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Abstracts

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITION
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The skills and knowledge of the public health nutrition (PHN) workforce are important determinants of workforce capacity. Professional development has been recognised as an effective method of developing skills and knowledge in public health. A strategy for workforce development in Victoria has been the design of a manual that guides PHN practice and a one-day training program to assist with its use. The manual provides a range of activities to facilitate planning to address a nutrition issue and is designed to be used independent of the training. The training program provided practical examples of how to use the manual to support local PHN practice. One hundred and twenty six participants (63% community dietitians) attended the training in six locations across Victoria. Most (86%) of the participants said their needs were met by the training and that the manual was a useful tool to guide practice. Participants reported that additional skills and knowledge in evaluation were required. The training identified a genuine commitment from participants to work in PHN, however the lack of experience and organisational capacity limitations were barriers to change of practice. There is an ongoing need to support practitioners in planning, implementing and evaluating PHN action. Models of supervised experiential learning for the workforce should be explored as well as strategies to increase workforce size.

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