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Health workforce focus good – but show us your policy

The Australian Private Hospitals Association (APHA) has welcomed Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese's focus on the health workforce, but has pressed him to release the policy detailing how he will achieve his aims.

APHA CEO Michael Roff said the healthcare workforce shortage was the 'single biggest issue facing healthcare in Australia' and just suggesting people will migrate to help prop up the system is naïve.

"Australia needs a skilled migration program that encourages people to come here and make a life here, not just send them home as soon as their visa expires. The healthcare workforce skills shortage is an international issue and if Australia wants overseas nurses to prop up the system, we need to make it worth their while to come.

"A recent article said the Victorian Government pursued a goal of 1000 immigrant nurses but only got 100, despite offering financial incentives – that's what we are up against."

Numbers from an internal survey of Australian private hospitals suggest the current workforce shortage is around 5,500 nurses. The sector urgently needs at least 1,000 skilled migrant nurses, and that is just for private hospitals.

Mr Roff said APHA supports a model that reinstates a pathway to permanent residency to create an added incentive to move to Australia and ensure investments in this workforce by employers and governments are not lost to this country.

"Past reforms to migration policy have reduced the scope for retaining skilled migrants beyond the initial visa period. However, last year the federal Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Migration tabled a report into Skilled Migration that recommended several changes that would open up pathways to permanent residency for a range of visa holders.

"These recommendations have not been adopted and we are calling on the incoming Government to do so as a matter of urgency," he said.

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