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## Human resources in transition: A comparative policy analysis of oral health human resources in developed country (Australia) and a developing country (South Africa)

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**Introduction:** Oral healthcare service delivery critically depends on the size and skill-mix of the health workforce. There are a number of policy concerns relating to the size, distribution, and skills-mix of oral healthcare workers that need to be understood and addressed by policy-stakeholders.

**Aim:** The study aimed to understand how the ongoing debates related to the oral healthcare workers provision, distribution, and skills-mix influenced oral healthcare service delivery. This study also sought to understand how the ongoing interaction between and amongst the policy-actors influence oral health human resource provision in a developed (Australia) and developing country (South Africa).

**Methods:** A cross-national cross-sectional time series, comparative analysis using extended literature reviews, documentary and policy analysis, and interviews was used in order to ascertain the existing practices and reality (ontic nature) of oral health human resources policies in Australia and South Africa.

**Results:** The results reveal that there are stark imbalances in the availability, skills-mix and geographic distribution of oral healthcare workers in both Australia and South Africa. There are debates around human resources such as scopes of practice and professional autonomy that need to be addressed by policy-actors.

**Discussion:** Oral healthcare worker shortages in underserved areas may be addressed through the effective and efficient use of oral healthcare workers, as well as by changing the scope of mid-level oral healthcare workers so that they may be able to better serve the needs of the population in areas where there are shortfalls. However, there is resistance to these policy initiatives and reforms.

**Conclusion:** Careful consideration has to be given to the current debates around distribution, development of appropriate skills-mix and scopes of practice and the primary oral healthcare needs of the populace so that the oral healthcare workforce policy developments and reforms meet the requirements of the country.

**Recommendations:** Inclusive stakeholder involvement in human resources planning needs to occur so that human resource planning could be aligned to national and local oral health goals and priorities.

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