THE AGED CARE WORKFORCE IN AUSTRALIA

POSITION PAPER

ATTRIBUTION

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ABOUT THE ACSA FEDERATION

Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA) is the leading national peak body for aged and community care providers. It represents church, charitable and community-based organisations providing housing, residential and community care and home support services to older people, younger people with a disability and their carers.

About 700,000 older Australians depend on care and support provided by ACSA members in the metropolitan, regional, rural and remote regions across Australia.

ACSA is made up of the following members:

- Aged and Community Services Association of NSW & ACT (ACS NSW&ACT)
- Aged and Community Services SA & NT (ACS SA&NT)
- Aged and Community Services Tasmania (ACS Tas)
- Aged and Community Services Western Australia (ACS WA)
- Aged and Community Services Australia - Victoria (ACSA Vic)
- Aged and Community Services Australia - Queensland (ACSA Qld)

Mission-based and not-for-profit (NFP) aged care organisations are charged with responsibility for providing services to those most in need. They deliver around 65% of residential aged care services and about 85% of community aged care services in Australia.[1]

These organisations are visible and highly accessible in the community resulting in the public relying on NFPs for service, support and care.

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[1] Australian Government, Department of Social Services, 'Report on the Operation of the Aged Care Act 2012/13', 26, 33.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Aged care is a 'people business' that involves people providing care and support to other people. As the population ages, so too does the need for skilled, flexible workers to provide care and support to the increasing number of older Australians. One of the direct consequences of the projected growth in the number of older Australians is a relative decline in the proportion of the 'working age' population. This major change will increase the level of competition for workers among the various employment sectors. Given these significant changes in demography, aged care service providers will not be able to continue using the same staffing methods and models. There simply will not be enough staff available to maintain current approaches.

At the same time, broader policy changes and consumer preferences are beginning to affect the way services are delivered. The aged care workforce of the future must adapt to these changes by using technology effectively to increase efficiency and improve quality, placing a greater emphasis on training to broaden staff skills and capabilities and creating flexible working arrangements that promote consumer choice and staff satisfaction. By successfully adapting the aged care work environment to meet changing needs, aged care services will increase the overall appeal of working in the sector and strengthen recruitment and retention.

Given the significance of ageing and aged care spending in the Federal Budget, it is crucial that government and industry work together to ensure that Australia retains a flexible, responsive, high quality and sustainable aged care system. This position paper identifies the gaps in current workforce planning and outlines key areas for further focus including new sources for aged care staff, skills development and training and priorities for technology implementation. By identifying these opportunities, this paper assists in targeting future aged care workforce initiatives to the areas of greatest impact.

The paper draws on the research captured in the discussion paper 'The Aged Care Workforce in Australia', August 2014 prepared by Richard Baldwin. From that evidence the following three areas of attention have been developed:

1.   Developing an Overarching Strategy
2.   Attraction, recruitment and retention
3.   Supporting a skilled, modern and diverse workforce

It is imperative that government, the aged care sector and other related organisations, such as skills and training bodies, work together to plan for and develop the aged care workforce of the future. Positive action in these areas now can lay the groundwork for innovation in service delivery into the future.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

The development and implementation of an Aged Care Workforce Development Strategy.

This strategy should consider:

- Improved workforce planning commencing with national and regional staffing projections based on population data that includes the contribution made by support and administration staff;
- A specific budget allocation to be made available for sector wide leadership development;
- The impact of emerging models of care on work patterns and the diversity of work roles;
- Action plans for improving attraction, recruitment and retention in aged care;
- Key partnerships and initiatives for building a skilled, modern and diverse aged care workforce.

Recommendation 2

That industry and the Australian Government partner to support technology initiatives for the aged care industry that:

- Enable agencies to deliver effective and efficient home care;
- Support implementation and uptake of technology through training and change management;
- Support education and skills development; and
- Improve delivery systems such as catering and maintenance.

Recommendation 3

That the Australian Government continue to provide funding support to joint initiatives between sector peak bodies and the industry training bodies to develop leadership competencies and capabilities in aged care. Future initiatives should include strategies for aged care leaders and managers to support a culturally diverse workforce and to assist staff from culturally diverse backgrounds to move into leadership roles.

Recommendation 4

That certificate courses related to aged care include mandated units of competency.

Recommendation 5

That the Australian Government partners with industry to build the capability of providers to review and design enterprise bargaining agreements to effectively respond to a consumer driven care environment.

Recommendation 6

That, in line with the Productivity Commission's previous recommendation, funding for volunteers in aged care focus on addressing the costs of:

- Administration and regulation; and
- Training and support needs.

Recommendation 7

That aged care providers and industry bodies work with registered training organisations to identify career progression opportunities with matching educational pathways for people working in aged care.

THE CURRENT WORKFORCE

The aged care and services workforce has grown significantly in recent years. According to a report on the Aged Care Workforce conducted on behalf of the Australian Government, the number of direct care staff working in residential aged care rose from 78,849 in 2007 to 94,823 in 2012.[2] Over the same period, the number of direct care staff working in Commonwealth subsidised community aged care services (packaged care, now known as Home Care Packages) rose from 74,067 to 93,359.

The same study also found that the vast majority of direct care staff in both residential (89%) and community (greater than 90%) aged care settings are female. The aged care workforce – both in residential and community settings – is older than the overall workforce in Australia and, like the population, is itself ageing.[3] These staff members have high levels of work-related qualifications. In 2012, 88% of direct care workers in residential aged care and 86% of the direct care workforce in community aged care held post-secondary qualifications.

The aged care workforce is also increasingly multicultural. Almost a quarter (23%) of direct care workers in residential aged care and 16% of direct care workers in the community speak a language other than English.[4] In 2012, over 50% of the migrant workforce who spoke a language other than English had lived in Australia for more than 10 years.

A major shortcoming of the current data on aged care staff is that almost all the detailed research is limited to direct care staff – registered and enrolled nurses, personal care attendants and, to a lesser extent, allied health staff. While these workers make up the bulk of the aged care workforce the almost exclusive focus on these roles obscures the fact that aged care is a highly diverse industry with a multitude of services and staff groups.

[2] King, D., Mavromaras, K., He, B., Healy, J., Macaitis, K., Moskos, M., Wei, Z. (2013). 'The aged care workforce 2012 final report'. Canberra: DoHA.

[3] King, D., Mavromaras, K., He, B., Healy, J., Macaitis, K., Moskos, M., Wei, Z. (2013). 'The aged care workforce 2012 final report'. Canberra: DoHA.

[4] King, D., Mavromaras, K., He, B., Healy, J., Macaitis, K., Moskos, M., .Wei, Z. (2013). 'The aged care workforce 2012 final report'. Canberra: DoHA.

Shortages

There are several inconsistencies in defining and reporting on workforce shortages. There is evidence that aged care service providers are already experiencing low numbers of suitable applicants for advertised vacancies. In 2011 the former Department of Education, Employment and Workplace (2012) reported that on average there were only 1.8 suitable applicants per registered nurse vacancy in residential aged care and only 1.6 suitable applicants for every vacancy for personal care workers.[5] With strong growth in workforce required over the coming decades, this trend will only increase unless there is significant action. There is also considerable variation in the experience of providers when it comes to recruiting staff. Services in rural and remote locations find recruitment much more difficult than those in large urban and regional population centres.

However, anecdotal evidence suggests there is a temporary undersupply of positions for graduate registered nurses in the acute sector. In May 2014 it was estimated that there was a shortfall of 3,000 positions for graduate registered nurses throughout Australia.[6] The lack of opportunities for newly graduated registered nurses in the acute sector presents an opportunity for the aged care sector to attract nurses at the beginning of their careers who, with positive support and experiences, will be more likely to develop loyalty to the sector. It is likely that this over-supply of graduate nurses will be a short-term measure so it is important that aged care providers act quickly to implement programs to attract and provide support to graduate nurses.

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[5] Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations. (2012): 'Profile of the Aged Care Workforce Aged Care Sector Forum Central Coast-Hunter Region February 2012.' Canberra.

[6] Stewart, John (2014): 'Thousands of nursing graduates unable to find work in Australian hospitals: union', *ABC News* http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-05-24/thousands-of-nursing-graduates-unable-to-find-work/5475320

THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

Projected growth

The aged care and services industry in Australia needs to grow significantly in the coming years and decades. According to government projections, there is a need for an additional 75,000 residential aged care places and a further 85,000 home care packages over the 10 years from 2013 to 2023.[7] As aged care is, at its essence, human work this increase in the number of care places means the need for a significant increase in the number of workers.

Numerous attempts have been made to determine the number of aged care staff, particularly in those providing direct care, that will be needed in the future. The Australian Government estimated that the number of aged care workers will grow by an average of 2.5% every year for the 40 years to 2050, peaking at 3.6% in the current decade.[8] This projection is supported by the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, which has predicted that the number of 'aged and disabled carers' will grow at a rate of between 2.2 and 4.4% each year from 2013-2025 with a growth rate of 1.4-3.8% for registered nurses.[9] Based on the projections for service growth to 2023, it is estimated that there will need to be an additional 55,770 FTE care workers (37,620 in residential aged care and 18,150 in community aged care) over the decade from 2013 to 2023.

While this data provides some indication of future workforce needs, it also has serious shortfalls. Although the composition of the aged care workforce is set to change significantly, these estimates are based on projecting current models into the future. It is unlikely that this will occur. There is also a need for more granular data linked to varying population scenarios and with regional breakdowns.

New models of care: challenges and opportunities

Reforms currently underway in the aged care and services sector will have a major impact on the way that services are delivered and staffed into the future. The requirement to provide all home care packages on a consumer directed care (CDC) basis from July 2015 and the proposed introduction of CDC into residential aged care has successfully increased the focus on consumer choice and is expected to lead to a greater diversity of service types and models.

As care models change, the roles of staff and volunteers who are involved in the provision of care and support services will also fundamentally change. The challenge of developing the future aged care workforce is not simply about finding more workers; rather, the challenge is finding new staffing models and ways of delivering services, transforming the composition and structure of the aged care workforce.

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[7] Aged Care Financing Authority. (2013): 'Inaugural report on the funding and financing of the aged care sector'. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

[8] Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. (2010): 'Submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry into Caring for Older Australians'. Canberra: DoHA.

[9] Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency. (2013): 'Industry snapshot 2013: Health care and social assistance'. Canberra: AWPA.

Another factor that will impact on staffing arrangements is the increasing acuity of aged care service users.[10] A focus on medication management and increased use of technology in both community and residential care suggests that employers will be expecting future employees to have broader sets of skills than in the past. This in turn will affect recruitment practices and training initiatives across the sector.

A significant challenge for much of the sector is to move away from hierarchical, medical models of care towards wellness models that support choice and enable staff to work to the full scope of their practice. This involves designing roles for registered nurses that enable them to use their technical clinical skills, rather than spending large amounts of time on administrative and managerial duties. It also involves allowing staff with certificate qualifications to increase their skills and competencies to provide assistance with exercise and allied health programs, exercise, reablement and medication administration.

Another opportunity to increase the scope of aged care workers is encouraging the uptake of nurse practitioner roles within the sector. There is strong evidence of the benefits of employing nurse practitioners in aged care. The Joanna Briggs Institute urges aged care facilities to employ nurse practitioners as members of medical teams as this has been shown to reduce healthcare spending and the use of acute care services, including ER.[11] At a time when the care needs of aged services consumers – in both residential and community care – are increasing, it makes sense to support motivated aged care nurses to become nurse practitioners. However, current supervisory requirements for nurse practitioners do not fit aged care and community based models and restrict the uptake of this option. This needs to be addressed if aged care providers are to take advantage of nurse practitioners in greater numbers.

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[10] Productivity Commission. (2011). 'Caring for older Australians, report no. 53, final inquiry report', Vol 2, Canberra, 367.

[11] Joanna Briggs Institute (2010). 'Effectiveness of Nurse Practitioners in residential aged care facilities: Evidence-based information sheets for health professionals, Best Practice 14(19)

A NATIONAL STRATEGY

A multifaceted approach is needed to address the broad range of workforce issues facing the aged care and services industry in Australia. An overarching aged care workforce strategy is needed. ACSA welcomes the work of the Aged Care Sector Committee's Aged Care Workforce Advisory Group in auditing Commonwealth-funded projects for developing the aged care workforce. This group, or a similar structure involving industry groups and other key stakeholders, would be well placed to play a leading role in shaping a broader strategy for developing the aged care workforce.

As well as considering the numbers of staff required to successfully support an ageing population, this strategy must also investigate new workplace models and the impact this will have on workforce composition and education. A strategy of this nature requires strong close cooperation between the aged care sector, government and other key stakeholders.

Recommendation 1

The development and implementation of an Aged Care Workforce Development Strategy. This strategy should consider:

- Improved workforce planning commencing with national and regional staffing projections based on population data that includes the contribution made by support and administration staff;
- A specific budget allocation to be made available for sector wide leadership development;
- The impact of emerging models of care on work patterns and the diversity of work roles;
- Action plans for improving attraction, recruitment and retention in aged care;
- Key partnerships and initiatives for building a skilled, modern and diverse aged care workforce.

BUILDING A SKILLED, MODERN AND DIVERSE WORKFORCE

Use of technology

In its 2011 report, the Productivity Commission stated that improved information and communication technology would have an impact on both quality and productivity within the aged care sector.[12] To derive the full return on investment in information and communication technology, staff skills and training must also be updated. Success in these changes will rely heavily on the ability of aged care managers to successfully lead change. Furthermore, investment in technology and the staff skills to go with it is not a one-off event. Technology innovation in aged care has been continuously developing for the past two decades in both residential and community aged care. The rate of change is only likely to accelerate in years to come, raising both opportunities and challenges for the industry.

Given the increasing importance of technology, it makes sense to include competencies in technology as part of the curriculum for all certificate and degree courses for nursing and care professionals. The technology skills of aged care workers could also be increased through workshops and the creation of minimum standards for technology. As the sector employs a high proportion of women aged over 45, and a growing rate of women aged over the age of 55, educational programs must be developed with this demographic in mind.

Government investment in high quality technology solutions throughout the aged care sector will enable providers to introduce innovative models of care that allow aged care workers to better respond to the individual needs of older people while driving business efficiencies. Investing in the following priority areas – identified by ACSA members – will deliver the greatest benefits to the consumers and staff of aged care services:

- Increased investment in the roll out of broadband to enable agencies to deliver effective and efficient home care using the latest technology;
- Investing in training, change management and service models that incorporate new and emerging technology
- Technology-based education and skills development; and
- Using technology to improve aged care support systems, such as catering and maintenance.

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[12] Productivity Commission. (2011). Caring for older Australians, report no. 53, final inquiry report. Canberra, 374.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management skills are repeatedly raised as a priority in reports on Australia's aged care sector. However, those reports do little to define the management skills and competencies which are required or could be developed further.

'Management skills' can include a wide range of competencies including financial management, people management, high levels of emotional intelligence and resilience as well as skills in planning, marketing and coordination. Some aged care managers may be very good at financial management but poor at people management, while others may excel at measuring and improving quality of care but fail in organising and coordinating services and resources.

A significant initiative in this area is the Aged Care Leadership Development Project, a joint project of ACSA and LASA in partnership with Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (CS&HISC). This project aims to define leadership capability requirements and map a flexible development path for building leadership capability across the sector.[13] One of the project's most significant achievements has been the development of the Australian Aged Care Leadership Capability Framework, which includes a range of capabilities needed by aged care leaders. The project is also developing a Leadership Development Companion Guide.

A further major development of the CS&HISC in collaboration with the aged care industry is the Workforce Innovation Network project (WIN) which aims to operate '*at both the regional and individual enterprise level to provide aged care organisations with the opportunity to review their business models and skills mix in line with the [current] reform agenda*'. Ten regions across Australia have initiated individual local projects. An interim evaluation of the program showed that the networks have delivered impressive results, including improved collaboration and increased workforce capacity. There were also early indications that the majority of the networks established through the project would be self-sustaining.[14]

ACSA members have identified a further need for assistance to support aged care leaders and managers in supporting a multicultural workforce. This area of leadership development must include a dual focus on managing diverse workforces and encouraging staff from a diverse range of backgrounds to progress into leadership positions within the aged care sector.

Training

The proportion of aged care workers who had completed appropriate post-secondary training increased significantly between 2007 and 2012. The reasons for this development are multi-faceted and may well include the Australian Government's continuing financial support for aged care workers undertaking training.

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[13] Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council. (2014a). Aged care leadership development project.

Retrieved 11 August, 2014, from http://www.cshisc.com.au/develop/innovation/aged-care-innovation project-activities/aged-care-leadership-development-project/

[14] Nous Group (2014). 'Evaluation of the Aged Care Workforce Innovation Network: Final Report', Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, 6,7.

However, despite the substantial support for education and training there has been consistent criticism of the quality of some aged care training programs, with both the Productivity Commission[15] and the Department of Employment[16] expressing concerns. In a review of training for aged care workers, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)[17] came to the conclusion that "many training programs are too short and provide insufficient time to enable the proper development of all of the competency and skills that people should be gaining from the training; and the workplace requirements for skills development and assessment are not clear enough". ASQA recommended that minimum work placement hours and units of competency be mandated, the principles of assessment be revised and the standards of assessment be increased and benchmarks be developed for a range of indicators related to training.

In recognition of the expected expansion of the industry and its workforce, the continuation of quality education and training program is essential for the maintenance of quality care. Suggestions for improvement have included improving the capacity and robustness of the TAFE system and introducing more stringent measures for monitoring quality of small education providers with the possible introduction of a rating system. While ACSA does not support a rating system, it does endorse the ASQA recommendation for mandated units of competency to ensure that people who complete relevant certificate courses are ready to work in aged care.

ACSA members have also identified the following further priorities for aged care training:

- *Cultural awareness:* There is often a cultural 'mismatch' between aged care staff and consumers as a result of background or generational differences. Training that addresses these cultural differences would be very useful, particularly with the trend towards increasing numbers of migrant workers.
- *'Upskilling' to respond to high care needs*: In response to the increasing acuity of aged care consumers, funding for training should focus on increasing the capacity of staff to respond to high care needs. This training should focus on increasing competencies in the areas of palliative care, allied health, medication management and wound care.

Changing work roles and industrial instruments

The current reforms and emerging models of care provide further impetus for developing new work roles in aged care. As a result, there is a strong need for modern, flexible industrial instruments and work arrangements, including more competitive employment packages for people working in aged care.

Over the coming years ACSA will focus on providing evidence from members to the Fair Work Commission's Modern Award Review as a priority. This will help to ensure that the possible adoption of common clauses does not result in the loss of industry-specific provisions that support existing

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[15] Productivity Commission. (2011). Caring for older Australians, report no. 53, final inquiry report. Canberra.

[16] Australian Government Department of Employment. (November 2013). Labour Market Rating ANZSCO 4233-12 Nursing Support Worker, Australia Canberra: Department of Employment.

[17] Australian Skills Quality Authority. (2013). Training for aged and community care in Australia: A national strategic review of registered training organisations offering aged and community care sector training. Canberra: Australian Skills Quality Authority, i.

services and sector viability. This work will be resource intensive, as will be the work required to modernise industrial arrangements to enable providers to respond to the current reform agenda, particularly the move to a consumer driven model.

The other key focus for ACSA will be building member capability to design contemporary enterprise bargaining agreements that will enable them to effectively redesign new roles and build responsiveness to consumers within their organisations. The sector will need support and resources to assist in delivering on this approach as a result of the need to apply significant resources to the Modern Award Review process.

Recommendation 2

That industry and the Australian Government partner to support technology initiatives for the aged care industry that:

- Enable agencies to deliver effective and efficient home care;
- Support implementation and uptake of technology through training and change management;
- Support education and skills development; and
- Improve delivery systems such as catering and maintenance.

Recommendation 3

That the Australian Government continue to provide funding support to joint initiatives between sector peak bodies and the industry training bodies to develop leadership competencies and capabilities in aged care. Future initiatives should include strategies for aged care leaders and managers to support a culturally diverse workforce and to assist staff from culturally diverse backgrounds to move into leadership roles.

Recommendation 4

That certificate courses related to aged care include mandated units of competency.

Recommendation 5

That the Australian Government partners with industry to build the capability of providers to review and design enterprise bargaining agreements to effectively respond to a consumer driven care environment.

ATTRACTION, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Attraction

The current image of aged care services does not adequately reflect the value that the sector adds to the community and the variety of roles available within the sector. To attract and recruit greater numbers of skilled staff, it is necessary to promote both these factors.

Initiatives to enhance the image of the aged care sector as a place to work need to build on evidence, such as research that highlights the positive impact of aged care services on the nation's economy and social environment. This 'big-picture' evidence needs to be reinforced by anecdotal 'good news' stories from aged care provider groups and state or regional alliances. Mission based organisations also have the potential to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive market place by appealing to the vision and stories that underpin their operations.

The image of aged care as a place to work can also be strengthened by promoting the breadth of different roles within the sector, as well as the opportunities for professional development, career progression and flexible work arrangements available in aged care work environments. It is important that the industry continues to review opportunities to enhance professional development and career progression for staff.

Recruitment

The costs of recruitment to the aged care sector are high and in some parts of Australia, particularly rural and remote areas, there are already skills shortages. Increased competition for staff in coming years will only heighten the challenges of recruitment.

Aged care providers must grow their workforces from existing pools of potential staff while expanding into new areas for staff growth. While the older profile of the aged care workforce is often viewed as a liability, there are many positives that can be taken from this. A recent report on the community aged care workforce concluded that the sector stands to benefit from an ageing workforce because 'mid-life women' already make up the majority of the people working in aged care and they have 'relatively high' retention rates.[18] The aged care sector has experienced success in attracting and retaining women aged over 45. It therefore makes sense for the industry to intentionally target older workers in its recruitment initiatives.

While building on the strengths of the older workforce, aged care providers can improve recruitment by developing strategies that appeal to other groups of workers, such as students and early career workers. There is a strong opportunity for aged care services that can successfully appeal to these less traditional workforce sources. In particular, the aged care sector has a good opportunity to capitalise on the short-term oversupply of graduate nurses, mentioned above, by developing programs that include mentoring and support, positive professional development and opportunities for career progression. Partnerships with the acute hospital sector offer opportunities to expand the aged care industry's engagement with graduate registered nurses and will support future workforce growth.

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[18] Austen, S., Mcmurray, C., Lewin, G., & Ong, R. (2013). 'Retaining workers in an ageing population: Insights from a representative aged and community care organisation', *Australasian Journal on Ageing, 32*(1), 41-46. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-612.2012.00599.

It makes strategic sense for aged care providers to seek to recruit workers from other areas, too. Appealing to school students through traineeships, volunteering and work experience programs will help to secure the sector's workforce for the future. At the same time, recruiting workers from related fields with similar skillsets – such as childcare and disability services – and allied health workers from non-aged care backgrounds will not only broaden the workforce field but also help to address the demand for increased skills in aged care. For these initiatives to be successful, however, there must be adequate infrastructure and supports in place to ensure new staff from these groups have a positive experience in aged care. In addition, the growth of brokered service provision and casual work across the community services, disability and aged care sectors may present opportunities for individuals to work across different employers and sectors. This may present challenges, but it also offers the prospect of streamlining work practices based on experiences in other sectors, and the ability for workforces to shift as areas of emphasis change.

As well as recruiting formal staff, aged care providers are faced with the challenge of recruiting volunteers. Research and anecdotal evidence has shown that volunteers in aged care settings help to boost social inclusion and even improve health outcomes for consumers, promoting general wellbeing and independence. Volunteering also provides significant benefits for volunteers, potentially leading to improved health in later life. More promotion of the benefits of volunteering may contribute to reduced age-related illness and increase the availability of volunteers.

The Productivity Commission found that although volunteers make an important contribution to aged care services throughout Australia, there are several significant cost barriers to volunteer recruitment within the sector. They include the costs of recruitment, obtaining police checks, training and managing the rosters of volunteers. The Commission recommended that to overcome these barriers, government funding for volunteer programs in aged care should consider the costs associated with volunteer administration, regulation and training for volunteers.[19]

Retention

A number of factors related to employment conditions have been shown to improve retention and productivity among aged care workers. These conditions include training and development, job status and recognition, job satisfaction and developing career prospects.

Current research shows that aged care workers are already highly committed to care recipients. Job satisfaction in aged care appears to be generated by the nature of the work itself and the capacity that workers feel to be able to carry out their work effectively. In residential aged care employees feel confident in their own skills to do the work, are able to use their skills and are provided with training. They also feel like they receive the respect they deserve although Personal Care Attendants (PCAs) felt less satisfied with this aspect of their work than other workers.[20] The major area of frustration with the work is not having sufficient time to spend with each care recipient. Community aged care employees have consistently recorded higher job satisfaction than residential aged care employees.[21] They were particularly satisfied with work life balance, teamwork, and the work itself. They were most dissatisfied with their wages, job security and opportunities to develop their skills.

A key period for determining job satisfaction and retention success is the first 12 months of employment. Aged care providers that do not already do so, should consider introducing formal

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[19] Productivity Commission. (2011). Caring for older Australians, report no. 53, final inquiry report, vol 2, Canberra, 344-45.

[20] King, D., Mavromaras, K., He, B., Healy, J., Macaitis, K., Moskos, M., .Wei, Z. (2013). 'The aged care workforce 2012 final report'. Canberra: DoHA, 36.

[21] King, D., Mavromaras, K., He, B., Healy, J., Macaitis, K., Moskos, M., .Wei, Z. (2013). 'The aged care workforce 2012 final report'. Canberra: DoHA, 95.

programs, such as mentoring and extended induction, to assist new workers to adjust to their roles. As an added benefit, mentoring programs also recognise the valuable experience of more experienced workers.

Other initiatives to improve retention throughout the sector include:

- Flexible rostering to accommodate caring and family responsibilities;
- Increased opportunities for full time roles for those who wish to make a career in aged care;
- Greater flexibility in leave arrangements, including portable leave within the sector;
- Greater use of assistive technology;
- Using fringe benefit tax options to provide health and wellness activities;
- Developing succession planning to successfully transfer skills and knowledge.

Career pathways

Career pathways are integral to retention strategies and provide an excellent opportunity to work with training providers to develop skills and competencies needed now and into the future. The aged care sector needs to work closely with vocational education and training providers as well as higher education providers to ensure that this happens. The current review of industry input into training packages provides ACSA with the chance to inform the future structure of the vocational education sector.

Some aged care organisations have developed their own internal processes for promoting career development and opportunities for their employees. However, there is a need for sector-wide development programs that identify career pathways between different services, in both community and residential care settings. Strategies for achieving this include:

- Mapping possible pathways so there are clear sequences of courses, qualifications and experience that meet current and future skill needs;
- Working with registered training organisations to the skills sets that will enable staff to work across the aged care and disability sectors; and
- Creating clear pathways between home and community services and residential services.

While qualifications are an important input when considering career pathways, it is also important to acknowledge the role of skill sets in training packages which lead to a particular competency rather than a qualification. One way to develop options for career advancement is by allowing for flexible workers to gain skills in particular competencies to meet particular needs, such as providing appropriate care and support to people with dementia.

One option for promoting the development of skills is 'embedding' educational infrastructure within aged care services. So far this has been achieved in some areas of Australia in teaching aged care facilities developed in partnership with universities and other tertiary institutions. The true benefits of this model are realised when the teaching facilities connect with other facilities in the local area – and further afield, using teleconferencing technology – under a 'hub and spoke' model to share the educational benefits.

Recommendation 6

That, in line with the Productivity Commission's previous recommendation, funding for volunteers in aged care focus on addressing the costs of:

- Administration and regulation; and
- Training and support needs.

Recommendation 7

That aged care providers and industry bodies work with registered training organisations to identify career progression opportunities with matching educational pathways for people working in aged care.

CONCLUSION

The projected demand for aged care services in coming decades means that the aged care workforce must grow significantly. For a sector already encountering low competition for vacancies and skills shortages, this represents several challenges.

However, aged care services cannot simply grow the existing workforce. The growth in competition for staff, the increasing focus on wellness and the rising acuity of aged care consumers mean that new models must be found. The sector must work with government and other stakeholders to develop an overarching strategy for future workforce growth.

Underpinning this strategy must be a series of broad ranging initiatives to improve the use of technology, leadership development, skills and quality of training in diverse, vibrant and modern work environments. There must also be efforts to improve attraction, recruitment and retention.

The aged care sector cannot achieve these goals acting in isolation. Individual providers and industry groups must continue to work together and in partnership with government, other industries, education providers and skills groups to build the aged care workforce of the future.

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