

# Immunisation workforce – a challenge

Perspectives from general practitioners,  
practice nurses and community pharmacists

Professor Nick Wood  
29 August 2025

Wendy King  
Suzanne Blackeby  
Karen Castle  
Meru Sheel  
Ann Burton  
Lauren Dalton



# Australia's National Immunisation Strategy

|                        |                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Vision</b>          |                                                                                                                                                  | <b>A healthier Australia through immunisation</b>                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
| <b>Mission</b>         |                                                                                                                                                  | <b>To reduce the impact of vaccine-preventable diseases through high uptake of safe, effective and equitable immunisation across the lifespan</b> |                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
| <b>Priority Areas</b>  | <b>1. Improve access to immunisation, with a focus on equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other priority populations</b> | <b>2. Build trust, understanding and acceptance of immunisation in communities</b>                                                                | <b>3. Use data more effectively to target immunisation strategies and monitor performance</b>                                                                    | <b>4. Strengthen the immunisation workforce</b>                                                                                                                                        | <b>5. Harness new technologies to respond to the evolving communicable disease and vaccine landscape</b>                                      | <b>6. Implement sustainable reform in vaccine program governance, program delivery and accountability</b>                                                                |  |
|                        | Partner with communities to understand barriers to access and co-design strategies to improve vaccine access.                                    | Engage with communities to build trust and understanding in the value of immunisation, and to combat misinformation.                              | Improve the completeness, timeliness and transparency of Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) data, ensuring optimal quality and utility for all stakeholders. | Embed immunisation in preventive healthcare across the lifespan.                                                                                                                       | Strengthen government immunisation program preparedness for new vaccine rollouts, including by leveraging new technologies.                   | Strengthen collaborative ways of working between the Australian Government and state and territory governments to deliver vaccines under the NIP and emergency programs. |  |
|                        | Use innovative service delivery models to increase equitable access to immunisation across the lifespan.                                         | Strengthen community partnerships for design, delivery and evaluation of tailored immunisation strategies.                                        | Work towards creation of a whole of life, interactive, real-time dashboard of coverage data for all Australian Government-funded vaccines.                       | Enable immunisation providers to safely work to their full scope of practice and harmonise relevant workforce policies, training, and accreditation across all states and territories. | Systematise horizon scanning for emerging and newly vaccine-preventable diseases and the vaccine pipeline.                                    | Support policies that improve confidence in vaccine safety and accountability, such as exploring the feasibility of a no-fault vaccine compensation scheme.              |  |
|                        | Ensure vaccine access and uptake to reach agreed national targets and maintain elimination status of measles, rubella and polio.                 | Track community sentiment, including for priority groups.                                                                                         | Expand data linkage capacity, analysis and reporting for better monitoring of vaccine program coverage, effectiveness, safety and impact.                        | Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce development to contribute to immunisation.                                                                              | Champion vaccine research and development, and support pathways to commercialisation for Australian researchers and biotechnology industries. | Standardise monitoring and evaluation of national, and state and territory vaccine programs to improve outcomes.                                                         |  |
| <b>Strategic Goals</b> | Consider additional evidence-informed targets.                                                                                                   | Strengthen knowledge, confidence, and skills of immunisation providers to support informed vaccination choices.                                   | Integrate and report timely surveillance data on diseases, vaccine coverage, safety, and social and behavioural insights.                                        | Strengthen preparedness for immunisation workforce surge capacity in future health emergencies.                                                                                        | Maintain onshore vaccine manufacturing capacity for increased resilience against pandemics and supply chain threats.                          | Strengthen Australia's contribution to supporting regional and global immunisation efforts.                                                                              |  |
|                        |                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                   | Strengthen vaccine safety surveillance, including for new vaccines, to improve detection of rare or delayed onset adverse events.                                | Build expertise across the immunisation and vaccine-preventable disease workforce in all areas, including data analytics, disease surveillance and communications.                     |                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
|                        |                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                          |  |

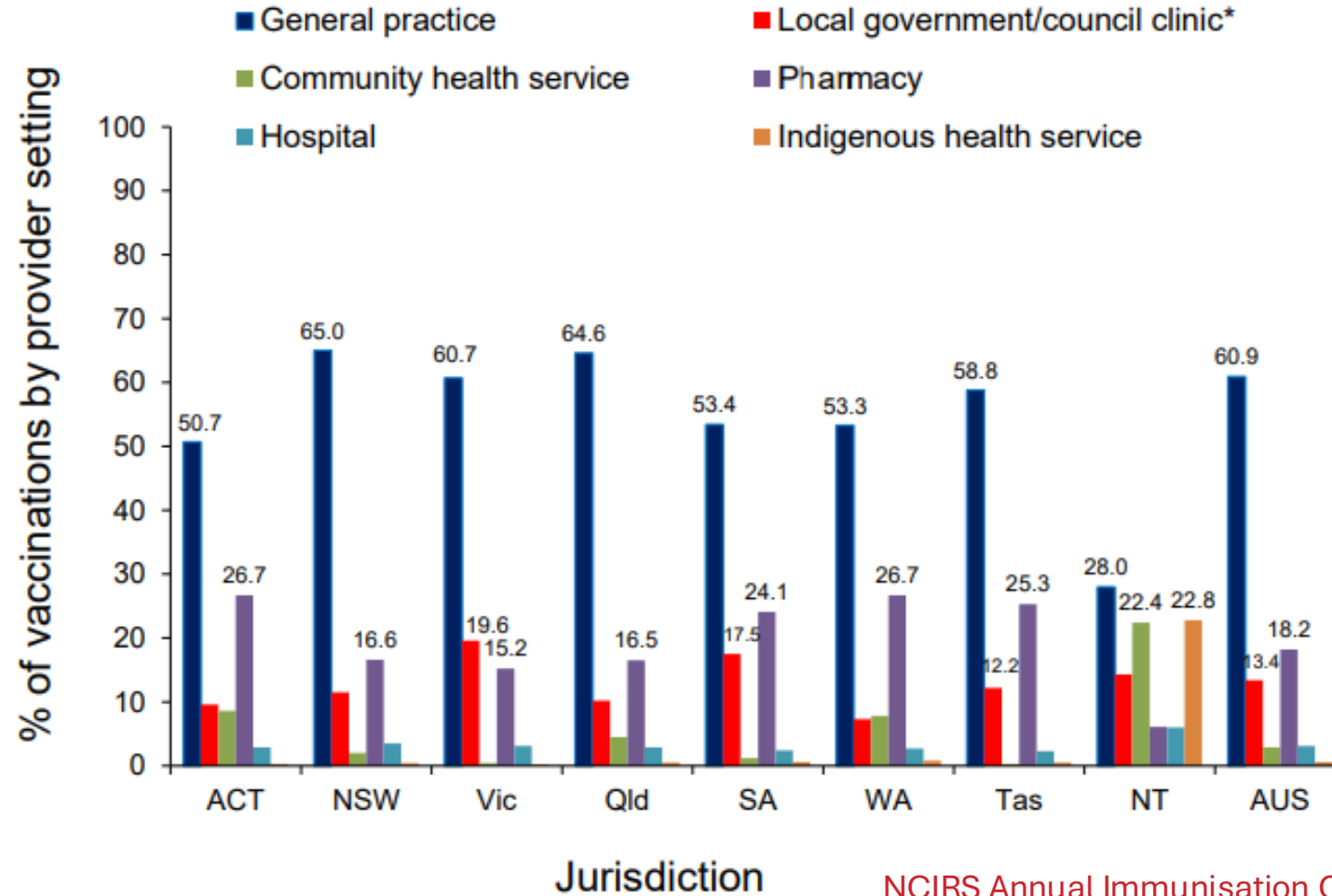


# Workforce challenges

- Immunisation coverage relies on trained vaccinators
- Human resource gaps and burnout
  - Poorly distributed = low numbers in some high need areas
  - Estimated (2020) to be a current health worker shortage of about 15.4 million health workers, which is expected to improve – by 2030 projected to be 10.2 million.
- Lack of training and support
  - Expanding number of vaccines and more complex programs
- Funding constraints
- Impact of conflict
- Challenge both in Australia and Globally
  - Need for dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander immunisation workforce



# Proportion of all vaccinations given to people of all ages by provider setting and jurisdiction, Australia, 2023





# Challenges from the perspective of a general practitioner

- Keeping up to date with changes to recommendations
- NIP funded “recommended” vaccines – explaining that to patients and justifying cost to patients of unfunded vaccines
- Different recommendations and funding for different patient groups
- Vaccine hesitancy including fear of vaccine side effects
- Vaccine fatigue, both for doctors and patients
- Need to spend more time explaining risk/benefit of vaccines to a generally better informed and enquiring population
- Countering the vaccine misinformation, especially on social media



# Challenges from the perspective of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce

## High turnover

Indigenous health workers are more likely to leave roles due to burnout, stress, and systemic barriers.

## Workplace environment

Some services still fail to provide culturally safe and supportive workplaces, which directly impacts retention.

## Racism

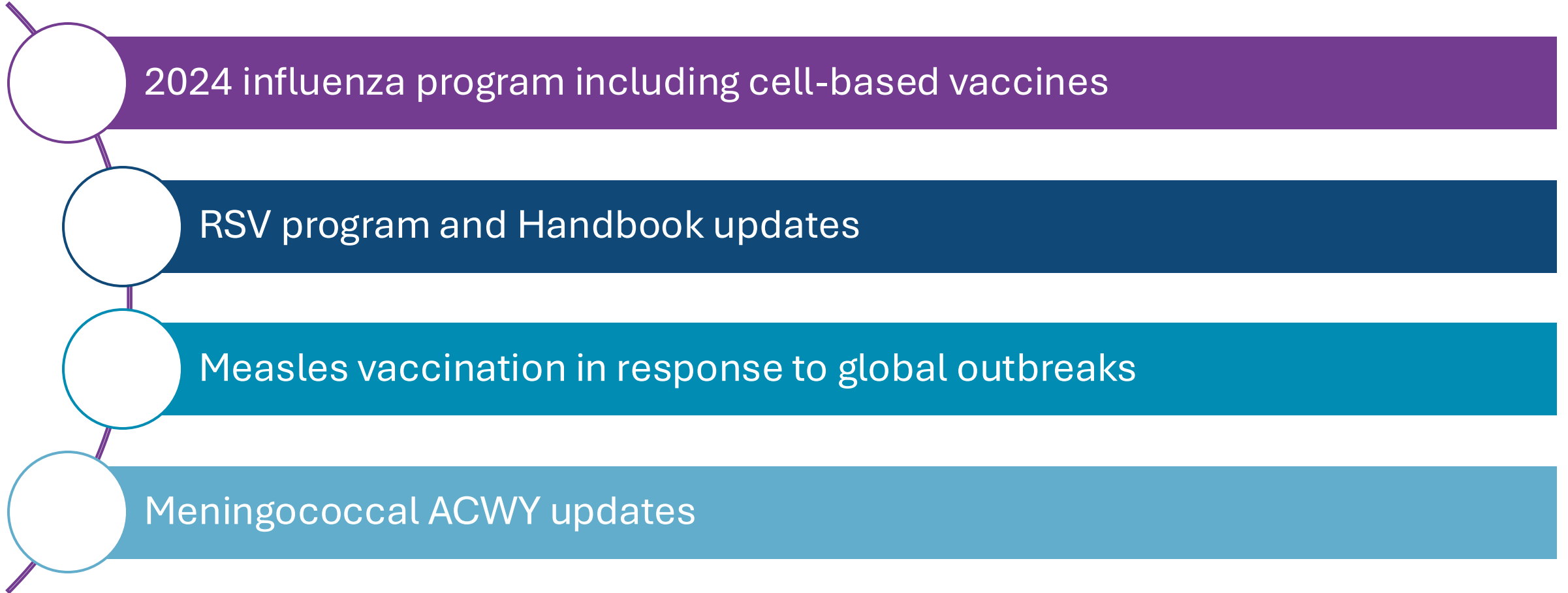
Racism in health settings remains a major barrier to recruitment and retention. For example, recent cases (e.g. racist slur against an Aboriginal midwife at RPA Hospital) highlight ongoing workplace discrimination.

## Tokenistic approaches

Some workplaces see hiring Indigenous staff as “ticking a box” without addressing systemic racism or valuing Aboriginal knowledges.



# Trending topics data 2024 – APNA support line





# Vaccines that pharmacists can prescribe (initiate) and administer August 2025

|     | Cholera | COVID-19 | DTP | Hib | Hep A | Hep B | Herpes zoster | HPV | Influenza | JE | MMR | Men ACWY | Men B | Men C | mPox | Pneumo-coccal | Polio | Q fever | Rabies | Rotavirus | RSV      | TB | Typhoid | Varicella | Yellow fever |
|-----|---------|----------|-----|-----|-------|-------|---------------|-----|-----------|----|-----|----------|-------|-------|------|---------------|-------|---------|--------|-----------|----------|----|---------|-----------|--------------|
| ACT |         | 5        | 5   | 5   | 5     | 5*    | 18            | 10  | 5         | 5  | 5*  | 5        | 5     | 5     | 16   | 50 / 70       | 5     |         | 5      |           | 60 / ✓^  |    | 5       | 5         |              |
| NSW |         | 5        | 5   | 5   | 5     | 5*    | 18            | 9   | 2         | 5  | 5*  | 5        | 5     | 5     | 16   | 50 / 70       | 5     |         | 5      |           | 60 / ✓^  |    | 5       | 5         |              |
| NT  |         | 5        | 5   | 5   | 5     | 5     | 5             | 5   | 5         | 5  | 5*  | 5        | 5*    | 5     | 18   | 5             | 5     |         |        |           | 5        |    |         | 5         |              |
| QLD | 2       | ✓        | 2   | 2   | 2     | 2*    | 2             | 2   | ✓*        | 2  | 2*  | 2        | 2*    | 2     | 2    | 2             | 2     |         | 2      |           | 2        |    | 2       | 2         |              |
| SA  | ✓       | ✓        | ✓   | ✓   | ✓     | ✓*    | ✓             | ✓   | ✓         | ✓  | ✓*  | ✓        | ✓*    | ✓     | ✓    | ✓             | ✓     | ✓       | ✓      | ✓         | ✓        | ✓  | ✓       | ✓         | ✓            |
| TAS |         | 5        | 10  |     | 10    | 10*   | 18            | 10  | 5         |    | 10* | 10       | 10    |       |      | 10            | 10    |         |        |           | 60 / 18^ |    |         | 10        |              |
| VIC |         | 5        | 5#  |     | 5~    | 5*~   | 5\$           | 5#  | 5         | 5  | 5*& | 5&       |       |       | 5    | 5\$           | 5~    |         |        |           | 5        |    | 5~      |           |              |
| WA  |         | 5        | 5   |     |       | 5*    | 5             | 5   | 5*        |    | 5*  | 5        | 5     | 5     |      | 5             | 5     |         |        |           | 5        |    |         | 5         |              |

NIP or CVCP funded for eligible patients  
Asterisk\* denotes state funded vaccines (in addition to NIP funded) for eligible patients

State funded vaccines for eligible patients

Non-govt funded vaccines only

Not permitted

~Only under Victorian Community Pharmacist Pilot (VCP);  
# For travel, min age 12 + only under VCP;  
& For travel, min age 15 + only under VCP;  
\$ For travel, min age 50 + only under VCP;  
^ Pregnant women 28–36 wks gestation

NIP funded vaccines may not be available for ordering by community pharmacies.

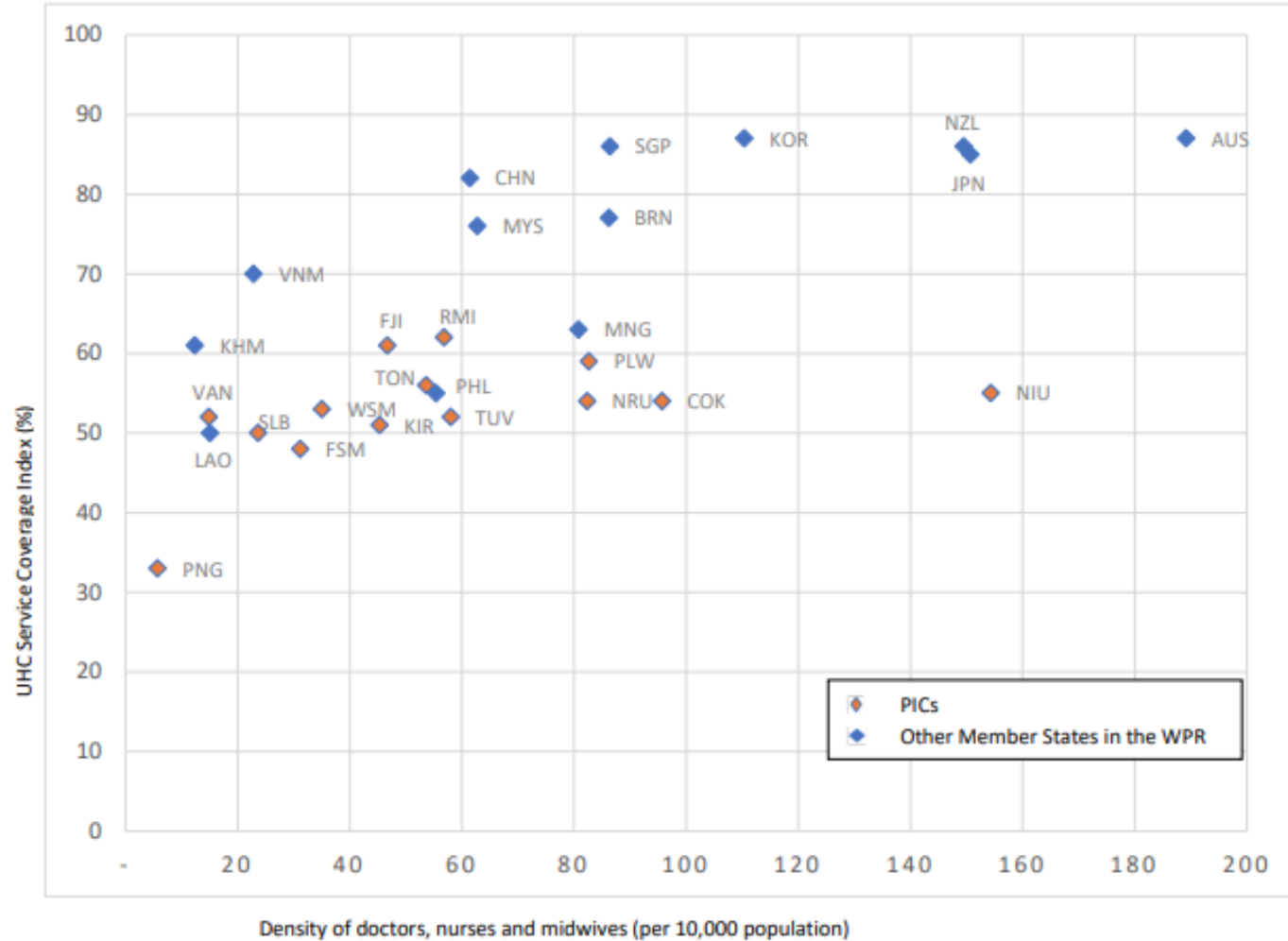
**IMPORTANT:** Additional restrictions may apply. Refer to state/territory pharmacist vaccination authorisations. Pharmacists must adhere to individual scope of practice, recommendations of the Australian Immunisation Handbook and ATAGI

# Beyond Australia

Thanks Meru Sheel for slides

# Health workforce in the context of Universal Health Coverage

Figure 1: Density of doctors, nurses, and midwives per 10,000 population and UHC SCI in the Western Pacific Region



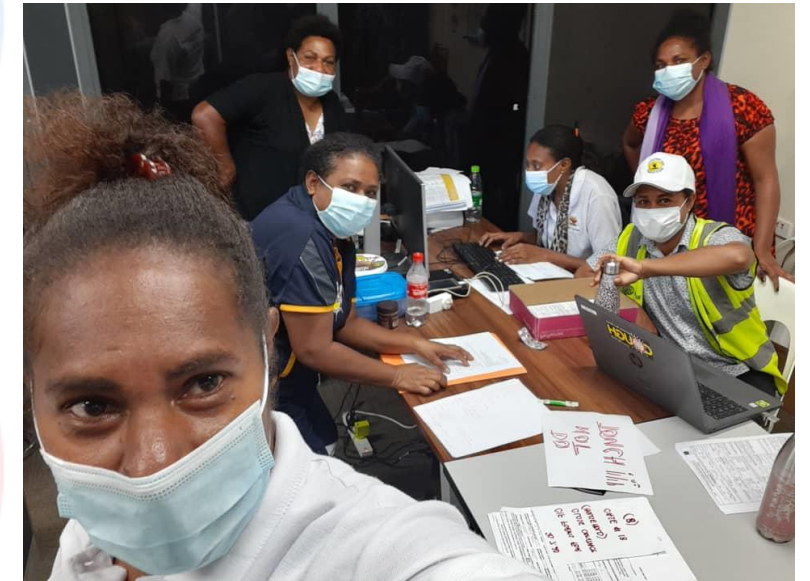
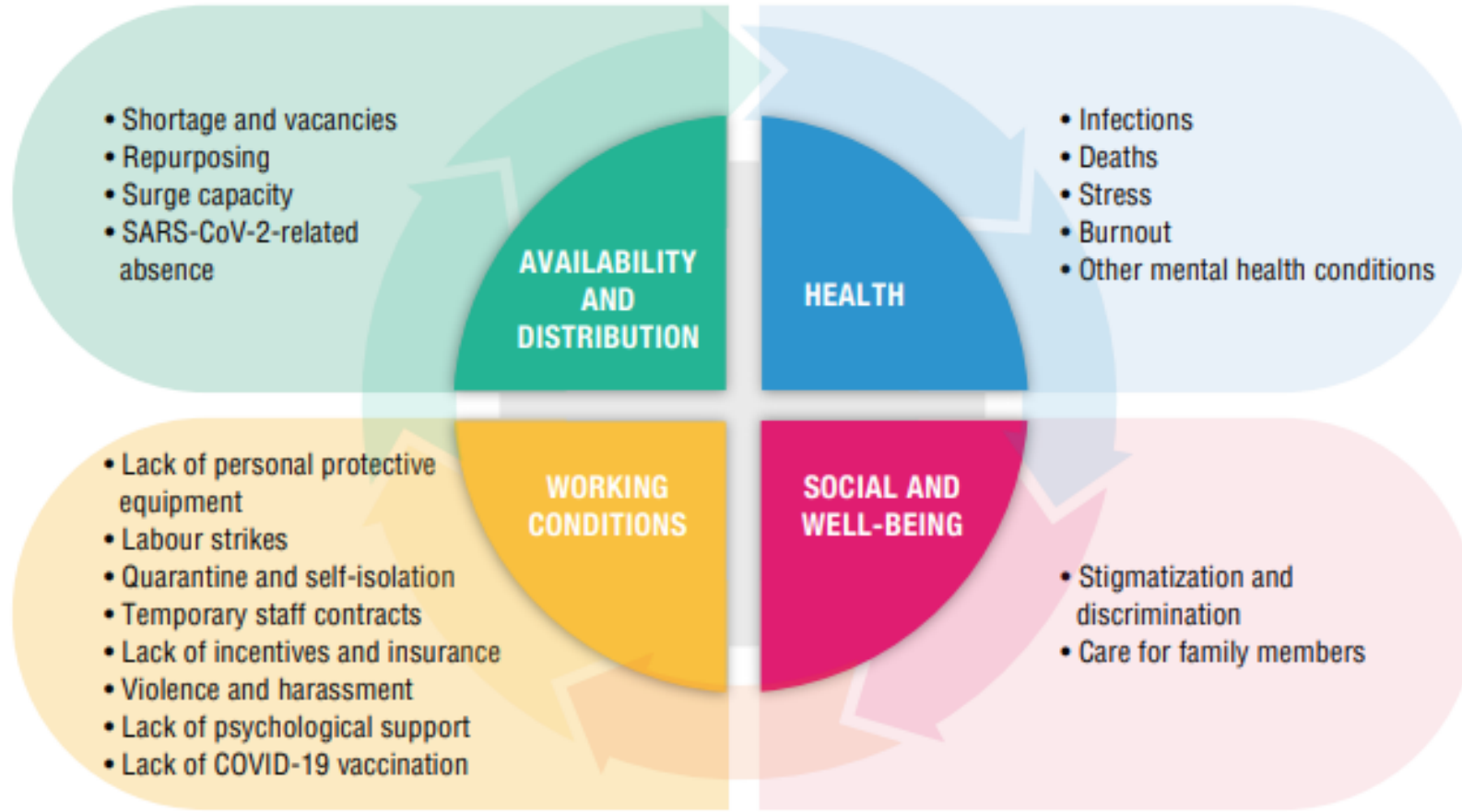
Distribution in the Pacific per 100,000 population

- 4 doctors, 9.84 nurses, 0.62 midwives, 0.25 dentist, 0.25 pharmacists
- 119% increase in doctors over past 10 years, including females.
- Nurses deliver majority health services
- No data on essential public health workforce

# Health workforce – impact of COVID-19 pandemic

- The pandemic has revealed weaknesses in the health workforce in many ways

Figure 2: Multidimensional factors related to COVID-19 that affect HCWs



COVID-19 Contact Tracing Team, NCD PNG  
– team of 6, population 400,000+,  
supporting national response, July 2020

# Gendered Dimensions of the Health and Social Care Workforce



Perspective

## Applying a Primary Health Care Approach to Closing the Human Resource for Health Gaps for Immunization

Healthcare 2024, 12, 1449

Folake Olayinka <sup>1</sup>, Thomas S. O'Connell <sup>2</sup>, Christopher Morgan <sup>3</sup>, Maria Fernanda Monzon <sup>4</sup>, Tokunbo Oshin <sup>5</sup>, Tova Tampe <sup>6</sup>, Alexandra Reed <sup>1,\*</sup>, Giorgio Cometto <sup>7</sup>, Adolphus Trokon Clarke <sup>8</sup>, Muhammad Ahmad Kazi <sup>9</sup> and Jessica C. Shearer <sup>10</sup>

- Women currently make up 67% of the health and social sector workforce globally
- Women are estimated to provide essential health services for five billion people worldwide. The financial value of women's input into health systems is estimated to be over USD 3 trillion annually.
- Women face challenges include gender discrimination, resulting in unequal pay and treatment in the workplace, inadequate workplace conditions that safeguard their health and security, or advancement opportunities; violence and sexual harassment; restricted independence or mobility outside the home; and the burden of balancing pregnancy and family expectations with their job.



**Challenge summary – need an increase in the number of skilled, appropriately distributed, well trained, updated and motivated health workforce to achieve immunization for all**



# Summary

- Health workforce is critical for achieving the Immunization Agenda 2030 goals as well as the SDGs and universal health coverage
- Growing population and shortage of trained vaccinators
- More complex vaccine programs