Technicians Support Services Industry Reference Committee (IRC)
Industry Summary

Part A – IRC Details

Name of the IRC
Technicians Support Services
IRC members
Name
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Leigh Svendsen
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Part B – Industry Details

Industry areas (1,000 words, include attachments where relevant)
Overview of industry sectors / sub-sectors covered by the IRC, including:
• *employers (size, local/state/national/global, government/not-for-profit/for-profit, key enterprises)*
• *key links with other industries and cross-sectoral work*

Technicians support services operate in an array of health care and social assistance sectors. The job roles supported by the VET Training Package Products and overseen by the Technicians Support Services IRC are varied and can involve undertaking administrative, assistant and/or operational (i.e. technician) activities in sectors including:

- Anaesthetic Technology
- Audiometry
- Cardiac Technology
- Health Administration
- Hospital Pharmacies
- Medical Practice Assisting
- Operating Theatre Support
- Optometry
- Pathology
- Sterilisation Services.

The technicians support services workforce works closely with a range of health professionals and staff in the wider health care and social assistance industry which employs just over 2 million people. Health is the largest employing industry in Australia and labour market forecasts predict that the

workforce will grow by 301,000 over the next five years (to November 2026).[1] The technicians support services workforce represents a diverse range of health care and social assistance roles with examples including clinical coding clerks, cardiac technicians, health administrative workers/supervisors, medical secretaries, pathology collectors, sterilisation technicians/supervisors and optical dispensers (to name a few). The diversity and extensive nature of roles covered therefore means it is difficult to quantify the exact workforce size supported by the Technicians Support Services Training Package. Some occupational profiles published by the National Skills Commission (NSC) however show that in 2021 there were **39,400 medical technicians** (ANZSCO[2] ID 3112) and it is **expected to reach 42,400 by 2026**. Occupations captured in this count include (November 2021):[3]

- 9,000 pathology collectors (ANZSCO ID 311216)
- 6,200 medical laboratory technicians (ANZSCO ID 311213)
- 5,600 pharmacy technicians (ANZSCO ID 311215)
- 2,400 other medical technicians (ANZSCO ID 311299),
- 1,100 operating theatre technicians (ANZSCO ID 311214)
- 690 cardiac technicians (ANZSCO ID 311212)
- 620 anaesthetic technicians (ANZSCO ID 311211).

Employer landscape

Providers operating in the technicians support services sectors include a range of public and private small, medium and large enterprises, spread across the country. Some examples and counts of relevant provider types involved in hiring workers supported by the Technicians Support Services Training Package across Australia include:[4]

- 693 public hospitals providing 62,000 beds (2017–18)
- 657 private hospitals providing 34,000 hospital beds (2016–17)
- 47,224 general practice medical services (June 2021)
- 20,177 specialist medical services (June 2021)
- 2,692 pathology and diagnostic imaging services (June 2021)
- 25,593 other allied health services (June 2021)
- 3,336 optometry and optical dispensing (June 2021)
- 7,571 physiotherapy services (June 2021)
- 5,905 chiropractic and osteopathic services (June 2021)

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many sectors significantly, and providers operating in the technicians support services sectors have particularly experienced increased scrutiny on infection control, sterilisation practices and hygiene. Policies and procedures had to be swiftly reviewed by providers in response to the impact COVID-19 was having on the community, as well as meet new government public health orders released. Additional measures were taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to improve and/or reinforce practices to improve infection control and help keep patients and the workforce safe.

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[1] Australian Government National Skills Commission (NSC) Industry Profiles: Health Care and Social Assistance [Available at: https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/industries/industry-details?industryCode=Q#1]

[2] Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) are the national occupation classifications reported on by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

[3] Australian Government National Skills Commission (NSC) Various Occupational Profiles [Available at: https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/occupations/occupation-search/]

[4] Various sources: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Australia's health 2020. Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Count of Businesses to June 2021.

The impact of the pandemic, including emerging protocols and procedures for conducting health practices and/or supporting health care recipients were considered as part of the Technicians Support Services Training Package review projects conducted (see Section C for more details).

Cross-sector
The HLT Health Training Package which includes the Technicians Support Services Training Package Products shares a significant amount of content with the CHC Community Services Training Package. Shared content is in the areas of:

- advocacy
- anatomy and physiology
- communication
- diversity
- information management
- management and leadership
- infection prevention and control
- legal and ethical practice
- policy and research
- professional practice
- oral health
- work health and safety
- first aid
- language literacy and numeracy.

Regulatory context (200 words)

Brief description of relevant industry standards, licensing or accreditation requirement

Work in the health industry reflects a complex inter-relationship of duty of care, ethical behaviors and personal values in the context of provision of high-quality service to clients.

The nature and principles of work in the health industry include:
- meeting duty of care, legal and statutory responsibilities (ethical behaviour)
- providing a non-discriminatory service
- providing a client-centered approach.

It is essential that workers have a sound understanding of the complex regulatory environment in which they work given the interaction between health professional registration legislation; consumer protection and health complaints legislation; public health legislation and the common law principles that apply to a treating practitioner/client relationship.

Part C – Industry Priorities

Major priorities for the industry sector (500 words)

Brief description of skills and training needs the IRC has focused on each year of the program and why these were a priority. What are the current top 3 skills priorities for the sector?

Past Skills Addressed

Clinical Coding Training Package Product Development 2021

The development of new Clinical Coding Training Package Products included one qualification, ten clinical coding units of competency and one Clinical Coding Auditor skill set which was added to the HLT Training Package.

Several reports relevant to skills development highlighted the lack of available skilled individuals for clinical coding job roles and no nationally recognised Qualification available within the HLT Health Training Package for clinical coders. The development of a new entry-level clinical coding Qualification has ensured that clinical coders have access to appropriate skills and knowledge to meet the current and future needs of the Australian health care system. A skill set was developed and targeted for experienced clinical coders seeking to broaden their skills and knowledge to include clinical coding auditing.

Anaesthetic Technology Training Package Product Update 2021

One qualification and seven units of competency were reviewed and updated included in the HLT Training Package.

Industry identified the need to update the Anaesthetic Technology Training Package to reflect current industry practice and knowledge since extensive changes in the scope of practice of anaesthetic technicians in terms of standards and protocols, new ideas and techniques, digital technologies, and the terminology used within the discipline of anaesthetics had come about since the Diploma of Anaesthetic Technology was last released in 2015. The updated Diploma in Anaesthetic Technology and Practice equips existing and new workers with the ability to perform their job roles in an efficient and effective manner; provides for the safe management of patients in the anaesthetics sub-sector; and also reflects new standards and core competencies set out in the ANZCA's Statement on the Assistant for the Anaesthetist.

Orthopaedic Technology Training Package Product Development 2021

The development of new Orthopaedic Technology Training Package products, including one qualification and seven Orthopaedic Technology units of competency were added to the HLT Training Package.

Industry's feedback strongly indicated that the HLT41412 Certificate IV in Cast Technology and its associated seven units of competency were deleted in error in 2015 without appropriate consultation with the previous Industry Skills Council. Industry reported an urgent need for the development of Cast/Orthopaedic Technology Training Package Products to ensure that Plaster/Cast Technicians (also known as Orthopaedic Technicians) have access to the appropriate skills and knowledge to meet current workplace responsibilities and the future needs of the Australian health care system. The job role of orthopaedic technicians demands specialised skills that need to be acquired and developed whilst working alongside orthopaedic surgeons.

Hospital or Health Services Pharmacy Support Training Package Product Update and Development 2021

Two qualifications and nine units of competency were reviewed and updated. Fourteen units of competency were developed and added to the HLT Training Package.

A Case for Change was submitted and approved in 2018 and it identified the need to develop new units that covered content on the application of underpinning knowledge in key areas such as the pharmacology of drugs and how those drugs interact with bodily systems. The two existing Hospital or Health Services Pharmacy Support Qualifications and units of competency were reviewed and updated to meet current industry standards for jobs in the workplace and to include current content and terminology required for the Hospital or Health Services Pharmacy Technician job role.

Health Administration Training Package Product Update 2021

One qualification and four units were reviewed and updated in the HLT Training Package.

The key rationale for updating the Certificate IV in Health Administration qualification was to:
- address workforce needs in terms of filling gaps in regional and remote areas where there was reduced access to doctors and nurses
- ensure that industry's need for rural, remote and cross-disciplinary roles could continue to be addressed
- ensure that individuals who work in operational roles within the health industry would have access to appropriate skills and knowledge required to meet the demands of the Australian health care system.

Current and Future Skills Priorities

SkillsIQ's 2022 Skills Survey, in addition with consultation with stakeholders across the technicians support services sectors and wider health industry revealed that initial skills priorities which employers focus on when filling a vacancy are those which are **job-specific and technical skills** for a job. For example, medical laboratory technicians, operating theatre technicians and cardiac technicians are expected to have skills and knowledge regarding the operation of equipment relevant to their work environment, as well as the ability to record activity measured by equipment. The use of technology and digital skills is vital as well.

When enquiring on non-technical skills requirements across the workforce, the top short-to-medium future skills needs identified for the wider health care and social assistance workforce (including technicians support services) reflected a number of soft skill areas - **communication**, **resilience**, **stress tolerance**, **teamwork**, **problem solving** and **emotional intelligence**.

Similar soft skill areas have been voiced by employers via the Australian Government's National Skills Commission's (NSC) Occupational profiles. For example, employers look for medical technicians who have strong skills related to **critical thinking**, **reading comprehension**, **active listening** and **speaking**.[5]

The Training Package review projects recently conducted and outlined above have aimed to address key skills gaps which sectors continually reported as a result of the emerging technology and operating equipment.

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[5] Australian Government National Skills Commission (NSC) Occupational Profile Medical Technician ANZSCO ID 3112 [Available at: https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/occupations/occupation-search/]

National qualifications not substantially updated[6] since 2015, and where possible indicative timeframe for when they may need to be reviewed (add additional rows as necessary)			
Qualification code	**Qualification title**	**Reason**	**Timeframe for review**
HLT37015	Certificate III in Sterilisation Services	Qualification was proposed in the 2019 Industry Skills Forecast to be reviewed in 2020-21. The review was delayed due to COVID-19. If a future review is required, please advise need for update and rationale.	Please advise timeframe.
HLT47015	Certificate IV in Sterilisation Services	*See 'Reason' provided above*	Please advise timeframe.
HLT37215	Certificate III in Pathology Collection	*See 'Reason' provided above*	Please advise timeframe.
HLT37415	Certificate III in Pathology Assistance	*See 'Reason' provided above*	Please advise timeframe.
HLT47715	Certificate IV in Medical Practice Assisting	*See 'Reason' provided above*	Please advise timeframe.
HLT57715	Diploma of Practice Management	*See 'Reason' provided above*	Please advise timeframe.
HLT47415	Certificate IV in Audiometry	*See 'Reason' provided above*	Please advise timeframe.
HLT57415	Diploma of Audiometry	*See 'Reason' provided above*	Please advise timeframe.
HLT47515	Certificate IV in Operating Theatre Technical Support	*See 'Reason' provided above*	Please advise timeframe.
HLT47815	Certificate IV in Optical Dispensing	*See 'Reason' provided above*	Please advise timeframe.

Critical challenges and opportunities for this industry sector (1,000 words)

Summary of key challenges, lessons learned, and any identified opportunities (at local/state/national/global levels) related to vocational education and training, including but not limited to:

• *issues with the implementation or delivery of training*

• *challenges achieving stakeholder consensus*

• *intersections or collaboration across industry sectors.*

Workforce challenges
Similarly to other sectors, stakeholders across the technicians support services sectors have indicated that **COVID-19, and associated restrictions and requirements,** has been by far the most significant workforce challenge experienced in the last 12 months, and the disruption continues to impact stakeholders. For example, it has been creating general uncertainty in the operating environment (i.e. absences due to close contact rules, changing workplace protocols), and difficulties in maintaining staff motivation (when keeping up with increased demand for services) and staff mental health wellbeing (SkillsIQ's 2022 Skills Survey). When most sectors were arranging for staff to work-from-home, the technicians services sector along with the wider health care industry continued to deliver their services in the workplace and at times, in high-risk settings to COVID-19 exposure.

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[6] Includes where a qualification was solely updated to transition to the to the 2012 Standards for Training Packages

The impact of the pandemic, including emerging protocols and procedures for conducting health practices and/or supporting health care recipients has been significant across the wider health care industry and the sectors of focus have had to stay abreast of all changes and ensure they are adhered to in their workplaces.

Skills shortages and **staff recruitment** are also major challenges faced by employers. New South Wales and the Northern Territory are reporting particular shortages of anaesthetic technicians and pharmacy technicians as registered in the government's 2021 Skills Priority List.[7] Whilst attracting staff to job roles is an issue, employers also face retention challenges. The issue of staff shortages is further exacerbated in regional and rural communities which have been struggling to fill roles as the workforce is significantly skewed towards metropolitan locations. The **lack of career progression** opportunities, and the need to **adopt and use new technology** have been challenges voiced by the sector over the years.[8]

Technicians Support Services and VET
Organisations operating across the sector are diverse, and a variety of skills needs and priorities exist across metropolitan, regional and remote locations. This therefore means that reviewing and developing VET Training Package Products that provide the skills and knowledge required of job roles, as well as achieving smooth implementation and the provision of quality training outcomes are especially challenging. Some of the main challenges and opportunities identified include:

- Competing views often existed during training package consultations. Differences in preferred approaches, training content and skills priorities were often voiced by stakeholders and captured in feedback. Therefore, the IRC was fundamental in exploring the issues and the associated evidence to make decisions that reflected the needs of industry from a national perspective.

- Implementation issues for new VET training products include administrative burdens on RTOs as they transition to deliver the new products. Academic staff also carry a burden with the responsibility to modify existing teaching resources and create new resource. To ensure systemic issues are addressed and effective implementation is achieved, the following measures are recommended:

    - Strong and ongoing relationships between industry and training providers, and industry involvement in the validation of learning and assessment materials/activities
    - Robust and reliable assessment by RTOs, including in relation to prior recognition practices
    - The creation of new and improved training and assessment resources to reflect the new and revised Units of Competency.

- Funding is also a challenge as a result of implementing new VET training products as significant levels of resources can go into developing new training and assessment material.

- Opportunities for the portability of skills across sectors has always been of focus of consultation efforts, with industry and other stakeholders asked to consider the relevance of proposed Training Package Products to their sector and business models. Training Package Products have been developed in a manner which addresses the needs of a diverse

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[7] Australian Government National Skills Commission (NSC) Skills Priority List June 2021.
[8] 2019 Technicians Support Services Industry Reference Committee Industry Skills Forecast. SkillsIQ [Available at: https://www.skillsiq.com.au/ResourcesResearchandSubmissions/2019IndustrySkillsForecasts]

range of industry sectors and organisation types, allowing for portability of skills across the industry.

Moving forward these opportunities need to continue to be explored and ensure that there is cross-sectoral consultation and collaboration between industries, the VET sector, and government.

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IRC Chair/s