

# ***CARING FOR OLDER AUSTRALIANS***

## **Submission by the National Council of Women of Australia Inc Ltd**

### **1 Background**

The National Council of Women of Australia (NCWA) is a national non-government umbrella organisation with broadly humanitarian and educational objectives, which seeks to raise the awareness of women to their rights and responsibilities as citizens and to encourage the participation of women in all aspects of community life.

The aims of NCWA include:

To act as a link for networking and a co-ordinator between State and Territory Councils of Women.

To act as a voice or agent of communication at national and international levels on issues and concerns of women.

The NCWA, in dealing with national issues on behalf of its membership, refers submissions and matters on to the Federal Government and relays information back to the State and Territory Councils.

### **2 Scope of the Inquiry: Sections Addressed in this Submission**

The submission addresses aspects of paragraphs 2 and 3 under Scope of the Inquiry, Terms of Reference (Attachment A, No. CFOA 1, 27 April 2010):

para 2 ..... *provide an appropriately skilled and adequately remunerated workforce* (lines 24-5);

para 3 *Systematically examine the future workforce requirements of the aged care sector, taking into account factors influencing both the supply and demand for the aged care workforce, and develop options to ensure that the sector has access to a sufficient and appropriately trained workforce.*

### **3. Basis of the submission**

The submission is based on two resolutions adopted at the triennial conference of the National Council of Women of Australia (NCWA) held in Adelaide, 25-27 September 2009:

#### **Resolution A: Health – Nursing Home Staff**

*‘NCWA urges the Federal Government to urgently legislate to increase funding to ensure the ratio of trained nursing staff to that of residents of nursing homes is increased to a level equivalent to that required by law in public hospital medical and surgical wards, so ensuring that no resident is cared for in unsafe conditions or suffers neglect, particularly on evening or night shifts.’*

#### **Rationale for Resolution A (extract)**

The level of after-hours care for less physically capable residents may fall below a reasonable standard.

The following examples relate to problems reported to facility managers or accreditation officers:

- a. Staff consistently report “being stretched to the limit”, particularly on evening and night shifts;
- b. Fatigue makes the practice of double shifts unsafe;
- c. Staff levels have been reduced at a time of increasing numbers of high-dependency residents. This has led to delayed assistance with toileting, retrieval of residents who have fallen during the night, and in dressing patients promptly after showering. Bedsores and dehydration have been attributed to less frequent attention to residents.

## **Resolution B: Standardisation of Nursing Salaries**

*‘NCWA urges the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing to provide increased funding in order to standardise the salaries of all nursing staff, whether in any type of aged care facility or public hospital covered by Federal and State Awards and/or Enterprise Agreements.’*

### **Rationale for Resolution (extract)**

Staffing of all aged care facilities poses significant issues of supply and demand.

Without additional government support, some aged care facilities, especially in rural areas, may have to close.

## **4 NCWA Endorsement of ‘Because We Care’**

The above resolutions confirm NCWA’s support for ‘Because We Care: Quality Care for Older Australians’, an ongoing media campaign launched by the Australian Nursing Federation in March 2009 with associated print and online resources.

The aim of the campaign is to ‘rais[e] awareness and recognition of Australia’s highly skilled and dedicated aged care nursing and care workforce, by focusing on: the right balance of skills and nursing hours so that nursing and care staff can provide quality care for every resident; fair pay for aged care nurses and care staff; recognition of the professional skills of assistants in nursing and care staff through a national licensing system; and a guarantee that taxpayer funding is used for nursing and personal care for each resident.’ (Australian Nursing Federation, 2009, ‘Because we care: quality care for older Australians, [www.becausewecare.org.au](http://www.becausewecare.org.au)).

## **5 Recommendations**

NCWA acknowledges the allocation of \$132 million in the 2010 Budget for a workforce package to encourage further relevant education for aged care employees, and to introduce a national licensing system for assistants in nursing and care staff employed in residential aged care facilities.

We recommend that future funding be guaranteed to ensure continuity in education programs and retention of the licensing system.

NCWA also acknowledges current efforts to secure a national pay structure for registered nurses employed in residential aged care facilities.

We recommend that current negotiations aimed at achieving national parity should not disadvantage nurses employed in New South Wales and Queensland already paid at higher rates than their interstate colleagues.