

Connect First at Central Adelaide

Connecting the new graduate allied health and scientific workforce



Emma Vo¹, Adam Govier², Kate Roberts², Chris King², Lucy Cashen²

¹ Director Allied Health Workforce and Reform, Central Adelaide Local Health Network, Adelaide, SA, 5000 - Emma.Vo@sa.gov.au

² Allied Health, Central Adelaide Local Health Network, Adelaide, SA, 5000

Background

- Central Adelaide Local Health Network (CALHN) is South Australia's largest health network, covering 30% of the population and employing over 1300 allied health and scientific professionals across over 20 professions.
- In response to global health workforce challenges and rapid expansion of health services, CALHN has recruited larger cohorts of new graduates to build the future workforce and meet the health care needs of consumers and communities.
- The new graduate year can be challenging, particularly in large and dynamic healthcare systems.
- It is essential for the new graduate workforce to be well-supported and connected to provide high quality consumer care, support workforce retention, and foster a positive start transitioning from student to employee.
- Interprofessional learning is fundamental to effective multidisciplinary team-based care.
- Acknowledging this, *Connect First at CALHN* has been implemented as a contemporary, interprofessional learning and development initiative to connect and support a large and diverse cohort of allied health and scientific new graduates, through a series of networking and education sessions.

Aim

- Connect First at CALHN* aims to (a) build an interprofessional education and support network for a large and diverse cohort of allied health and scientific new graduates to safely transition into the work environment, and (b) foster connected, consumer-centred, culturally safe, team-based care through self-reflection, critical thinking, shared learning, and peer support.

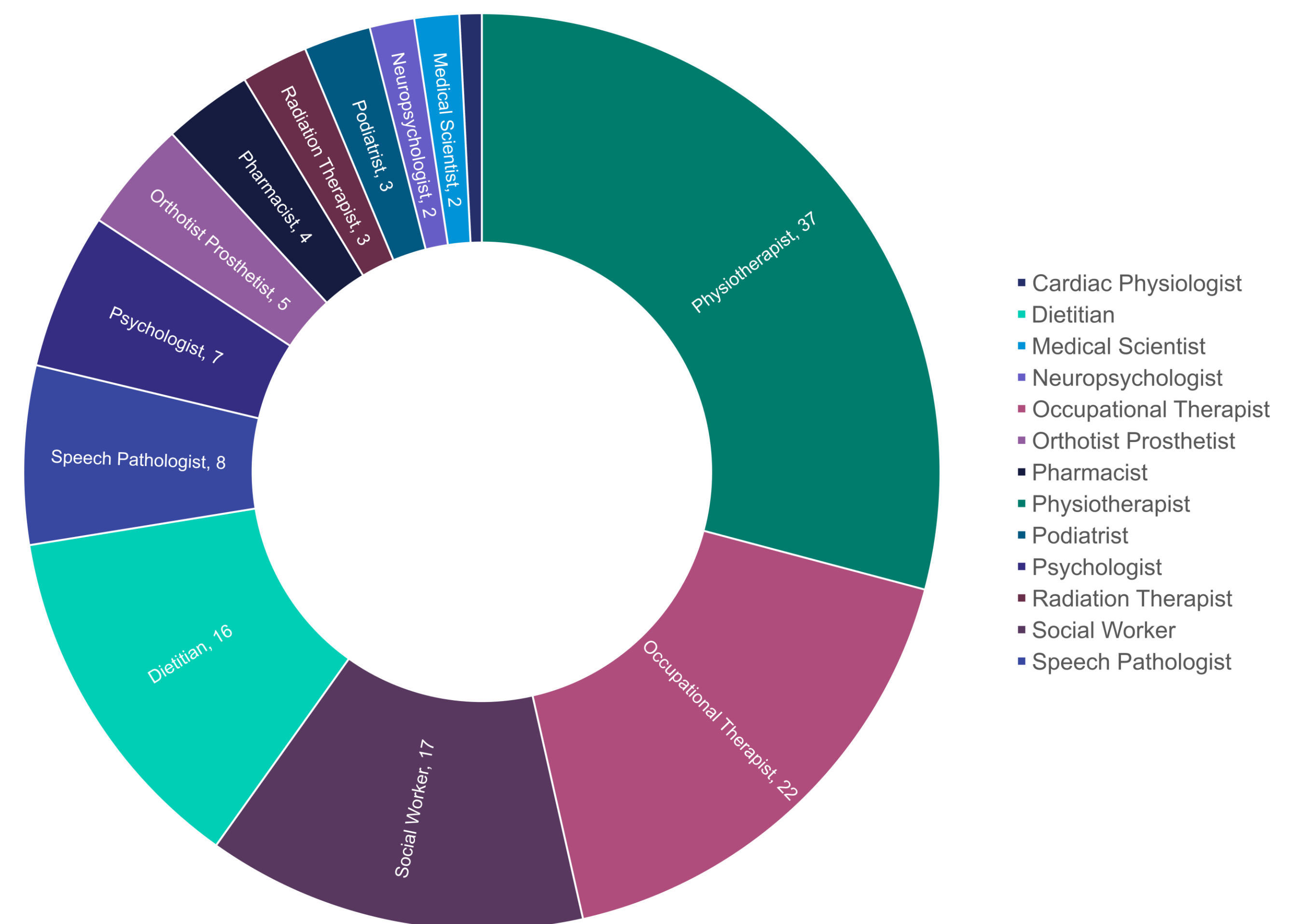
Design

- The program was designed in partnership with clinicians and leaders across all career levels.
- Session topics and content were aligned to organisational priorities and included building safe connections, co-ordinated multidisciplinary teamwork, Aboriginal health, consumer-centred care, quality improvement, and workforce wellbeing.
- Learning activities included group-based discussions, case-based scenarios, consumer stories, and interprofessional work-shadowing.
- Sessions were facilitated in-house by subject matter experts, including senior clinicians, with the intention of fostering the ongoing development and retention of the experienced workforce.

Implementation

- A pilot program was implemented from August to December 2023, and 37 new graduates from eight professions, participated in three sessions.
- Building on the pilot success, a six-session program was launched in 2024, catering to 48 new graduates from 11 professions.

Fig. 1 Professions of participants across 2023-2025



Outcomes and Sustainability

- 127 allied health and scientific clinicians from 13 professions and 4 sites have participated in the program, from August 2023 - June 2025 (Fig.1).
- Feedback from the 2024 series was positive:
- 100% respondents would recommend the initiative to new graduates.
- Respondents gave an average rating of 4.5/5, with regards to value.
- 93% felt that the initiative fostered better connections with CALHN.
- 100% respondents expressed a desire to remain employed at CALHN.
- 98% reported learning new information across sessions, including how to deliver better consumer-focused and culturally-safe care.
- The broader workforce has indicated a need for similar programs at other stages of the career.
- As a fully in-house initiative, *Connect First at CALHN* is a sustainable, cost-effective learning solution, fostering consumer-centred, team-based care, while supporting workforce attraction and retention.

Conclusions

- Connect First at CALHN* has proven effective in building an interprofessional learning and support network for a large cohort of new graduate allied health and scientific professionals in the first year of their career at large local health network.
- While the program was specifically designed for new graduate allied health and scientific professionals transitioning into CALHN, the structure, content, and format could be adapted for use across other health, disability and education settings.

Future Directions

- The design, delivery, and evaluation process could be applied to learning and development programs for other career stages within a health network or at a state level. This would foster interprofessional learning and collaboration, while supporting workforce attraction and retention at other career levels.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the valued contributions of senior allied health professionals, Aboriginal health leaders, and administrative support officers at Central Adelaide who developed session content and/or facilitated sessions, in particular – Ciara Keogh, Anne Gatley, Simone Dafoe, Sonja Rogasch, Joseph Agius, Andrea Parker, Trish Laccos, Ngara Keeler, Maria Fantasia, and Georgina Pearce.