



Supporting Aged Care Workforce Capability

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Understanding the Aged Care Workforce

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Australians are living longer than ever before, and this changing demographic is changing the demand for, and the provision of, aged care. Recognising and supporting an ageing population with increasing frailty has implications for those who are providing care.

Reform directions

Aged care operates within a structured regulatory environment. The aged care system has been subject to several significant reviews in the last decade including the influential 2018 report of the Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce. [1] The report, *A Matter of Care*, set out 14 actions needed for the sector to develop a culture based on caring that will attract and sustain a skilled aged care workforce responsive to the needs of older people.

The findings of the Royal Commission into Safety and Quality in Aged Care also reinforced the need for workforce growth and sector maturation. The final report highlighted the need for workforce initiatives and environmental contexts that will influence care practices and approaches to service and sector management. [2]

These issues have been acknowledged in the broader care and support industry with the development of the National Care and Workforce Strategy. [3] This strategy sets out

the issues and gaps faced by the sector and guides targeted action to support an increase in workforce participation to meet Australia's growing needs in this sector.

More specifically, the Aged Care Workforce Action Plan: 2022–2025 outlines the Government's actions across 3 goals:

1. **Grow:** Promote approaches that attract and retain workers with the right skills, knowledge and attributes to work and pursue a career in aged care.
2. **Skill:** Support a continuous learning environment. This includes approaches for workers and providers to upskill, attain formal qualifications and put learnings into practice.
3. **Enable:** Support aged care providers to develop sustainable and coordinated approaches for growing a skilled workforce, with an emphasis on thin markets and meeting the needs of diverse communities. [4]

All the workforce policy documents highlight the need for an expanded workforce that is responsive to user needs and innovative. Many of the principles associated with these plans acknowledge the importance of being valued and able to build a career within aged care.

A large and complex industry

Aged care is already one of Australia's largest service industries. The most recent National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey includes information on 2,716 Residential Aged Care (RAC) facilities with 277,671 workers, 834 Home Care (HCPP) providers with 80,340 workers, and 630 Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) providers with 76,096 employees. [5]

Personal care workers (PCWs) are the largest group of direct care workers across each of the three service care types. In all three service care types, most direct care staff work in permanent part-time positions. Staff employed through an agency or subcontractor are largely allied health professionals. [5]

Supporting older people across ageing and end of life

Demands on services continue to grow in response to the needs of an ageing population who are living longer with increasing prevalence of complex chronic disease. Care staff need to have the technical skills and knowledge as well effective communication skills to deliver comprehensive and responsive care.

Inevitably addressing care needs associated with the end of life must also be considered when identifying workforce capabilities.

The 2022-2025 Aged Care Workforce Action Plan recognises the need for specialist skills for the workforce including the need for dementia and palliative care training. Initiatives such as [ELDAC](#), [PACOP](#), and [PEPA](#) have been funded to provide specific training. The work of the [National Palliative Care Program](#) including [palliAGED](#), [Advance Dementia](#), and [CareSearch](#) also contribute to the development of skills, knowledge and capabilities of the health and aged care workforce.

Other initiatives such as the [Comprehensive Palliative Care in Aged Care Measure](#) aim to support palliative care for older Australians living in residential aged care by exploring and evaluating new ways of providing palliative care and end-of-life care by state and territory governments.

Developing workforce capability is critical if appropriate and compassionate care is to be available to the increasing number of people who are not only living longer but dying older.

References

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3. Workforce Australia. [National Care and Support Workforce Strategy](#). Canberra: Australian Government; 2022 Mar.
4. Department of Health. [Aged Care Workforce Action Plan: 2022-2025 \(1.04MB pdf\)](#). Canberra: Australian Government; 2022 Mar.
5. Department of Health. [2020 Aged Care Workforce Census Report](#). Canberra: Australian Government; 2021 Sep.