

A snapshot of residential aged care

Older Australians who require care in nursing homes deserve the best quality care. This can only be achieved by providing a skilled and robust nursing workforce and adequate funding. The Australian government is ultimately responsible to ensure that funding is available and properly accounted for, and that funds are directed to the provision of quality care.

More and more, older Australians are remaining in their own homes for longer, and are entering nursing homes only when their care needs are too complex to be managed in the community. That complexity of care means that more than ever, we need qualified nursing and care staff whose skills are valued, whose professionalism is acknowledged and who feel they can care for their residents properly.

There are three levels of care staff working in aged care: registered nurses, enrolled nurses and personal carers (PCs)[#]. Personal carers, who are not licensed as nurses, now constitute the majority of the aged care direct care workforce. Their skills are highly valued by care teams, but the ANMF believes it is time to increase the professionalism of workers in these roles to guide their delivery of care and protect them as workers and most importantly those they care for.

Residential Aged Care Nursing Workforce Trends

Between 2003 and 2016 the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) direct care staff employed in nursing homes has increased by almost 29%. However, registered nurse (FTE) employment decreased by 10.5% over the same period.

As at 2016 there are 1,701 fewer FTE RNs working in aged care than there were in 2003, while between 2003 and 2016, the number of residential aged care places increased by 30%. The dependency level of residents also increased with 89% of residents with high care needs as at June 2015. (See note under Resident dependency levels table on page 2.)

The National Institute of Labour Studies (NILS) 2008 Report *Who Cares for Older Australians?* identified a significant restructuring of nursing staff in nursing homes. It found an overall increase in nursing care delivered by staff other than registered and enrolled nurses. “Overall, these figures suggest a significant reorganisation of care in residential aged care homes so that more care is provided by PCs and less by nurses. Moreover, a greater proportion of new hires continue to be PCs suggesting that the trend towards increased use of PCs will continue”.(Martin and King)

This trend was confirmed in the 2012 Report and highlighted again in 2016. The report notes “...residential facilities continue to rely increasingly on PCAs to provide direct care to residents. There has been some increase in the number of RNs, but there has been a corresponding and larger fall in the number of ENs. PCAs are the only residential direct care occupational category to substantively raise its share of employment since 2012...”

This shift in workforce structure within aged care emphasises the importance of maintaining the delivery of high quality and safe nursing care in the sector. The Australian population is ageing and the ANMF asserts that we need to ensure that registered and enrolled nurses are employed in aged care to meet this increased demand.

Occupation	2003	2007	2012	2016
Nurse Practitioner	n/a	n/a	190 (0.2%)	293 (0.3%)
Registered Nurse	16,265 (21.4%)	13,247 (16.8%)	13,939 (14.7%)	14,564 (14.9%)
Enrolled Nurse	10,945 (14.4%)	9,856 (12.5%)	10,999 (11.6%)	9,126 (9.3%)
Personal Care Attendant	42,943 (56.5%)	50,542 (64.1%)	64,669 (68.2%)	69,983 (71.5%)
Allied Health Professional	5,776* (7.6%)	5,204* (6.6%)	1,612 (1.7%)	1,092 (1.1%)
Allied Health Assistant			3,414 (3.6%)	2,862 (2.9%)
Total number of employees (FTE) (%)	76,006 (100)	78,849 (100)	94,823 (100)	97,920 (100)

Source: Mavromaras K, Knight G, Isherwood L, et al. 2017. *The Aged Care Workforce 2016*. Commonwealth of Australia as represented by the Department of Health. Table 3.3 page 13

* In 2003 and 2007 these categories were combined under 'Allied Health'

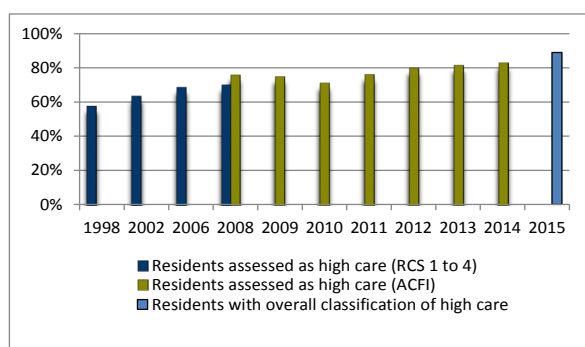
The term PCs includes personal care workers, assistants in nursing and other unlicensed workers (however titled) working in aged care.

RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE SERVICES AND THE EMPLOYMENT OF NURSING STAFF

Resident characteristics

- 175,989 permanent residents in mainstream residential aged care services at 30 June 2016.
- Average age of residents in permanent care as at 30 June 2016:
 - 85 non-indegeous
 - 73 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Resident dependency levels



Note: Overall levels of "high" and "low" care are no longer reported by AIHW. The figure for 2015 is derived from the Distribution of care need domain ratings, at June 2015 using the same process to determine the overall high/low distinction in the 2013-14 Report. See additional note at bottom of page.

- 92% of residents in permanent care on 30 June 2016 had high care needs in at least one care area.

Number of aged care services

As at June 2016 there were 2,669 residential aged care services providing 195,825 resident places.

Number of operational residential aged care places

30 June 1995	134,810
30 June 2005	161,765
30 June 2010	179,749
30 June 2012	187,941
30 June 2013	186,278
30 June 2014	189,283
30 June 2015	192,370
30 June 2016	195,825

Ratio of residential aged care places per 1000 persons aged 70 years and over

30 June 2005	86.4
30 June 2009	87.0
30 June 2010	86.8
30 June 2011	85.7
30 June 2012	84.4
30 June 2013	86.0
30 June 2014	82.6
30 June 2015	81.1
30 June 2016	79.7

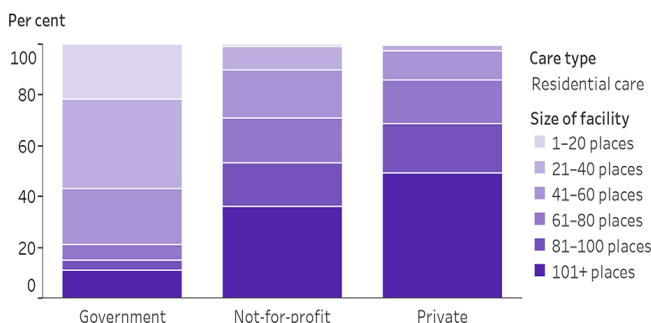
Average number of places per facility

1998	46.4
2006	60.0
2010	64.8
2012	69.0
2013	68.5
2014	70.4
2015	81.1
2016	73.4

Ownership of residential aged care places

Private for profit providers	39.1%
Private not for profit providers	31.4%
Religious providers	24.8%
State/Territory/local government	4.7%

Places in Residential care, by organisation type and size of service, 30 June 2016



Registered and enrolled nurses in residential aged care

- The number of registered and enrolled nurse full-time equivalent positions in residential aged care has dropped by 13% since 2003. Between 2003 and 2015 the number of residential aged care places has increased by 30% and dependency levels of residents have increased from 64.4% assessed as high care in 2003, to 89% in 2015.
- The decline in the number of registered nurses is also highlighted in AIHW Nursing Labour Force reports, noting the substantial skill loss which places further pressure on the residential aged care sector.

Wages gap

- Full time residential aged care nurses now earn approximately an average of \$200 per week less (calculated on the base rate) than their colleagues in other sectors resulting in increasing difficulties attracting and retaining adequate numbers of appropriately trained nursing staff.

Note:

The figure of 89% of residents with an overall classification of high care is based on the process applied in the 2013-14 AIHW Report whereby people were classified as high care if they had an ACFI appraisal of either high in Activities of Daily Living or high in Complex Health Care, or high in Behaviour together with low or medium in at least one of the other two domains, or medium in at least two of the three domains. (<http://www.aihw.gov.au/aged-care/residential-and-home-care-2013-14/glossary/>)

Sources:

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