



Building, Training, and Supporting the Aged Care Workforce Roundtable Follow-up

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About UnitingCare Australia

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church's community services network and is an agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia.

We give voice to the Uniting Church's commitment to social justice through advocacy and by strengthening community service provision.

We are the largest network of social service providers in Australia, supporting 1.4 million people every year across urban, rural, and remote communities.

The UnitingCare Aged Care Network is the largest not-for-profit aged care provider nationally. We support approximately 97,000 older people, comprising 8.5% of total residential beds and 10% of Home Care Packages nationally. Over 80% of our workforce and 60% of our services recipients are ² women.

Key Issues

Ongoing inadequate resourcing is the overwhelming and driving challenge in Australian aged care

The aged care sector is in intertwined funding and workforce crises. UnitingCare Australia recognises and commends the Government's prioritisation of aged care reform and the consultative footing it has taken on this priority. We note the varied and complex issues addressed through these Roundtables. However, we also note that the driving challenge in aged care is sustained inadequate resourcing. Since 1998 the cost of wages has risen by more than 110 per cent, the cost of goods has gone up by almost 85 per cent and funding has risen by just over 50 per cent. Resourcing, accounting for all announced reforms, into the sector will be short by about \$5 billion annually. The sector will continue in crisis until this is remedied.

Improving pay for workers in the aged care sector is essential

The pay for working in aged care does not match the contribution being made. The interim Fair Work Commission decision will part remedy this issue, but it is vital that decision is fully funded immediately and inclusive of the non-direct care workforce. Recent passage of the *Secure Jobs, Better Pay Bill* also has the potential to improve conditions but requires Government engagement and participation in the bargaining process to succeed.

While remuneration remains so far below the contribution being made, **Government housing support should be considered for workers especially in regional and remote locations.**

Working in aged care needs to be more attractive

Working in aged care is interpersonally rewarding and engaging. But the conditions of aged care work are inadequate and more needs to be done to make working in aged care attractive. Beyond remuneration, improved broader conditions while retaining job security will be crucial. This should include continually improving career pathways and additional support for First Nations people, mature age workers, school leavers, and culturally and linguistically diverse workers to enter the sector.

We need to improve the training and skills of workers

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety identified the need to increase the number of qualified and well-trained workers in the sector. Dedicated training and support, including training and support focussed on cultural safety and person-centred care, should be available to workers to ensure best practice care is provided. An overarching workforce strategy needs to take a broad lens across the care sector to improve engagement and uptake. Funding for training is limited with many providers already making a loss. The options for building smaller qualifications into a larger qualification should be further explored.

Migration is important and needs to be undertaken thoughtfully

The sector needs to focus on building the skills of existing workers, but also recognise that migration can be an important contributor to the workforce. Worker migration needs to be undertaken ethically in keeping with the needs of the worker and the community of origin. Registration and visa process wait times need to be drastically lowered. Personal care workers make up the largest cohort of employees in the aged care sector, and while other countries have established relevant visas the pathways into Australia for these workers are limited.

Key solutions: innovation in action

Case studies of Workforce Solutions from the UnitingCare Network:

<p>UnitingCare Australia delivered a foundational pilot project that informed the creation of the Government's <i>Launch into Work</i> program which provides long-term employment pathways for people who have been long term unemployed, with a particular focus on women.</p>
<p>Eldercare repurposed a retirement living facility in Maitland on the York Peninsula in South Australia into free staff accommodation. The aim was to attract and retain workforce, accommodate agency staff and enable Eldercare to continue to deliver much needed services in that regional location.</p>
<p>Helping Hand has recently refurbished a decommissioned wing of a residential aged care facility in Port Pirie, South Australia, into short to medium term accommodation for both staff and students, again to ensure adequate staff to deliver quality services.</p>
<p>People with disability and First Nations people are two groups with higher than average unemployment rates. Uniting NSW.ACT has set targets as a strategy to increase their workforce and their diversity and inclusion. Within their Local Area Coordinator team their target for employment of people with disability is set at 20% and they are currently reaching 16%, additionally their target for employment of First Nations people is 15% and they are tracking at 11% to date.</p>
<p>Juniper aged care in Perth and Western Australia has developed a Career Pathway map which guides employees through their journey with the organisation. It shows the path and qualifications required to move through different career streams.</p>
<p>Wesley Mission Queensland is developing a First Nations Aged Care Worker Traineeship program, collaborating with an external RTO.</p>

Suggested solutions from the UnitingCare network:

<p>Collaboratively designed Employee Value Proposition for the Aged Care Sector which would underpin career pathways</p>
<p>Review and increase wages for mature aged trainees and apprentices as current rates are not adequate to attract people to the roles</p>
<p>Funding for a technology solution to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of recruitment process eg: an automated approach to employee screening verification, online reference checking and the ability to use candidate video as part of the process</p>
<p>Streamlining the requirement of employment screening – National Police Clearance, NDIS Worker Screening Check, DHS Working with Children Check. Each currently have individual costs which are currently incurred by organisations.</p>
<p>Expedited visa processes – as an example it can take up to 12 months for a visa to be approved under the PALM Scheme and a further 4 months to get people on the ground because of the administrative/bureaucratic processes involved.</p>