



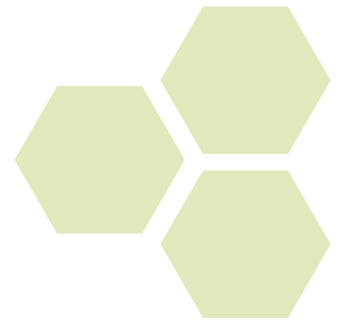
Australian College of Nursing

# PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

## 2023–2024







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## Pre-Budget Submission 2023-24:

# Foreword



The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) welcomes the opportunity to provide our pre-budget submission ahead of the 2023 Budget.

The past year has seen the Australian community 'learn to live with COVID' – following years of social and economic upheaval, tragedy on a mass scale, desperation, and despair. Nowhere has this been felt more acutely than in the health care sector.


As the largest and most geographically dispersed health profession in Australia, nurses are on the frontline of their local communities. They work tirelessly to ensure our most vulnerable are safe and well-cared for and deliver evidence-based health care, health promotion and illness prevention. Australian nurses provide highly skilled, trusted care in a range of settings, and their leadership and expertise have been crucial throughout the evolving COVID-19 pandemic and in day-to-day health care settings.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (Royal Commission) and the COVID-19 crisis in aged care have revealed systemic failures in the aged care sector's funding, regulation, workforce planning, and risk management. ACN welcomes many of the reforms already in place or committed to by the Australian Government but believes more can be done to shore up the aged care nursing workforce. Although significant numbers study to become nurses, new graduates face challenges entering the workforce due to poor transition practices<sup>1</sup>. These problems will only be amplified over the coming years as we continue to witness the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and as the ageing nursing workforce transitions to retirement. More than 50% of the Australian

nursing workforce is over the age of 45 years<sup>2</sup>. Australia must work to upskill and prepare the next generation of nurses to ensure older people receive the highest quality of health care and meet growing legislative requirements arising from the Royal Commission reforms.

ACN believes skilled migration must be part of Australia's nursing workforce demand solution and welcomes the outcomes of the Australian Government's Jobs and Skills Summit. Following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and a predicted global nursing shortage of 13 million<sup>3</sup>, Australia has fallen behind other countries in recruiting internationally qualified nurses. Australia urgently needs a strategy for attracting and retaining overseas-trained nurses to ensure the supply of a skilled workforce. Currently, there are too few mechanisms to address the barriers internationally trained nurses face. The resulting burden on nurses minimises their chances to succeed and contribute to the Australian health care system. ACN proposes a suite of strategies based on improving Australia's Migrant Integration Policy Index<sup>4</sup> to attract migrants back to Australia. This will enable skilled migration to re-emerge as a viable workforce solution, as 20% of Australia's current nursing workforce obtained their initial qualification overseas.

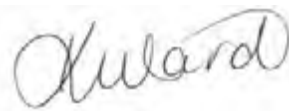
Strong leadership in the nursing workforce is vital to ensure a high-quality, sustainable, and effective health care system that is equipped to meet the increasingly complex needs and demands of Australia's diverse communities. Central to this is the professional development and upskilling of senior nurses leading teams such as In-Charge/Nurse/Nursing Unit Managers (NUMs). NUMs supervise and manage nursing teams and can be found across all parts of the health sector,



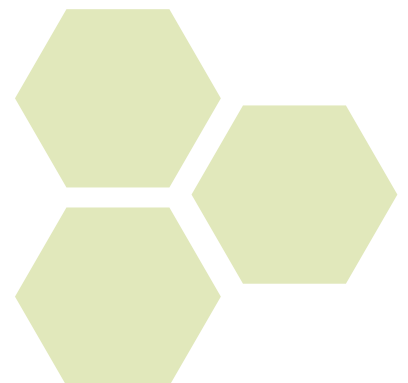
including hospitals, Hospital in the Home (HITH) services, and community residential or outpatient clinics/ambulatory services. Their elevated decision-making responsibilities require NUMs to undertake extensive management duties (including reporting and financial tasks, clinical and corporate governance, HR and performance development) on top of their health care, clinical, quality, and safety duties. Evidence demonstrates that well-supported appropriately qualified NUMs significantly improve the quality-of-care provision, promote wider workforce retention and drive innovation and efficiency<sup>5</sup>. However, undergraduate training and clinical experience do not equip nurses with the various managerial and leadership skills required to fill the NUM role. Investing in the budget to provide training for NUMs such as ACN's NUM Leadership Program would bridge this gap by inspiring these vital nursing leaders and equipping them with the skills they need to manage and develop innovative care models to manage the complexities of the health care sector.

In addition to strategies geared towards strengthening our nursing workforce at home, ACN believes that Australia should do more to support the local nursing workforce of our Pacific neighbours. Nurses make up over two-thirds of the Pacific region's health care workforce and form the frontline of health service delivery. Nurses have also held an essential role in the management of COVID-19 in the region, as well as in primary health care more broadly<sup>6</sup>. The state of the Pacific health system is therefore inextricably linked to the state of the nursing health workforce. Supporting the fifteen Pacific Island nations to build resilience within their health systems via a strong and supporting nursing workforce is aligned with Australia's foreign policy interests, as it is an opportunity to cement Australia as the strategic partner of choice for the region as well as build regional stability and security in the face of threats such as COVID-19.

ACN is committed to our strategic intent of Shaping Health, Advancing Nursing to enhance the health care of all Australians. The public has long regarded nursing as the most trusted and ethical profession.' ACN welcomes the opportunity to continue its work with the Australian Government to raise the profile of nursing and demonstrate the value nurses bring to Australia's health and aged care systems.



**Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward RN, MMgt, FACN, FCHSM, Wharton Fellow, MAICD**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Australian College of Nursing



# Summary of recommendations

## RECOMMENDATION 1

### AGED CARE

#### **Upskilling the aged care nursing workforce**

##### **Expanding the Aged Care Transition to Practice (ACTTP) program**

ACN recommends increased investment for ACTTP programs of \$682,500 (10 courses at an estimated \$1950/participant for course costs) to expand existing providers of the ACTTP program in 2023-24 based on the initial feedback and success of this Australian Government funded program.

##### **Providing Graduate certificates in Aged Care scholarships**

ACN recommends an investment of \$52.5M over 3 years (5,000 places x \$10,500 per course) to fund 5000 scholarships for registered nurses (RNs) working in residential aged care to undertake a Graduate Certificate in Aged Care.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

### SKILLED MIGRATION

#### **Supporting overseas-trained nurses to live and work in Australia**

ACN recommends the development of a suite of measures to support overseas-trained nurses who choose to live and work in Australia. This includes changing the National Law to allow the current providers who offer an approved ANMAC bridging course for internationally qualified nurses to continue to do so beyond 2023.



## RECOMMENDATION 3

### NURSING LEADERSHIP

#### **Supporting nurse leaders to undertake leadership programs**

ACN recommends an investment of \$16.5M over three years to provide scholarships to 3,000 nurse managers to attend ACN's NUM Leadership Program (at \$5,500 per course).

#### **Investing in other nurse leaders**

ACN also recommends sponsoring 600 additional scholarships for \$4.65M over three years to support more extensive nurse leadership training. Specifically:

- \$1.65M to support 300 nurses to attend ACN's Mid-Career Nurses Leadership Program (at \$5,500 per course).
- \$3M to support 300 nurse leaders and executives to attend ACN's Nurse Executive Leadership Program (at \$10,000 per course).

## RECOMMENDATION 4

### PACIFIC NURSING

**Strengthening the nursing workforce in the Pacific**  
ACN recommends an investment of \$2.5M (200 places x \$10.5K per course, plus on costs) to fund 200 nurses in the 15 Pacific Nations to undertake an ACN postgraduate certification online.

ACN recommends the government invest \$1.3M to provide the online Principles of Emergency Care for up to 1000 nurses.

# Aged care

## RECOMMENDATION 1

### Upskilling the aged care nursing workforce



## PROPOSAL

### Expanding the Aged Care Transition to Practice (ACTTP) program

ACN recommends increased investment for ACTTP programs \$682,500 (10 courses at an estimated \$1950/participant for course costs) to expand existing providers of the ACTTP program in 2023-24 based on the initial feedback and success of this Australian Government-funded program.

### Providing Graduate Certificate in Aged Care scholarships

ACN recommends an investment of \$52.5M over 3 years (5,000 places x \$10,500 per course) to fund 5000 scholarships for RNs working in residential aged care to undertake a Graduate Certificate in Aged Care.

The ACTTP program enables aged care providers to attract, develop and retain newly registered, enrolled and transitioning nurses to the sector. A skilled nursing workforce improves health outcomes and enhances the quality of life of older people living in in-home, community settings and residential aged care facilities (RACFs). With extra funding, there is an opportunity for education providers to continue to deliver the ACTTP program and improve access to the program beyond 2024.

ACN is one of three Commonwealth-funded providers of an ACTTP program, though this contract is due to expire in 2024. ACN has successfully delivered nationally a Commonwealth-funded ACTTP program for new registered and enrolled nurses commencing in aged care, and RNs transitioning into the sector since July 2021. An ACTTP program provides education, and support and encourages nurses to pursue a career in the aged care sector. The ACTTP program is designed to empower nurses to become the clinical and professional leaders required for the upcoming reforms in the aged care sector.

The ACTTP program provides a return on investment by reducing workforce costs related to staff retention, pressure injuries, falls, medication errors, ED presentations, ambulance costs, and hospital admissions. The content for the program is based

on the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission Standards (2021)<sup>7</sup>. This program aims to address issues identified in the Royal Commission's Final Report<sup>8</sup>.

ACN is committed to protecting the health, welfare, and dignity of all residents in RACFs. Staffing levels, skill mix, resourcing and communication all have an impact on the delivery of care, or what is referred to as missed care. The Royal Commission found 'many failures and shortfalls in the Australian aged care system'<sup>9</sup>. In RACFs, the first step to ensuring the resident is placed at the centre of care is to ensure appropriate staffing and skill mix to minimise missed care.

ACN strongly supports the Australian Government's commitment to require all RACFs to have a registered, qualified nurse on site, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. RNs are critical in aged care facilities, providing expert clinical governance, leadership and oversight of enrolled nurses (ENs) and unregulated health care workers (UHCWs) who make up the majority of the aged care workforce, across residential and in-home care settings.

Australia's rapidly ageing population and the subsequent rise in complex multimorbidity among older people require a skilled nursing workforce within RACFs. ACN acknowledges the Australian Government's



recent legislation to increase the pay equity of nurses working in RACFs, however, many nurses are still finding it difficult to pay for postgraduate education. In addition, most aged care providers are not able to financially support RNs to undertake further study, as they face significant cost pressures to implement the reforms from the Royal Commission.

ACN believes providing scholarships for RNs to undertake a Graduate Certificate in Aged Care would ensure they have the clinical expertise, leadership, and management experience to ensure safe, effective, high-quality and person-centred care for every older person living in a RACF in Australia.

## THE ISSUES

The Royal Commission highlighted recruitment and retention of the nursing workforce in the aged care sector is vitally important. ACN applauds the Australian Government's commitment to ensuring high-quality care for older people is achieved by having an RN on-site at all times in every RACF by July 2023, but this will require more than a single strategy.

It is pivotal to upskill and support the next generation of nurses to both ensure RACFs can meet this requirement and ensure every older person receives the high-quality, person-centred, and safe care they deserve. Likewise, ENs play a critical role in supporting RNs and UHCWs to work within their scope of practice.

Newly graduated nurses working in aged care report feeling overwhelmed and unprepared for the highly complex and physically and emotionally demanding nature of aged care nursing<sup>10</sup>. Similarly, these nurses feel overwhelmed as they are often thrust into leadership positions<sup>11</sup>. Residents in RACFs may not be acutely unwell but they require expert assessment and management of their often many chronic conditions. A newly graduated nurse in a RACF does not always have the resources that are available to nurses in other parts of the health system, so these new nurses must develop their critical thinking and assessment skills to ensure they are practising safely and confidently.

RNs play a major leadership role in RACFs, delegating tasks to other health workers and providing motivation and encouragement to those tasked with caring for residents. However, research suggests a lack of training focused on 'clinical leadership and health team management' indicates RNs require more leadership training to ensure the safety and care of residents<sup>12</sup>.

RACFs that provide high levels of person-centred care employ staff with qualifications in dementia or gerontological care to ensure a high standard of care<sup>13</sup>. RNs are clinically prepared for the workplace but require regular upskilling and a supportive working environment to maintain competence to work in RACFs and to feel valued as a retention strategy.

An opportunistic outcome from providing RNs with the requisite skills to manage residents' care will reduce acute hospital admissions from RACFs.

There is evidence that staff with postgraduate qualifications improve nursing management of complex clinical issues and gerontological syndromes<sup>14</sup>. However, increasing resident acuity and a growing number of residents with comorbidities in RACFs, place an even greater demand for professional nurses with the clinical expertise, leadership, and management experience to ensure safe, effective, and high-quality person-centred care provided in all RACFs<sup>15,16</sup>.

It should be noted that much national and international evidence supports improving the continuity of care for residents in RACFs, resulting in fewer hospitalisations for residents and, more importantly, for much-reduced incidents of readmissions to hospitals. For the elderly, a hospital stay is undesirable, a negative experience in which their care and wellbeing have not been properly attended to by health care professionals<sup>17</sup>. The increase in hospital admissions by residents in RACFs is an unnecessary financial burden on the health care system<sup>18</sup>. Hospitalisation could be reduced through more and better-educated staff and seamless continuity of care<sup>19</sup>.

Supporting RNs will bolster the skill mix and resources needed to prevent the missed care highlighted in the Royal Commission while ensuring every resident is provided safe, high-quality, and person-centred care.

## THE SOLUTION

An evidence-based ACTTP program aligns with the following six elements:

- an organisational culture that values learning
- best practice clinical practice
- a positive learning environment
- an effective health service-education provider relationship
- effective communication processes
- and appropriate resources and facilities<sup>20</sup>.

ACN recommends the Australian Government provide additional investment for education providers to continue to deliver the ACTTP program and improve access to the program beyond 2024.

ACN also recommends that the Australian Government provide additional investment to facilitate the availability of scholarships for RNs working in RACF to undertake a Graduate Certificate in Aged Care. This will help to ensure that nurses leading clinical governance, high-quality care, and oversight of the care workforce in RACFs are well-equipped and supported through specialist postgraduate training.

# Skilled migration

## RECOMMENDATION 2

Supporting overseas-trained nurses to live and work in Australia



## PROPOSAL

**ACN recommends the development of a suite of measures to support overseas-trained nurses who choose to live and work in Australia. This includes changing the National Law to allow the current providers who offer an approved ANMAC Bridging Course for internationally qualified nurses to continue to do so beyond 2023.**

Australia is experiencing a chronic shortage of nurses within the Australian health care system<sup>21</sup>. Australia desperately needs nurses at all levels of training and expertise to ensure optimum nursing skills mix<sup>22</sup> within health care settings, ensuring all Australians receive the best care across their lifespans.

ACN welcomes the Australian Government's commitment to increasing the skilled migration intake, as recommended by the Jobs and Skills Summit. This increase will help fill shortages in urgent areas of need, including aged care and rural/remote areas.

However, to ensure this initiative delivers maximum benefits, it needs to be supported by additional measures to reduce or remove current barriers to nurses from overseas entering our health and aged care workforce.

ACN welcomes nurses from overseas, specifically from the Pacific region, a move that helps strengthen ties with our close neighbours<sup>23</sup>. It must be stated that ACN recognises the ethical tensions that exist when recruiting nurses from overseas in this time of global nursing shortage. While welcoming internationally trained nurses, ACN stresses Australia's obligation to provide overseas nurses with support systems to help them settle into their new country such as access to affordable housing, mentors to help them navigate new health systems and processes, access to universal health care, and support for family members who accompany them as outlined in the Migrant Integration Policy Index<sup>24</sup>.

Along with fast-tracking the processing of existing migrant visa applications<sup>25</sup>, these measures will help fill critical shortages in our health and aged care sectors.

## THE ISSUES

Nurses recruited from countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom have their nursing qualifications recognised in Australia without further assessment. However, in the current context, nurses trained in countries other than those above must follow one of two pathways for obtaining Australian registration until the end of 2023.

The first is to undertake an authorised bridging course at a cost to the participant of approximately \$16K. This option is only available to applicants who have received letters of approval from March 2020 to enrol until July 2023. The second pathway is to submit to an Outcome-Based Assessment (OBA) – the second half of which is the Objective Structured Clinical Exam (OSCE). This option is more cost-effective than a bridging course, costing the applicant \$4K. However, it is currently only delivered face-to-face in Adelaide, considerably limiting the ability of many nurses to take the assessment and adding costs required for travel and accommodation. Anecdotally ACN has been informed that participants are having to complete the OSCE multiple times, increasing the financial and time burden on such participants. Further limitations of this option

were highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic when international and domestic borders were shut for months thus putting the completion of the OBA at a standstill.

Five providers offer an approved ANMAC bridging course for internationally qualified nurses and midwives. ACN's offer is the Graduate Certificate in Nursing (Bridging & Re-Entry) following an NMBA request. The provision of this pathway will end in 2023, following legislation that has resulted in the OBA being the only pathway for obtaining registration going forward. This sole pathway will become problematic with the increasing demand for nurses and the limitations of both location and availability of OBE/OSCE.

ACN strongly believes this process should be reviewed, given the nursing workforce shortage in Australia. Anecdotally, many overseas-trained registered nurses wait long periods for a place in the OSCE, with some giving up and seeking employment as unregulated health care workers rather than using their existing training. Limited places and logistical barriers to undertaking the OSCE face-to-face means even nurses who pass the recently adapted National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) are unable to complete the assessment.

Beyond education and training, migrant nurses must be provided holistic support to ensure they transition into their new roles and new home. Current research demonstrates that the greatest issues host countries face when recruiting international nurses in an attempt to supplement the workforce are integration and retention<sup>26</sup>. This is due to misinformation about employment requirements and inadequate support systems implemented by host countries, resulting in nurses experiencing isolation and distress<sup>27</sup>. In cases where culturally specific training, development opportunities, and structured mentorship were provided, nurses experienced better general and psychological health, resulting in the retention of the workforce<sup>28</sup>. ACN recommends that the eight Migrant Integration Policy Index categories be reviewed and address those which will specifically assist this workforce solution 'access to nationality and permanent residence'<sup>29</sup>.

## THE SOLUTION

ACN proposes the Australian Government compel the NMBA to change the Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Committee (Assessment of overseas qualified nurses and midwives) National Law or Terms of Reference to allow multiple bridging pathways for internationally qualified nurses to become registered in Australia. ACN also calls on the Australian Government to offer scholarships to undertake approved programs of study that are bridging courses for internationally qualified nurses and midwives beyond 2023.

Developing an online version of the OSCE would enable better access, potentially reduce the cost of training and would allow internationally qualified nurses who come to or currently live in Australia faster and more accessible pathways to have their credentials recognised.

The COVID-19 pandemic saw education and training programs becoming far more accessible for those who can only attend remotely. A further consideration to support new migrant workers is to provide them with resources that will allow them to engage in class from anywhere in Australia.

In the context of nursing, providing professional development in key identified skills and knowledge will increase confidence, capability and capacity in that setting and thus support retention. To encourage the uptake of continuing professional development (CPD), a set number of identified scholarships could be made available to migrant nurses, accessible for up to three years after their arrival. To tackle the extreme shortages of skills in the aged care workforce, initial training should focus specifically on training for those working in aged care.

Skilled migrants could be supported, matched or linked with professional organisations and community groups, in the state or territory where they settle so they are integrated into Australian society and culture creating a sense of belonging. ACN has an existing Mentor Match program for members, which could be leveraged and adapted to provide migrant nurses with on-the-ground or virtual support. In the short term, this will help them feel welcomed, allowing them to better integrate into Australia's complex health system while drawing on the knowledge and expertise of locally trained nurses. Long-term, it will ensure these migrant nurses see future career pathways available to them and encourage much-needed workforce retention and sustainability.

# Nursing leadership



## RECOMMENDATION 3

Supporting nurse leaders to undertake leadership programs

## PROPOSAL

### Investing in nurse managers

ACN recommends an investment of \$16.5M over three years to provide scholarships to 3,000 nurse managers to attend ACN's NUM Leadership Program (at \$5,500 per course).

### Investing in other nurse leaders

ACN also recommends sponsoring 600 additional scholarships at a cost of \$4.65M over three years to support more extensive nurse leadership training. Specifically:

- \$1.65M to support 300 nurses to attend ACN's Mid-Career Nurses Leadership Program (at \$5,500 per course).
- \$3M to support 300 nurse leaders and executives to attend ACN's Nurse Executive Leadership Program (at \$10,000 per course).

There are many postgraduate level leadership programs provided however these are academically based and concentrate on the theoretical component of leadership. The ACN NUM Leadership Program is a practical course that will enhance the capacity and capability of RNs and midwives who currently hold positions such as NUM, acting NUM, or emerging nurses/midwives proactively demonstrating an ambition to work in a management role.

The ACN NUM Leadership Program focuses on both the capability and the potential for nurses/midwives to lead and manage a unit in the present and emerging environment. The program aims to develop and augment the skillset of participants to influence and manage self, others, resources, and operations for the benefit of staff, the community, and the recipients of care.

The curriculum of this program is specifically designed to alleviate the issues identified above, by providing NUMs with the practical training they need to be effective and successful in their role. As such, the program will have a direct return on investment for the facility they operate in, the staff they lead, and the overall health system.

## THE ISSUES

Strong leadership is vital for the Australian Government to address current health care challenges, including evolving models of care, staff recruitment and retention, constrained budgets, increasingly informed consumers and ongoing digital transformation. These changes, along with the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters such as floods and bushfires, highlight the need for skilled, experienced and supported leaders within the Australian health system<sup>30</sup>.

NUMs play a crucial role in the success of the Australian Government in delivering on its vision as frontline leaders ensure the delivery of high-quality safe care, while also maintaining the safety and wellbeing of staff. NUMs are key to the culture of a ward, unit or service and are the most influential personnel in staff recruitment and retention<sup>31</sup>. NUMs are also vital in driving changes within the health system to meet future workforce needs and to respond to the constant evolution and transformation of health care delivery (including, digital transformation).



In the current workforce-challenged environment, less experienced nurses are required to step into management and leadership positions, however undergraduate nursing education does not adequately equip nurses to undertake these roles in a modern and constantly evolving hospital environment.

Managing the complexities of a clinical unit has become more challenging over the past two decades due to the increasing complexity of patients in public hospitals, shortened length of stay and the growth in management responsibilities in the health sector. These challenges are compounded by ongoing shortages of RNs due to the large number of nurses leaving the profession, resulting in a need to continually recruit and train new staff. The movement toward a greater work-life balance has resulted in a reduction of nurses wanting to work full time with some members reporting their states/territories have greater than 60 per cent of their workforce taking up part-time employment. This adds to the number of staff a NUM has to lead and ensure engagement and clinical governance requirements.

There is robust evidence demonstrating that appropriately qualified and supported NUMs increase the quality of care provided in hospitals while also improving efficiency and staff retention<sup>32</sup>. However, many NUMs in public hospitals are not formally trained managers and, despite being high-performing clinicians, are often undertrained in the required competencies to fill the NUM role. Without proper training, and typically operating in overworked and under-resourced facilities, these NUMs are not always able to fulfil their potential in their role.

Likewise, studies suggest nurse leaders at both mid-career and executive levels feel they are ill-prepared to lead and lack the confidence to lead<sup>33,34</sup>. Nurse leaders are expected to possess a range of skills such as improving efficiency and outcomes, communicating effectively and leading high-performance teams to meet pre-determined goals. Nurses who appear overwhelmed in a leadership role may discourage other nurses from similar ambitions<sup>35</sup>. Providing leadership skills for nurses in all roles will provide nurses with the confidence to lead and manage in these high-pressure settings while demonstrating career pathways for new nurses.

## THE SOLUTION

The acquisition of leadership skills would be fostered by the provision of specifically tailored training courses dedicated to learning the necessary skills, (as opposed to a master's degree which offers a different value proposition to the NUM and health service).

One key outcome of targeted NUM management and leadership training would be increased retention of nurses within the public hospital system. Training and recruiting new nurses are expensive and as well as being economically costly, high rates of nurse turnover are also associated with negative patient outcomes, including disrupted continuity of care.

One factor which has been identified as being critical to a positive work environment is the role of nurse leaders with several studies demonstrating the link between strong and effective nursing leadership, staff nurse satisfaction and retention<sup>36</sup>. Based on Australian Government figures there were over 18,400 NUMs in Australia in 2021 and there will be approximately 22,448 NUMs by 2026<sup>37</sup>.

To help support and develop some of these NUMs and address the issues identified above, ACN proposes the Australian Government initially sponsor 1,000 scholarships/year over the next three years to support NUMs to attend ACN's NUM Leadership Program.

Further, ACN currently offers the highly sought-after Mid-Career Nurse Leadership Program and the Nurse Executive Leadership Program for those nurses seeking or in a nurse executive role. Effective nurse leaders are not only clinical experts, they also are effective communicators and influencers who provide nurses and other health care workers with the support necessary to deliver high-quality patient care. Effective nurse leaders encourage nurses to continually improve their practice, they are approachable and treat people with respect<sup>38</sup>. A strong leader will have proportionally more competent and proficient nurses working with them, the benefits being improvements to patient safety and wellbeing<sup>39</sup>. Providing enhanced access for nurses to leadership courses will benefit all health care workers and consumers. ACN seeks additional funding to offer its existing nursing leadership programs to more nurses across Australia, to ensure the nursing workforce is equipped to respond to an increasingly complex health care environment.

### NURSE MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP SCHOLARSHIPS

Course	Cost per course	Total
ACN NUM Leadership Program	\$5,500	\$16.5M
<a href="#">ACN Mid-Career Nurse Leadership Program</a>	\$5,500	\$1.65M
<a href="#">ACN Nurse Executive Leadership Program</a>	\$10,000	\$3.0M
<b>Total cost (over three years)</b>		<b>\$21.15M</b>
Total cost per annum		<b>\$7.05M</b>

# Pacific nursing



## RECOMMENDATION 4

Strengthening the Pacific Islands nursing workforce

## PROPOSAL

**ACN recommends the government invest \$2.5M (200 places x \$10.5K for course and on costs) to fund 200 nurses in the 15 Pacific Nations to undertake an online ACN postgraduate certification.**

**ACN recommends the government invest \$1.3M to provide the online Principles of Emergency Care for up to 1000 nurses.**

Delivery of ACN postgraduate courses to mentor, train and upskill nurses within the Pacific supports Australia's wider foreign policy priorities within the region. Australia has strong cultural, economic, and security ties with the Pacific Island nations and the export of education will assist in ensuring Australia remains the region's strategic partner of choice<sup>40</sup>.

Providing nurses in the Pacific with the opportunity to obtain a postgraduate qualification will improve the skill, motivation, and leadership of the nursing workforce, as well as the quality of care which is delivered to the community. As nurses form the frontline of the local community in the Pacific, strategies to strengthen the nursing workforce will have resounding benefits across the health system at large<sup>41</sup>.

## THE ISSUES

Across the Pacific, nurses are at the centre of the region's health and wellbeing priorities, standing at the forefront of the fight against non-communicable and infectious diseases, humanitarian and natural disasters, and COVID-19<sup>42</sup>.

Although health outcomes across the Pacific Island countries vary widely, each nation is threatened by increasing rates of non-communicable lifestyle diseases, COVID-19, climate change and the return of climate-sensitive communicable diseases<sup>43</sup>.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) recognises that strengthening their health systems and achieving universal health care coverage is essential for the Pacific's resilience to these challenges and by extension regional health security and Australia's foreign policy interests<sup>44</sup>.

This recognition is reflected within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDG) target 3.8: 'to achieve universal health coverage [and] access to quality essential health-care services', of which Australia is a signatory.

Under the UN-SDG, Australia has further committed to 'substantially increase health financing and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries, especially in the least developed countries and small island developing States (target 3. c)<sup>45</sup>.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) acknowledges that the achievement of universal health care is dependent upon a local nursing workforce that is flexible, resilient, educated and motivated<sup>46</sup>. The requirement for emergency skills is paramount as a first-line requirement for nurses working in the health sectors which was certainly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic response<sup>47</sup>. Therefore, Australia should place nurses at the centre of health systems strengthening initiatives in the Pacific Island nations, as part of our wider foreign policy and international development agenda.

## THE SOLUTION

Throughout 2020 to 2021, ACN delivered online postgraduate training courses within the Pacific Island nations to upskill their nursing workforce, as part of a wider regional COVID-19 response plan. The Pacific Community, with funding support from DFAT, facilitated the on-the-ground delivery of ACN's Postgraduate Certificate in Critical Care<sup>48</sup>.

The delivery of postgraduate nursing courses within the Pacific strengthens the skill of the local nursing health workforce, encourages leadership and career progression, and improves the quality of care. Additionally, by providing avenues for higher education within female-dominated industries such as nursing, ACN supports women's participation within the workforce and gender equality more broadly<sup>49</sup>.

ACN course coordinators identified a key range of contributory factors to course participation and completion including regular communication, peer support, assistance with academic writing, flexibility, study preparation and internet accessibility. ACN's online learning platform incorporates these crucial elements by providing nursing students with ongoing engagement with ACN educators, networking with ACN's domestic cohort, flexible timelines, learning resources, and feedback and support.

ACN recommends the Australian Government provide additional investment over the forward estimates to continue Australia's contribution to the upskilling of the Pacific nursing workforce.

By undertaking a postgraduate nursing course by ACN, an accredited Tertiary Education Quality and Standards (TEQSA) education provider, nurses from Pacific nations will receive accreditation applicable to the Australian context. This provides appropriately skilled Pacific nurses with the necessary qualifications to seek skilled migration visas in Australia for at-level roles, as well as explore further higher education opportunities.

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