

HUNTER NEW ENGLAND AND CENTRAL COAST PRIMARY HEALTH NETWORK (THE PHN) JOURNEY TO EMPLOYER OF CHOICE: A BRIEF NOTE

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ABSTRACT

In 2019, the PHN initiated a three-year People and Culture (P&C) Strategy (2020-2023) aimed at enhancing organisational culture and achieving the Australian Business Awards Employer of Choice [EOC®]. This recognition was awarded to the PHN in 2023, the first Primary Health Network to receive the honour. The Strategy focused on four key pillars of the EOC Framework: Culture, Leadership, and Strategy; Education, Training, and Development; Performance, Recognition, and Remuneration; and Health, Safety, and Satisfaction.[1] These brief outlines the PHN's journey to achieve this goal and provides an overview of the PHN's new three-year PHN EOC Strategy to continue building exceptional capability, culture, and delivery.

KEYWORDS

primary health network, employer of choice, training, education

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

The first step was clarifying the vision to become an EOC and creating an internal business case. The business case covered many areas including highlighting the links between attracting and retaining top talent with high performance. A global survey from McKinsey suggests that high performers are 50% more productive than average ones and in highly complex occupations such as the work of managers and software developers, high performers are astounding 800% more productive. [2] Working directly with PHN leadership on the original vision to obtain buy in, enabled this to be lead from the top.

Next was to explore becoming an EOC and there are many avenues. [3] Rather than just claiming a title, the PHN adopted an evidence-based approach to strengthen its

P&C Strategy, enhancing retention, performance, and attraction. The Australian Business Awards EOC Framework offered a structured, criteria-based model for assessment, enabling benchmarking and learning among participating organisations.

APPROACH

The PHN approached this vision by consulting PHN leadership and employees to develop a P&C Strategy underpinned by the key attributes of the EOC Framework that outline the characteristics of well-managed, high-performing, industry-leading organisations that provide a stimulating and supportive workplace. [4] This initial strategy was set out over three years to support achievement against the four pillars of the framework.



CULTURE, LEADERSHIP, AND STRATEGY

The first pillar fosters a workplace culture aligned with the PHN's purpose and values while driving outcomes. To achieve this, the PHN enhanced internal communication to align employees with organisational goals. Key interventions included:

- Strategy and Communication: the PHN organisational strategy development involved wide consultation, regular team briefings and monthly one-on-one meetings. All-staff gatherings were implemented to maintain clear and consistent communication. Off-site sessions with each portfolio further reinforced the strategic direction and encouraged cross-functional cohesion.
- Leadership Development: the PHN invested significantly in developing leadership capabilities. Managers engaged in foundational training programs and group leadership workshops, complemented by a structured talent management initiative to nurture a pipeline of internal talent.
- Technology and Flexibility: to support a hybrid workforce across a vast region, the PHN invested in technology and adopted flexible work arrangements

with a minimum office attendance of 40%. This reduced location silos.

EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND DEVELOPMENT

In 2023, the PHN significantly expanded learning and development initiatives to build internal capacity. Through a comprehensive learning program, 25% of employees advanced to higher roles, and 30% were promoted or seconded. The key components of this program included:

- Continuous Professional Development: individual and group training sessions focused on skills relevant to strategic priorities and a PHN Learning Hub landing page, fostering a culture of continuous learning.



PERFORMANCE, RECOGNITION, AND REMUNERATION

The PHN recognises Daniel Pink's theory that people are motivated through autonomy, mastery and purpose, and has designed systems, training, policies and tools to achieve its key ambitions. [6]

To align performance management with PHN values and capabilities, P&C re-introduced the Individual Accountability Planning (IAP) process. This process connects individual performance reviews with organisational objectives, encouraging accountability and recognising contributions. Key elements included the PHN Thumb's Up' Recognition Program to acknowledge employee achievements, strengthening motivation and aligning personal contributions with organisational goals.

The infographic is titled 'Individual accountability planning' and features the Primary Health Network logo. It is structured around a timeline with three main stages:

- JULY:** Set your performance objectives and development plan using the 'Individual Objectives and Review' form. Meet with your Manager to agree on the plan. (Accompanied by an image of the 'Individual objectives and review' form)
- ONGOING:** We have 3 forms to assist you in tracking progress with your Manager:
 - Use the '30 / 90 day action planning and feedback' form for a monthly accountability meeting; or
 - Use a '1:1 KPI form' for your meetings.
 - Use a 'PCIO Monthly Accountability Tool' excel form if you are in the PCIO team.
 Just ask your Manager which form they prefer. (Accompanied by images of the '30 / 90 day action planning and feedback' form, the '1:1 KPI form', and the 'PCIO Monthly Accountability Tool' excel form)
- JULY:** Review the year that was using the same form you set your objectives with. (Accompanied by an image of the 'Individual objectives and review' form)

How we show to our team



YOU'RE PART OF SOMETHING IMPORTANT

- We're passionate about transforming the health of our communities.
- We embrace diversity and inclusion.
- Our teams' reflect the diverse communities we serve.
- We value a supportive and fun working environment.



WORK FLEXIBILITY FOR BETTER BALANCE

- We pride ourselves on our flexibility to give you more alignment between your work and family commitments (eg. our span of hours is from 7am to 7pm Monday to Friday).
- We can discuss with you many other flexible arrangements that may suit your needs such as the ability to apply for a 9 day fortnight.
- Ability to work from home for some of your hours.



MORE HOLIDAYS AND LEAVE

- We offer 3 additional paid days off over Christmas.
- We provide an additional 5 days family and carers leave.
- 12 weeks full pay or 24 weeks half pay parental leave for all parents (primary carer and partners), after 12 months employment.
- Ability to purchase up to 2 weeks additional leave per year.
- 10 days cultural leave (5 days paid and 5 days unpaid).
- 1 day volunteering Leave.
- Compassionate leave and Sorry Business Leave for immediate family considering your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship structure.

WE'RE AN ORGANISATION THAT STRIVES TO SUPPORT POSITIVE STAFF HEALTH AND WELLBEING.

HNECCPHN.COM.AU

* Pro-rated for part-time employees



MORE MONEY

- \$15,900 of your wage is tax-free, which boosts your take home pay.
- You can salary package additional entertainment and hotels (dining out at a restaurant, hotel while on holiday).
- You can take out a novated lease on a car through our salary packaging program.



WE LOVE WELLBEING

- Access to discounted gym memberships through the fitness passport.
- Participation in Safe Driver Training.
- Access up to six free private counselling sessions with our Employee Assistance Provider (EAP) for you or members of your household.
- Annual flu shots.



HELPING YOU THRIVE PROFESSIONALLY

- We will help to reach your potential through on the job coaching and structured programs.
- We offer a supportive environment to be at your best.
- Real professional development and training to grow your skills.



In 2023, the PHN embedded talent management into its performance and potential framework. An Internal Talent Management process commenced with executives in 2023

and middle managers in 2024 where a process for high potential identification, calibration, and action planning was built into existing frameworks.

PHN performance and potential framework



HEALTH, SAFETY, AND SATISFACTION

The PHN and its employees recognise that supporting the health and wellbeing of employees is fundamental to the development of a positive and productive organisational culture, and the successful achievement of the inspirational vision of 'Healthy People and Healthy Communities.'

The P&C team developed an employee wellbeing strategy informed by Curtin University's Thrive at Work framework. [7] The result is a comprehensive plan that provides the PHN with a clear set of evidence-based strategies to address the full spectrum of mental health. [5] Some programs implemented over the period included Dr Darren Morton's "Lift project", "The Resilience Project TM", safe driver training, First Nations Protocols Guidelines, financial wellness and working well training, LinkedIn learning platform and family and domestic violence training.

The PHN also worked with internal stakeholders to develop and deliver its first Diversity Inclusion and Belonging strategy and supports internal working groups such as a "Staff Wellbeing and Engagement Team" – SWEET, "First Nations Collective" and "LGBTQIA+ Collaborative" to meet and develop initiatives and provide advice to leadership on improving inclusivity in the workplace. Next for the PHN is an "Innovate" Reconciliation Action Plan.

LEARNING AND IMPACT

This focused strategy and intentional work led to the PHN being recognised as an Australian Business Employer of Choice in August 2023 and 2024 and named the Business NSW Employer of Choice in the Hunter 2024.

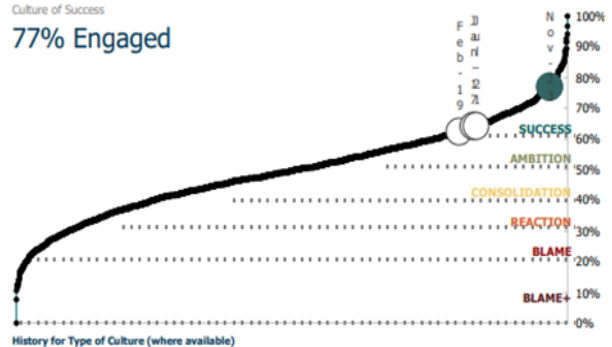
The P&C Strategy not only earned the PHN the award, but it also led to a 13% increase in employee engagement, low voluntary turnover of 8.5% in 2023 and 94% of employees stating that the PHN is a "truly great" place to work. [9]

What is our Type of Culture?

Hunter, New England and Central Coast PHN

Culture of Success

77% Engaged



To maintain the PHN's position as an EOC, the P&C team has implemented a 2024 -2026 PHN Employer of Choice Strategy that maintains a commitment to curiously develop, grow, and evolve the workforce to reach its full potential. Over this period, the PHN has built and strengthened its capability to deliver, at the same time putting people first. These plans will set the PHN up to build on the achievement of being an EOC winner in 2023 and 2024.



2023 & 2024 Australian Business Employer of Choice and 2024 Hunter Business Employer of Choice winner.



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