorities. Participant checking was used to ensure validation of data and formal permission was sought from health services to distribute findings.

Results

Data was received from 30 health services, with the majority being public hospitals and two community health centres. Health services identified 36 advanced practice roles/clinics that had been, or were currently being implemented. These roles/clinics covered the following professions: physiotherapy(20), podiatry(5), occupational therapy(4), social work(4), speech pathology(4), dietetics/nutrition(1), orthoptists(1), and orthotics(1). The physiotherapy – adult advanced musculoskeletal in emergency department role has been implemented by the highest number of health services. Health services identified a further 32 roles/clinics where planning was underway and nearly 100 advanced practice roles/clinics, across 11 professions, which were opportunities for the future.

Discussion

The majority of roles/clinics identified by services were within the allied health: therapy disciplines with significant overlap across health services. Opportunities therefore exist for further engagement of the allied health: science disciplines and greater collaboration between services. This data provides an excellent overview of the state of allied health advanced practice in Victoria and will inform policy and program direction, both at government and service level.