



URGENT CALL TO PROTECT OLDER PEOPLE FROM AN AGED CARE WORKFORCE CRISIS

3 November 2021

Older people are missing out on care as a result of acute workforce shortages, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Australia's aged care workforce is reaching a crisis point. Availability of workers is under extreme pressure. Some aged care homes are unable to admit new residents due to the inability to secure adequate numbers of skilled and experienced staff. Many home care services cannot take on new clients to meet increasing demand.

The Australian Aged Care Collaboration calls on the Federal Government to take the following urgent action:

1. Supporting aged care providers to pay a competitive wage by formally agreeing to fund the outcome of the Fair Work Commission Work Value Case.
2. Incentivising nursing students to work in aged care.
3. Incentivising prospective care and support workers.
4. Implementing a plan for foreign workers to fill vacancies on a short and long-term basis where a local workforce is not available
5. In conjunction with State and Territory Education Departments, developing a VET pathway program for secondary school students into aged care, with a particular focus on a pathway into home care.
6. Offering enrolled nurses subsidies to upskill as registered nurses.

The current crisis has been substantially worsened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. International border closures have eliminated a major source of workers in aged care. COVID protection mechanisms like single site operations have stretched aged care homes. And competition with the health sector (especially COVID vaccination clinics) has reduced access to registered and enrolled nurses.

The pressure on the aged care workforce is not a new problem. It has been highlighted in the following reports:

- In 2011, the Productivity Commission's *Caring for Older Australians* report outlined the workforce challenges as demand increased over the next 30 years unless action was taken to address the workforce gap urgently.
- In 2018, an independent aged-care workforce taskforce delivered a plan with 14 actions titled *A Matter of Care: Australia's Aged Care Workforce Strategy*. An Aged Care Workforce Industry Council is implementing the 14 actions.
- At the beginning of 2021, the Royal Commission into the Quality and Safety of Aged Care echoed the earlier findings in their report and made a number of recommendations focused on how to address workforce issues.
- In mid 2021 the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) *Duty of Care: Meeting the Aged Care Workforce Challenge* report found "at least 110,000 extra workers are required in the industry over the next decade and the figure could balloon to more than 400,000 workers by 2050". "We need at least 17,000 more aged-care workers each year for the next ten years just to meet basic standards of care," the report says.

We commend the actions that Government has taken in response to the Royal Commission, including the aged care nurse retention bonus and home care workforce support program. However, the current workforce pressures show more comprehensive action is needed.

We now urge the Government to respond comprehensively to the challenges posed by the current workforce crisis. Older people deserve nothing less.

Required Actions

1. Supporting aged care providers to pay a competitive wage:
 - Increase indexation payments to ensure they cover, as a minimum, the Fair Work Commission Minimum Wage increase for 2021-22 and 2022-23;
 - Commit to support any aged care pay rise approved by the Fair Work Commission in the current wage increase case.
2. Incentivising nursing students to work in aged care:
 - Subsidise university fees to undertake a nursing degree;
 - Require graduating nurses to complete a period of time at an aged care facility prior to gaining their qualifications;
 - Create incentives for registered nurses to work in regional and rural areas where there are so few nurses.
3. Incentivising prospective care and support workers:
 - Have a re-skilling program for people in other sectors who are unemployed because of COVID who may come across to aged care;
 - Redesign the right training with credentials that are recognised and allow for career progression;
 - Incentivise older students and school leavers to become aged care workers. Incentives could include: improved financial conditions, training, paid re-education fees.
4. Implementing a plan for foreign workers to fill vacancies on a short and long-term basis depending on demand:
 - Include skilled occupations for aged care workers (ANZSCO Unit Codes 4231 and 4233) on the Immigration Skilled Occupation List Medium and Long-term Strategic Skills List (MLTSSL).
 - Remove the restrictions on aged care providers, in line with what is already in place in the Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA);
 - Establish pathways to Permanent Residency (include partners);
 - Provide exemption, reduction, or simplification of the Skilling Australian Fund (SAF) levy;
 - Provide visa concessions for Regional Australia;
 - Reduce/remove the VISA application fee for aged care providers in regional Australia;
 - Expand the reach of the Seasonal Worker Program to include aged care.
5. In conjunction with State and Territory Education Departments, developing a VET pathway program for secondary school students into aged care, with a particular focus on a pathway into home care.
6. Offering enrolled nurses subsidies to upskill as registered nurses.

Claerwen Little, Chair Australian Aged Care Collaboration

On behalf of

Paul Sadler
Chief Executive
ACSA

Kasy Chambers
Executive Director
Anglicare Australia

Nicole Hornsby
Executive Director
Baptist Care Australia

Nick Mersiades
Director, Aged Care
Catholic Health Australia

Sean Rooney
Chief Executive
Leading Age Services Australia