



Response to: Finance and Public Administration References Committee Inquiry into the current capability of the Australian Public Service (APS).

FEBRUARY 2021



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION
AUSTRALIAN NURSING AND MIDWIFERY FEDERATION NSW BRANCH

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Foreword

The New South Wales Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) is the registered union for all nurses and midwives in New South Wales. The membership of the NSWNMA comprises all those who perform nursing and midwifery work. This includes: registered nurses; enrolled nurses and midwives at all levels including management and education, and assistants in nursing and midwifery.

The NSWNMA has approximately 70,000 members and is affiliated to Unions NSW and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). Eligible members of the NSWNMA are also deemed to be members of the New South Wales Branch of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation.

NSWNMA exists to be a strong, influential union of members respected as a contemporary leader in society for its innovation and achievements. We welcome the opportunity to provide a response to this consultation.

This response is authorised by the elected officers of the New South Wales Nurses and Midwives' Association

Membership of the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association includes Registered Nurses (RNs) employed in the Australian Public Sector, including the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (ACQSC).

The role of the ACQSC is to protect and enhance the safety, health, well-being, and quality of life of people receiving aged care. They achieve this through independently accrediting, assessing, and monitoring aged care services subsidised by the Australian Government, conducting home care investigations, and determining compliance requirements to be imposed on providers (such as sanctions)¹.

The ACQSC employs Quality Assessors to undertake its functions, including RNs. However, they are under-represented within the ACQSC workforce, an oversight that we believe contributes to the failure of the ACQSC to adequately identify the staffing and skills mix required to provide safe, clinical care.

RNs by virtue of their qualifications and experience can expertly assess the care needs of the elderly and identify system failures that lead to poor care outcomes including lack of access to RNs and Enrolled Nurses (ENs). We consider RNs should be an integral part of every assessment visit to providers of aged healthcare.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has shone a spotlight on the aged care sector. It has identified failure of the ACQSC to both identify and rectify poor care and neglect. We believe having more highly qualified and experienced RNs within the ACQSC workforce delivering site audits would assist in ensuring safer aged care.

However, the ACQSC does not offer sufficient remuneration to attract highly skilled and experienced RNs, an oversight we believe contributes to the significant shortfall in RN representation within its workforce.

The ACQSC also engages individual contractors and private providers to deliver some of its assessment functions. We are aware the ACQSC is currently seeking to procure service providers to assist them to deliver a backlog of site audits on aged care services incurred due to COVID-19 disruptions. At this stage this is being achieved through a Registrations of Interest (ROI), which on this occasion is a compulsory step towards a formal tender process.

¹ <https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/about-us>

We note the gradual introduction of private contractors to deliver this essential government function is occurring at a time when the ACQSC is under scrutiny of the Royal Commission into Aged care Quality and Safety, for failing to ensure the safety of older people in commonwealth funded aged services.

Our members currently employed under these insecure privatised arrangements report lower terms and conditions of employment and less opportunity for professional development than their counterparts employed directly by the ACQSC. This does not create a climate to attract a highly skilled, stable, and experienced workforce necessary for public protection. Nor does it support RNs to fulfil their professional obligations in regard to their continuing professional development.

In addition, we understand those employed directly by the ACQSC endure high workloads and poor access to training and education. Combined with the fragmentation of the Quality Assessor workforce this signals a recipe for disaster for recipients of aged care if unresolved.

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association would recommend the following:

1. Current caps on recruitment to the ACQSC be lifted to enable a permanent, secure, and well skilled workforce to be established and maintained.
2. Current pay and conditions within the ACQSC be enhanced to reflect the skills and experience required to undertake regulatory functions and attract additional RNs into its workforce.
3. Additional RNs be recruited to the ACQSC to ensure RNs are an integral part of every assessment visit to providers of aged healthcare.



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