

Submission: Delivering a skilled workforce for WA

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About ACCPA

Aged and Community Care Providers Association (ACCPA) is the national Industry Association for aged care providers offering retirement living, seniors housing, residential care, home care, community care and related services.

ACCPA exists to unite aged care providers under a shared vision to enhance the wellbeing of older Australians through a high performing, trusted and sustainable aged care sector. We support our members to provide high quality care and services while amplifying their views and opinions through an authoritative and comprehensive voice to the government, community and media.

Our sector serves to make better lives for older Australians, and so do we.

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Executive Summary

The care sector, particularly aged care, is the fastest growing sector in the Australian economy in terms of employment. At the same time the sector has been subject to enormous pressure from COVID-19, uncompetitive pay and a global shortage of nurses.

Some services are already turning away clients because they can't find the staff.

With policy changes set to further accelerate growth in demand for staff and unemployment at record lows, fixing the workforce crisis in aged care is critical to taking pressure of the public health system and ensuring older Australians can access the care they need.

There are no silver bullets or overnight fixes when it comes to addressing workforce issues. However, there are several measures that our members believe will assist in mitigating aged care workforce challenges.

In summary these require the sector and governments to work together to:

- **Make aged care more attractive:** by boosting staffing levels (with a plan to account for shortages); increasing pay and conditions by supporting the Work Value Case and a further increase for nurses to provide pay parity with hospitals; providing prioritised access to childcare; supporting professional development; and providing quarantined funding for teaching training and development.
- **Bring in overseas staff:** by making it easier and more attractive for foreigners already living in Australia to work in aged care; and making it easier to bring new workers into Australia through fee relief, faster processing, and an industry labour agreement.
- **Expand the pool of staff:** by increasing completion rates for Certificate IIIs; more clinical placements; expanded transition to practice programs; school-based programs; taking pressure of hospitals through sub-acute care.

Delivering a skilled workforce for WA

ACCPA notes the initiatives undertaken by the WA State Government to deliver a skilled workforce for WA including the Perth Skills Summit held on 30 July 2021 and Regional Skills Summits held between August and December 2021 which provided a unique opportunity for business and industry leaders and the State Government to work together to identify new and innovative ideas to grow Western Australia's skilled workforce in line with industry needs.

ACCPA welcomes the WA State Government's related initiatives as articulated in '[*Delivering a skilled workforce for Western Australia*](#)'.

We understand that with Western Australia experiencing very low unemployment and the strongest economic performance in the nation, demand for skilled workers continues to be high. The Australian Jobs and Skills Summit to be held on 1-2 September, also provides an important opportunity for the State Government to raise issues which are vital to workforce participation in Western Australia.

We concur that of particular importance is identifying policy settings managed by the Federal Government to enable greater access to skilled workers, including skilled migration, investment in the care sector, boosting workforce participation and targeted incentives to encourage retirees back into the workforce.

We appreciate the invitation to contribute further ideas through a written submission to suggest new opportunities to grow Western Australia's skilled workforce, including those which may build on current programs and initiatives.

Workforce matters are an area of high priority for ACCPA and as a national peak body, we operate a number of industry and workforce development programs to support the aged care sector.

ACCPA's submission recognises that although the funding and regulation of the aged care sector is a Federal responsibility, the issues of workforce and skills are also of interest to State Governments – as is the outcome we are all striving for, of delivering high quality care for Australia's ageing population.

We welcome the WA State Government's consideration of the recommendations in this submission.

Context

Solving the workforce crisis in the Australian aged care sector is critical and requires effort from Federal and State Governments alike.

Shifts are already going unfilled, older Australians are being turned away in both home and residential care, and demand for staff is growing strongly.

In residential care, registered nurse (RN) levels need to increase by about 45% by October 2023, and 59% by October 2024 relative to March 2022 levels. Personal care worker and enrolled nursing levels also need to increase by 6 per cent to October 2024 and 13 per cent to October 2024.

Meanwhile in home care, there have been significant increases in package numbers to address long wait times. This resulted in a 65% increase in packages in the two years to June 2022. And an additional 17% increase in packages is planned in the year to June 2023.

Our best estimate is that these policy changes mean that WA will need on a headcount basis:

- by October 2023
 - 1,111 additional RNs in residential care
 - 843 additional PCWs or ENs in residential care
 - 863 additional workers in home care
- by October 2024 (on top of the 2023 requirements)
 - 358 additional RNs in residential care
 - 1,053 additional PCWs or ENs in residential care

In using the above figures, it should be noted that they are sensitive to several assumptions about patterns of demand and hours worked. We would be happy to discuss the basis for these assumptions in further detail.

It should also be noted that the above excludes the significant number of additional staff that will need to be hired to replace staff that retire or otherwise leave the industry.

Improving conditions

Improving conditions will help improve quality and fairness, and attract more staff.

R1 The WA State Government support the following recommendations (which are the responsibility of the Federal Government):

- a) Increased staffing levels in residential care (in line with Federal Labor's commitments) will help relieve pressure, reduce burnout and improve quality. However, a clear plan is needed to account for the fact that the workforce may not be initially available.
- b) Fairer pay is also essential. Federal Labor's commitment to support the Fair Work Commission case offers personal care workers in aged care hope that they will get the same pay as workers in disability. However, a further commitment will be needed to give aged care nurses (who are usually already paid above the Award) pay parity with hospitals.
- c) Prioritised access to childcare for the children of aged care workers will provide tangible recognition to a workforce that is too often ignored, and help increase the hours that (generally part-time) staff are able to work.

- d) Respect and recognition can also be supported by funding the development of associations for personal care workers (with a view to eventual self-funding and professional registration) and gerontological nursing (with a view to it becoming a recognised specialisation).
- e) Separate funding for teaching, training and research (as occurs in hospitals) will also ensure workers are supported.

ACCPA also notes the WA State Government's support for practical initiatives in regional areas such as for housing.

R2 The WA State Government consider extending regional housing initiatives to the aged care sector, such as expanded eligibility for aged care workers or through partnership with aged care providers.

Migration

Migration is a key short-term measure to mitigate workforce challenges, with the share of recent migrants in the care workforce dropping from 16.5% in 2015 to 12% in 2021.¹ Any migration strategy will need to take into account the suitability of workers and potential perverse incentives to reduce domestic recruitment and training efforts.

ACCPA welcomes related WA State Government initiatives including an advertising campaign to bolster the health workforce to attract more local, national and international workers to work in Western Australia as enrolled nurses, registered nurses and midwives as well as committing \$2.4 million to attract international students to live, study and work in regional Western Australia, targeting occupations such as aged and disability care, childcare, hospitality and tourism.

R3 The WA State Government support the following recommendations (which are the responsibility of the Federal Government):

- a) Support foreigners already living in Australia on other visas, such as student or spousal visas, to work in aged care by extending the COVID-19 measures that allowed international students to work longer than normal hours, and giving those who work in aged care extra points towards permanent residency.
- b) Make it easier to attract workers from overseas through fee relief, action to reduce processing delays, the development of an industry labour agreement, and an active Commonwealth program to support the recruitment to match the programs being run by States and Territories for their public health systems.

Unlocking extra workers

There are a number of other steps that should be considered to unlock additional workers.

ACCPA supports WA State Government initiatives including low fee existing worker traineeships for industries with a critical need to upskill workers such as in aged care.

R4 The WA State Government considers how it can support the Federal Government to achieve the following recommendations:

- a) Fund programs to boost completion rates for Certificate IIIs in Individual Support (which are currently just 36%).²
- b) Providers, State and Territory Governments and the Commonwealth should work together to create pathways into aged care through secondary schooling.
- c) Transition to practice programs for nursing into aged care have been effective and should be expanded. Additionally, funding clinical placements would increase the number of nurses with aged care exposure.
- d) Support for technology and telehealth solutions is also important to improve access to expertise in regional areas.
- e) The Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments work together to increase subacute care and transition pathways out of hospitals to help reduce demand for staff in the public health system.

¹ Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 'National Care and Support Workforce Strategy', March 2022, <https://www.dese.gov.au/workforce/resources/national-care-and-support-workforce-strategy>.

² Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2022.

R5 The WA State Government consider engaging with the Commonwealth about an extension of the Pacific Labour Mobility Scheme for a WA context, such as the inclusion of localities closer to the west coast such as the Philippines, South-East Asia and India and for which there are large corresponding communities in WA.