

‘Not PALMing it off’: A collaborative approach to addressing the sexual health needs of PALM Scheme workers in NSW

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Background/Purpose:

As of January 2025, there were 30,705 Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme workers in Australia including almost 5,700 in NSW. Many workers come from countries with high rates of STIs, HIV, hepatitis and tuberculosis, including Fiji, which is currently experiencing an HIV outbreak. There are growing concerns regarding the health and wellbeing of NSW PALM Scheme workers, particularly in relation to their sexual and reproductive health.

Approach:

In lieu of a nationally coordinated approach, NSW Health convened a statewide working group and developed a workplan to address the sexual and reproductive health needs of PALM Scheme workers, employers, and stakeholders. This led to a statewide action plan, informed by over 40 consultations with PALM Scheme employers and stakeholders.

Outcomes/Impact:

Consultations highlighted the need to improve health outcomes for PALM Scheme workers in NSW, strengthen primary care workforce capacity, and increase capacity and accountability of PALM Scheme employers to provide access to health care, information, and support.

In collaboration with 17 employers, NSW Health developed a standardised health education package, with a focus on sexual health, to be delivered during worker arrival briefings. This package has been distributed to 75 PALM Scheme employers across NSW. NSW Health is also progressing a range of complementary initiatives, including the development of in-language resources, animated educational videos, and a dedicated health information webpage for workers and stakeholders.

Combined with efforts to upskill local GPs and the broader healthcare workforce, strengthen information delivery during pre-departure briefings, and implement outreach models for sexual health testing and education, NSW's strategy for supporting PALM Scheme workers is innovative and responsive to local needs.

Innovation and Significance:

NSW is the first state to convene a statewide working group with a dedicated action plan to address priority health concerns for PALM Scheme workers, employers, and stakeholders. This work offers a valuable model that other organisations may adopt.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

None.