



The Pharmacy
Guild of Australia

The Workforce Capability Project

Career Paths Report

Edition 1



guild.org.au



Introduction

Pharmacy practice within Australia facilitates the development, storage, preparation, allocation and dispensing of medicines to individuals.

The pharmacy workforce aims to ensure the safe and ethical use of medicines by consumers through the implementation and delivery of pharmaceutical knowledge and systems within their practice. Pharmacists and pharmacy staff improve the health outcomes of individuals within primary, secondary and tertiary care settings, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all patients. Community pharmacists, the most accessible healthcare professional in Australia, primarily prepare, dispense and distribute medicines. However, they are also responsible for helping customers with disease prevention, the Quality Use of Medicine, supplying pharmacist-only medicines, and improving general well-being and health.

This report explores the available career pathways within the Australian pharmacy sector for pharmacists, pharmacy assistants and dispensary assistants/pharmacy technicians.

The analysis of career pathways in this report draws on information based on various workplace instruments within the sector, including the Federal Awards¹ and the respective Health Employee State Awards. In addition, information was gathered from a range of sources including the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Pharmacy Board of Australia (PBA), Australian Pharmacy Council (APC), Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA), Jobs and Skills Australia (formerly the National Skills Commission), Society of Hospital Pharmacists Australia (SHPA), Medicines Australia and MTP Connect.

1. Pharmacy Industry Award 2020 and Health Professional & Support Services Award 2020



Key Findings



To become a registered pharmacist, individuals must complete all the following:

- Bachelor of Pharmacy degree or a 2-year Master of Pharmacy degree
- An approved supervised practice (internship) of 1,824 hours (currently reduced to 1,575 hours due to COVID-19)
- Ahpra (Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency) board registration examination.

Community Pharmacy

- > The normal career trajectory for a pharmacist working in the community sector is pharmacy Student, Pharmacy Intern, Pharmacist, Experienced Pharmacist, Pharmacist in Charge and finally Pharmacist Manager.
- > Formal education is not a compulsory requirement for community pharmacy assistants and dispensary assistants. Nevertheless, best practice indicates the competency unit *Support the supply of Pharmacy Medicines and Pharmacy Only Medicines* should be completed.
- > The career trajectory for community pharmacy assistants is from Level 1 to Level 4. This progression directly relates to increased skills, knowledge and experience. Specialised capability and training are available for pharmacy assistants Levels 3 and 4 to operate as dispensary assistants.

Hospital Pharmacy

- > Hospital pharmacists complete the same educational process as community pharmacists to achieve registration. Once registered, hospital pharmacists can opt to undertake residency programs aimed at equipping them with the specific skills and knowledge required for the hospital sector.
- > The career trajectory for a hospital pharmacist is very structured and the criteria for specialist knowledge, training, experience and educational attainment become progressively more rigorous.
- > The educational prerequisites for hospital-based pharmacy assistants and technicians differ depending on the jurisdiction in which they are employed and whether they are employed in the private or public sector. Nonetheless, there are specific mandatory qualifications for those aiming to advance in this sector.

Industrial Pharmacy

- > Industrial pharmacists conduct research, testing and analysis to assist in the development of medicines, vaccines and other healthcare and cosmetic products. They can also specialise in clinical research, sales and marketing, drug safety (pharmacovigilance), medical information/medical affairs, medical science liaison or regulatory affairs.
- > There is limited information available regarding the non-professional pharmaceutical workforce within the industrial pharmacy sector.

Community Pharmacy Sector

Community pharmacies are the most accessible and commonly used means of obtaining medicines and medical information in Australia.

Community pharmacies serve as the first point of contact for most individuals seeking services from health professionals and maintain the vital role of providing medical counselling, support and education for consumers.

The primary employment opportunities in the realm of community pharmacy revolve around pharmacists and pharmacy assistants. ABS Census data indicates the workforce in community pharmacy exceeds 70,000 individuals.

Professional Pharmacy Workforce

According to the ABS Census, there were 21,655 pharmacists employed in the community pharmacy sector in 2021.² Pharmacists are experts in medicines and have a primary responsibility to see that medicines are used safely, judiciously and effectively. They provide accessible, patient-focused healthcare, ensure the community has timely access to essential medicines, improve health literacy, and provide non-urgent care and other services.

The following section discusses career pathways for pharmacists working in the community pharmacy sector.

Education

A registered pharmacist must:

1. hold an Ahpra-approved tertiary qualification (e.g., Bachelor of Pharmacy degree or a 2-year Master of Pharmacy degree or APC-recognised international qualification)
2. complete an approved supervised practice (e.g., internship)
3. pass the Ahpra registration examination process.

Community pharmacists can pursue careers in areas of interest, such as medication management, aged care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, general practice, or educator (diabetes, asthma etc.).

Career Progression

The career progression for pharmacists starts at the student level and progresses as an individual gains more knowledge and experience.

Pharmacy students and interns must meet the requirements of their course as well as specific requirements outlined by the PBA and Ahpra.³ Once they have completed their internship, they must obtain general registration to practise and must meet mandatory standards to remain registered.

At all stages of their career, pharmacists must adhere to the codes, guidelines and policies of the Pharmacy Board of Australia.

The Pharmacy Industry Award 2020 serves as the foundational framework for the career advancement of pharmacists within the community pharmacy sector, as depicted in Diagram 1. Appendix A provides a detailed depiction of the education requirements and career path for community pharmacists.

It should be noted that the Pharmacy Industry Award 2020 is not used in Western Australia, where the Retail Pharmacists' Award 2004⁴ provides the employment arrangements for pharmacists employed by a sole trader, partnership or unincorporated entity. The Retail Pharmacists' Award 2004 employment classifications are the same as the Pharmacy Industry Award 2020 and the career progression depicted in Diagram 1 is applicable to pharmacists employed in community pharmacy Australia-wide.

Diagram 1: Career Progression Structure – Pharmacist



Source: Pharmacy Industry Award 2020

2. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), Customised Report
3. [Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency \(Ahpra\)](#)
4. [Retail Pharmacists Award 2004 – Western Australia](#)

Non-professional Community Pharmacy Workforce

Pharmacy Assistants

Pharmacy assistants require a wide range of skills and knowledge that vary depending on their position and role and the size of the community pharmacy. The skills and knowledge needed encompass customer service, administration, assisting with dispensing, and business management and marketing along with comprehensive pharmacy and health-related product knowledge.

According to a Jobs and Skills Australia Report published in 2023,⁵ approximately 35,200 individuals are employed within the community pharmacy sector as pharmacy assistants.

Education

While formal education is not a mandatory requirement for pharmacy assistants to work in a community pharmacy, it is expected that pharmacy assistants will undertake a formal vocational education and training (VET) qualification.

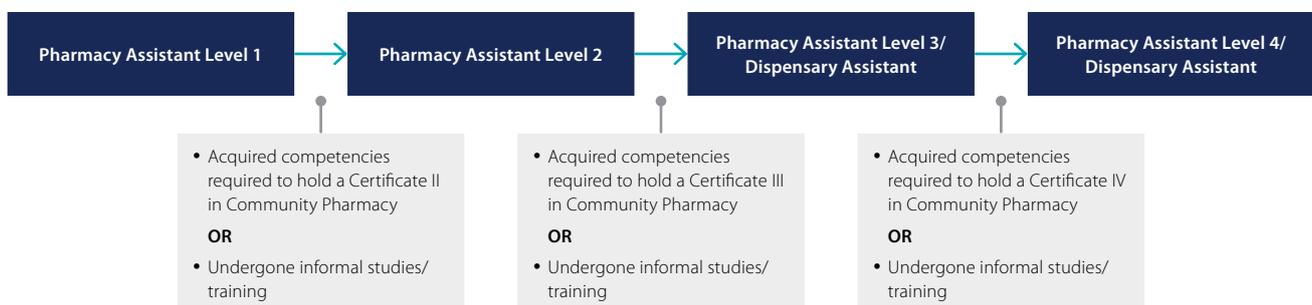
Formal qualifications for pharmacy assistants can be found in the Retail Services Training Package (SIR)⁶ for community pharmacy. As of 2023 the qualifications are:

- Certificate II in Community Pharmacy
- Certificate III in Community Pharmacy
- Certificate IV in Community Pharmacy
- Certificate IV in Community Pharmacy Dispensary

In Australia, the only mandatory education requirement for all customer-facing staff (except for delivery drivers) is the completion of the SIRCIND002 *Support the supply of Pharmacy Medicines and Pharmacy Only Medicines* unit for pharmacies seeking accreditation through the Quality Care Pharmacy Program (QCPP).⁷

Pharmacy Assistants (Dispensing)

Diagram 2: Career Progression Structure – Pharmacy Assistant



Source: Pharmacy Industry Award 2020

Pharmacy assistants, also referred to as dispensary assistants, undertake tasks within the dispensary area. These positions play a crucial role in the community pharmacy by directly assisting the pharmacist in dispensing prescription medicines. These employees operate under the direct supervision of a pharmacist, manage customer records as permitted by law, and assist in selecting and labelling of medications and the handling of claims.

Education

There is no mandatory requirement for formal qualifications for a pharmacy assistant to work in the dispensary area. Nevertheless, the PBA has stated that an individual is required to undergo specialised training, either formal or informal, and have relevant experience to work in this area.

The Certificate III in Community Pharmacy offers a specialised elective stream for dispensary in addition to the specialist qualification Certificate IV in Community Pharmacy Dispensary for individuals.

Career pathway for non-professional pharmacy workforce

The Pharmacy Industry Award 2020 serves as a foundational framework for the career advancement of pharmacy assistants within the community pharmacy sector, as depicted in Diagram 2. Appendix B provides a detailed depiction of the education requirements and career path for pharmacy assistants within this sector.

According to the Pharmacy Industry Award 2020, a dispensary assistant is categorised as a pharmacy assistant at level 3 or 4.

Career progression for the non-professional workforce in the community sector is standard across Australia and is dependent on the skills, capability and knowledge of the individual. Career progression to each stage is at the discretion of the employer.

5. [Pharmacy Sales Assistants | Labour Market Insights](#)

6. [training.gov.au - SIR - Retail Services Training Package](#)

7. [Quality Care Pharmacy Program \(QCPP\)](#)



Hospital Sector

Hospital pharmacy departments are embedded in hospital sites and are an integral part of patient care in hospitals.

A hospital pharmacy department typically comprises both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, who undertake a variety of clinical and non-clinical tasks including:

- procuring, compounding and dispensing medicines
- advising healthcare professionals and patients on safe, effective and quality use of medicines.

Hospital pharmacy departments provide different service levels based on their relative size: a large metropolitan hospital may employ many pharmacists and pharmacy support staff and deliver a broad range of services, whereas a small rural hospital pharmacy department may have only one or two pharmacists on site.

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) reports that there were more than 6,100 hospital pharmacists, more than 250 interns and more than 1,000 hospital pharmacist technicians working across Australian public and private hospitals in 2020.⁸

Professional Pharmacy Workforce

Hospital pharmacists are highly specialised medication experts who operate within multidisciplinary healthcare teams, holding a pivotal position in delivering top-tier medicine management to patients. Their responsibilities encompass far more than just dispensing and prescribing; they serve as a valuable resource, offering guidance to nurses and physicians in addressing medicine-related issues. This multifaceted role includes conducting meticulous medication chart reviews, closely monitoring therapeutic drug regimens, promptly identifying and managing adverse drug reactions, and ensuring that medications achieve their intended therapeutic outcomes. Hospital Pharmacists also perform the crucial duties of providing thorough counselling to patients upon discharge and performing meticulous medication reconciliation during admissions.

8. [The Society of Hospital Pharmacists – Hospital Pharmacy at a Glance 2022](#)



Education

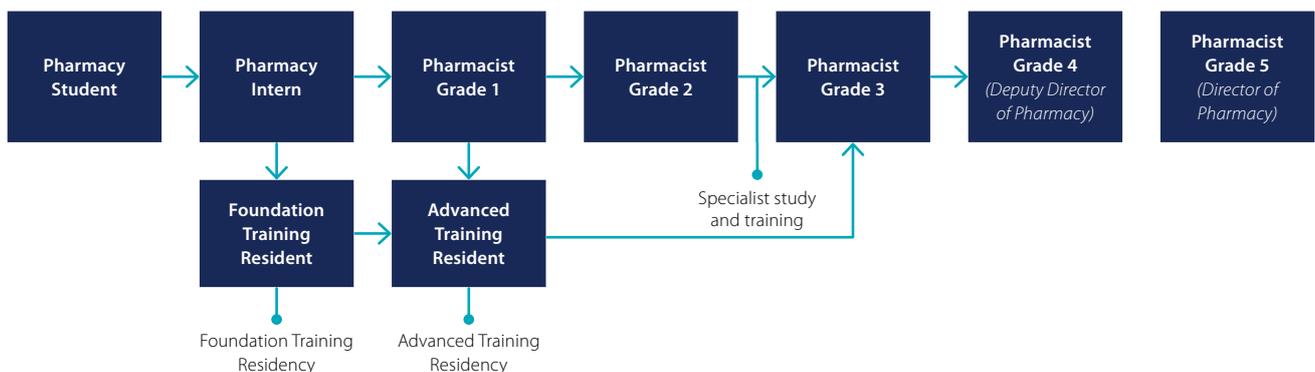
The educational path for hospital pharmacists is identical to that of community pharmacists until the registration stage. Once registered and employed in a hospital, a hospital pharmacist may participate in residency programs aimed at equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed for the hospital sector.⁹ The residency programs are:

- **Foundation Training Residency Program** – a 2-year (FTE) program designed for early career pharmacists.
- **Advanced Training Residency Program** – a 2-year (FTE) program designed for pharmacists with more than 3 years' experience in a hospital pharmacy, which provides advanced knowledge and skills in oncology and haematology, geriatric medicine, medicines information, critical care, paediatrics, mental health, surgery and perioperative medicine, nephrology, medication safety, emergency medicine, and infectious diseases

Career pathway for the professional pharmacy workforce

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) determines the career pathway for pharmacists within the hospital sector. To progress in their careers, pharmacists must undertake specialist study and training as well as gaining experience and knowledge based on the duration of their employment within the sector. Each specific level of employment not only has specified education/specialisation requirements but also outlines the minimum number of years an individual must have worked in the field to progress to the next level. The career progression of pharmacists within the hospital sector is outlined in Diagram 3 and a detailed depiction can be found in Appendix C.

Diagram 3: Career Progression Structure – Pharmacists



Source: The Society of Hospital Scientists of Australia 2023

9. The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia – Residency Programs

Non-professional Pharmacy Workforce

Various awards can serve as a foundational framework for pharmacy assistant career advancement within the hospital sector. This section is based predominantly on the New South Wales¹⁰ and Victoria¹¹ Health Awards and the Health Professionals & Support Service Award 2020.

Pharmacy assistants work under the supervision of hospital pharmacists in dispensing and preparing medicines in hospitals for both inpatients and outpatients. They play an important role in assisting the delivery of hospital pharmacy services and quality patient care within a hospital environment.

There are 2 primary employment classification for non-professional hospital-based pharmacy roles: pharmacy assistant and pharmacy technician.

Pharmacy Assistants

Pharmacy assistants support pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in the delivery of hospital pharmacy services by assisting in administrative and basic technical activities.

Education

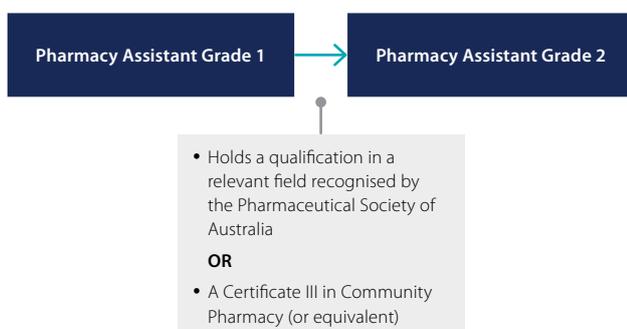
Within the hospital sector, specific qualifications are mandatory for advancing to higher levels within the pharmacy assistant profession.

For example, in New South Wales, to progress to a Grade 2 individuals must obtain a recognised qualification in a relevant field recognised by the PSA or hold a Certificate III in Community Pharmacy (or equivalent). In Victoria, state awards make no reference to pharmacy assistants and do not differentiate between assistants and technicians working in hospitals.

Career pathways for Pharmacy Assistants

While there is limited data available regarding career trajectories for hospital pharmacy assistants, an employee can ascertain the specific classification levels for this role by referring to various state health awards. In general, one to two tiers of pharmacy assistants exist depending on the state and the applicable award coverage for the hospital in which they are employed, as detailed in Diagram 4.

Diagram 4: Career Progression Structure – Pharmacy Assistant – NSW



Source: NSW Health Employees State Award 2023

10. NSW Health Employees (State) Award 2023

11. Victorian Public Sector Enterprise agreement 2021-2025

12. Standard of Practice for Pharmacy Technicians to support Clinical Pharmacy Services

Pharmacy Technicians

Pharmacy technicians support pharmacists in the delivery of hospital pharmacy services through the provision of higher level administrative, technical and leadership activities. These include dispensing, compounding, inventory management and medicine distribution, along with supervised clinical support on wards, outpatient clinics and outreach services.

Education

Pharmacy technicians may hold either a Certificate III or Certificate IV in Hospital or Health Services Pharmacy Support or possess equivalent training and experience. Advanced Pharmacy Technicians must have completed a Certificate IV in Hospital or Health Services Pharmacy Support and must have also undergone a structured competency assessment to enable them to engage in extended scope of practice activities.¹²

It is worth noting that the educational prerequisites for pharmacy technicians differ based on their jurisdiction of employment and the specific award/workplace instrument applicable to their place of employment. For example, in NSW, career advancement is contingent upon qualifications as well as competencies in performing complex tasks in specialist areas of practice.

- **Pharmacist Technicians Grade 1** – must have completed a qualification in a relevant field or up to the level of Certificate III in Hospital and/or Community Pharmacy.
- **Pharmacist Technicians Grade 2** – must have completed a Pharmacy Technician Certificate Course at level IV or equivalent.
- **Pharmacy Technician Grade 3** – must have completed a Pharmacy Technician Certificate Course at level IV or equivalent and display competencies in performing complex tasks in specialist areas of practice.
- **Pharmacy Technician Grade 4** – must have completed a Pharmacy Technician Certificate Course at level IV or equivalent and possess qualifications in Management Studies of a formal nature.

In Victoria, the advancement of pharmacy technicians is contingent on their qualifications, experience and level of responsibility.

- **Pharmacy technicians at Grade 1** are not required to possess any qualifications. However, they may commence a Certificate III in Hospital or Health Services Pharmacy Support within the first 12 months of employment.
- **Pharmacist Technician Grade 2** – must have successfully obtained a Certificate III in Hospital or Health Services Pharmacy Support.
- **Pharmacist Technician Grades 3 and 4** – must hold a Certificate IV in Hospital or Health Services Pharmacy Support.



Career pathways

The Health state awards provide a roadmap for the career progression of pharmacy technicians within state-based hospital settings. For example, as per the NSW Health Employees State Award 2022, pharmacy technicians employed in hospital pharmacies are classified into 4 distinct levels of employment (refer to Diagram 5).

Diagram 5: Career Progression Structure – Pharmacy Technician – NSW



Source: NSW Health Employees State Award 2022

In Victoria, the requirements for each level of employment are similar but the education requirements vary slightly at each level (refer to Diagram 6).

Diagram 6: Career Progression Structure – Pharmacy Technician – Victoria



Source: Health and Allied Services, Managers and Administrative Workers (Victorian Public Sector) (Single Interest Employers) Enterprise Agreement 2021-2025



Industrial Pharmacy Sector (Pharmaceutical Science)

In 2021, around 250 local and global research-based pharmaceutical companies were actively engaged in operations within Australia. In addition, the pharmaceutical industry invests more than \$1 billion in research and development in Australia each year.¹³

Career Pathways for Professional Workforce

Working in the pharmaceutical industry provides pharmacists with opportunities to acquire diverse experience and skills across various domains, including marketing, sales, clinical research, medical research, quality assurance and regulatory affairs. It also offers the chance to engage in national and international travel. Pharmacists in this sector can find employment with prominent pharmaceutical companies such as Aspen, AstraZeneca, Baxter, Bayer, Charm Health, GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer, Sanofi, and many others.

A significant role for industrial pharmacists is conducting research, testing and analysis to contribute to the development of medicines, vaccines and other healthcare and cosmetic products.

Pharmacists can specialise in various areas within the industrial and manufacturing sector.¹⁴ More information on the specialisation for the industrial pharmacist is available in the [Pharmaceutical Society of Australia – Pharmacy Careers Guide](#).

Career Pathways for the Non-professional Workforce

There is very limited information available regarding the non-professional pharmaceutical workforce within the industrial pharmacy sector.

13. Medicines Australia Facts Book 2021 (Fifth Edition)

14. Pharmaceutical Society of Australia – Pharmacy Careers Guide 2015



Conclusion

Professional Workforce

There are many career options for the professional pharmacist workforce within the pharmaceutical industry. Prior to obtaining general registration, education requirements are the same for individuals regardless of which sector they wish to seek employment in.

Following registration, individuals with further training and education may advance along specialised pathways that interest them.

In terms of career progression, pharmacists have the same number of professional levels within the community and hospital sectors. Within the community sector, the highest level a pharmacist can attain is to become the owner of a pharmacy/ pharmacies. Within the hospital sector, the highest level that can be attained is Director of Pharmacy, managing the pharmaceutical department of a hospital/hospitals.

In the industrial sector, there is limited information on the career progression of pharmacists. However, it can be assumed that the various opportunities would be unique to each organisation.

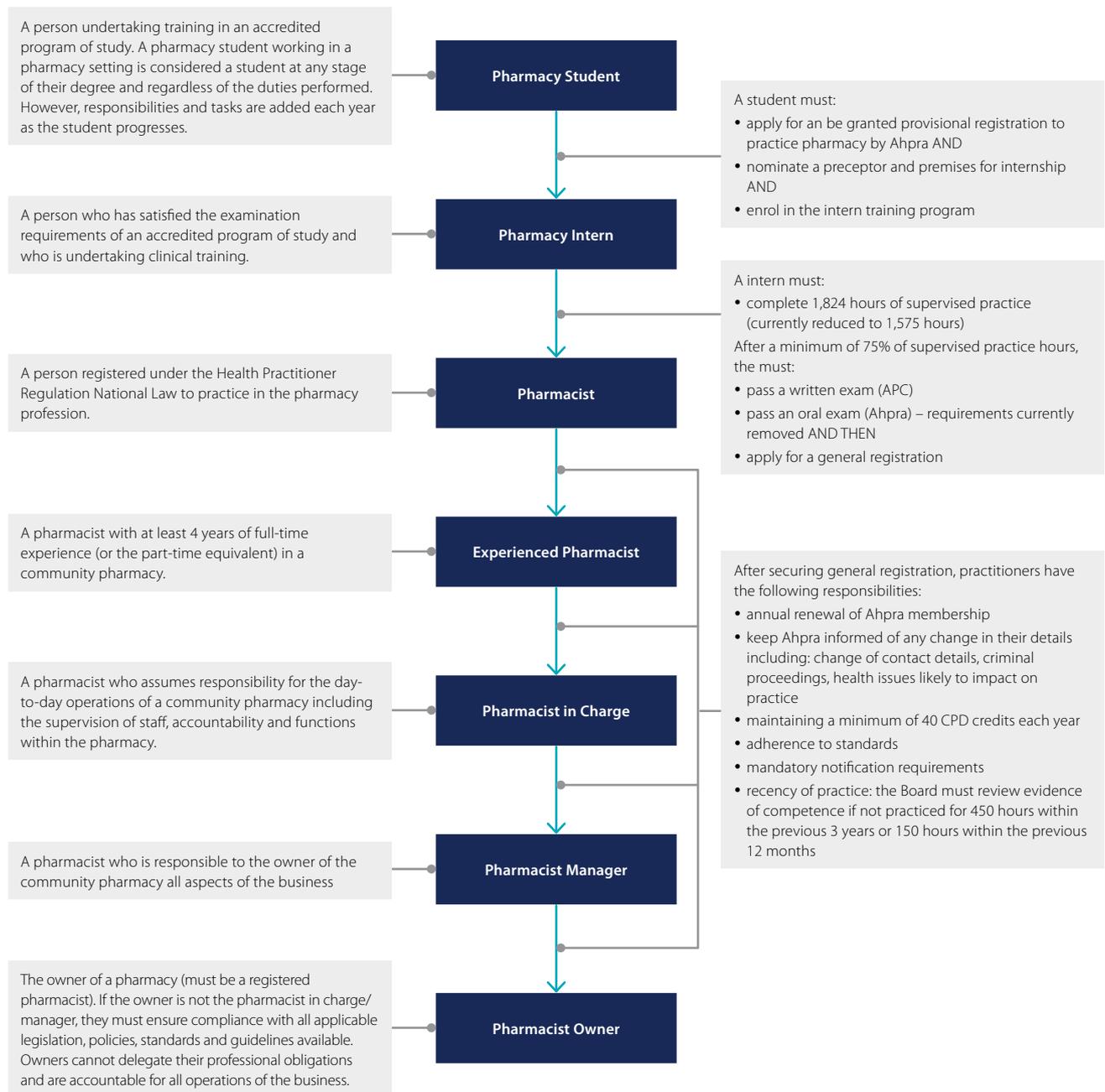
Non-Professional Workforce

Education requirements for the non-professional workforce vary depending on whether individuals are employed in the community, hospital or industrial sector, as well as the jurisdiction in which the individual is employed. No formal qualifications are mandatory for community pharmacy assistant and dispensary assistants; however, an employer may require formal qualifications. Career progression for the non-professional workforce in the community sector is standard across Australia and is dependent on the skills, capability and knowledge of the individual. Career progression to each stage is at the discretion of the employer.

Pharmacy assistants and technicians employed in hospitals may be required to have formal qualifications depending upon jurisdiction and employment level. Career progression for pharmacy assistants and technicians in the hospital sector is dependent on the jurisdiction in which the individual is employed. Career progression is usually based on qualifications obtained.

Information regarding the non-professional workforce employed in the industrial sector is not available at this stage.

Appendix A: Career Progression for Pharmacists in the Community Pharmacy Sector



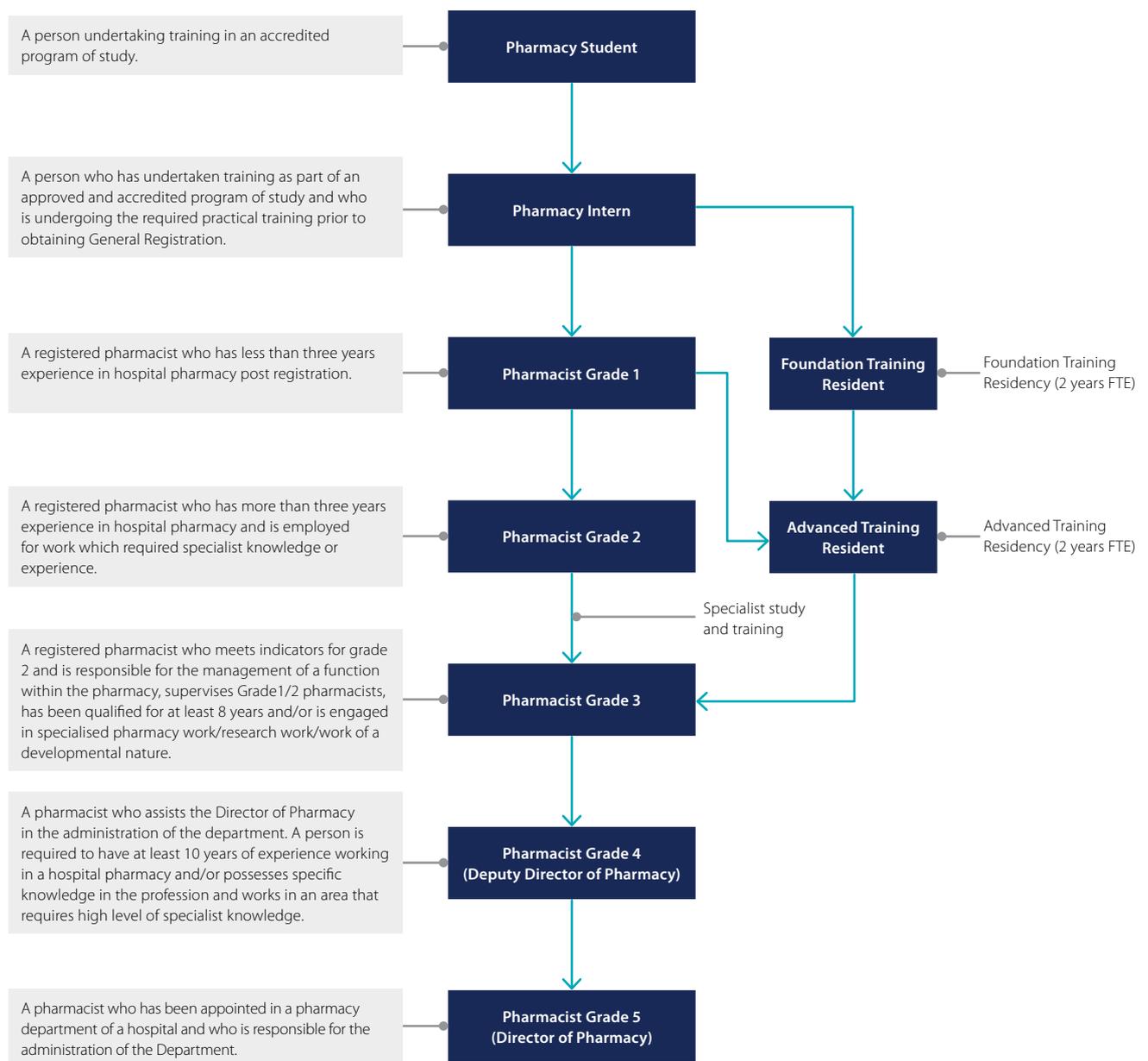
Source: Pharmacy Industry Award 2020

Appendix B: Career Progression for Pharmacy Assistants in the Community Pharmacy Sector



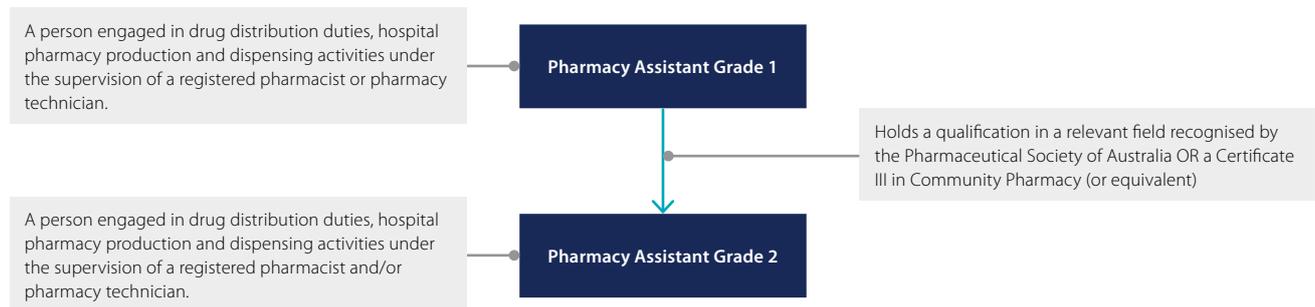
Source: Pharmacy Industry Award 2020

Appendix C: Career Progression for Pharmacists in the Hospital Pharmacy Sector



Source: The Society of Hospital Scientists of Australia 2023

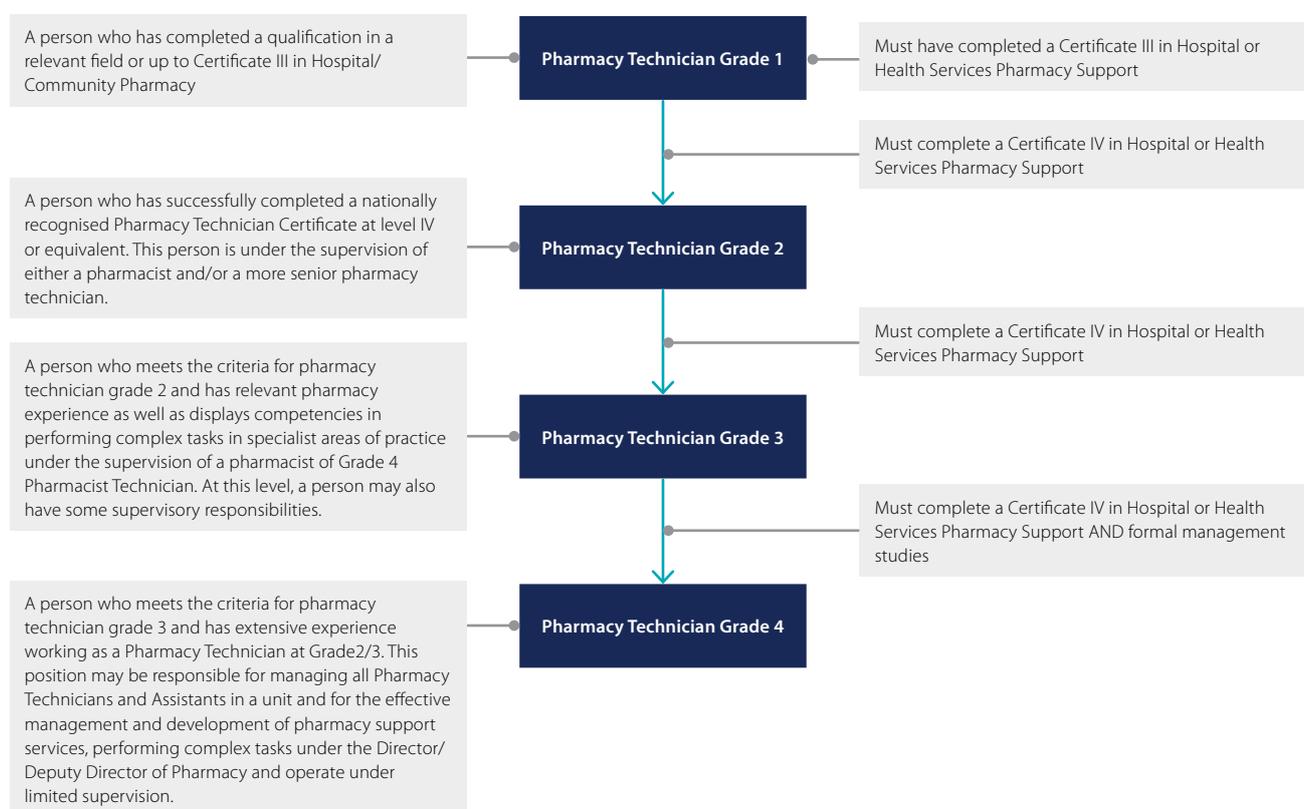
Appendix D: Career Progression for Pharmacy Assistants in the Hospital Pharmacy Sector



Source: NSW Health Employees State Award 2023

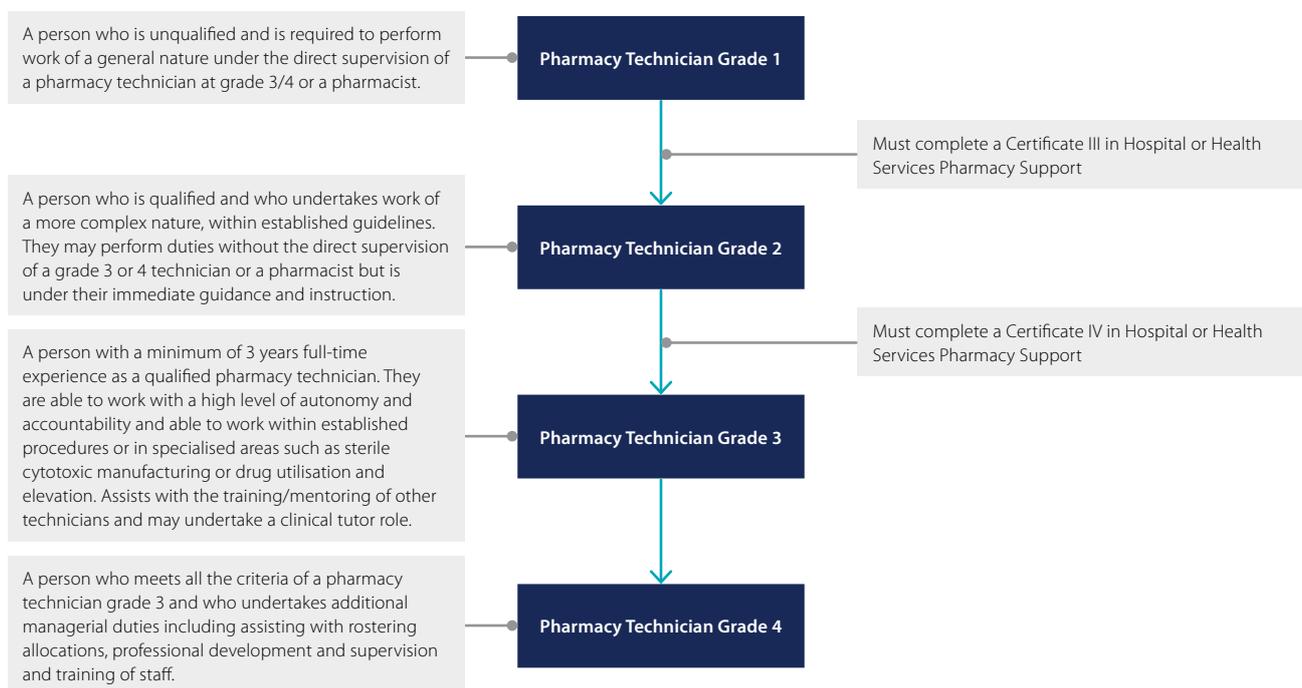
Appendix E: Career Progression for Pharmacy Technicians in the Hospital Pharmacy Sector

New South Wales



Source: NSW Health Employees State Award 2022

Victoria



Source: Health and Allied Services, Managers and Administrative Workers (Victorian Public Sector) (Single Interest Employers) Enterprise Agreement 2021-2025



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