

FIT FOR OUR COMMONWEALTH
TOWARD A RESILIENT AND SUFFICIENT HEALTH AND WELLBEING WORKFORCE
Report of the Commonwealth Civil Society Policy Forum 2025



COSW welcomes publication of the report of the Commonwealth Civil Society Policy Forum 2025, convened by Commonwealth Health Professions and Partners Alliance (CHPA) and submitted to the Commonwealth Health Ministers' Meeting (CHMM), Geneva on 17th May 2025.

COSW, a CHPA member, played a key role in planning the online Policy Forum (28 February 2025). This annual event consults on recommendations to CHMM. Social work contributors included Zeni Thumbadoo (Deputy Director, National Association of Child Care Workers, South Africa) and David N Jones (COSW Board member).

Four recommendations to the CHMM were delivered by Victoria Rutter, Chairperson of CHPA and Executive Director of the Commonwealth Pharmacists Association. She said "A long term investment in the health and care workforce brings economic and social rewards far in excess of the initial investment. Commonwealth governments are encouraged to seriously consider the following recommendations and plan for their implementation."

In a [LinkedIn video interview](#) with the Commonwealth Secretariat, COSW Board member David N Jones commented: "Commonwealth governments recognise that health and wellbeing has to be central to their political agendas, for their populations, for their economies and for their security. ... Commonwealth Accredited Organisations link across the Commonwealth with local groups. In partnership with governments, we are able to deliver the sort of changes that people are looking for."

RECOMMENDATION 1

Commonwealth governments, recognising that a sufficient 'fit for purpose' health and social care workforce:

- contributes to economic prosperity, social stability, and security by promoting health, preventing unnecessary and costly disease, and enabling rapid recovery from ill health, and
 - saves more than it costs by keeping the population healthy and economically productive,
- commit to sustainable long-term financing for their entire health and social care workforce to ensure they are sufficient in number, integrated across health and social care (primary care to intensive care), and appropriately educated.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Commonwealth governments, while acknowledging that it is difficult to predict the future, particularly the impact of artificial intelligence, commit to initiating formal forward national planning for their health and social care workforce, linked to the country's health and social care needs and data profile and include consultation with:

- the existing health and social care workforce, and
- the young people who will form the health and social care workforce of the future.

Planning should address inequalities of access to services and the health and social care workforce within countries; consider innovative models of service delivery; and which health workers are most appropriate to deliver the services necessary to ensure an economically productive, socially stable, and secure population.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Commonwealth governments, in order to obtain a return on their investment in educating and employing their health and social care workforce, commit to developing and implementing effective retention strategies for their health and social care workforce, recognising that:

- investing in the health workforce requires investing in working conditions that keeps workers in the system;
- a vibrant and effective health and social care workforce requires a positive working environment: positive leadership, understanding and support; access to continuing education; motivation and encouragement; reasonable workloads; and appropriate remuneration, reward and career progression;
- a toxic workplace that includes excessive workloads, burnout, and bullying, is a wasted investment and drives the health and social care workforce out of the sector or to migrate to greener pastures; and
- a happy workforce is one which will be retained and give a positive return on investment.



RECOMMENDATION 4

The CCSPF discussed the freeze of USA overseas aid at very short notice and expressed concern that this action has:

- put lives at risk when life-saving medications, medical procedures, and essential research have been withdrawn without time to put alternative arrangements in place;
- brought significant hardship to the people who benefited from those programs, and to local people working within those programs;
- resulted in the immediate cessation of programs and the consequential closure of organisations and agencies, dispersal and unemployment of staff, and loss of infrastructure, which will be costly to replace.

The CCSPF recommends:

That the Commonwealth Secretariat, working with Commonwealth governments, the World Health Organization, and other relevant agencies, including Commonwealth civil society, facilitate the collection of data and other information about programmes in each Commonwealth country which were receiving USA overseas development aid, to identify the short, medium and long term impact of the withdrawal of USA overseas aid, both to recipients of the aid and the local programme workforce, and prioritise those in need of immediate assistance to save lives and prevent harm.

ENDS

The proceedings of the Forum, including a video of the whole event, copies of presentations and the [report](#) is available at <http://www.chpa.co/>.

The report is also available on the COSW website.

NOTE: COSW is an organisation for citizens of the Commonwealth who are interested in supporting social work and social development. It is supported by social work associations in the Commonwealth. It aims to promote and support communication and collaboration between social workers and social work associations of Commonwealth countries, and to uphold and promote the code of ethics of the International Federation of Social Workers. This statement can be found on the [COSW website](#).

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