



Aged Care workforce deserves more: survey of 4425 older Australians

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New research from National Seniors Australia (NSA) shows older Australians highly value aged care workers, but have strong views on how to improve quality of care.

The findings, based on 4425 Australians aged 50 and older who participated in the most recent National Seniors Social Survey reveal strong support for training for aged care workers prior to starting work, with almost 100% of respondents rating this 'very important' (92%) or 'somewhat important' (8%).

Respondents also supported dementia training (98%), further training on the job (98%), career development (97%), higher pay (97%), and improved working conditions (98%), with 61%-77% rating each of these items 'very important'.

"The results reinforce the importance older Australians place on a quality aged care workforce," NSA CEO Mr Chris Grice said.

"Older people want to see aged care workers treated better and better supported to do their absolute best for older Australians entrusted into their care."

Better conditions make better carers

More than 600 respondents supplied comments revealing a common concern that poor pay conditions contribute to chronic understaffing and in turn impact care.

Some comments connected employment conditions and clients' experiences: *"The quality of care trickles down from the top. If staff are treated with respect by management, they will in turn treat each other and residents [with] respect."*

Some respondents expressed the need to reframe aged care work to attract and retain quality workers, with *"more work done so it is perceived by the wider community as a credible, respected, desirable, aspirational career."*

While training is critical, 151 people believed inherent traits including kindness, compassion, patience, respect, attentiveness, being sociable and good humoured were more important than qualifications for aged care workers.

One person wrote, *"Having experience with aged care homes, [there] have been some amazing workers who have empathy without any training, they are the ones that should be treated like gold."*

A workforce to suit clients' needs

Ninety-nine percent of respondents supported the government requirement that every aged care facility must have a registered nurse on duty 24/7 to manage medical problems as they arise, and to relieve pressure on emergency

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services and hospitals by treating residents in-house for non-urgent medical needs. But commenters also acknowledged problems from imposing the requirement without exceptions.

As one wrote, *“This has forced the closing of many aged care residential homes in rural towns – RNs were on call but not in a facility 24/7 – so now local hospitals are full of aged/dementia care.”*

In addition, 99% believed clients should receive care from the same individual or the same small group of carers, noting this builds trust, reduces anxiety, and better enables staff to notice changes in clients’ wellbeing.

Similarly, 98% felt workers should speak the same language as clients, particularly because loss of hearing or vision can exacerbate language difficulties, as can workers wearing masks.

In contrast, other aspects of workers’ social and cultural backgrounds were rated ‘not at all important’ by a large proportion of respondents.

“Given Australia is wonderfully multicultural, many older Australians recognise the benefits and realities of a diverse workforce,” Mr Grice said.

“But because language is key to communication, we must find ways to ensure aged care workers and clients can always understand each other.

“We often talk about the failures of the aged care system without recognising the special people doing the important work within it. As our research reveals, aged care workers are valued and should have the support to reflect this.”

The report offers ten recommendations for government and the aged care sector to consider.

Read the full research report [here](#)

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