

Response to the Employment White Paper

30 November 2022

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About us

Dementia Australia is the source of trusted information, education, and services for the estimated half a million Australians living with dementia, and the almost 1.6 million people involved in their care. We advocate for positive change and support vital research.

We are here to support people impacted by dementia, and to enable them to live as well as possible. Founded by carers more than 35 years ago, today we are the national peak body for people living with dementia, their families, and carers.

We involve people impacted by dementia and their experiences in our activities and decision-making, to make sure we are representative of the diverse range of dementia experiences. We amplify the voices of people impacted by dementia through advocating and sharing stories to help inform and inspire others.

No matter how you are impacted by dementia or who you are, we are here for you.

Introduction

Dementia Australia welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Employment White Paper consultation.

In our submission, we put forward our solution to building a sustainable care economy in the context of an ageing population and other drivers of demand for care services.

As the nation's peak body for people living with dementia, their families and carers, as well as a key provider of dementia-specific education and support to the aged care sector, Dementia Australia is acutely aware of the current pressures on the care services sector. Various factors are likely to cause additional strain on the system in coming years.

Dementia Australia believes that dementia education is key to ensuring the sector meets current and future demands and is an immediate solution to the aged care workforce crisis.

Current and future demand for dementia care services

Dementia is Australia's second leading cause of death and leading cause of death for women¹. We expect dementia will become the overall leading cause of death in coming years, overtaking ischaemic heart disease, to become "one of Australia's most pressing health challenges"².

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), [Causes of Death, Australia](#), ABS Website, accessed 28 November 2022.

² The Commonwealth of Australia (2021), [2021 Intergenerational Report](#), accessed 28 November 2022.

In 2041, there will be 6.66 million people aged 65 and over and 1.8 million people 85 and above. This is an increase of 54 and 140 percent, respectively³. Without a medical or scientific breakthrough in this time, we anticipate this population boom will result in significant demand for dementia care services.

Already, more than two-thirds of aged care residents have moderate to severe cognitive impairment⁴. Approximately 10 percent of people who undertake an aged care assessment have dementia and an additional 4.4 percent have cognitive impairment⁵. In 2019, almost 10,000 people were receiving the Dementia and Cognition Supplement⁶ to their home care. Because of the challenges many face getting a diagnosis of dementia, these figures may underestimate the actual prevalence in Australians needing aged care services.

It's clear that action is needed to ensure that people with dementia have access to the services and support they need, both now and in the future.

A tool we have at our immediate disposal is dementia education.

Dementia education and career pathways

We know that a significant proportion of nurses, personal care workers and other staff across home and residential aged care settings do not receive dementia-specific education.

In 2020, 82 percent of residential aged care and 55 percent of home care providers (Home Care Package Program and Commonwealth Home Support Program) offered dementia training as part of continuing professional development⁷. Whilst this appears initially encouraging, only a minute fraction of the overall workforce had the opportunity to participate. This is despite dementia education being regarded as the most critical competency by aged care workers⁸.

Extensive consultation conducted by Dementia Australia in 2019 demonstrated that, for people living with dementia, their families, and carers, education is one of the most important components of quality care. The findings from this research are outlined in the resultant communique, **Our Solution: Quality care for people living with dementia**, ratified by people impacted by dementia.

³ ARC Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research, (2022) [New population projections for Australia and the States and Territories, with a particular focus on population ageing](#), accessed 28 November 2022.

⁴ The South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (2020), [Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, Research Paper 8 - International and National Quality and Safety Indicators for Aged Care](#).

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) [Dementia in Australia, Aged Care Assessments](#), AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 28 November 2022.

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) [Dementia in Australia, Community-based aged care](#), AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 28 November 2022.

⁷ Department of Health (2021), [2020 Aged Care Workforce Census Report](#), Australian Government, accessed 28 November 2022.

⁸ Department of Health (2017), [The Aged Care Workforce, 2016](#), Australian Government, accessed 28 November 2022.

Inadequate training not only impacts care quality, but also increases staff turn-over rates, fuels job dissatisfaction, exacerbates time inefficiencies (for example, inability to address resistance to eating or personal hygiene), creates an unsafe work environment, and leads to more frequent intervention by acute care services.

Dementia Australia proposes an urgent response to remedy the current workforce skills crisis and lay the foundation to a sustainable, high quality, aged care workforce. The initial focus of the response would be to deliver targeted education through a roll out of the **Dementia Essentials** programme to upskill those parts of the sector in most immediate need.

Concurrent expansion of the Community Visitors Scheme to provide access to dementia care training to volunteers and workshops and support for carers and families will have the dual benefit of alleviating pressure on the aged care sector whilst improving quality of life for people living with dementia.

Dementia Australia understands that education alone will not address staff shortages in the sector. However, we believe that by opening up pathways to long-term careers in dementia care, we can attract and retain qualified, experienced and satisfied staff.

Dementia Australia recommends that aged care providers support their workforce with career enhancing mechanisms such as peer-to-peer mentorship, practice or clinical supervision, and knowledge and research translation. This could be achieved with a national dementia practice leadership network.

Dementia Communities of Practice is an award-winning programme that inspires aged care professionals to transform their workplace's approach to dementia care through networking, knowledge sharing, mentoring, and access to leading dementia experts.

Conclusion

In summary, Dementia Australia believes that investment in dementia education will:

- Attract and retain workers with a rewarding, long-term career in dementia care
- Improve workplace conditions by reducing serious incidents, accidents and occupational health and safety concerns
- Increase employee satisfaction, competency, and efficiency

Most importantly, it will provide critical quality improvements for people with dementia living both at home or in residential care, both now and in the years ahead.

Dementia Australia's position statement, **Dementia education and the residential aged care workforce** explains these matters in detail.

Dementia Australia welcomes the opportunity to discuss this important issue further.