

Q1) Why does an aged care workforce strategy matter?

Australia's population is ageing and with an estimated 5.8 million people aged ≥ 65 years expected by 2013¹ and 9.6 million by 2064², it is anticipated that the aged care sector will face considerable pressure. Trends in aged care indicate an increased prevalence of complex acute and chronic diseases, multiple co-morbidities and poly-pharmacy. An increased number of people suffering from dementia, mental health conditions and/or other high level behavioural disorders is also evident.

Workforce supply issues have also resulted in the substitution of Registered Nurses with unregulated workers (however titled) in residential aged care facilities. Registered Nurses (RNs) are appropriately skilled in providing quality and safe care through high level clinical assessment and decision making, as well as delegation and supervision of care provided by enrolled nurses (ENs) and unlicensed care workers. However, the current nursing workforce is itself ageing and faces projected shortages. This will make it even more challenging to address the issues facing the aged care sector in the near future if more nurses, with the necessary skills, are not attracted to the sector. It is therefore essential that an aged care workforce strategy is developed and implemented to address these challenges. This strategy must include, AI, robotics and technology to support the nursing workforce of the future.

An unregulated workforce of assistants in nursing (however titled) introduces uncertainty to the workforce. A workforce strategy with defined parameters for all aged care workers from nurse practitioners to AINs is necessary to provide certainty to those receiving care and their families.

Finally, a new strategy must address the impact of the introduction of the NDIS on the aged care workforce, as the growing demand in the disability sector is looking for similar skillsets that are valued in aged care.

Q2) What practical difference do you hope a strategy will make?

An aged care strategy should provide career pathways in nursing that ensure quality care, fewer adverse events and assurance for residents and families. ACN believes this can be achieved through the following improvements:

- National regulation of assistants in nursing (however titled).
- Ensuring (at a minimum) an RN is on-site at all times to supervise the tasks delegated and performed by EN's and unregulated care workers.³
- Greater utilisation of nurse-led models of care.
- Strategies for promoting an aged care specialisation at university and attracting new graduates to aged care.
- Strategies for retaining the current workforce.
- Building and securing an appropriately skilled workforce, as well as identifying and utilising appropriate sources of workforce supply.⁴
- Appropriate training and education in specialised aged care areas such as BPSD, end of life, palliative, mental health and critical care.
- Encouraging the use and sharing of digital records to reduce errors and time spent by family members discussing their relative's health and aged care needs.
- Ensuring safety and security measures for aged care workers and residents.⁵
- Ensuring the nurse practitioner role is effectively utilised in aged care.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 'Projection Results – Australia' (2013). cat. no. 3222.0, ABS, Canberra, Accessed from: [http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3222.0main+features52012%20\(base\)%20to%202101](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3222.0main+features52012%20(base)%20to%202101)

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 'Ageing' (2016). Accessed from: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/ageing/>

³ Australian College of Nursing, 2016, 'The role of registered nurses in residential aged care facilities - Position statement'. Canberra, ACT. Accessed from: https://www.acn.edu.au/sites/default/files/representation/position_statements/the_role_of_the_rn_in_residential_aged_care.pdf

⁴ National Aged Care Alliance (NACA). 'Position Paper: Aged Care Workforce' (2017). Accessed from: <http://www.naca.asn.au/PDF/NACA%20Aged%20Care%20Workforce%20Position%20Paper.pdf>

⁵ Roche, M. A., Diers, D., Duffield, C., & Catling-Paull, C. J. (2010). Violence toward nurses, the work environment, and patient outcomes. *Journal Of Nursing Scholarship*, 42 (1), 13-22. doi:10.1111/j.1547-5069.2009.01321.x
http://www.academia.edu/26818535/Violence_Toward_Nurses_the_Work_Environment_and_Patient_Outcomes

- Decreasing the amount and volume of unnecessary documentation that takes nurses away from direct care (particularly the RN)

Q3) How do you think a strategy can contribute to meeting future needs in aged care?

In terms of building an aged care nursing workforce of sufficient capacity in the future, the strategy can provide specific guidance on suitable skill mix level and numbers; training requirements around increasingly complex care requirements for older people; methods for attracting and recruiting aged care nurses (e.g. positive practice environments which include appropriate remuneration, career pathways, flexible hours for work life balance, workforce diversity with more experienced nurses from ATSI, CALD and LGBTIQ+ communities);^{6,7} and methods for building an aged care workforce in underserved areas (e.g. transforming the image of nursing in rural and remote areas).

In terms of identifying sources of workforce supply, the strategy must be aware of potential competition from the NDIS workforce who are themselves aiming to build future capacity.⁸ Other sources of workforce supply need to be considered such as nurses from overseas and older nurses.⁹ The strategy should look into the retention of older nurses as a growing number are leaving the workforce for financial, social and health reasons, taking with them significant experience and invaluable knowledge. Specific guidance is required on addressing age-related stigmas and technological challenges potentially experienced by this nursing demographic.¹⁰

Lastly, there should be no tolerance for violence, bullying, elder abuse and neglect in aged care facilities. Given the growing prevalence of such incidents, compulsory reporting, appropriate penalties and mechanisms for preventions should be addressed in future strategies. Guidance on appropriate training and education on reporting and responding to elder abuse is necessary.¹¹

Q4) Tell us what you see as the changes on the horizon that aged care needs to be ready for, and how you think the workforce strategy can contribute to meeting these future needs (in the context of an ageing population calling on aged care services in a variety of settings)?

Aged care needs to be prepared for an ageing population and the demands resulting from multiple co-morbidities, complex acute and chronic diseases, as well as poly-pharmacy. Nurses as front-line workers in aged care will bear the impact of these demands. As a result there is a growing need for nurses specialising in aged care in which the national strategy must address. Nurse practitioners as clinical and professional leaders are capable of working in a wide variety of areas include aged care, chronic disease management and mental health. Greater utilisation of nurse practitioners who have significant clinical expertise and advanced training should be on the agenda.

Additionally, substitution of RN roles in general areas of residential aged care with unlicensed health workers has been documented. This is of particular concern as aged care facilities are increasingly presented with cases of BPSD and are often inadequately resourced in terms of clinical and management skills to meet the complex needs of residents with Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (BPSD). BPSD care extends beyond high-level physical and lifestyle care as symptoms are wide-ranging requiring specialised knowledge and skill. More so, aged

⁶ National Aged Care Alliance (NACA). 'Position Paper: Aged Care Workforce' (2017). Accessed from: <http://www.naca.asn.au/PDF/NACA%20Aged%20Care%20Workforce%20Position%20Paper.pdf>

⁷ National Aged Care Alliance (NACA). 'Position Paper: Aged Care Workforce' (2017). Accessed from: <http://www.naca.asn.au/PDF/NACA%20Aged%20Care%20Workforce%20Position%20Paper.pdf>

⁸ National Disability Services. 'Building an NDIS Workforce of the Future' (2017). Accessed from: <https://www.nds.org.au/news/building-an-ndis-workforce-of-the-future>

⁹ National Aged Care Alliance. 'Position Paper: Aged Care Workforce' (2017). Accessed from: <http://www.naca.asn.au/PDF/NACA%20Aged%20Care%20Workforce%20Position%20Paper.pdf>

¹⁰ Duffield C, Graham E, Donoghue J, Griffith R, Bichel-Findlay J & Dimitrelis S. 'Why older nurses leave the workforce and the implications of them staying' (2014) *Journal of Clinical Nursing*.

¹¹ Aged Care Crisis (2015). 'Elder Abuse'. Accessed from: <https://www.agedcarecrisis.com/care-issues/elder-abuse>

care facilities often lack access to specialist nursing and medical services that need to be addressed in future aged care strategies.¹²

Aged care also needs to be prepared for persistent and projected shortages in underserved areas, particularly mental health and rural and remote areas where there are much higher rates of turnover and temporary hire as well as overall instability and use of unregulated workers. These areas are often poorly perceived by the nursing profession with a general lack of educational support, clinical supervision, incentives and mentorship capacity. A focus on transforming the negative image of aged care nursing as ‘unclean, basic, repetitive and less exciting’ is required.¹³ Specifically, a national strategy promoting and presenting aged care nursing as a challenging and professionally satisfying career pathway that provides a broad scope of clinical skills is necessary to attract nurses to underserved areas.

Q5) Tell us what is working well in the aged care workforce (across the industry, at provider or service level or through place-based initiatives) and where future opportunities lie.

The Geriatric Rapid Acute Care Evaluation (GRACE) model of care, which has been employed at both the Hornsby Kuring-gai Hospital Service and at Western Health in Victoria, has shown positive effects in enhancing the aged care journey of residents through collaboration with the GP, hospital and aged care facility. It has shown demonstrated reduced hospital admissions, length of stay in hospital and access block.¹⁴

Future opportunities

In Australia, autonomous registered nurse prescribing only falls within the scope of nurse practitioners. To make better use of nursing resources there is also scope to use RN skills and knowledge in prescribing medication. In addition to supporting more efficient use of limited health resources, RN prescribing could: reduce demand on traditional prescribers and enhance access to medicines (particularly within disadvantaged, underserved and harder to reach communities); improve continuity of care; contribute to quality use of medicines and improve the multidisciplinary management of chronic and complex conditions.¹⁵

Although still in its early stages, the nurse navigator model has received positive feedback anecdotally in Queensland, leading to interest from other states who will look to implement similar models in the near future. The nurse navigator model has the potential to make a positive impact in aged care (see Q7).

ACN believes that future opportunities also lie in developing innovative nurse-led care models that address the growing prevalence of chronic disease and utilise the expertise of nurses in these models. These can include the use of nurse practitioners working to their full scope of practice.

Q6) What do you think are the key factors the Taskforce needs to consider to attract and retain staff?

Aged care nursing faces a workforce shortage risk as early as 2025.¹⁶ Despite efforts to date, there are still many negative perceptions about working in aged care. These have been publicised in professional literature and the

¹² ACN (2017). ‘ACN submission to the Australian Government Department of Health on Specialist Dementia Care Units – Consultation Paper’

¹³ Christopher, S., Chiarella, M., and Waters, D. (2015). Can Generation Y nurses supply areas of shortage? New graduate challenges in today’s job market. *Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing* (Online), 33(2), 35.

¹⁴ NSW Government (2018) ‘Geriatric Rapid Acute Care Evaluation (GRACE) Model of Care’ Accessed from: <https://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/ie/projects/grace-model-of-care>

¹⁵ Australian Government Department of Health, ‘Registered Nurse / Midwife Prescribing Symposium: Final Outcomes Report’ (2017).

¹⁶ Health Workforce Australia (HWA) 2014: Australia’s Future Health Workforce – Nurses Detailed

media with aged care nursing being described as ‘dirty’, ‘basic’, ‘repetitive’ and ‘less exciting’ compared to other nursing careers.¹⁷

Attracting nurses to aged care facilities in rural areas is very difficult, particularly younger nurses who usually seek opportunities in metropolitan areas because of the perceived ability to work in a more challenging area. Pay disparity compounds this. However, these younger nurses aren’t aware that nurses in aged care are readily called upon to use their diagnostic skills and are presented with a variety of challenges in the workplace.

Attracting nurses to aged care must include a rejuvenation of the image of nursing and show the rewarding nature of the work, particularly the role of Nurse Practitioner, which sits at the pinnacle of the nursing profession.¹⁸ In particular, being able to demonstrate how diverse and interesting a career in nursing is would make it easier to market and present to undergraduates and high school children contemplating their career choices. This is even more important in rural and regional areas where investment is needed to attract and retain a high calibre rural nursing workforce to meet the increasing health care needs of communities outside of major cities and regional centres.

ACN has had direct experience with providing scholarships to students from rural areas and those from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background and found that there is a lower withdrawal rate from study by those who receive scholarship support.

Q7) What areas of knowledge, skills and capability need to be strengthened within the aged care workforce?

Boosting the competencies and skills of the existing workforce requires a change in how education and training is delivered and regulated. This applies to both the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system as well as the university sector. ACN is addressing known competency/skills gaps with continuous professional development (CPD) courses designed to provide nurses with practical, up-to-date skills they can apply immediately in the workplace. Further collaboration between service providers and educators is needed to ensure the future workforce is equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to be effective in the workplace.

The aged care workforce must be equipped to respond to dementia, mental health and end-of-life issues in the workplace as well as cognitive function, deteriorating mobility and assistance with ADL’s which require human assistance. Specialist roles in dementia are required to deal with increasing prevalence in society.

As the frontline staff dealing with mortality every day, the aged care workforce needs a renewed focus on ensuring their health and well-being is recognised and supported. The importance of improving emotional intelligence to increase resilience and retention within aged care cannot be underestimated.

Investment in nurse navigators within aged care, particularly community aged care, is an opportunity to strengthen and improve communication between the industry and its consumers. Nurse navigators are RNs that coordinate patient care for patients with high and complex needs across the breadth of the health sector.¹⁹ Nurse navigators help these patients in identifying and accessing appropriate services during a patient’s “entire health care journey, rather than focusing on just a specific disease or condition.”²⁰ Nurse navigators will play an important role in the future by being the one constant in a patient’s health journey and providing a central point of contact that can

¹⁷ AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADVANCED NURSING Volume 33 Issue 2 37 SCHOLARLY PAPER

¹⁸ ACN White paper

¹⁹ Department of Health, Queensland 2015. Nurse Navigator Fact Sheet.
https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/143486/nninfosheet.pdf

²⁰ Department of Health, Queensland 2015. Nurse Navigator Fact Sheet.
https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/143486/nninfosheet.pdf

navigate the complexities of health systems and provide information to the patient as they need it. Nurse navigators have the potential to play an important role in an aged care system which is well-known for its complexities.

Q8) What do you think is needed to improve and better equip the workforce to meet individual needs and expectations?

Australia's health and aged care systems must be supported by a nurse workforce with competence to provide appropriate and safe care to more effectively meet the communication, dietary, psychosocial, cultural and spiritual needs of people from diverse backgrounds such as CALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and LGBTIQ+ communities.

To develop a competent nurse workforce, cultural and linguistic diversity must be addressed at all levels of nursing education (VET, tertiary and continuing professional development courses).²¹ From a recruitment perspective, improving cultural diversity within the workforce by attracting nurses from minority populations will improve health equity in the health care system.²² A more diverse nursing workforce is able to provide improved access for all populations to health resources and health care.²³

Investing in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce creates a range of cross sector regional and national benefits, including improved education, training and employment outcomes.²⁴

Another area that should be examined is the importance of using research and data about care outcomes to inform best practice and improve the transparency of the industry. There is a need to change the mindset of the aged care industry so that it shares best practice and focuses on accountability and transparency of data.

Q9) What is needed for leadership, mindset and accountability to innovate and extend new ways of working tailored to the needs of older people who use aged care services, their families, carers and communities.

Increased consumer participation in the individual planning process with health professionals is necessary to ensure that all needs are met for users of aged care services. In particular, the ability to match a nurse's skills to patient needs leads to improved care.²⁵ The successful use of nurse navigators in the health care system is an example of innovation that can be applied to the aged care workforce.

Care planning and profiling of people to inform models of care is an emerging area in aged care. For residential aged care, this includes planning care over days, night and weekends. These models of care need to emphasise the relationship between staff and consumers, with a focus on quality of life, rather than purely clinical care.

²¹ Westerman, T. (2010). Engaging Australian Aboriginal youth in mental health services. *Australian Psychologist*, 45(3), 212–222.

²² Williams SD, Hansen K, Smithey M, et al. Using Social Determinants of Health to Link Health Workforce Diversity, Care Quality and Access, and Health Disparities to Achieve Health Equity in Nursing. *Public Health Reports*. 2014;129(Suppl 2):32-36.

²³ Williams SD, Hansen K, Smithey M, et al. Using Social Determinants of Health to Link Health Workforce Diversity, Care Quality and Access, and Health Disparities to Achieve Health Equity in Nursing. *Public Health Reports*. 2014;129(Suppl 2):32-36.

²⁴ Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives, 'Position Paper: Uniqueness of Our Workforce' <<http://catsinam.org.au/static/uploads/files/uniqueness-of-our-workforce-position-statement-endorsed-march-2016-wfliyceizieu.pdf>>.

²⁵ Optimal Nurse Staffing to Improve Quality of Care and Patient Outcomes 2015. Avalere Health. <http://lists.ana.org/img/lists/marketing/2015/1221/NurseStaffingWhitePaper.pdf>

New models of care should focus on the consumer journey, and improving connections between home care, residential care, primary care, sub-acute care, functional health and financial and retirement planning. Workforce planning and skills mix modelling is emerging as an industry-wide competency that can be strengthened to ensure clearer line of sight between existing and emerging business models, their consumer profiles, individual/aggregate care plans and the workforce decisions being made.

A sustainable aged care workforce will need nurses with both broad and narrow skill sets. This will promote an agile and innovative workforce that can adapt to changing circumstance. The future workforce will need to be flexible and responsive. The use of nurse navigators (see Q7) in care coordination can help the elderly and their families negotiate the complex aged care system.

Data analytics and nursing informatics specialists could become crucial components of an aged care workforce strategy, providing valuable information on where agile nurses can be efficiently matched to areas of health demands. Informative data analytics could instill confidence in aged care organisations around the composition of their workforce structure.

Lastly, transparency is paramount and there is a clear opportunity for the industry to step ahead of community expectations and establish its own code of practice. This could define standards of quality and safety in a “living well context”. By focusing on aspirational expectations of the industry it could go beyond matters of compliance in addressing consumer-led approaches, community engagement, board governance, best practice sharing, industry benchmarking and workforce accreditation.

Q10) What should aged care providers consider with workforce planning?

In residential aged care, the median age of nurses in 2016 was 47 for RNs and 50 for ENs.²⁶ Therefore, there is a high probability of large-scale retirements across the industry over the next 10-15 years. Not having strong leadership and succession planning in place could put organisations at risk of “negative financial and patient care repercussions”.²⁷

To significantly improve nurse retention of younger and less experienced nurses, succession planning and transition support systems must be a focal point of workforce planning. These should aim to support all nurses in transition including: newly registered nurses; early/mid-career nurses; internationally qualified nurses; and nurses re-entering the aged care system.

Operationally, any workforce structure in RACFs must include a registered nurse working and available around-the-clock. Only RNs have the ability to provide, or supervise the complex care necessary for the growing level of “co-morbidities associated with physical and cognitive decline”.²⁸

²⁶ Department of Health 2016. National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey – The Aged Care Workforce, 2016.

https://agedcare.health.gov.au/sites/g/files/net1426/f/documents/03_2017/nacwcs_final_report_290317.pdf

²⁷ Sherman R. & Pross E., (2010). Growing future nurse leaders to build and sustain health work environments at the unit level. *Online Journal of Issues in Nursing* **15** (1), 4.

²⁸ Australian College of Nursing (2016). The role of registered nurses in residential aged care facilities position statement. https://www.acn.edu.au/sites/default/files/representation/position_statements/the_role_of_the_rm_in_residential_aged_care.pdf

An appropriate skill-mix with a higher proportion of RNs is crucial to delivering appropriate care and reducing patient morbidity and mortality.^{29,30} RACFs are capable of replicating these scenarios and should be regulated to ensure appropriate staffing levels that stipulate, at a minimum, at least one RN be on-site at all times.³¹

There is great scope for utilising nurse-led services and clinics across Australia's health and aged care settings, particularly in the prevention and management of chronic disease.

Lastly, a workforce strategy must include the ability to collect and analyse workforce data. The strategy should focus on obtaining meaningful data without creating an onerous burden on service providers.

Q11) In undertaking its work, the Taskforce has been asked to have regard to recent submissions to and reports of relevant inquiries on aged care workforce matters, and government responses. If you want the Taskforce to draw on a submission you have made, or evidence or materials you want to draw to our attention, please provide the details in the text box below.

The Australian College of Nursing has previously submitted the following responses to consultations relating to Australia's aged care sector workforce:

- [Australian Law Reform Commission – Elder Abuse Inquiry: response to Discussion Paper \(DP 83\) December 2016](#)
- [Australian Government Department of Health – Aged Care Legislated Review consultation](#)
- [Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs – inquiry into the future of Australia's aged care sector workforce](#)
- [NSW Legislative Council – Inquiry into Elder Abuse in NSW](#)

Q12) Any other information or comments

ACN would add the following points to its submission for further consideration:

- The use of robotics and artificial intelligence is becoming more prevalent in health care and should be considered as an enhancement to the aged care workforce.

²⁹ Aiken, L.H., Sloane, D.M., Bruyneel, L., Van den Heede, K., Griffiths, P., Busse, R., Diomidous, M., Kinnuen, J., Kózka, M., Lesaffre, E., McHugh, M., Moreno-Casbas, M., Rafferty, A.M., Schwendimann, R., Scott, P.A., Tishelman, C., van Achterberg, T. & Sermeus, W. 2014, 'Nurse staffing and education and hospital mortality in nine European countries: a retrospective observational study', *The Lancet*, vol. 383, no. 9931, pp. 1824-1830.

³⁰ Duffield, C., Diers, D., O'Brien, L., Aisbett, C., Roche, M., King, M. & Aisbett, K. 2011, 'Nursing staffing, nursing workload, the work environment and patient outcomes', *Applied Nursing Research*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 244-255.

³¹ Australian College of Nursing (2016). The role of registered nurses in residential aged care facilities position statement. https://www.acn.edu.au/sites/default/files/representation/position_statements/the_role_of_the_rm_in_residential_aged_care.pdf

- An environment and workforce that has a culture of innovation is essential to providing the care that consumers will require.
- Clinical nursing is physically demanding, which leads to some nurses moving to part-time work as they age.
 - This in turn can lead to disadvantages with superannuation as they approach retirement and as such, some nurses find alternative employment. The government should look at addressing this problem and develop strategies to keep experienced nurses in aged care for as long as possible.