



# **Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services**

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## **Agency Health Professional Reference Group**

## **Allied Health Professional Workforce Planning Group**

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## **Allied Health Professional Workforce Planning Project**

## **Health Librarian Information**

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### **3 Preface**

This Health Librarian Information should be read in conjunction with the main Allied Health Professional Workforce Planning Project Discussion Paper.

## 4 Overview

Health librarians collect and organise medical information and help practitioners find the information they need for patient care, education, research and administration.

Undergraduate and post-graduate courses in librarianship are offered in all states except Tasmania and some courses are offered by distance education mode. A Graduate Diploma in Information Management is to be offered by the University of Tasmania, commencing in 2003.

As at March 2002, there were eight health librarians employed in 7.06 FTE positions in the HAS and CS Divisions of the DHHS.

All of the DHHS health librarians were female.

Seventy-one per cent of the health librarian workforce was aged over 50 years, making the health librarian workforce the 'oldest' of the allied health professions. This could have a significant impact on the number of staff leaving the workforce over the next 5 to 10 years.

In the two years 2000 and 2001, no health librarians left the DHHS and no DHHS health librarian positions were advertised.

The Australian Library and Information Association, the professional organisation for librarians, stated that since 1997, there has been a general downgrading and a reduction in the level of library and information services in the public health sector in Tasmania. As a result, there were limited and decreasing opportunities for librarian employment in this area.

Increasing workloads was an issue highlighted by DHHS librarians. Across the world, librarian workload patterns have changed with movements to electronic journal collections. Frequently, changing workload patterns resulted in less library processing work but an increased role in library-user education for computer based activities.

The Australian Library and Information Association has produced a set of recommended minimum standards for health libraries and these include standards on staffing numbers and combinations and levels per numbers of professional users serviced. These standards could assist with the assessment and management of DHHS health librarian workloads.

The future of the DHHS health librarian workforce is likely to be directed by the outcomes of the Australian Senate Inquiry into the Role of Librarians in the Online Environment, and the current DHHS internal review of information services within the Corporate Services Division.

The Australian Library and Information Association stated that as the private hospitals in Tasmania do not maintain professionally staffed library

and information services, there was considerable scope for expansion of the DHHS library and information services to the private health sector on an appropriately managed fee-for-service basis.

## **5 Description of the profession**

Librarians may also be referred to as information managers or research officers. They have tertiary level qualifications.

Librarians design, develop and manage collections of recorded material and the delivery of information services to users. Information may be contained in books, journals, newspapers, pamphlets, manuscripts, maps, films, computer disks, sound recordings, microfilms and CD-ROMs, as well as computerised on-line services.

In large libraries, librarians may specialise in areas such as acquisition, cataloguing, reference work or on-line services. They may also work in specialist libraries including school, company, law or medical libraries (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training 2000).

Health librarians collect and organise medical information and help practitioners find the information they need for patient care, education, research and administration (Thinkquest 2002).

### **5.1 Description of related occupations**

#### **5.1.1 Library technicians**

Library technicians assist librarians and other information managers to organise and operate systems for handling recorded material and files. Library technicians cover all facets of library functions including circulation, acquisitions, reference, and audiovisual. They usually work under the supervision of librarians, but may also supervise other library or clerical staff. Library technicians usually hold a diploma of library and information studies obtained through a TAFE institution.

#### **5.1.2 Library assistants**

Library assistants maintain, sort, issue and receive library items such as books, magazines, tapes, films and associated records. Library assistants work as part of a team under the supervision of librarians or library technicians. Library assistants may have no formal qualifications but may have received on-the-job training or hold a certificate of library and information studies obtained through a TAFE institution.

(Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training 2000)

## 6 Workforce supply

### 6.1 Profile of the current health librarian workforce

#### 6.1.1 Demographics of the health librarian workforce

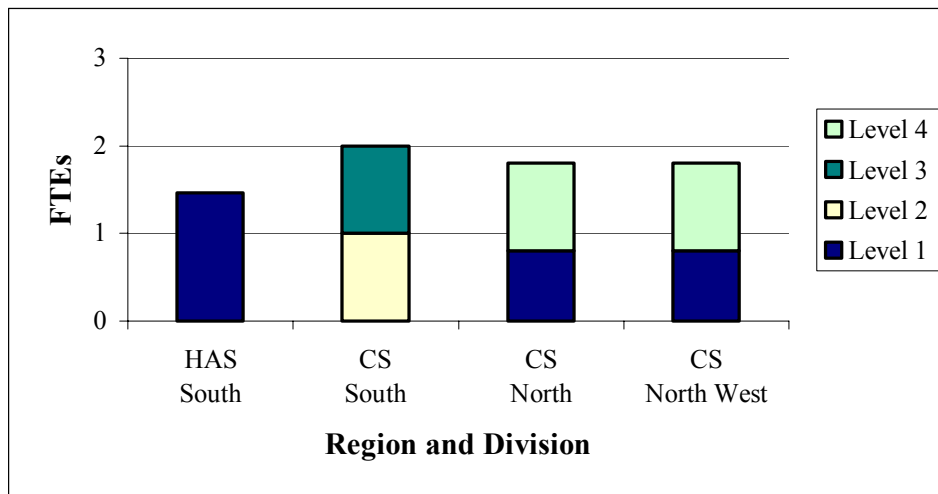
##### 6.1.1.1 Human Resource Services Information System data

Data on the DHHS health librarian workforce from the DHHS Human Resource Services Information System (as at 21 March 2002) has been displayed graphically. The information displayed in these graphs represents all health librarian positions within DHHS regardless of whether these were filled or vacant at the time of the analysis.

The data indicated that there were eight health librarians (7.06 FTEs) employed across DHHS in a mix of full-time and part-time positions:

- six (5.6 FTEs) in the Corporate Services Division (Library and Records Section)
- and two (1.46 FTEs) in the Hospitals and Ambulance Service Division (0.96 FTE in the Lade Library and 0.5 FTE in the Ambulance Service Training Unit).

**Figure 1: Health librarian FTEs per award classification across DHHS**



Source: DHHS Human Resource Services Information System 21 March 2002 (filled and vacant positions)

Table 1 shows the numbers of DHHS health librarians at the various award levels.

**Table 1: Breakdown of the numbers of DHHS health librarian FTE positions at specific award levels**

Award levels	PF1	PF2	PF3	PF4	State total
FTE health librarian positions	3.06 FTEs	1.00 FTEs	1.00 FTEs	2.00 FTEs	7.06 FTEs

Source: DHHS Human Resource Services Information System 21 March 2002 (filled and vacant positions)

The health librarians employed by DHHS were aged between 30 and 65, with five of the seven health librarians older than 50 years of age. The average age of the health librarians was 50 years. The median age of the DHHS health librarian workforce was 52 years, which was older than the median age of the overall DHHS allied health professional workforce, which was 42 years.

Of the workforce of eight health librarians, seven were female and one position was vacant.

#### **6.1.1.2 DHHS staff survey data**

Of the eight health librarians employed by DHHS, three completed a survey form; resulting in a 38 per cent response rate. Due to the low response rate, only responses to some of the questions that were supported by information gained in consultations were used to describe the supply of health librarians later in this report.

#### **6.1.2 Changes in health librarian numbers**

The DHHS Human Resources Information System identified two health librarian positions that were vacant for six months in the period from 1 July 2001 to 1 January 2002. These positions were not to be advertised pending the outcome of an internal organisational DHHS review.

#### **6.1.3 Entry level qualifications to the profession**

Courses in library and information studies are offered at several levels.

Those who already have an undergraduate degree can become a librarian by studying a graduate diploma or masters first-award course in information studies or information management.

Those who do not possess an undergraduate degree can become a librarian by enrolling in an undergraduate course in library and information studies.

Undergraduate and post-graduate courses in librarianship are offered in all states except Tasmania (The Australian Library and Information Association July 2002). Some are offered by distance education mode.

There has been no librarianship training in Tasmania since the library school closed in 1994. However the University of Tasmania, in collaboration with the Edith Cowan University is to offer a Graduate Diploma in Information Management in 2003. This course will be offered as a one year full-time or three years part-time course by the Faculty of Commerce at the Hobart and Launceston campuses to students who already possess an undergraduate degree (University of Tasmania 2002).

Local health librarians stated that there was a decreasing ability to train librarians and support staff on-the-job and that new staff must come with the skills.

## 6.2 Projecting workforce supply

Workforce supply is a balance between outgoing staff (retirees, those temporarily withdrawing from the workforce, emigrants or those who die or take up employment with other employers) and incoming staff (new graduates, immigrants, staff coming from other employment and staff increasing their hours of employment).

No health librarians left the DHHS in the two years 2000 and 2001 and no positions were advertised for health librarians by the DHHS.

### 6.2.1 Outgoing staff

In the years, 2000 and 2001, no health librarians left employment with the DHHS.

In order to ascertain the possible future numbers of outgoing health librarians, staff were asked a number of questions in the DHHS staff survey. Staff were asked:

- if the hours they worked were the hours they wanted to work;
- if they anticipated a change in their work hours in the next three years and the reasons for this change;
- if they were considering leaving the DHHS in the next six to twelve months, and if so, what were the reasons;
- what their levels of satisfaction were for a number of professional practice parameters.

All three health librarian respondents indicated that the hours they worked were the hours that they wanted to work.

One respondent anticipated an increase in work hours over the next three years. This respondent indicated that 'workplace change' was the factor most likely to cause this increase in hours.

None of the health librarian respondents indicated that they were intending to leave the DHHS in the next six to twelve months. The Australian Library and Information Association Tasmania (ALIA) stated that librarians in the government sector do not actively seek other positions.

Table 2 provides information about staff levels of satisfaction with the various professional practice parameters.

**Table 2: Satisfaction with professional practice parameters in DHHS**

<b>Criteria measured</b>	<b>Per cent of respondents who were satisfied or very satisfied</b>
Opportunity to use your abilities	100%
Sufficient work to maintain competence	100%
Hours of work	67%
Amount of work	0% (100% neither satisfied or dissatisfied)
Overall satisfaction	67%

*Source: DHHS staff survey data December 2001*

Other information relevant to outgoing staff was that 71 per cent of the health librarian workforce was over 50 years of age and there were no health librarians under 30 years of age.

The ALIA stated that since 1997 there has been a general downgrading and a reduction in the level of library and information services in the government health sector in Tasmania. Since 1997, most librarian positions in the DHHS have been abolished as they have been vacated.

### **6.2.2 Incoming staff**

In the years 2000 and 2001, no health librarian positions were advertised by the DHHS.

ALIA also indicated that there are limited and decreasing opportunities for employment for librarians in the health services sector in Tasmania. ALIA was also concerned about the perceived lack of open advertising of positions to ensure the best possible applicants are attracted to the positions.

## **7 Workforce demand**

### **7.1 Current demand for health librarians**

No data was collected directly from the community, other health providers or students on the needs for health librarian services; however, consultations with ALIA provided information on service gaps.

#### **7.1.1 Perceived service gaps**

The ALIA stated that the private hospitals in Tasmania do not maintain professionally staffed library and information services. ALIA indicated that there was considerable scope for expansion of the DHHS library and information services to the private health sector on an appropriately managed fee-for-service basis.

#### **7.1.2 Patterns of usage**

No information was available on the national or Tasmanian health librarian profession to population ratios, but staff workload assessments were examined in order to define the demands on the present services.

##### **7.1.2.1 Staff workload assessments**

The DHHS staff survey asked health librarians if they considered their current workload was about right, too much or too little. Of the three health librarian respondents:

- two (67 per cent) stated that their workload was too much
- one (33 per cent) stated that their workload was about right.

## **7.2 Projecting future demand for health librarians**

### **7.2.1 Perceived drivers of health librarian services in Tasmania**

The majority of health librarian respondents to the DHHS survey perceived that the factors likely to increase the future size of the health librarian workforce were:

- changing patterns of health
- patient expectations
- safer procedural practice
- advances in technology
- defensive practice
- growth in consumer demand.

The majority of health librarians perceived that cost containment and reforms to increase efficiency would decrease the future size of their workforce.

## **8 Workforce planning issues identified through consultations**

### **8.1 Management of current staff workloads**

The majority of health librarians indicated that their workload was too high and stated that this situation could deteriorate if positions are abolished as they are vacated.

The ALIA has produced a set of recommended minimum standards for health libraries in their 'Guidelines for Australian Health Libraries' (ALIA August 2002). The Guidelines recommend staffing numbers, combinations and levels per numbers of professional staff serviced. These Guidelines could assist with the assessment of staff workloads.

### **8.2 DHHS plan for library services**

Currently in progress, the internal DHHS review of information services and arrangements for a new organisational structure within the Corporate Services Division will inform the future need for health librarians and support staff.

### **8.3 Australian Senate inquiry into the role of libraries**

The Senate of the Parliament of Australia has established a Committee to undertake an Inquiry into the Role of Libraries in the Online Environment (Senate 2002). The committee is due for reporting in March 2002.

The terms of reference cover issues such as the current patterns of demand for library services, the responses of libraries to changing community demands and strategies to enhance the wider use of libraries to deliver information.

This inquiry may assist in defining the directions of the DHHS library services, and in turn, the DHHS librarian workforce.

#### **8.4 Effects of hard copy versus electronic information resources**

There is considerable debate about the effects on costs and staff workloads of the trend towards electronic information resources. Montgomery and Sparks in 2002 showed that staff workload patterns changed with a move to an electronic journal collection and that overall costs increased, although costs in some areas decreased. The workload patterns changed so that there was less library processing work but an increased role in library-user education for computer based activities.

Tasmanian health librarians stated that this was the trend in their services as well and the degree to which workloads changed depended on the mix of hard copy to electronic resources in each library.

#### **8.5 Library support staff**

The DHHS library services had library support staff who were employed under the Administration and Clerical Stream of the Community and Health Services (Public Sector) Award. Most were qualified librarian technicians.

The employment of more support staff may be an option to cope with service delivery demands.

#### **8.6 Staff satisfaction with DHHS employment**

Information about staff satisfaction with DHHS employment was sought through focus groups. However, no health librarians attended the focus groups.

#### **8.7 Professional development to retain and strengthen a quality workforce**

The DHHS staff survey asked if regular CPD was offered through their employment. All of the health librarian respondents indicated that regular CPD was not offered.

All three of the health librarians who responded to the DHHS staff survey indicated that they had applied for conference funding in the last two years. All said that their application was successful and the proportion of funding received from DHHS varied between 50 to 100 per cent.

The ALIA indicated that there is low membership of the Association by librarians employed in the government health sector. Similarly, participation rates by health librarians in the Association's Tasmanian CPD program are also low. However, health librarians indicated that since the demise of the Tasmanian Health Libraries and Special Libraries section of ALIA in 2000, they have been more dependent on email lists and web-based resources for CPD than on the ALIA Tasmania group.

## 9 References

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