

Productivity Commission Inquiry into Building a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce

Dementia Australia Submission June 2025

Dementia Australia is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into building a skilled and adaptable workforce.

Australia is currently facing a critical shortage of aged care workers. Lack of workforce supply is impacting the health and wellbeing of people living with dementia and their families, as people across the country face lengthy waits for home care packages and residential aged care places to become available.

This significant public policy issue requires careful consideration and a range of nationally coordinated strategies to support workforce growth and capability.

Dementia Australia recommends that the Productivity Commission consider how flexible post-secondary education and training can support the growth of the aged care workforce to meet current and future demand. We recommend that policy strategies:

1. Support investment in post-secondary education and training in aged, disability and dementia care careers.
2. Develop dementia care career pathways for the aged, health, and disability sectors, with options for career advancement.
3. Support professionalisation and training for the aged care sector through a national aged care worker registration scheme.

Dementia in Australia

Dementia is one of Australia's most significant public health, social and economic challenges. It has been estimated that in 2020-21, almost \$3.7 billion of health and aged care spending was directly attributable to the diagnosis, treatment and care of people with dementia.

There are 433,300 Australians living with dementia, a figure projected to almost double in the next 30 years. Dementia is the leading cause of death for Australian women and the second leading cause of death overall.(1)

Dementia causes significant cognitive and physical disability through progressive impairment of brain function, impacting memory, speech, thought, personality, behaviour and mobility. (1)

Despite medical advances, there is currently no cure for dementia. As dementia progresses, so do care needs, with care provision relying on both the paid workforce and unpaid family carers.

Growing demand for quality care

As the prevalence of dementia grows, there is an increasing demand for a skilled and capable workforce across the health, aged care and disability sectors. More than half of the approximately 242,000 people accessing residential aged care services are living with dementia. (1)

To ensure that Australians living with dementia have access to quality care, there needs to be sustained investment in education and training in health, aged, disability and dementia sectors.

Unfortunately, and despite significant reform efforts, care outcomes for people living with dementia remain variable. People living with dementia, carers and former carers regularly tell Dementia Australia about the negative experiences they have had in aged care, health and disability settings, resulting in part from inconsistent workforce capability.

These are structural issues which must be addressed to support the growth of the workforce and an uplift of capability to meet the needs of Australians living with dementia now and in the future.

Strengthening the dementia care workforce

Workforce shortage is a critical factor for the aged care sector. To support the growth of a fit-for-purpose dementia care workforce, it is essential to promote post-secondary aged and dementia care training through both vocational and tertiary education options.

Development of career pathways for the aged and disability care sectors is essential, with options for career advancement.

Dementia Australia supports the professionalisation of the aged care workforce through a national worker registration scheme, with a mandatory minimum qualification. Positive benefits would include recognition of capabilities, career progression, workforce growth and retention.

The existing aged care workforce should be supported to attain minimum qualifications and update training, including recognition of prior skills and experience.

Work-related training is a critical component of post-secondary education for the aged care workforce, including on-the-job coaching and mentoring. These allow aged care workers to apply skills and knowledge from formal training.

There also needs to be a focus on development of leadership capabilities and career pathways, with options including the Certificate IV in Dementia Practice. The development of dedicated career pathways provides an incentive for aged care workers to remain in the workforce, supporting growth and retention.

There is also a need to improve dementia capability in the disability workforce, to deliver quality care to the 29,000 Australians living with dementia who are aged under 65. (2) This includes the one in 2,900 children born with a condition causing childhood dementia. (3)

Any worker employed in disability care who works with a child or adult living with dementia should be required to undertake dementia education and training to ensure they are appropriately skilled and qualified to deliver quality care. These minimum qualifications are essential to professionalise the disability care sector alongside aged care.

A minimum qualification for aged and disability care workers would also support workforce mobility across these sectors. Development of career pathways for dementia care, with investment in education and training, should also extend to health care, especially acute care and first responders.

Dementia Australia recommends that the Productivity Commission recognise the unique and growing care needs of Australians living with dementia with national strategies to strengthen workforce capability through education, training, and professionalisation.

Investment in post-secondary education and career pathways for dementia care, and professionalisation of the industry, will support growth of a fit-for-purpose workforce that delivers quality care.

This will not only improve care outcomes for people living with dementia but also ensure the growth of a sustainable care sector for the future.

Thank you for considering our submission. The Dementia Australia Policy team can be contacted at [**policyteam@dementia.org.au**](mailto:policyteam@dementia.org.au).

References

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Dementia in Australia. Australian Government 2024.
2. Dementia Australia. Facts and Figures 2025. [**https://www.dementia.org.au/about-dementia/dementia-facts-and-figures**](https://www.dementia.org.au/about-dementia/dementia-facts-and-figures).
3. Childhood Dementia Initiative. Childhood dementia facts and statistics 2025. [**https://www.childhooddementia.org/health-professionals/understanding-childhood-dementia**](https://www.childhooddementia.org/health-professionals/understanding-childhood-dementia).