

Rising educational attainment in the AOD sector: evidence and implications

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Introduction: In healthcare, the education of a workforce is associated with its professional maturity, prestige and remuneration. Against the backdrop of high levels of education in the health professions generally, the AOD sector has historically been characterised by relatively low levels of education.

Method: We tracked the educational background of the AOD workforce in the ACT over sixteen years from 2006 to 2021. We used data obtained from the ACT Alcohol and Other Drug Workforce Profile, an approximately three yearly survey of the AOD sector in the ACT.

Results: Levels of education across the entire AOD workforce increased substantially over the study period. The proportion of all employees with a Bachelor's degree or higher increased from 43% to 59%, including an increase of 34% to 40% from 2017 to 2021 among staff identified as AOD workers. A substantial increase was seen in those having a postgraduate degree (Graduate Diploma, Masters or Doctorate) from 17% to 33%.

Discussions and Conclusions: The rapid increase in educational attainment in the AOD sector in the ACT may well be driven by demographic factors peculiar to the region and reflect a general trend towards increasing levels of education. Nevertheless, the increase in the average education level within the sector signals a growing professional maturity and increasing capacity. Given that better educated workers generally demand higher salaries and enjoy broader employment opportunities, this trend has implications for salary costs to the sector and its capacity to attract and retain workers.

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