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KEEPING NURSES INFORMED, CONNECTED AND INSPIRED

FREE EDITION

## A VARIED AND exciting CAREER

Reflections on nursing in  
remote and rural Australia

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skilled nurses in  
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Judith Smith MACN

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Professor Marion Eckert MACN

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INSIDE



# A NATIONAL NURSING ALLIANCE

*Enabling nurses to work to their full scope of practice*

**N**ine of the nation's leading nursing and midwifery organisations have formed an Alliance to campaign for significant and meaningful primary healthcare reform.

Nurses, nurse practitioners, and midwives make up 54 per cent of Australia's health workforce. They are the most geographically dispersed health workforce in the country and yet one-third rarely work to their full scope.

The Alliance of the nine Peaks – the Australian College of Nursing (ACN), the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), the Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA), the Australian College of Nurse Practitioners (ACNP), the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM), the Australian College of Midwives (ACM), the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN), the Council of Remote Area Nurses of Australia (CRANaPlus), and the Council of the Deans of Nursing and Midwifery (CDNM) – will campaign to promote the benefits of nursing and midwifery for all communities.

- Nurses and Midwives are **Skilled**
- Nurses and Midwives are **Trusted**
- Nurses and Midwives are **Experienced**
- Nurses and Midwives are **Safe**
- Nurses and Midwives are **Underutilised**

**Fully utilising nurses, nurse practitioners, and midwives will make health care more accessible and better value for all Australians.**

The Alliance calls on all governments to enable nurses, nurse practitioners, midwives, and allied health professionals to work to their full scope of practice to improve access to high-quality, affordable health care for all Australians, no matter where they live.

Working with the Federal Government, the Opposition, and all parties and Independents, the Alliance will campaign to promote the benefits of nursing and midwifery for all communities to ensure significant healthcare reform in line with the raft of independent reviews under the Strengthening Medicare banner, including the Unleashing the Potential of our Health Workforce – Scope of Practice Review.

Patients and communities – especially in rural, regional, and remote areas, including First Nations communities – will benefit when nurses, nurse practitioners, and midwives can use their full skill set.

There is a critical connection between education, skills development, workforce, and clinical practice. For over thirty years, nurses have been educated in

universities, backed by evidence-based research that reflects changing models of care and the use of new technology.

Nurse-led primary health care has been operating successfully in Australia for decades. This success has been built upon in recent times with an increase in the number of nurse-led walk-in clinics in some jurisdictions. Nurses are trusted and valued by patients for their accessibility and the cost-effective care they provide. Governments benefit from nurse-led care as it reduces pressure on general practices and emergency departments.

Fully utilising nurses, nurse practitioners, and midwives will make health care more accessible and deliver higher quality care for all Australians.



**JOHN FLANNERY**  
ACN CHIEF PUBLIC  
AFFAIRS OFFICER





Ministers, MPs, and Peaks leaders take the stage to celebrate nurses and midwives.



Hon. Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health and Aged Care; Adjunct Professor Kathryn Zeitz PhD FACN, ACN CEO.



Adjunct Professor Kathryn Zeitz PhD FACN, ACN CEO; Hon. Ged Kearney MP, Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care.



Ken Griffin, Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association CEO; Karen Grace MACN, Australian College of Nursing National Director - Professional Practice; Hon. Bob Katter, Independent MP for Kennedy; Adjunct Associate Professor Leanne Boase, Australian College of Nurse Practitioners CEO.





Adrian Armitage, Australian College of Mental Health Nurses CEO; Marion Scrymgour, Labor MP for Lingiari; Adjunct Professor Kathryn Zeitz PhD FACN, ACN CEO; Ken Griffin, Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association CEO.



Ken Griffin, Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association CEO; Senator Deborah O'Neill, Labor Senator for New South Wales; Adjunct Professor Kathryn Zeitz PhD FACN, ACN CEO; Adrian Armitage, Australian College of Mental Health Nurses CEO.



Ken Griffin, Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association CEO; Senator Jess Walsh, Labor Senator for Victoria; Adrian Armitage, Australian College of Mental Health Nurses CEO, Adjunct Professor Kathryn Zeitz PhD FACN, ACN CEO.



Adrian Armitage, Australian College of Mental Health Nurses CEO; Senator Larissa Waters, Greens Senator for Queensland; Karen Grace MACN, Australian College of Nursing National Director – Professional Practice.

# 600 NURSES Project

## *Targeted skin checks led by primary care nurses in rural Australia*

Australia is renowned as the ‘sunburnt country’, but this title comes with a dark side: we have the highest melanoma rates in the world. Sadly, melanoma claims the lives of approximately 1,400 Australians every year (Melanoma Institute Australia [MIA], 2022). What makes this even more tragic is that melanoma and other skin cancers are among the most preventable, detectable, and treatable forms of cancer.

The 600 Nurses Project is a transformative initiative in the prevention and detection of skin cancer in rural Australia. By training primary care nurses to lead targeted skin checks, we are not only bridging the healthcare gap for underserved communities but also saving lives through early detection. This innovative model of care empowers primary care nurses to work to their full scope of practice, leveraging technology and multidisciplinary collaboration to create a future where preventable deaths from skin cancer are dramatically reduced.

### A NURSE-LED SOLUTION

Service gaps exist in the provision of skin checks for people living in rural Australia who are at high risk of skin cancer. There is a shortage of professionals trained in skin checks in regional and rural Australia which impacts waiting times and out-of-pocket expenses for patients (MIA, 2022). Access to opportunistic screening needs to be provided to improve care for these populations (Adelson & Eckert, 2020). These challenges highlight an urgent need for primary care nurse training, enhanced clinical practices, and innovative care models to revolutionise early melanoma detection and deliver more effective and efficient skin cancer surveillance for Australian communities. Nurses, the largest distributed healthcare professionals in regional areas, are well positioned to work collaboratively with general practitioners (GPs) and dermatologists to provide skin checks. Multidisciplinary team (MDT) care in skin cancer is recognised as best practice and reflected in the optimal care pathways for melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancers (Cancer Council, 2021). Nurses are key MDT members and recognised primary care providers in rural communities, having a broad scope of practice and working collaboratively

in extended and advanced roles. Nurses can, therefore, lead models of care for skin cancer prevention through to early detection and management (Beames et al., 2023).

There are approximately 2.5 million people over the age of 50 years living in regional Australia. For each person to receive an annual skin check, we have calculated that 600 full-time equivalent primary care nurses will need to be trained. This is where the 600 Nurses Project was founded, a collaboration between the Rosemary Bryant AO Research Centre (RBRC) at the University of South Australia (UniSA), and Skin Smart Australia. The initiative is focused on training primary care nurses to perform targeted skin checks in regional communities to reduce the number of lives lost each year from skin cancer. Empowering nurses to lead screening initiatives is a game-changer, enabling early detection and management of skin cancer, particularly in underserved and high-risk communities.

Primary care nurses undertake a comprehensive online training program that equips them with the knowledge and skills required to perform skin checks using dermoscopy. We then provide a free ‘pop-up’ skin check clinic at a community event in a regional area and these nurses get hands-on experience performing skin checks under the guidance of an expert dermoscopist. Any lesions suspicious for malignancy are imaged and uploaded to artificial intelligence (AI) software to support provisional diagnoses, clinical decision making and to optimise multidisciplinary collaboration. People with any suspicious lesions are referred for medical follow-up.

### OUR IMPACT

Facilitated by our funders, Preventive Health SA, and previously The Hospital Research Foundation and Skin Check Champions, we have provided eight free pop-up skin

### KEY FACTS ABOUT SKIN CANCER

- Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world.
- Melanoma is the third most diagnosed cancer in Australia, and the most common cancer in those aged 15-29 years.
- 2 out of 3 people will receive a skin cancer diagnosis by the age of 70 years.
- Melanoma incidence is highest among men, people aged 70-79 years, or those living in regional areas of Australia.
- Without intervention, it is projected that by 2030, an additional 14,000 Australians will die from melanoma, and over 205,000 will be diagnosed.
- Skin cancer is the most expensive cancer to treat nationally.
- The economic cost of melanoma to the nation is estimated to reach \$8.7 billion by 2030 if current trends continue.

(Cancer Council, 2023; MIA, 2022)

### KEY NATIONAL PRIORITIES

- Develop and implement a national strategy for melanoma prevention and awareness.
- Invest in Australia’s high-impact melanoma research.
- Improve early detection and evidence for a National Targeted Screening Program.
- Reduce variation in diagnosis and treatment.
- Develop a melanoma supportive care and survivorship model.

(MIA, 2022)



600 Nurses Project at Parliamentary Friends of Nursing



Skin checks at Parliamentary Friends of Nursing

check clinics in regional communities of South Australia, trained 36 regional nurses, screened 860 people, detected 78 lesions suspicious for melanoma, and 239 for non-melanoma skin cancer. Over half of the people who engage with the service have never had a skin check prior, and 10-15 per cent are classified above average risk for melanoma. Consumers overwhelmingly accept the service and GPs have been supportive of this nurse-led model.

### OUR GOALS

- Educate and train primary care nurses to provide ongoing, sustainable skin cancer detection and care in regional areas.
- Empower primary care nurses to lead targeted skin checks.
- Drive early detection of skin cancer to reduce preventable deaths.
- Increase access to skin cancer screening in underserved, high-risk communities.
- Enhance health outcomes by improving timely intervention and care.
- Provide a long-term, cost-effective solution to bridge the healthcare gap in rural Australia.
- Provide best-practice research evidence to inform a National Targeted Screening Program that optimises the role of the primary care nurse and where possible, telehealth and AI.

### CASE STUDY

Jo Lloyd, Chief of Staff for the Office of Dr Gordon Reid MP, took the opportunity to have a mole on her leg checked by an RN at the Parliamentary Friends of Nursing event. During her spot check with the RN, the lesion was noted to have several suspicious features including more than one colour and asymmetry in shape. We recommended that Jo seek medical follow-up. Jo required two surgeries to completely remove the lesion, which was later diagnosed as a basal cell carcinoma (BCC) (pictured).



*"I cannot thank the team enough from UniSA. I recently met them whilst at work in Parliament House and participated in a skin check. I had noticed a new spot that I was keen for them to review. Thankfully, I did. They did suggest that I seek a follow-up with a skin specialist which I did, and I had the spot removed. I would like to note that I had attended another skin clinic previously about this spot where no concerns were raised. The nurses were incredibly professional and thorough in their examination. They have followed up with me to ensure I had the spot reviewed and again following the removal. I thank them for their diligence. This service highlights the importance of having our health practitioners working to the top of their scope of practice."* - Jo Lloyd

- Obtain funding to provide ongoing support for the 600 Nurses Project. The RBRC will be making a submission for the 2025-26 Federal Budget.

### PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDS OF NURSING

The 600 Nurses Project provided a nurse-led 'pop-up' clinic at the Parliamentary Friends of Nursing event at Parliament House in Canberra on 19 November 2024. Four lesions suspicious for malignancy were detected by a registered nurse (RN) who recently trained in performing skin checks. The team showcased how primary care nurses are the solution to increasing early detection of skin cancer in high-risk communities.

### CONCLUSION

People living in rural and regional Australia face a disproportionate risk of skin cancer, compounded by barriers to essential skin checks that could save their lives. Primary care nurses are the key to solving this crisis. By training primary care nurses to perform skin checks, we can close the healthcare gap and ensure early, life-saving detection. Empowering nurses to lead these efforts in their communities will not only drive more timely and effective interventions but will also improve health outcomes and reduce the national burden of skin cancer. Investing in this initiative is not just a commitment to the health of rural Australians – it is

an investment in the future strength and sustainability of our entire healthcare system.

If you would like to find out more about the project, please contact [RBRC@unisa.edu.au](mailto:RBRC@unisa.edu.au).

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**PROFESSOR MARION ECKERT MACN**  
Professor of Cancer Nursing  
Director, Rosemary Bryant AO  
Research Centre  
University of South Australia

# TRANSITIONING TO aged care nursing

## *The value of highly skilled nurses in aged care*

**Aged care nurses are essential for supporting the health and well-being of older individuals, ensuring they receive high-quality care in their later years. As demand for aged care services grows, it's vital to develop a skilled workforce of qualified nurses to address the physical, emotional, and psychosocial needs of the elderly.**

The role of trained nurses in the aged care sector is invaluable, as they provide high-quality care, advocate for elderly patients, and ensure the safety and well-being of vulnerable individuals. The complexity of the nursing role in aged care involves a combination of clinical expertise, interpersonal skills, and the ability to navigate the evolving needs of older people. This article explores the challenges of transitioning into the aged care sector in Australia and the importance and value of trained nurses, focusing on their critical contributions and the complexities they face in this vital sector.

The number of older adults (65 years or older) is growing faster than any other age group. It is predicted that in 2025, 17% of the Australian population will be 65 years or older, with over 24% of these living in residential aged care facilities. (AIHW, 2024).

### THE AGEING POPULATION AND THE NEED FOR SKILLED NURSES

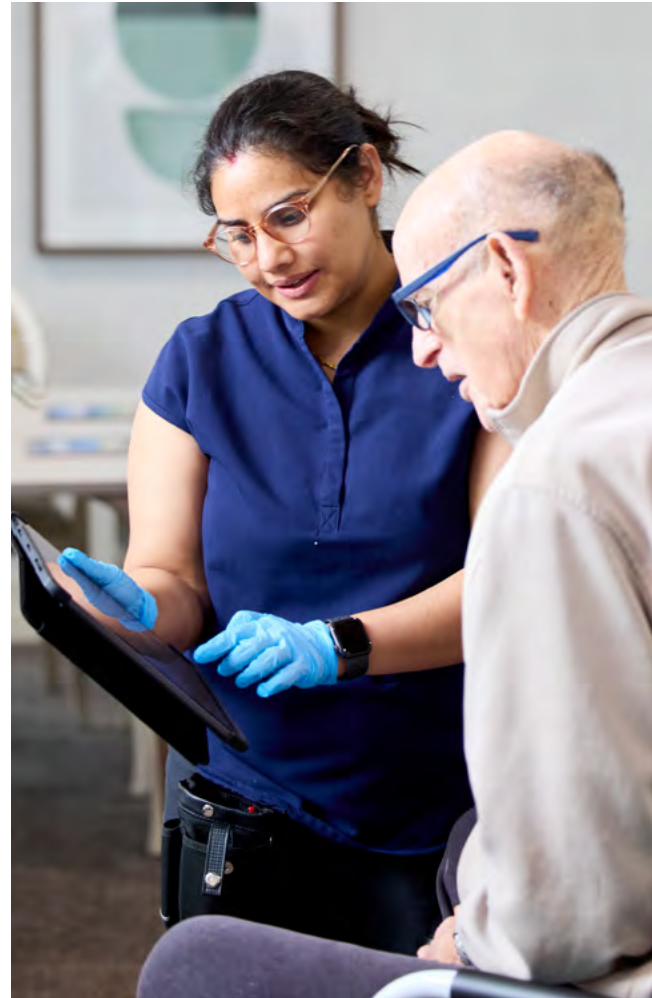
Australia's population is aging rapidly, with the proportion of individuals aged 65 and older expected to reach 23 per cent by 2050 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2021). This demographic shift presents significant challenges for the aged care sector, particularly in the areas of healthcare provision, workforce demand, and sustainability. Trained nurses are central to addressing these challenges, offering specialised care tailored to the unique needs of older individuals. Nurses working in aged care settings possess skills in geriatric nursing, chronic disease management, and palliative care, which are essential for improving quality of life and ensuring dignity in later years.

Aged care nurses are at the forefront of managing complex conditions. Their work directly impacts health outcomes, with evidence suggesting that higher levels of trained nursing staff correlate with improved quality of care and reduced adverse events in aged care facilities

Most older adults (80%) in Australia have at least one chronic health condition, and close to a third of this group are living with three or more chronic conditions (Aus Government, 2024b)

(Aiken et al., 2018). Additionally, skilled nurses are often the first point of contact in identifying early signs of health deterioration, helping to prevent hospital admissions and facilitating timely interventions.

Increased complexity among older people requires additional time and resources to deliver appropriate care. In addition to delivering direct clinical care to individuals with chronic illnesses and disabilities, aged care nurses are critical in coordinating care services (Whitehead et al 2023). They also provide essential supervision, mentoring, and education to nursing assistants and carers, ensuring the delivery of evidence-based, effective, and safe care.



## THE AGED CARE ENVIRONMENT

Despite their vital role, nurses in the aged care sector face various challenges that can affect the quality of care provided. One major issue is the shortage of skilled nurses, exacerbated by the growing demand for aged care services. According to a 2022 report by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, the workforce in Australia's aged care sector is insufficiently staffed, with many facilities experiencing high turnover rates and burnout among employees (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, 2021). This shortage places immense pressure on the existing workforce, reducing the quality of care and contributing to higher stress levels and job dissatisfaction among nurses.

In 2024, there were around 456,000 aged care workers in Australia (Australian Government, 2024). However, 5 per cent had no formal training or qualifications in aged care. The most common qualification level was a certificate in aged care (39%), and

less than 15 per cent held a Bachelor of Nursing (Australian Government, 2024a).

The complexity of the care required for elderly individuals with multiple chronic conditions demands a higher level of training and ongoing professional development. However, there is a significant gap in the uptake of specialised training opportunities for nurses in aged care. Evidence nationally and internationally across a range of settings links staffing levels and skills directly to the quality of care and clinical outcomes, particularly in areas such as dementia care and end-of-life care (Dall'Ora et al., 2022).

## THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSITIONING TO AGED CARE NURSING

Nurses transitioning from more traditional care settings to aged care in Australia face several challenges due to differences in models of care, staffing structures, and support systems. In acute care settings, nurses work in teams with several colleagues, which allows for a high level of

support from managers, educators, and medical staff, fostering a collaborative approach (Bragadóttir et al., 2023). The transition to aged care can be difficult, especially when nurses need to adapt to an independent role with less support (Sun et al., 2024). Significantly higher patient-to-nurse ratios in aged care place additional burdens on nurses. Typically, residential aged care facilities (RACFs) have one registered nurse overseeing an area, supported by personal care workers (PCAs), which increases the nurse's autonomy and responsibility (Eager et al., 2029; Sun et al., 2024).

One of the most significant challenges for nurses transitioning into aged care is bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical competence. Many nurses—whether new graduates or experienced professionals transitioning from other sectors—feel unprepared to handle the demands of aged care (Hallaran et al., 2023). These demands





include managing complex care needs, dementia care, chronic illness, and end-of-life care. Aged care nursing requires specific skills that may not be emphasised in acute or community care environments.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSITION TO PRACTICE PROGRAMS

The importance of a well-structured and supportive Transition to Practice (TTP) program cannot be overstated, especially in the aged care sector, where the demands on clinical leadership and patient care are significantly different from those in other healthcare settings. TTP programs are designed to assist nurses in adapting to their new roles, boosting their confidence and competence while ensuring patient safety. These programs are essential in easing the transition, not only for new graduate nurses but for any nurse moving from acute or community care to aged care (Ankers et al. 2017).

Transition programs provide targeted education and clinical experiences in a safe and supported environment. These programs allow transitioning nurses to gain the necessary skills to thrive in aged care and ensure they are providing the highest quality care. Notably, transition programs in aged care have been found to improve clinical leadership skills, which are essential for leading a team and ensuring patient safety. Nurses who complete these programs are more likely to develop the confidence and leadership abilities needed to guide their teams effectively (Murray and Sundin, 2017; Weller et al, 2022).

### ACN'S COMMITMENT TO AGED CARE NURSING

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) recognises nurses as central to delivering safe, high-quality aged care and is committed to supporting their professional growth.

ACN is pleased to announce that we have received funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care for our **Aged Care Transition to Practice Program**.

For further information visit [acn.edu.au/education/aged-care-transition-to-practice](https://acn.edu.au/education/aged-care-transition-to-practice) or contact [acttp@acn.edu.au](mailto:acttp@acn.edu.au)

In addition to the ACTTP program, ACN offers a variety of educational programs, including postgraduate courses and CPD modules, tailored to registered and enrolled nurses working in diverse aged care settings such as acute, residential aged care, and community care.

As well as education, ACN provides numerous opportunities for nurses to engage with peers, stay informed on the latest research, best practices, and policy developments, and connect with others with similar professional interests.



## Aged care nurses are at the forefront of managing complex conditions.

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Scan here to learn more about ACN's education and engagement opportunities in aged care



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