

## AGED CARE STAFFING

**The aged care workforce is large and diverse, including nurses, care workers, managers, domestic, hospitality and administrative staff. There are currently more than 366,000 aged care workers<sup>1</sup> caring and supporting about 1.3 million people Australia-wide.**

Aged care providers employ staff to deliver services in different models of care and to meet resident and client needs. The accreditation system then assesses whether the provider has the sufficient level and right skill mix to deliver quality care.

Currently the ANMF is running a campaign calling for a staff or nursing ratio in residential facilities which they argue will result in better quality care. In common with the ANMF, the aged care industry shares the desire to deliver the highest quality care to all but we do not agree that a ratio will deliver that result.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF NURSING STAFF

ACSA is very supportive of nurses and 24/7 RN cover where it is needed in those services whose residents require a high level of clinical expertise at all times. The increase of hours worked per resident per day over time are a reflection of the increasing care needs of residents.<sup>2</sup>

Care hours worked per resident per day							
Average all facilities	June 2012	June 2013	June 2014	June 2015	June 2016	June 2017	Dec 2017
Care Management	0.10	0.09	0.09	0.11	0.10	0.12	0.12
Registered Nurses	0.28	0.33	0.33	0.32	0.36	0.37	0.38
Enrolled and Certified				0.38	0.32	0.26	0.29
PCA/Care workers	1.96	2.15	2.21	1.92	2.02	2.05	2.11
Allied Health	0.08	0.12	0.11	0.13	0.11	0.12	0.15
Agency Care Hours	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.44</b>	<b>2.69</b>	<b>2.74</b>	<b>2.86</b>	<b>2.90</b>	<b>2.93</b>	<b>3.06</b>

### WHY NOT A RATIO?

ACSA supports sustainable staffing levels, and an appropriate skill-mix across the sector, but does not support fixed staffing levels. This is because aged care facilities need to be staffed to meet the needs of the residents which change over time.

A ratio is a blunt instrument and locks in staffing numbers rather than allowing flexibility to meet the changing needs of residents over time. The Australian Aged Care Quality Agency ensures there is adequate staffing in aged care homes as part of the aged care regulatory regime.

Arguments in favour of fixed staffing numbers need to account for the fact that residential aged care is not funded to provide hospital-level care, and are homes for a mix of residents with diverse needs and choices that exist in urban, regional, rural and remote with differing workforce challenges.

There is also no evidence that rigid ratios actually improve care outcomes for residents. Comprehensive research for the Victorian Government by La Trobe University concluded that: *"...little evidence could be found to sustain an argument in favour of [ratios]. Staffing methodologies are called for that take account of a broad range of variables and contexts... that acknowledge the contributions a broader skill mix brings to meeting the clinical and lifestyle needs of residents. The skill mix includes RNs, ENs, PCAs and activity officers, alongside access to medical, allied health and specialist services."*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Australian Government, Department of Health, The Aged Care Workforce, 2016, March 2017, p.xvi.

<sup>2</sup> StewartBrown, Residential Aged Care Survey data, December 2017.

<sup>3</sup> The Government of Victoria, Department of Health, Innovative workforce responses to a changing aged care environment, LaTrobe University, March 2011. [file:///C:/Users/Heather/Downloads/agedcare\\_workforce-PDF%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Heather/Downloads/agedcare_workforce-PDF%20(1).pdf)

The Productivity Commission (PC) similarly concluded that an across-the-board staffing ratio is a fairly 'blunt' instrument for ensuring quality care because of the ever changing care needs of aged care recipients. They further stated that adopting ratios would not be an efficient way to improve the quality of care.<sup>4</sup>

### CAN WE AFFORD RATIOS?

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Not within the existing funding envelope.

Requiring a ratio would necessitate significant additional funding from the Government and/or from residents.

A recent survey by accountancy firm StewartBrown Data showed around 40% of residential care providers made a loss as of December 2017. In outer regional, rural and remote areas that figure is higher still with around 56% reporting losses - up from 52% the same time last year. And the predictions are that the number of unviable providers will grow.<sup>5</sup>

Aged care providers operate with a budget of around \$230 a day for each resident compared with \$1,900 per day in acute settings.

There has been significant public comment, particularly from the ANMF, on the requirement to jointly increase the hourly rate for direct care staff (nurses and carers) as well as increasing the amount of direct care provided to residents to 4 hours and 18 minutes daily (4.3 hours). Given this, StewartBrown have estimated this could only be effectively achieved through additional government subsidy or consumer funding \$2.4 to 3.5 billion per year.

### AGED CARE WORKFORCE STRATEGY

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A great deal of work has been undertaken by the Government's Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce – of which ACSA was a member. The final report was handed to the Government on 29 June 2018. The Government has yet to respond.

The Taskforce has proposed a strategy for growing and sustaining the workforce providing aged care services and support of older people, to meet their care needs in a variety of settings across Australia.

The recommendations include an industry-led voluntary code of practice, a new committee to improve education and training and a greater voice for providers in remote Australia.<sup>6</sup>

**- Updated: 13 August 2018**

**ACSA is the peak body for Australia's not-for-profit, church, charitable and community-based aged care providers.**

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<sup>4</sup> Productivity Commission, *Caring for Older Australians*. 2011. <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/aged-care/report>

<sup>5</sup> [www.stewartbrown.com.au/news-articles/26-aged-care/150-december-2017-aged-care-benchmark-sector-reports-released](http://www.stewartbrown.com.au/news-articles/26-aged-care/150-december-2017-aged-care-benchmark-sector-reports-released)

<sup>6</sup> <https://agedcare.health.gov.au/reform/aged-care-workforce-strategy-taskforce>