

Aged Care Worker Registration Scheme Consultation

Dementia Australia submission April 2025

Dementia Australia welcomes this consultation and strongly supports the establishment of an Aged Care Worker Registration Scheme.

To improve care outcomes for people living with dementia, it is essential that there be a minimum qualification for aged care workers of the Certificate III Individual Support – Ageing Specialisation, and a requirement for minimum hours of continuing professional development.

Dementia education must be mandatory for all aged care workers and aligned with the national standards articulated in the National Dementia Education and Training Standards Framework.

People living with dementia, carers and former carers have told us frequently and strongly about the negative experiences they have had in aged care resulting from inconsistent workforce capability. There are systematic issues which must be addressed to support an uplift of dementia capability across the aged care sector.

An aged care worker registration scheme will be a powerful tool to improve care quality if it establishes requirements for dementia education and supports both the workforce and aged care providers to achieve these requirements.

Regulatory oversight will be critical to ensure that requirements for the scheme are implemented and there must be transparent reporting by aged care providers on workforce education.

There will also be positive workforce benefits from a registration scheme, supporting recognition of aged care workers capabilities, career progression and workforce retention.

Recommendations

Dementia Australia recommends that:

- 1) A public register for aged care workers be established with a requirement that aged care workers hold a Certificate III in Individual Support and undertake continuing professional development.
- 2) Aged care workers be required to complete the Ageing Specialisation including the unit of competency Providing Support to People Living with Dementia.
- 3) The registration scheme require that there be continuing professional development in dementia care, aligned with the National Dementia Education and Training Standards Framework.

- 4) The scheme require that any aged care worker employed in a Memory Support Unit, Specialist Dementia Care Program, or otherwise principally delivering care to people living with dementia be appropriately skilled and have access to ongoing dementia education.
- 5) The scheme minimise administrative and financial burden on aged care workers, with aged care providers responsible for updating education and training for workers they employ, and regulatory oversight of provider compliance.
- 6) Professional development include a mix of training modes and opportunities, together with on-the-job supervision, coaching and mentoring of aged care workers, to maximise the impact of formal learning.
- 7) Aged care providers be required to transparently report on workforce development expenditure. There needs to be formal oversight by the aged care regulator of the standard of training provided to the aged care workforce.

Scheme design

A public register

Dementia Australia supports a public register for aged care workers, with appropriate privacy protections for any sensitive information. A public register will increase confidence and enable better choice and control for individuals accessing aged care services.

A public register will have added benefit for individuals accessing in-home care, enabling individuals to ensure that their care staff have appropriate qualifications and skill for the support required.

The public register should be managed by a regulatory or statutory agency, to ensure appropriate oversight.

Evidence requirements

There should be a joint responsibility for both aged care workers and aged care providers to supply registration requirement evidence to the register. It would be beneficial for the scheme to make the minimum impost on aged care workers, to avoid deterring workers from the sector because of perceived administrative or financial burden.

Aged care providers should generally be responsible for updating the register with information about training and education that they provide to workers they employ. Aged care provider compliance with the requirements for maintaining worker registration information should be integrated with the aged care regulatory system.

Dementia education

Aged care workers must be required to complete the Certificate III - Ageing Specialisation including the unit of competency Providing Support to People Living with Dementia.

The registration scheme should require that there be continuing professional development in dementia care, aligned with the National Dementia Education and Training Standards Framework. This Framework provides the level of competency required of different roles within the workforce for quality dementia care.

Registration categories

There are certain contexts in which provisional registration categories would be appropriate. During establishment of the scheme, provisional registration would support the existing aged care workforce to meet requirements and would help to prevent loss of experienced aged care workers from the sector.

In regional and rural areas, or other thin markets, provisional registration would assist with attracting workers to the sector and supporting their education and training while meeting community need.

Scheme implementation

Transition period

During establishment of the registration scheme, a transition period will be essential to enable the existing workforce to attain minimum formal qualifications, and for providers to analyse gaps and develop workforce education plans.

The existing aged care workforce should be supported to attain minimum qualifications and update training during the transition period. A process should be established for recognition of the skills and experience of aged care workers when obtaining a Certificate III in Individual Support. It is important that there is a process of recognition of employees' existing capabilities.

In the transition period, additional funding will likely be required from government to support systematic uplift of workforce capability to meet minimum requirements. For example, a scheme wherein providers could apply for government funding to cover time release and backfill costs to release staff for training would be beneficial.

Specific requirements

It is critical that all aged care workers employed in a Memory Support Unit, Specialist Dementia Care Unit, or otherwise principally delivering care to people living with dementia are appropriately trained and skilled.

All aged care workers who provide care to people living with dementia should be required to undertake dementia education and training aligned with the National Dementia Education and Training Standards Framework. The Framework provides a consistent and comprehensive approach to dementia education, with standards for knowledge and skills across a core range of dementia learning domains.

A minimum standard of communication skills is necessary. Skills in communicating with people living with dementia and carers should form part of core requirements for aged care workers.

It is also essential that aged care workers providing home care services are trained to work autonomously and without direct supervision. Home care workers must be skilled in using independent judgement and decision-making.

Continuing professional development

Once minimum qualifications have been obtained, aged care workers should be required to undertake continuing professional development for a minimum number of hours per year.

On-the-job coaching and mentoring are essential to allow aged care workers to apply skills and knowledge from formal training. Communities of practice are also a valuable tool for workforce development through peer support.

The process of determining relevant training and education should be a collaboration between the aged care worker and the provider, aligned to expectations under the Strengthened Quality Standards and for dementia care, the National Dementia Education and Training Standards Framework.

Aged care providers should be required to transparently report on workforce development expenditure. There needs to be formal oversight by the aged care regulator of the standard of training provided to the aged care workforce.

Barriers and supports

There should be no cost of registration for the existing aged care workforce, and government should continue to support fee-free Certificate III and IV courses for care workers.

The existing aged care workforce should be supported with access to education and training, including any necessary pre-education support, such as for literacy and numeracy.

A mix of training modes should be offered to support the different learning styles of staff and improve learning outcomes, including the use of impactful technology like virtual reality.

The use of technology can make education more accessible. Online training options can also support workers in regional, rural and remote to access suitable education and training.

Workforce planning

Aged care providers are responsible for workforce planning to engage competent staff, implement supervision and support, and provide competency-based training in core areas. The introduction of a minimum Certificate III qualification would support providers to meet these obligations.

Workforce shortage is a critical factor currently facing the aged care sector. A national worker registration scheme with a mandatory minimum qualification will make aged care more attractive as a career. Professionalisation, recognition, career pathways, and job satisfaction all contribute to workforce retention.

The Strengthened Quality Standards should form the basis for gap analysis and identification of training needs. Gap analysis is critical to identify where training is required to improve care outcomes.

There is not currently a sufficient focus on the development of leadership capabilities, especially in dementia care. As part of planning for career progression, aged care providers and workers should consider leadership training options including the Certificate IV in Dementia Practice. The development of dedicated career pathways is an incentive for aged care workers to remain in the workforce, supporting the sector's sustainability.

Funding for ongoing training should largely be the responsibility of aged care providers, who are responsible for workforce planning and determining how job requirements relate to training needs for employees. Aged care providers should be required to report transparently on expenditure on workforce education and training.

Cross sector requirements

A centralised register will support workforce mobility. All workers employed in aged care, disability support or veteran's care should have a minimum qualification of a Certificate III in Individual Support.

Any worker employed in disability or veteran's care who works with people living with dementia, people at risk of dementia, or older people should be required to undertake dementia education and training to ensure they are appropriately skilled and qualified.

Thank you for considering our Recommendations for a national aged care worker registration scheme. We would be pleased to discuss our submission in further detail. The Dementia Australia Policy and Advocacy team can be contacted via **policyteam@dementia.org.au**.