



NHMRC **Workforce Strategy** 2025–2029



Our vision

The National Health and Medical Research Council Strategic Workforce Strategy 2025–2029 (the Strategy) describes the actions required to ensure that we have the workforce and workplace needed to respond to our drivers of change, effectively deliver our future business objectives and achieve our mission of building a healthy Australia.

Our Strategy reflects and builds upon the objectives and goals of the NHMRC Corporate Plan. It sets the workforce direction to be efficient, sustainable and capable, with activities to enhance the culture of connection, inclusion and integrity in a hybrid work environment.

The future of work – environmental scan

Our context

Our Corporate Plan touches on a range of factors that shape our future of work, ranging from emerging health challenges to trends and policy in data access, sharing and transparency as well as advances in technology and innovations. Each of these factors has been taken into consideration in the development of the Strategy. These factors align with the APS Reform Agenda to build a skilled, agile and inclusive workforce. Importantly, our demographic context plays a critical role in ensuring the Strategy is practical and responsive to both the growing risks and emerging opportunities in the labour market.

External factors

- Workforce demand will shift due to changes in emerging health issues, consumer experiences and demographic changes, with the need for improved consumer engagement and cultural competency capabilities.
- Policy changes influence workforce competition that requires workforce flexibility and adaptability. Interplay between government, industry and community organisation increases workforce demand in program management.
- Advances in technology and/or innovations in the use of technology in research and in health requires new skill sets, digital literacy and more interdisciplinary capabilities combining health professional, IT specialist and data scientists.
- The future of workforce development is digital transformation, service modernisation and inclusion.
- Flexibility is beyond the ad hoc work-life balance requirements and is now a sustainable and balanced approach between the employer and employee needs.

Internal factors

- We have an attractive mission and engaged workforce and need a strong culture driven by engaged and capable leaders.
- We have a unique, educated and capable workforce mix that we can leverage to create the agility and adaptability we need.
- Better connect with the broader APS and universities to overcome barrier of a small agency to grow capabilities, mobilities and create career pathways.
- We have high concentration of senior roles that highlight the need to strengthen capability development in middle management to ensure succession planning and create more entry level roles to optimize workforce distribution.

Demographic shift

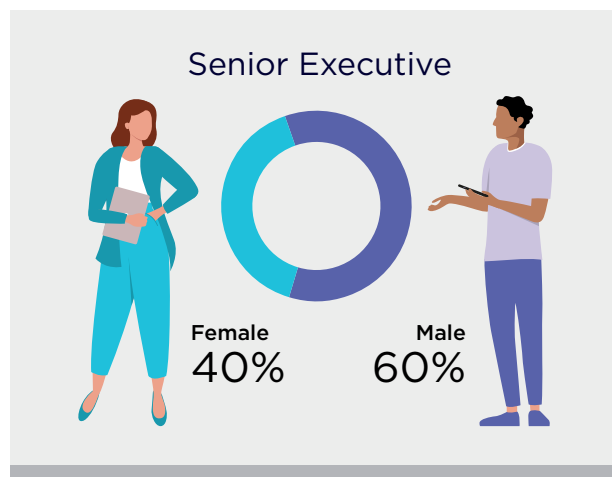
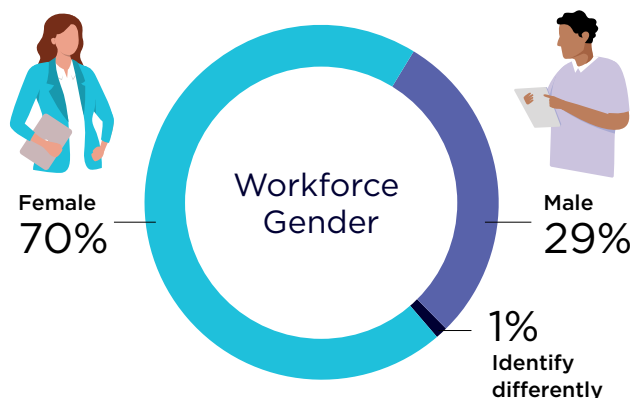
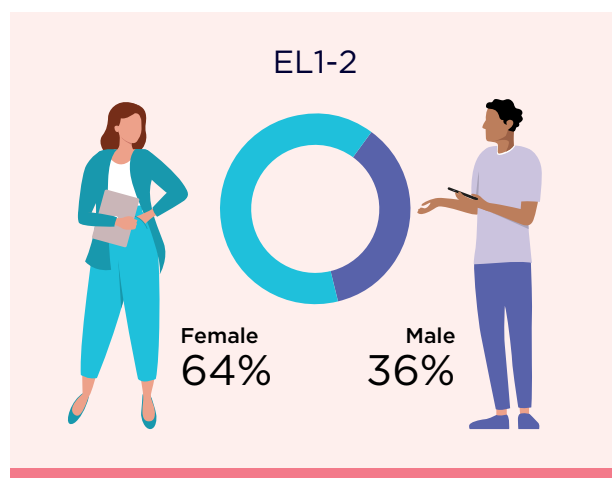
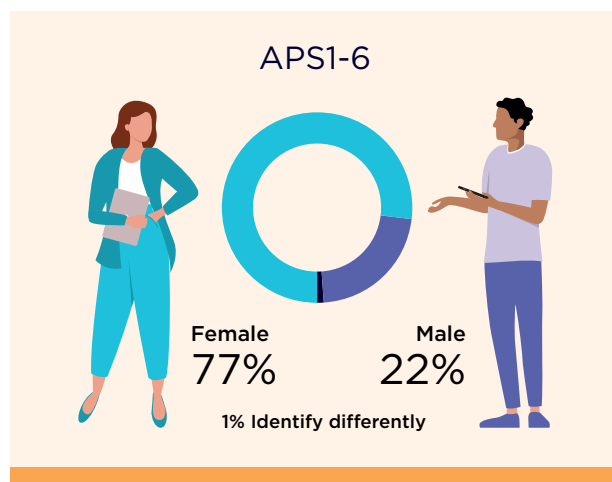
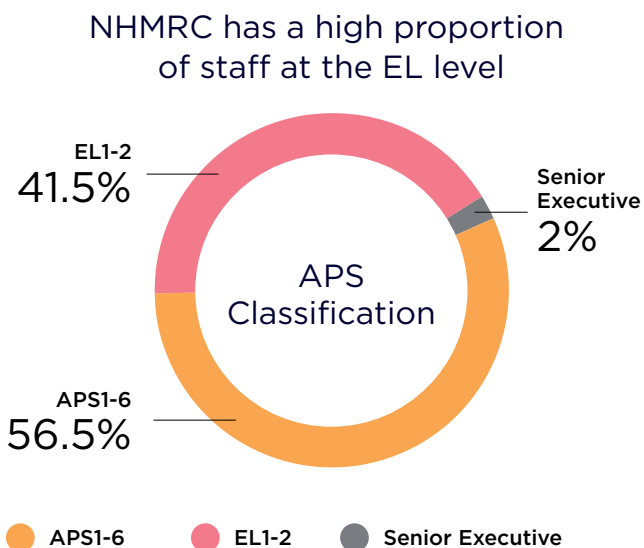
- The anticipated demographic shifts over the coming years will see increasing number of mature age workers and the millennial generation forming a significant proportion of the workforce. The benefit of a diverse workforce requires an inclusive culture to harness the creativity powered by differing backgrounds and experience.
- Personal growth (helping employees grow as people, not just professionals), deeper connections, a shared purpose and holistic well-being are all emerging as important needs of the younger generations within the workforce.

APS Reform

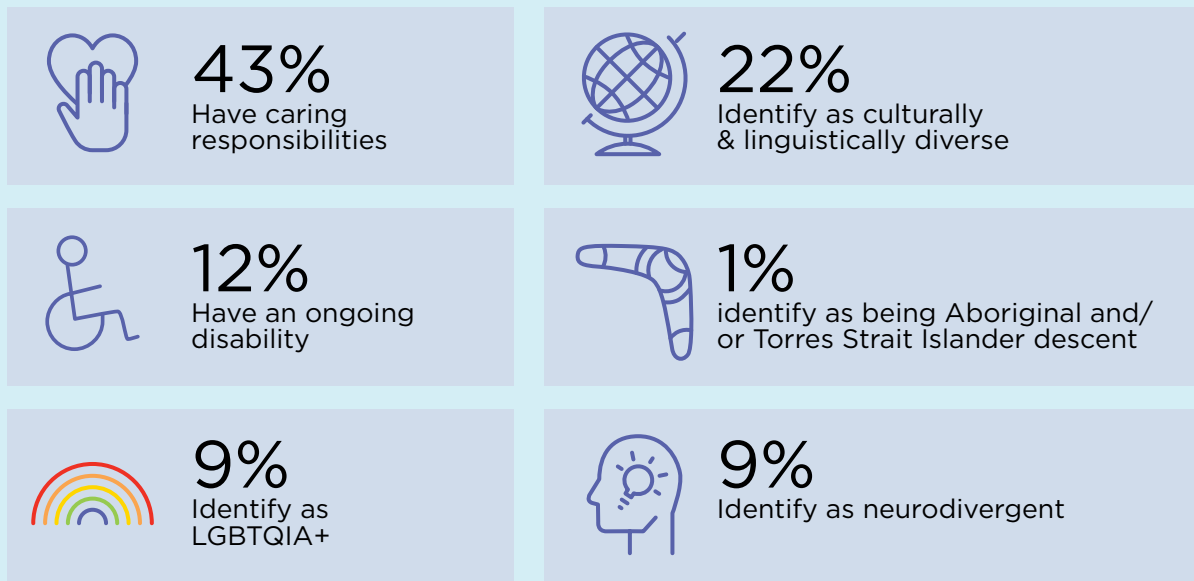
- The APS Reform Agenda announced in 2022 aims to build a stronger public service, positioning the Australian Public Service to work collaboratively and dynamically. This agenda is expected to:
 - strengthen a culture of integrity
 - deliver human and user-centred policy and service excellence
 - create a strong employee value proposition
 - set standards for equity, inclusion, diversity and First Nations employment, and
 - improve capabilities to ensure the ability to adapt to future challenges.

Our Workforce

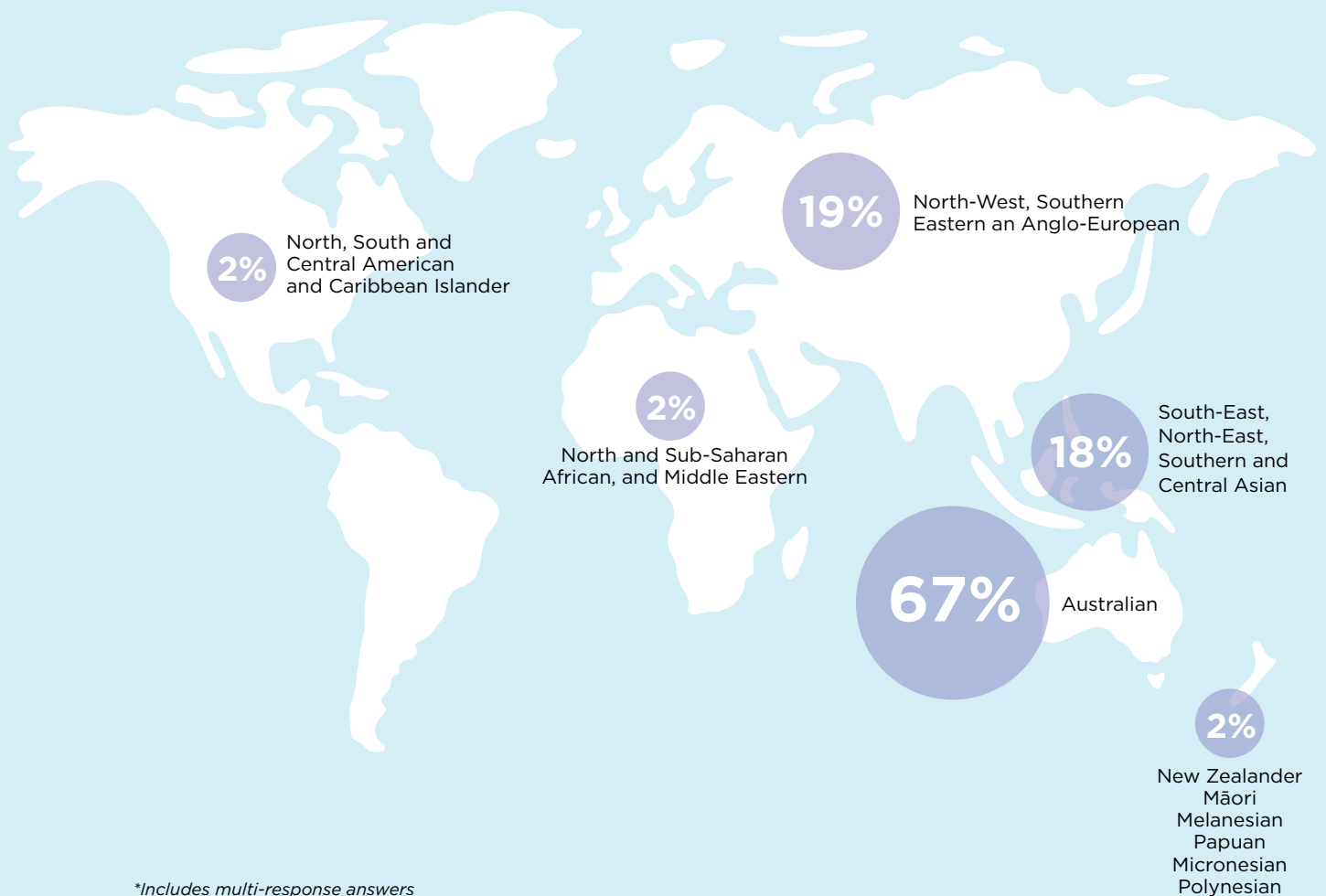
A key component of the development of the plan was an examination of the current NHMRC workforce profile.



Diversity



Cultural background



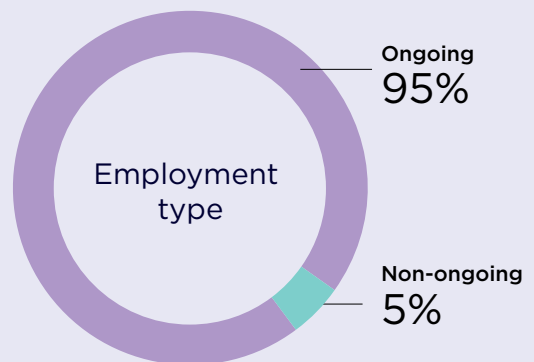
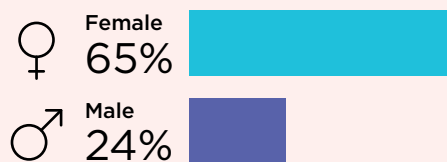
Flexible working arrangements



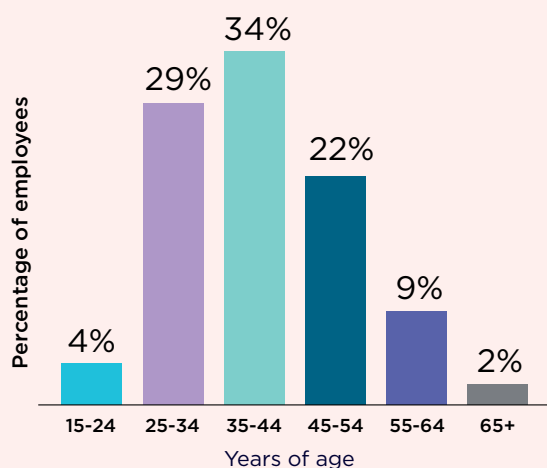
Accessing flexible arrangements



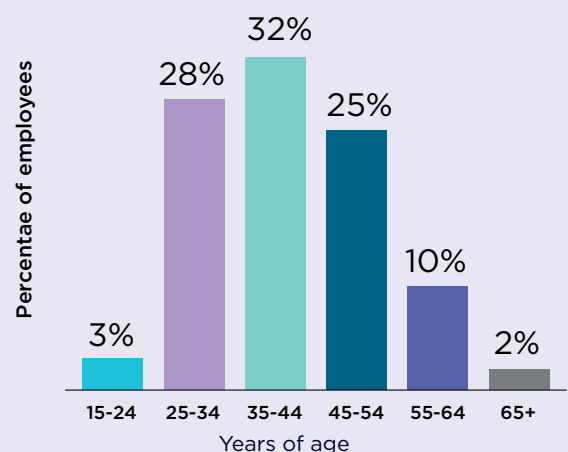
Working from home



Accessing flexible work by age



Age of workforce



In June 2024, NHMRC undertook an analysis on our Optimal Management Structure (OMS). Key findings are the span of control for:

- SES positions aligns with OMS Benchmarks
- EL2 positions aligns with OMS Benchmarks for Specialist roles but is below benchmarks for Policy, Program and Service Delivery roles. However, average team size is substantially higher for Service Delivery sections.
- EL1 positions aligns with OMS for Specialist roles but below benchmark for policy, program and service delivery roles, where larger teams exist but are supported by narrow leadership spans.

The findings indicate NHMRC has a top-heavy structure, compressed leadership model with multiple EL1s and EL2s managing fewer than optimal direct reports, especially in service areas. This may result in inefficient delegation, reduced development and decision-making autonomy, increased upward reporting and bottlenecks and higher resourcing costs for minimal functional differentiation.

Our Action Pillars

To build towards our vision for a capable NHMRC workforce, we are committed to three pillars of action:



Our action pillars consider our vision, operating environment, and workforce. It aligns with APS Workforce Strategy and builds on the influence of the APS Reform Agenda.

Capability

APS Workforce Strategy Actions aligned

- Attract, build and retain skills, expertise and talent
- Embrace data, technology and flexible and responsive workforce models

What we have

- A funded Learning and Development Strategy

What we will deliver

- Collaborate with APS and other stakeholders to identify and develop external mobility opportunities to upskill or supplement our existing capability.
- Design and implement an internal mobility register aligned with business needs to capture internal talent, support strategic redeployment, and foster interdisciplinary collaboration. This initiative will identify in-demand roles and match them with available skills during workforce troughs, enabling professional development and enhancing organisational agility.
- Build knowledge and skills transfer into outsourcing arrangements to grow in house capability.
- Undertake periodic reviews to capture key skills and capabilities, identify and address critical gaps.
- Deliver talent management programs (succession) for leadership and critical roles.
- Promote and embed a talent segmentation mindset across the organisation by integrating segmentation principles into workforce planning, performance conversation, and talent development strategies.

How we measure success

- A workforce focused on developing strong capabilities aligned to current and emerging requirements.
- A culture where how we do our work matters as much as what we deliver.
- Increased competencies in priority skills and capabilities.
- Uptake of mobility opportunities.
- Critical roles have identified successors with increased leadership participation.
- A workforce actively seeking out and embracing technology to work more innovatively and efficiently in a digital world.
- Reduction in use of external labour and associated costs (within the core base).

Culture

APS Workforce Strategy Actions aligned

- Strengthen integrity and purposeful leadership

What we have

- A Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- NHMRC Values and Behaviours
- LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Action Plan
- Disability Inclusion Action Plan

What we will deliver

- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Inclusion Action Plan.
- Embed NHMRC Values and Behaviours in all stages of the employment cycle.
- Clearly define NHMRC's Employee Value Proposition (EVP) to make NHMRC an employer of choice.
- Streamline, automate, and uplift the recruitment and onboarding process to enhance the applicant experience and enable data collection and analysis.
- Identify and address critical gaps (e.g., induction) and pain points to create a culture that helps people thrive in a hybrid environment.
- All leaders are accountable for actions generated from engagement surveys to foster cultural and performance improvement.
- Create EVPs for specific job segments for critical roles and diversity cohorts.
- Improve our workforce maturity in adapting to flexible work and manager capability in managing high performing hybrid teams.

How we measure success

- Compelling EVP that is well positioned to attract top talent.
- Increased representation in key workforce segments.
- Maintain or increase positive responses to the following questions in the APS Census:
 - 'I feel a sense of belonging at NHMRC'
 - 'I have seen changes in our workplace culture to be more inclusive'
 - 'Regardless of my work location, I feel connected and included at NHMRC'
 - 'The culture in my Agency supports people to act with integrity'
- Obtain and maintain Inclusive Employer status through Diversity Council of Australia by improving our diversity and inclusion, workforce capability and remaining at the forefront of flexible work practices.
- A workforce that models and promotes a pro-integrity culture.

Capacity

APS Workforce Strategy Actions aligned

- Attract, build and retain skills, expertise and talent
- Embrace flexible and responsive workforce models

What we have

- A need driven resourcing allocation

What we will deliver

- Develop a targeted talent register in critical and emerging fields like AI, data analytics, program management, and consumer/community engagement.
- Build a partnering HR function that proactively identifies and prioritises workforce issues, delivering data-driven insights to inform workforce decisions.
- Develop an efficiency incentive program to encourage innovative workforce practices and process improvement.
- Assess and align workforce resourcing to core and demand-driven functions regularly.
- Establish a position management framework that embeds functional classification (i.e. job family, core or demand driven) and light touch impact assessment in vacancy justification.
- Consciously review and broaden spans of controls for EL1s and redistribute workloads to increase capability at APS5-6 levels.
- Leverage APS graduate and entry-level programs to address workforce needs.

How we measure success

- Job roles evaluated and re-designed to support new and emerging capabilities and inclusivity.
- Closer alignment with OMS.
- Workforce resourcing aligned to core and demand-driven functions.
- Flexible and responsible workforce that can be deployed quickly to adapt to changing priorities.
- Strong and capable leadership pipelines and a commitment to succession planning and development.
- Increased cross-team deployment and reduced idle capacity during troughs.
- Efficiency opportunities identified in enduring functions.
- Increase in flexible component of the workforce.

Monitor and Review

The Strategy will be assessed and evaluated regularly. Progress will be reported to the Executive Board. Some actions may become obsolete and new actions may be required if the work environment changes significantly. Others will need to respond to specific business demands as they arise.

For these reasons and to keep the Strategy relevant at all times, it is iterative. A number of actions identified in the Strategy are already being implemented, including the L&D Strategy and D&I action plans. In 2027, a checkpoint review will consider changes in the operating context, progress on key actions and make recommendations to the Executive Board about the remaining two years of the Strategy.

A full review of the Strategy will be undertaken in 2029 and reported to the Executive Board.

Our methodology

The methodology used to develop the Strategy was guided by the Australian Public Service Commission's (APSC) Workforce Planning methodology (outlined in the Australian Public Service Workforce Planning Guide, 2023).

The consultation and data gathering process comprised:

- Focus groups with members of the Executive and Directors
- Focus groups with staff
- Administration and analysis of a Skills and Capability survey, and
- Review of NHMRC documentation, sample workforce plans from other public sector agencies and APS Reform priorities.