

CESPHN Practice Manager Strategy 2025-2029

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Foreword

Central and Eastern Sydney Primary Health Network (CESPHN) values the role of both clinical expertise and strong leadership in building resilient, high-performing general practices. Practice managers are critical to delivering the stability, innovation, and responsiveness that modern healthcare demands. This strategy represents our commitment to enabling and empowering practice managers as leaders in the transformation of primary care.

Executive Summary

Practice managers are the operational leaders of general practice, critical to delivering safe, effective, and efficient care. Amid significant transformation across the primary care landscape, their role has become more vital and more complex than ever.

This strategy outlines CESPHN's commitment to supporting and strengthening the practice manager workforce across our region from 2025 to 2029. It reflects extensive consultation, evidence of emerging workforce challenges, and the need to elevate practice managers as key leaders in team-based primary care.

Focusing on five strategic priorities - Workforce Support, Digital Transformation, Business Resilience, Leadership, and Education, this strategy sets out clear, achievable initiatives. Our goal is to build a confident, connected, and capable practice manager workforce that drives improvement, fosters resilience, and ensures general practice remains a cornerstone of the Australian health system.

CESPHN Practice Manager Strategy 2025–2029

Role of Practice Managers

Practice managers are the operational and strategic backbone of general practice. They lead teams, manage systems, ensure quality and safety, and help practices navigate an increasingly complex healthcare environment. As general practice faces growing pressures from workforce shortages and funding uncertainty, their role is more critical than ever. CESPHN is committed to supporting practice managers as leaders, innovators, and partners in strengthening primary care across our region.

Practice managers are no longer just administrators - they are critical enablers of team-based care, operational excellence, and system integration. As general practices evolve to meet rising community needs and national reforms, practice managers will play an increasingly strategic role. Their ability to lead change, optimize business models, manage digital systems, and support multidisciplinary teams is central to the success of primary care reform efforts.

Changing Context: Pressures and Opportunities in General Practice

Australian general practice is undergoing rapid change. New funding models, regulatory complexity, digital transformation, and shifting community expectations are reshaping how care is delivered. Practice managers face challenges including workforce shortages, high staff turnover, rising operational costs, digital upskilling, and workforce burnout. At the same time, innovations in telehealth, team-based care, and AI offer new opportunities - if practices are equipped to adapt.

Through surveys, interviews, and focus groups, practice managers told us they find deep purpose in their roles - but face a growing workload, isolation, and limited professional development. Some felt undervalued despite their centrality to practice success. There is strong appetite for more peer connection, recognition, leadership support, and career pathways.

Strategic Priorities

Workforce Support

CESPHN is committed to building a strong, stable pipeline of capable practice managers through improved recruitment, retention, recognition, and workforce data. Acknowledging the emotional and operational pressures faced by practice managers, wellbeing support, peer mentoring, and burnout prevention strategies will be embedded in the engagement model. Regional workforce planning tools will be explored to monitor turnover, identify supply gaps, and forecast future demand for practice management roles. These insights will guide advocacy efforts and enable targeted workforce investment.

We will:

- Embed wellbeing support, peer mentoring, and burnout prevention strategies into our engagement model to recognise the emotional and operational pressures faced by practice managers.
- Strengthen the pipeline of practice managers. CESPHN will work with sector partners to improve recruitment, onboarding, and retention of skilled practice managers. This includes developing a regional business case that articulates their value and supports tailored induction for new managers entering general practice.
- Explore regional workforce planning tools to track turnover, identify supply gaps, and forecast future demand for practice management roles. This data will inform our advocacy and enable targeted workforce investment.
- Work to enhance professional identity and recognition of practice managers. CESPHN will advocate for greater visibility of practice managers as critical members of the primary care workforce. We will partner with peak bodies to raise standards, support credentialing, and highlight their contribution to high-performing practices.

Digital Transformation

Practice managers are positioned to lead the local implementation of key national programs such as MyMedicare, using practice data to support patient enrolment, shared care, and population health improvement. Their role in driving continuous quality improvement will be supported through accreditation readiness, integration of clinical guidelines, and performance tracking. Leadership in digital transformation is also a core focus, enhancing workflows, adopting new tools safely, and managing change across care settings. This includes implementing high-quality telehealth models and engaging with regional interoperability initiatives to ensure practices remain compliant and future ready. CESPHN will facilitate communities of practice for digitally engaged managers, enabling shared learning and co-design of new digital workflows.

We will:

- Support practice managers in leading local implementation of key national programs such as MyMedicare and to use practice data for patient enrolment, shared care, and population health improvement.
- Empower practice managers to lead continuous quality improvement activities, including preparation for accreditation, integration of new clinical guidelines, and tracking of service performance metrics.
- Build digital confidence and capability. We will equip practice managers with training in digital health tools, data governance, and cybersecurity. This ensures they can lead safe, effective use of technology within their practices.
- Facilitate communities of practice for digitally engaged managers, supporting shared learning and co-design of new digital workflows.
- Support adoption of smart systems. CESPHN will work with practices to adopt efficient, integrated digital systems that reduce administrative burden, enhance care coordination, and support quality improvement.

Business Resilience

Practice managers need to be equipped with practical tools, training, and support to lead accreditation processes, strengthen clinical governance, and embed continuous quality improvement across their practices. Resources and strategic partnerships will reinforce the business foundations of general practice, enabling managers to navigate operational challenges with confidence. In response to payroll tax pressures and shifting consumer expectations, access to small business advisory services and peer-led case studies will support the development of resilient, future-ready practices.

We will:

- Equip practice managers with practical tools and training to lead accreditation processes, strengthen clinical governance systems, and embed quality improvement activities across their practices.
- Aim to lift business capability in general practice. We will provide practice managers with resources and training in financial management, billing optimization, and strategic planning to strengthen long-term sustainability.
- Provide access to small business advisory services and peer business case studies.
- Foster innovation in care models. CESPHN will support practices to explore new models of care - such as multidisciplinary teams and nurse-led services that improve outcomes and open new revenue streams.
- Improve access to funding and incentives. We will guide practices in identifying and applying for relevant grants and government programs, particularly those supporting innovation and care for underserved communities.

Leadership

Practice managers are recognised as strategic leaders within healthcare teams, with elevated professional visibility and a clearly defined role in driving practice performance and patient outcomes. A regional Practice Manager Leadership Network will support this leadership by fostering knowledge exchange, professional advocacy, and collaborative problem-solving across practices.

We will:

- Support development of future leaders in practice management. We will launch a regional mentoring program that pairs experienced practice managers with those new to the field or seeking advancement, building leadership depth across the region.
- Create a regional Practice Manager Leadership Network to support knowledge exchange, professional advocacy, and shared problem-solving.
- Identify opportunities to embed practice managers in primary care leadership. CESPHN will create formal opportunities for practice managers to contribute to our projects, governance processes, and strategic forums, amplifying their voice and expertise.

Education and Career Development

Entry-level pathways into practice management will be strengthened through structured onboarding, transition support for administrative and nursing staff, and early-career peer networks. Ongoing access to high-quality learning, mentoring, and structured professional development will ensure long-term capability and retention.

Micro-credentialing and career pathway frameworks will be explored to formalise progression within the profession, attracting new talent, particularly from health administration and nursing backgrounds and promote lifelong learning. An annual Practice Manager Education Summit will showcase innovation, celebrate leadership, and foster cross-sector collaboration.

We will:

- Explore entry-level support pathways into practice management, including structured onboarding, transition support for administrative or nursing staff, and early career peer networks.

- Ensure access to high-quality learning. We will continue to invest in learning and development pathways that reflect current healthcare realities, emerging technologies, and regulatory requirements.
- Advocate for a national framework that defines the competencies, roles, and training pathways for practice managers in the 21st century.
- Promote structured, lifelong development. CESPHN will work with AAPM, academic partners, and sector leaders to define clear career pathways and support ongoing professional growth.

Monitoring Progress

Regular feedback from practice managers and general practice teams will be collected to assess the impact of CESPHN initiatives. Surveys, engagement data, and feedback forums will be used to monitor participation and satisfaction, ensuring support remains responsive to emerging needs.

Workforce stability, including retention and vacancy rates along with uptake of training, professional development, and engagement with digital and business support tools, will be actively tracked. These indicators will be aligned with national and state-level benchmarks where available, providing consistency, comparability, and a strong evidence base for targeted investment and advocacy.

Partnerships and Alignment

Successful implementation will rely on active collaboration with professional associations such as the Australian Practice Managers Association and training providers. CESPHN will continue to align its efforts with broader national workforce strategies and reforms.

We will also work with partners to support culturally safe practice environments and service models that improve access for Aboriginal, culturally and linguistically diverse, and underserved populations.

Governance and Reporting

A project team within CESPHN will oversee the delivery of this strategy, with regular reporting to the Board. Annual progress reports will be developed and shared with stakeholders, with transparency in outcomes and priorities for improvement.

Sustaining the Impact

This strategy is not a one-off effort. CESPHN is committed to sustaining support for practice managers beyond 2029, embedding ongoing workforce development into the fabric of general practice. We will continue to champion the role of practice managers as vital contributors to primary care innovation and excellence.

CESPHN will invite all stakeholders — from professional associations to educators and practice owners — to partner with us in building a practice manager workforce that is future-facing, confident, and empowered. Together, we can unlock the full potential of general practice as a central pillar of an integrated, accessible, and high-quality health system.