

**Partnerships for a Healthy Region (PHR)
Strengthening Health Workforce in the Pacific (Nursing and Midwifery) (SHWP)**

Brief: Visit to Vanuatu 4-7 March 2025

This brief provides an update on recent activities of the Strengthening Health Workforce in the Pacific (nursing and Midwifery) (SHWP) Program. The program is conducted by WHO Collaborating Centre for Nursing, Midwifery, and Health Development at the University of Technology Sydney (WHO CCNM UTS), and coordinated by South Pacific Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officers Alliance (SPCNMOA) and other partners. SHWP will contribute to the Partnerships for a Healthy Region (PHR) initiative by Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Australia. Vanuatu College of Nursing Education (VCNE) contract was also discussed.

Details

Professor Michele Rumsey (Director, WHO CCNM UTS), Professor Di Brown, and Associate Professor Marg Gatling visited Port Vila, Vanuatu from 4-7 March 2025 to meet with:

- DFAT Health Advisor at Australian High Commission
- Vanuatu Principal Nursing Officer (PNO)
- Vanuatu College of Nursing Education (VCNE)
- members of the Vanuatu Nursing Council
- Vanuatu-Australia Health Partnership (VAHP) staff at Ministry of Health
- WHO Vanuatu representatives

An outline of attendees at each meeting and discussion points are described below.

Day 1 Tuesday 4 March 2025

DFAT meeting

Prof Michele Rumsey, Prof Di Brown, and A/Prof Marg Gatling met with Ms Mary Hay, Australian High Commission Program Manager Regional Health. An update was provided on current SHWP/PHR activities including the upcoming Pacific Leadership Program (PLP) at UTS which will be attended by nursing and midwifery leaders and future leaders from the region. Ms Hay updated the team on current matters in Vanuatu. There has been a recent change of government, and the Port Vila community is continuing to deal with repairs to infrastructure damaged in the December 2024 earthquake.

Meeting with Principal Nursing Officer

A meeting was held with Ms Harriet Sam, to discuss progress and activities related to SHWP program. Ms Claire Bennett, Nurse educator (VSO) was also in attendance. Ms Sam updated the UTS team about recent activities relating to nursing in Vanuatu. The PNO's team have been working on a submission to their Government drawing attention to the challenges faced by the country's nursing workforce. Technical support was provided in preparing Ms Sam's paper, to align with regional nursing policies. Developing strategies to address these nursing workforce challenges is at the core of the SHWP program.

The UTS team was fortunate to greet Ms Shirley Tokon, Director General at the Ministry of Health, who was meeting at the same location.

Meeting with Vanuatu Nursing Council

Prof Michele Rumsey and A/Prof Marg Gatling met with members of the Vanuatu Nursing Council (VNC)– Ms Bertha Tarileo (Registrar), Ms Valentine Ling (Nurse Adviser/Compliance), and Mr Eric Nalau (Education).



Figure 1 Harriet Sam PNO and Shirley Tokon MOH DG

The Council members who had attended the recent series of webinars covering nursing and midwifery regulation said they had found them very interesting. The content had prompted them to think about what changes and improvements they could make to their regulatory processes.

The Council members said that registration is a priority area for them. They voiced a need for clear policies and processes to guide registration, both initial registration for graduates and also registration renewal. A checklist for ensuring that internationally qualified nurses are qualified and fit to practise in Vanuatu would be very helpful.

While discussing these issues, participants noted that the current legislation, Vanuatu Nurses Act (2000) has sections which outline the functions and duties of the Council

including registration. These sections and paragraphs would underpin policies and processes to enhance the current registration system.



Figure 2 L-R Marg Gatling, Bertha Tarileo, Michele Rumsey, Valentine Ling, and Eric Nalau

The Council consider that work in areas is needed to advise nurses and consumers about the relationship between registration and patient safety.

Best practice in program accreditation and CPD was discussed, including the importance of ensuring clinical placement sites are appropriately set up to provide students with the best possible experience. This includes the preparedness of RNs supervising student in the clinical environment.

The UTS team said they were looking forward to returning to Vanuatu later in the year facilitate workshops on regulation and the nursing strategy to discuss many of these areas. A draft program will be discussed with Council and PNO. Prof Michele Rumsey thanked VNC members for such a productive and interesting meeting.

[Wednesday 5 March was a public holiday in Vanuatu as the community celebrated Custom Chief's Day]

Day 2 Thursday 6 March 2025

Meeting with VCNE staff

Prof Di Brown met with the teaching staff of Vanuatu College of Nursing Education to discuss the third phase of work under the

forthcoming contract between the Ministry of Health and UTS. This exciting project will include implementation of the Advanced Diploma in General Nursing, a revision of the Bachelor of Nursing (Conversion) program and a Bachelor of Nursing program curriculum developed for delivery by VCNE.



Figure 3 VCNE educators

Meeting with VCNE Educators

The first meeting was focused on practicalities surrounding the proposed intake of students into the Advanced Diploma in May. This is a directive from the Prime Minister and there was considerable discussion about the logistics of managing a mid-year intake along with a regular intake in 2026. The group discussed options for managing both cohorts simultaneously to ensure that the maximum numbers of graduates can be made available to the Vanuatu health system as soon as possible.

Meeting with VAHP staff at Ministry of Health
Prof Michele Rumsey met with Ms Leiep Joseph, Procurement and Finance and Director Corporate is Posikai Tapo at Vanuatu Ministry



Figure 4 Meeting at Vanuatu Nursing Council

of Health. The meeting discussed the forthcoming contract between the Ministry and UTS for VCNE development of the BN program curriculum. They also discussed the new Prime Minister, Mr Jotham Napat's, 100 Day Priority Plan which includes the Vanuatu health workforce.

A site visit to Vanuatu Nursing Council was held collecting documents and observing earthquake damage to buildings.

Day 3 Friday 7 March 2025

Meeting at WHO Vanuatu Country Office

Prof Michele Rumsey met with WHO representatives in Vanuatu, Dr Revite and Mr Amandeep Singh. WHO CCNM UTS regional and Vanuatu programs were discussed. A presentation was shared and opportunities to connect and work together in the future were shared



Figure 5 Dr Amandeep Singh, Michele Rumsey, Dr Revite

Meeting with VCNE staff

Prof Di Brown spent the day with staff from VCNE to consolidate planning and course development. Discussion with Ms Evelyne Emil and Ms Keliza Mailalong about future implementation plans and strategies was agreed. In particular a time-line and process were agreed for revision and submission of the BN Conversion curriculum to VQA. We also had preliminary discussions about the need to

develop a 4-year Bachelor of Nursing with multiple exit points.

A brief workshop was held to assist the VCNE in developing the subjects for the first semester. A plan for long distance support was agreed and a plan for another support trip agreed. This is planned in mid-April to ensure that the teaching, learning and assessments are developed to the standards needed and that staff feel confident in delivering the first semester of the new Advanced Diploma.

Day 4 Saturday 8 March 2025

Update and review meeting held with Harriet Sam PNO to discuss career pathway and specialisation.

Next steps

The UTS team enjoyed their visit to Vanuatu and agreed that meetings were valuable and productive. Future activities of the SHWP (Nursing and Midwifery) and VCNE include;

- Setting up 'taskforce' or 'working parties' at PLP to begin working on priority areas related to regulation and the nursing strategy.
 - Country visits commencing in July or early August 2025 to work with taskforce, stakeholders and facilitate workshops on specific areas of regulation, specialisation, career pathways and nursing strategy as required
 - Work with VAHP on Vanuatu contract to start student enrolments for the Advanced Diploma proposed to start May 2025 and commence the development of the revised BN conversion curriculum for VCNE
- Pacific Leadership Program (PLP) at UTS commencing on 31 March 2025 for 10 days of workshops and knowledge sharing



Figure 6 Meeting with VCNE staff