



Australian College of Nursing

SECURING AUSTRALIA'S NURSE WORKFORCE

A PROPOSAL TO SUPPORT NURSING FOR
FUTURE GENERATIONS

SUBMISSION ON THE 2021-2022 FEDERAL BUDGET BY
THE AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF NURSING



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Pre-Budget Submission 2021-22:

Foreword

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) welcomes the opportunity to provide our budget proposals ahead of the 2021-2022 Budget.

The past year has seen devastating bushfires, a global pandemic and major social and economic upheaval for millions of Australians. Nowhere have these crises been felt more acutely than across the health and aged care sectors. As the single largest health professional workforce, nurses have witnessed and experienced the overwhelming situations faced by individuals, families, colleagues and organisations during these challenging times.

Nurses are on the frontline of their local communities. They work tirelessly to ensure our most vulnerable are safe and well-cared for across the lifespan, as well as delivering evidence-based health promotion and prevention. Australian nurses provide highly skilled, trusted care in a range of settings, and their leadership and expertise has been crucial through both the COVID-19 pandemic as well as in day-to-day health care settings.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, and the COVID-19 crisis in aged care has revealed systemic failures in the funding, regulation, workforce planning and risk management in the aged care sector. Nurses are best placed to address many of these issues, providing much needed leadership and coordination to ensure person-centred, streamlined and holistic care. ACN is committed to supporting nurses to drive much needed reforms in aged care; allowing older people greater autonomy, dignity and access to the care outcomes they value most.

These crises also strike at the heart of future challenges the nursing profession faces. Australia is expected to experience an estimated shortage of over 100,000 nurses by 2025¹. Furthermore, while we are seeing a significant number of students study to become

nurses, new graduates are seeing a lack of vacancies and experiencing challenges in entering the workforce due to poor transition practices². These problems will only be amplified over coming years as we witness the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and as many nurses approach retirement age. More than 50 per cent of the Australian nursing workforce is over the age of 45 years³.

Australia must work to support and encourage existing nurses, inspire the next generation and ensure that our nurses are working in the most effective way if Australians are to continue to receive the highest quality of health care. It is imperative that nurse leaders are supported towards achieving quality care and outcomes through evidence-based practice models that can generate a return on investment⁴.

ACN's submission provides a way forward in supporting the planning of the Australian nursing workforce and creating opportunities for both current and prospective nurses to achieve their potential. Our recommendations work to support both potential and future nurses through the creation of opportunities for scholarships and access to education, as well as ensuring that new nurses are supported during the challenges of their early career.

Our submission also ensures that we are utilising the existing nurse workforce to best support Australians as they age, whether in a residential aged care facility (RACF) or in their own home. An increasing demand for 'at home' care by older Australians will create a workforce challenge for nurses. ACN must now work to ensure that appropriate education is provided to nurses to support older Australians in the comfort of their own home. In addition, the Australian Government must engage with ACN and workforce planners to prevent simple redeployment of nurses as this may create workforce deficits in other health care settings. It is imperative that the Australian Government does not merely utilise unregulated health care workers to fill in deficits when building the 'at home' workforce. Instead

1 Health Workforce Australia (2014), Australia's Future Health Workforce – Nurses Detailed, HWA, accessed 20 January 2021

2 Tyndall DE, Scott ES, Jone LR, and Cook KJ (2019) 'Changing New Graduate Nurse Profiles and Retention Recommendations for Nurse Leaders', *The Journal of Nursing Administration*, 49(2), 93-98. doi:10.1097/NNA.0000000000000716.

3 World Health Organization (2017), National Health Workforce Accounts Data [online], Nursing Personnel, Available at: <https://apps.who.int/nhwportal/Home/Index>. [Accessed 27 January 2021].

4 Tucker S. (2014) 'Determining the Return on Investment for Evidence-Based Practice: An Essential Skill for All Clinicians'. *Worldviews Evid Based Nurs*, 11(5):271-3. doi: 10.1111/wvn.12055.

opportunities and appropriate educational support must be afforded to skilled nurses seeking but unable to find employment, including newly qualified graduates and those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

ACN is committed to our mission of advancing nurse leadership to enhance the health of all Australians. Nursing is highly regarded by the public as the 'most trusted profession' and has been for many years.

ACN welcomes the opportunity to continue its work with the Government to raise the profile of nursing and demonstrate the value nurses bring to Australia's health and aged care systems during 2021.

Mr Neil Haynes FACN (Hon.) FCA

Australian College of Nursing

Acting Chief Executive Officer

Summary of Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

Workforce Planning

ACN calls on the Australian Government to fund a transition to practice program (TTPP) for 2,000 newly registered nurses to be practice ready for \$3.5 million over three years.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Workforce Utilisation

ACN calls on the Australian Government to commit \$5.5 million over five years to conduct longitudinal research focused on improved utilisation of the nursing workforce in the home care setting.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Nursing Scholarship Programs

ACN calls on the Australian Government to fund the following additional scholarships over a four-year period:

- 3a. ACN seeks \$6 million to establish up to 200 scholarships for postgraduate studies for nurses working within the mental health area over four years.
- 3b. ACN seeks \$4.8 million to establish up to 160 scholarships for postgraduate studies for nurses working in community and primary health care areas.
- 3c. ACN seeks \$8 million to establish 260 scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate students in the aged care sector over four years.
- 3d. ACN seeks \$8.4 million to establish up to 120 additional scholarships for the Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme (PHMSS), which would include scholarships for postgraduate study.
- 3e. ACN recommends the Australian Government commit funding of \$720,000 over three years to establish the Leading Excellence through Advanced Practice (LEAP) Scholarship Program, delivering 150 scholarships to support the development of the next generation of Australian nurses.

Workforce Planning

RECOMMENDATION 1

ACN calls on the Australian Government to fund a transition to practice program (TTPP) for 2,000 newly registered nurses to be practice ready for \$3.5 million over three years.

PROPOSAL

ACN is seeking funding to build on existing work to provide a TTPP for newly registered nurses (RNs) across Australia.

ACN has been providing a successful national TTPP in partnership with an industry partner for the last two years. It has been designed to improve workplace culture and retention among graduate nurses as well as health outcomes.

The proposed national TTPP provides education and support to RNs to develop the skills to become clinical and professional leaders, while ensuring the provision of person-centred care that meets the complex needs of individuals and their support network.

RNs will have to meet identified workplace competencies and build a professional portfolio reflecting on their continued professional development. New graduates are encouraged by undertaking activities within the modules to become lifelong self-directed learners and to apply what they are learning to practice.

This program will be offered to 2,000 newly registered nurses. New graduate RNs who have not been successful in acquiring a funded workplace will be eligible for a placement. Participants will work independently through the program and have the option of four weeks of workplace learning experience with ACNs industry partners supported by ACNs external service providers (ESPs). ACN will offer mentor services to the new graduates and continuing professional development to the ESPs.

THE ISSUES

I. Newly registered nurses need more support

Research demonstrates that newly qualified RNs are often inadequately prepared for the workplace following formal nursing education^{5,6}. Newly qualified RNs refer to the workplace expectations as a 'reality shock'⁷. This is because RNs are expected to be 'work ready' after completing their pre-registration education, despite feeling overwhelmed by the responsibilities and 'life or death' decision-making⁸. Whilst most health professions have programs assisting new graduates to transition from their education to the work environment, not all newly qualified RNs have the opportunity to undertake a TTPP to support them into the workplace.

5 Walker A, Costa BM, Foster AM, et al. (2017) 'Transition and integration experiences of Australian graduate nurses: a qualitative systematic review'. *Collegian*, 24: 505–512.

6 Ankers MD, Parry YK and Barton CA. (2018) 'A phenomenological exploration of graduate nurse transition to professional practice within a transition to practice program'. *Collegian*, 25: 319–325.

7 Kramer M. (1974). *Reality shock: why nurses leave nursing*. St Louis, Missouri: C.V Mosby Company.

8 Gardiner I and Sheen J. (2016) 'Graduate nurse experiences of support: a review'. *Nurse Education Today*, 40: 7–12.



II. Insufficient positions for TTPP

Evidence demonstrates improved retention rates of newly qualified RNs who participate in a TTPP, as well as overall cost savings to the health system^{9,10}. Despite this, there are several reasons for a lack of available TTPP positions for new graduates¹¹. One significant factor is that employment opportunities for Australian graduate nurses are often limited by employers utilising international/visa RNs whom have specialised skills and experience, as outlined in the March 2016 Senate report, *A National Disgrace: The Exploitation of Temporary Work Visa Holders*¹².

In 2019, almost 70 per cent of applicants for graduate jobs in Western Australian (WA) public hospitals missed out. There were 2127 applications for 721 registered nurse, enrolled nurse and midwife graduate positions in that year. Over the past five years the number of nurses applying for graduate program positions increased from 1488 to 2112, according to WA Health; with the success rate falling from 62 to 33 per cent. As a result, the Nursing and Midwifery Office entered a five-year partnership with the National Health Service Grampian in Scotland (who are experiencing nurse shortages) to provide jobs for newly qualified registered nurses who could not find work in WA¹³. There is currently limited data available to identify what happens to RNs who do

not gain employment when they are newly registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA), however given the oversupply of graduates, TTPP opportunities should be available in underserved areas (e.g. rural and remote settings, aged care setting, primary care settings) to avoid turnover or loss of the workforce. These underserved areas often require complex and specialised skills leaving many nurses overwhelmed. At present, TTPPs for RNs are mostly provided in large public hospitals.

9 Hillman L and Foster RR. (2011) 'The impact of a nursing transitions programme on retention and cost savings'. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 19(1), 50-56.

10 Calleja P, Adonteng-Kissi B, and Romero B. (2019) 'Transition support for new graduate nurses to rural and remote practice: a scoping review'. *Nurse education today*, 76, 8-20.

11 Peters K and Jackson D (2013) 'New graduate nursing unemployment: A threat to the future health care workforce'. *Contemporary Nurse*, 44(2), 130-132

12 Parliament of Australia (2016). *A National Disgrace: The Exploitation of Temporary Work Visa Holders*. [online] Available at: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/temporary_work_visa/Report [Accessed 20 January 2021].

13 The West Australian (2019). Hundreds of WA nurses go to Britain to find work under Health Department deal. [online] Available at: <https://thewest.com.au/news/wa/wa-nurses-go-to-britain-to-find-work-under-health-department-deal-ng-b881140044z> [Accessed 20 January 2021].

Workforce Utilisation

RECOMMENDATION 2

ACN calls on the Australian Government to commit \$5.5 million over five years to conduct longitudinal research focused on improved utilisation of the nursing workforce in the home care setting.

PROPOSAL

ACN has identified the need for sustained and concerted funding from Government to support multidisciplinary research that will enable continuous improvements in clinical care in the home, and facilitate cost efficiency.

Specifically, ACN would like to partner with a university to design and undertake a mixed method **'pilot research program for aged care in the home'** to:

- Explore additional training requirements needed for the aged care workforce to provide care to older Australians in the home. This would be founded on a value-based approach, to ensure the nursing workforce is equipped to deliver outcomes that matter to patients¹⁴.
- Develop a national minimum dataset for the aged home nursing care setting to permit informed decision making amongst workforce planners with the consumer. Nationally consistent data collection is needed to inform workforce requirements, skill mix demands, models of care, service planning and future development of education, curriculum, and research/evaluation methodologies related to nursing practice.
- Identify the relationship between different levels of skilled nurses (tiered workforce) and the proportion of hospital emergency departments visits, hospital admissions, hospital re-admissions and/or transfer to residential care.

- Explore more effective utilisation of advanced practice nurses (APNs) in the home care setting. APNs have advanced education with requisite skills in professional leadership, clinical aged care, support of systems, and research. APNs are able to effectively and efficiently lead the nursing profession and health service delivery. Aged care nursing leadership will ensure that there is accountability, quality care, engagement and consultation within the home care setting.

BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

I. The needs and preferences of older Australians

Older Australians increasingly want to be cared for in their own homes to preserve their comfort, autonomy and independence. The COVID-19 crisis has only exacerbated many older Australians' reluctance to enter RACFs. Those accessing or using home nursing care often have complex health needs and many manage multiple chronic conditions. Currently there is no systematic or evidence-based strategy to offer a tiered nursing workforce approach to innovative aged care nursing assistance in the home. In consideration of the growth of our ageing population, aged home nursing care consumers will increase so the manner in which the nursing profession thinks about its workforce is critical.

14 Australian College of Nursing (2020). The Importance Of Value-Based Health Care To Patient-Centred, Fiscally Responsible Health Care And The Centrality Of Nursing To Its Authentic And Effective Functioning —A White Paper by ACN 2020. [online] Available at: <https://www.acn.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/white-paper-value-based-health-care.pdf> [Accessed 27 January 2021].



II. Demand for Government funded home care packages

Most Government funded packages for aged care are allocated to the residential care setting, however the home care setting is growing rapidly, reflecting consumer preferences for remaining in their homes for as long as possible. Currently there are two types of Government funded services providing care in the home: i) Commonwealth Home Support Programme (entry-level care); and ii) Home Care Packages (more complex care). While there are four levels of packages available (dependent on the individuals needs and circumstances) there are significant wait times. It was reported at 31 December 2018, roughly 123,000 senior citizens were waiting for a package at their approved level, with roughly 54,000 offered a lower-level package. The typical wait time for someone to enter the lowest level package at that timeframe was three to six months, and more than 12 months for all other levels^{15,16}.

III. Demand for a workforce in home care

In 2016, more than 366,000 aged care workers operated across the residential and community settings, including 240,000 direct care workers with most (roughly 154,000) in the residential sector.

Given the growing demand for care in the home, it is essential that a sustainable and skilled workforce is available to meet these demands into the future¹⁷.

IV. Nursing workforce dataset

The value of a nursing workforce dataset to aged care services provided in the home has gone largely unnoticed. In Australia, there is currently a lack of timely and accurate access to datasets relating to the nursing workforce across all levels of the health care system. In addition, there is a lack of transparency around workforce datasets employed by workforce planners on a national and international level. Nurse staffing is inherently linked to patient, nurse and health system outcomes. The availability of a national minimum dataset would benefit health services providing aged care in the home at the local, district, state and national levels; allow for appropriate allocation of a skilled workforce into the home; and undisputedly translate into improved patient care, and enhanced outcomes for both patients and nurses¹⁸.

V. Primary Care Research Funding

Less than one per cent of funding in the Medical Research Future Fund's 10-year investment plan has been committed to primary care research. To identify the key areas where the largest gains and best outcomes for patients can be made, funding for research is needed. Research should focus on how better use of the nursing workforce, particularly in coordination of care, can result in keeping patients well and able to access care in the community. This would in turn reduce unnecessary demand on hospital emergency departments and prevent hospital admission or re-admission. To identify the key areas where the largest gains and best outcomes for patients can be made, funding for research is needed. There have been numerous short-term pilot studies into reducing hospital costs through better coordination and integration of care, funded and led by the national, State and Territory Health Departments over the past 15–20 years. Noting that short-term pilots with limited funding are not able to fully measure the longer-term impacts that can result from improved preventive care, such as improved quality of life.

15 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). Aged Care. Canberra: AIHW. [online] Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/aged-care> [Accessed 19 January 2021]

16 Department of Health (2019). Home Care Packages Program Data Report, 2nd Quarter 2018–19.

17 Mavromaras K, Knight G, Isherwood L, Crettenden A, Flavel J, Karmel T et al. (2017). 2016 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey—the aged care workforce, 2016. Canberra: Department of Health.

18 Australian College of Nursing (2020). A National Minimum Dataset for Nursing Workforce Planning and Decision Making – A White Paper by ACN 2019. [online] Available at: <https://www.acn.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/white-paper-national-minimum-dataset.pdf> [Accessed 17 January 2021]

Nursing Scholarship Programs



RECOMMENDATION 3

ACN calls on the Australian Government to fund the following additional scholarships over a four-year period:

- 3a. ACN seeks \$6 million to establish up to 200 scholarships for postgraduate studies for nurses working within the mental health area over four years.
- 3b. ACN seeks \$4.8 million to establish up to 160 scholarships for postgraduate studies for nurses working in community and primary health care areas.
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- 3e. ACN recommends the Australian Government commit funding of \$720,000 over three years to establish the Leading Excellence through Advanced Practice (LEAP) Scholarship Program, delivering 150 scholarships to support the development of the next generation of Australian nurses.

PROPOSAL

With this experience, gaps in the nursing workforce, a shortage of skills and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, ACN believes now is the time to further invest in Australia's nursing workforce. ACN has seen a dramatic increase in demand for scholarship placements by nurses looking to improve their skills or offer services to underserved communities, and this investment will support securing the next generation of Australian nurses.

ACN's proposal covers **five key areas** on direct scholarship funding as follows:

3a. Mental Health Scholarships

ACN seeks \$6 million to establish up to 200 scholarships for postgraduate studies for nurses working within the mental health area over four years.

Under recent application rounds for Nursing and Midwifery Scholarships, there was significant interest from current nurses in undertaking postgraduate studies to specialise in mental health nursing¹⁹.

The Mental Health Productivity Commission report stated that mental health nurses are a critical part of the current mental health workforce, being the largest clinical occupational group dedicated to mental health. The number of mental health nurses practicing in Australia should be significantly increased and additional funding is likely to be needed to address the need for more mental health nurses in all parts of Australia²⁰.

3b. Community and Primary Health Care Scholarships

ACN seeks \$4.8 million to establish up to 160 scholarships for postgraduate studies for nurses working in community and primary health care areas.

ACN strongly advocates for nurses working in community and primary health care (C&PHC) to access postgraduate opportunities. These would develop their skills in preventive health, risk communication and behaviour change, health promotion, wellness, chronic disease management and wound care. Many C&PHC nurses lament the acute, hospital-centric focus of most nursing education in adequately preparing them for the increasingly complex needs of consumers in C&PHC settings. Scholarships for tailored training would enable C&PHC nurses to feel more prepared, confident and better equipped to provide primary health care in their communities.

Under recent application rounds for the Nursing and Midwifery Scholarships, there was significant interest from current nurses in undertaking postgraduate studies to specialise in community and primary health care nursing²¹.

¹⁹ Appendix A, 'Scholarships Application Dataset' [COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE].

²⁰ Productivity Commission (2020). Mental Health, Report no. 95, Canberra. [online]. Available at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report/mental-health.pdf> [Accessed 19 January 2021]

²¹ Appendix A, 'Scholarships Application Dataset' [COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE].

3c. Aged Care Nursing Scholarships

ACN seeks \$8 million to establish 260 scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate students in the aged care sector over four years.

ACN currently administers the Aged Care Nursing Scholarships, providing funding for aged care staff to undertake undergraduate and postgraduate studies. There has been significant interest in these scholarships above and beyond the available places²².

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety found that skill shortages and difficulties filling positions in aged care is common, particularly in regional and remote areas. Aged care services have difficulties in recruiting registered nurses and almost two thirds of residential facilities and one half of home care services have reported skill shortages.

3d. Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme

ACN seeks \$8.4 million to establish up to 120 additional scholarships for the Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme (PHMSS), which would include scholarships for postgraduate study.

The Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme (PHMSS) is designed to encourage and assist Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander undergraduate students in health-related disciplines to complete their studies and join the health workforce. The scheme provides scholarships for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people studying an entry level health course. According to the *Educating the nurse of the future report*²³, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students make up only a little over one per cent of higher education enrolments despite comprising three per cent of the population. Around 20 per cent of Indigenous students are studying health-related degrees, but many fail to complete their course. Poor school preparation, a lack of experience with tertiary study, a paucity of role models, and financial pressures are all impediments to the successful completion of their studies. PHMSS was established in 2002 and has supported just over 1,200 recipients to complete their studies.

Over recent years, PHMSS has seen significant demand above and beyond the availability of places²⁴. Additional funding in this area would be highly beneficial to increase the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health care workforce, as many worthy applications were unable to receive the support of the scholarship.

22 Appendix A, 'Scholarships Application Dataset' [COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE].

23 Schwartz S (2019). *Educating the Nurse of the Future—Report of the Independent Review into Nursing Education*. Commonwealth of Australia. [online] Available at: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2019/12/educating-the-nurse-of-the-future.pdf> [Accessed 20 January 2021]

24 Appendix A, 'Scholarships Application Dataset' [COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE].

3e. Leading Excellence through Advanced Practice Scholarship Program

ACN recommends the Australian Government commit funding of \$720,000 over three years to establish the Leading Excellence through Advanced Practice (LEAP) Scholarship Program, delivering up to 150 scholarships to support the development of the next generation of Australian nurses.

The ACN Institute of Leadership is committed to advancing nurse leadership and practice to enhance health and aged care delivery to all Australians. ACNs LEAP scholarship program is designed to develop nursing capability across the five practice domains supporting advanced practice, clinical practice, education, leadership, systems support and research. The program will support and develop the next generation of advanced practice nursing leaders. The focus on millennial nurses (under 35 years of age) is designed to give this cohort the skills they need to play an even more influential role in shaping the health and aged care system in years to come.

ACNs LEAP scholarship program will explore innovation and transformative leadership concepts through a range of learning sessions aligned to the ACN White Paper, '*A New Horizon for Health Service: Optimising Advanced Practice Nursing*'²⁵.

ACN's LEAP scholarship program is reflective of the *Advanced Nurse Practice Guidelines* for the Australian Context by the Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officers Australia²⁶, initiatives and models of care delivery utilising advanced nursing practice roles and for nurses to work to their scope of practice and develop toward advanced practice. This provides potential to improve workforce flexibility and assists in generating a sustainable supply of advanced practice nurses who can work across boundaries (p.15)²⁷.

25 Australian College of Nursing (2019). *A New Horizon for Health Service: Optimising Advanced Practice Nursing*, A White Paper by ACN. [online]. Available at: <https://www.acn.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/white-paper-optimising-advanced-practice-nursing.pdf> [Accessed 21 January 2021]

26 The Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officers Australia (2020). *Advanced Nurse Practice Guidelines for the Australian Context 2020*. [online]. Available at: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/advanced-nursing-practice-guidelines-for-the-australian-context> [Accessed 20 January 2021]

27 Ibid.



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