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## **New Budget Submission Calls for \$234.3 Million Investment to Rebuild Australia’s Environmental Health Workforce**

*By strengthening the EHO workforce, Australia can save billions in productivity costs, reduce foodborne illnesses, and enhance national public health resilience.*

**BRISBANE, QLD, February 5 2025**

A groundbreaking budget submission for 2025–26 is urging the Australian Government to invest \$234.3 million over four years to rebuild and strengthen the nation’s Environmental Health Officer (EHO) workforce. The proposal comes in response to an estimated \$15.4 billion annual economic burden from preventable environmental health risks – including \$2.4 billion from foodborne illnesses – which strains both the healthcare system and national productivity.

### **A Call to Action for Australia’s Public Health**

Environmental Health Officers are on the front line of safeguarding Australia’s health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, EHOs enforced critical quarantine and infection control measures. Today, their evolving role is even more vital as they integrate within the One Health framework to address zoonotic diseases and implement enhanced food safety standards. However, a significant national shortage—up to 30% of positions remain unfilled—and an aging workforce (with nearly 40% aged 50 or older) have left communities increasingly vulnerable to daily and emerging public health threats.

Worsening this crisis is the recent closure of three accredited Environmental Health degree programs within leading university health and medical schools, drastically shrinking the pipeline of new graduates entering the profession. In response, the EHA Pre-Budget Submission 2025–26 outlines a strategic investment plan designed to reopen accredited programs, rebuild and sustain the environmental health workforce, and strengthen Australia’s public health preparedness and security.

### **Key Elements of the Budget Proposal Include:**

- **Workforce Expansion:** The creation of 1,000 new university places over the next four years to nurture the next generation of EHOs, ensuring a steady pipeline of qualified professionals for the coming decade.
- **Enhanced Public Health Outcomes:** Investment in EHOs is projected to reduce foodborne illnesses by at least 15%, potentially saving \$360 million annually and contributing to a national GDP boost of up to \$4 billion per year.
- **Modernisation & Professional Development:** Measures to improve job placement support, undertake workforce and professional skills analyses, secure sustainable workforce representation, and strengthen accredited education pathways.
- **Research and Policy Innovation:** Dedicated funding for translational research aimed at driving legislative, regulatory, and policy reforms, essential for effective preventive health initiatives.

### **“EHOs Are Essential for Our Future”**

“Environmental Health Officers are not an optional component of Australia’s health infrastructure; they are a necessity,” said Melissa Burn, EHA National President. “By investing in our EHO workforce, we are not only protecting public health but also ensuring significant economic returns – an estimated return on investment of 14.3:1 – while enhancing our preparedness for future health emergencies.”

### **Investing in a Safer, Healthier Australia**

The submission underscores that the benefits of investing in the environmental health workforce extend beyond immediate health protection. By securing dedicated funding, Australia can reinforce its progress on the National Preventive Health Strategy 2021–2030, aligning with the goal to direct 5% of total health expenditure to preventive measures by 2030. This strategic investment will empower EHOs to tackle both communicable and preventable non-communicable health risks, fostering healthier, more productive communities across Australia and even across the Pacific region.

### **Support Across the Sector**

The proposal also calls for increased representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals in the EHO workforce and supports initiatives led by allied organisations, including the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)-led Environmental Health Workforce Roadmap and measures outlined in the Climate And Health Alliance (CAHA) 2025–26 Pre-budget Submission on the National Health and Climate Strategy.

### **The Time to Act is Now**

The submission makes it clear: failing to support Australia’s Environmental Health Officers will only drive up primary healthcare costs and further strain an already burdened healthcare system. As Australia faces an evolving landscape of health threats—from pandemics to climate-related challenges—the need to invest in preventive health through a robust EHO workforce has never been more urgent.

*The submission document can be seen here: <https://www.eh.org.au/documents/item/1658>*

*“We protect people from hazards in their environment!”*

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