



Workforce Planning & Management

THE ASK:

Workforce planning and management are crucial elements to delivering quality and safe consumer-centred care that is sustainable, compliant with applicable laws, and meets community expectations. The governing body and executives of aged care providers must consider how the provider's workforce plan attracts, recruits, manages and retains a skilled workforce.

Covered in this Topic Guide

- What is workforce planning?
- Attraction and recruitment
- Training and development
- Staff performance management workforce retention

Where are we now?



We're in a difficult situation at the moment, [and] workforce is our biggest challenge moving forward. Our key people are leaving – the talent are leaving. They're not prepared to do the work at the moment. There needs to be some sort of strategic thinking about the future to make sure that the sector stays viable.

GOVERNING BODY MEMBER

Key concepts

- **Recruitment strategy** is a clear plan that is aligned with the provider's strategic objectives. It sets out what skills, what roles and how many workers a provider requires. It should set out a clear course for how, when and why the provider will recruit for certain roles and include a forecast that identifies future needs to inform current recruitment processes.
- **Employee value proposition (EVP)** is a tool that can be used by providers to attract, recruit and retain workers. It is a way to set out the rewards and benefits (monetary and non-monetary) that prospective employees are offered when working for a provider.

The aged care sector workforce

The shortage of a skilled workforce is a significant challenge facing the aged care sector. With the increasing demand for an aged care workforce and the impacts of policy, economic and environmental changes (such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and aged care reforms arising from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety), finding and retaining a skilled workforce requires strategic planning and management.

Additionally, effective workforce planning and development for aged care providers must be in line with consumer needs and preferences and the Aged Care Quality Standards. Specifically, Standard 7 Human Resources, Requirement (3)(a) requires that ‘the workforce is planned to enable, and the number and mix of members of the workforce deployed enable, the delivery and management of safe and quality consumer-centred care and services.’ The composition of the aged care workforce is varied across occupation type, employment type and required qualifications. Volunteers may also play a critical role in the composition of the aged care workforce. For example, volunteers often assist with social activity support, companionship and planned group activities. This broad workforce requires governing bodies to implement structured systems to determine and monitor the workforce numbers and skills needed to deliver quality and safe services to consumers.

Story from the sector



The provider should have a clear workforce plan and recruitment strategy

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Workforce planning presents a forecast for future needs and a strategic plan about how to meet those needs.
- An effective recruitment strategy and employee value proposition can be useful tools to support a forward-looking workforce plan.

At their last strategy day, Acme Community Services’ governing body discussed that the aging Australian population was resulting in an increasing level of consumers with dementia. As a result, and as part of their workforce management, the management team forecasted that they would need to increase their current workforce by 20% to meet future demand. The management team prepared a recruitment strategy that set out recruitment targets for the types of skilled workers that the provider needed over the coming 5 years. That recruitment strategy was provided to the governing body for them to provide their insights, ensure that the plan aligned with the strategic objectives, and advise on strategies to further attract a workforce to meet their recruitment targets.

Shortly after, it was announced that the new regulations would require increased care hours for consumers with dementia and for a registered nurse to be on duty at all times. The demand for workers increased substantially as competitors all started their recruitment processes. However, because Acme Community Services had strategically planned for this and presented a strong employee value proposition proactively, they were able to attract and recruit skilled, quality staff before the immediate needs arose. This led to consistent, high quality consumer-centred care for their consumers.

Tips for workforce planning and management

Older Australians at the Centre

- Providers should promote consumer interaction as a key part of the value proposition of working in aged care.
- Embed changing consumer needs into the workforce forecasts and planning to ensure the needs of consumers are met.

Obligations and Accountabilities

- Governing bodies are responsible for ensuring that the workforce operating model aligns with strategic objectives.
- A requirement of the Aged Care Quality Standards is workforce planning that enables the delivery and management of safe and quality consumer-centred care and services.

Knowledge, Skills and Experience

- Workforce planning considers the skills that reflect consumer needs as well as training demanded by regulatory reforms.

Leadership and Culture

- Workforce planning should align with a provider's strategic objectives and reflect the values and goals of the provider.
- Frameworks and processes should seek to recognise, acknowledge and reward workers

Reflecting on your practice



Think...

Below are the top things you need to be **thinking** about:

- What can we be doing differently so that we can attract, recruit and keep quality staff in a market where the workforce is in limited supply?
- Does our workforce plan support the delivery of safe, consistent, high quality consumer-centred aged care?
- How can we better understand the motivators that attract people to work in the aged care sector and their reasons for exiting the sector?
- What are we doing to reduce staff turnover and encourage workers to continue to work at our provider?



Ask and say...

Below are the top **questions you need to be asking**:

- Does our workforce plan align with our strategic objectives and any upcoming changes and reforms in the sector that we will face?
- Have we implemented an active recruitment strategy that meets the forecasted future needs of the provider?
- How do we ensure that we have people with the right skills and experience consistently and sustainably into the future?
- When budgeting, have we considered any Government-funded training and professional development opportunities we can offer workers?
- Do we have accurate position descriptions that reflect the responsibilities, personal characteristics, expectations and capabilities of potential workers?
- What frameworks and initiatives do we have in place to encourage our people to stay with us?



Do...

These are the top **actions and behaviours** of leaders:

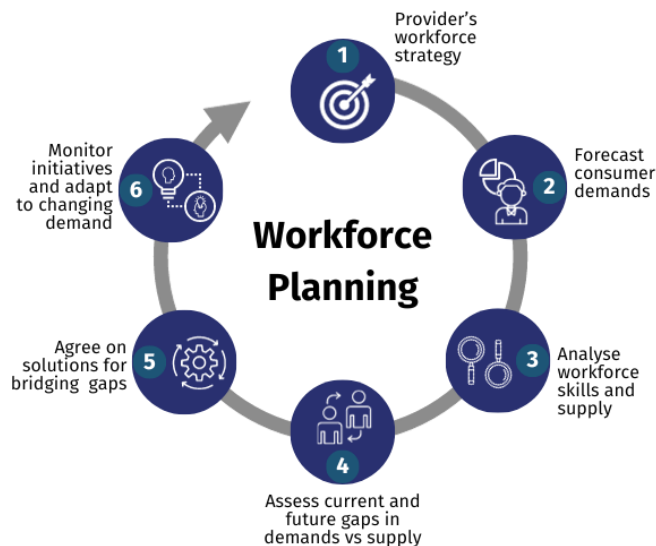
- Ensure the workforce's interactions with consumers are kind, caring and respectful, considering each consumer's identity, culture and diversity?
- Regularly review the workforce plan and recruitment plan to assess their effectiveness and be ready to adjust those plans to meet changing needs in a changing environment.
- Demonstrate compassionate leadership by listening and responding to the needs of the workforce.
- Stay informed and up to date with trends and reforms to the aged care sector. Continue to scan the environment of the provider to identify opportunities for better workforce planning.

What is workforce planning?

Workforce planning, as part of workforce management, sets out the process of determining the provider's future needs and implementing strategies and processes to prepare for and address those needs. This planning should include the following elements:

- **Recruitment** - identifying mandatory skills and hiring staff with required competencies.
- **Development** - upskilling and training staff to meet current and future needs and forecasting succession plans.
- **Management** - maximising the performance and potential of the current workforce.
- **Retention** - maintaining the desired levels of engagement and satisfaction to sustain the workforce.

Workforce planning with a continuous improvement mindset allows the governing body to position the provider's workforce to best deliver safe, high quality consumer-centred care to consumers and manage risks both through reform and into the future. It is important that governing bodies continually monitor and challenge how the workforce plan reflects the provider's strategy, meets consumer needs and balances employee satisfaction. To do this most effectively, it may be appropriate to consult consumers and staff directly regarding their particular needs in relation to workforce size, nature and experience.



Workforce planning also requires an element of succession planning. Governing bodies must be proactive in their workforce planning to:

- forecast the needs of the provider and consumers
- understand the provider's funding model
- meet changing consumer demands
- make plans for potential staff shortages.

Providers that are able to establish an agile workforce plan that informs how that provider recruits, develops and manages staff will lead to a workforce that is better placed to provide consumers with consistent, high quality and safe consumer-centred care.

The role of the governing body and executives

Beyond the specific compliance requirements, the issue of workforce planning and management is one of the key issues facing the aged care sector and provider governing bodies. The role of the governing body is to implement strategies, plans and processes to ensure the continuity of quality, safe care is being delivered sustainably to consumers. Aged Care Quality Standard 7 Human Resources sets out the provider's requirements regarding the management of the workforce. This standard focuses on four key concepts.



Ultimately, it is the governing body's responsibility to ensure compliance with the requirements in the Aged Care Quality Standards. Compliance can be demonstrated by:

- developing an effective strategic recruitment strategy for current and future needs
- creating professional development and training opportunities to encourage upskilling and training on the job to provide the skills to meet diverse and complex consumer needs
- considering recruitment and retention incentives when budgeting
- reflecting and evaluating previous recruitment processes with a view to continuously improve strategies to attract and retain workers
- engaging directly with consumers in workforce planning to better understand their needs and how those needs can be reflected in worker recruitment, onboarding and training.

- ensuring registered nurses are on duty 24/7 to be available to identify and address potential risks, reduce the risk of consumer harm, improving consumer safety and prevent unnecessary trips to hospital emergency departments.

Governing bodies are expected to support, equip and prepare staff to care out their roles. This includes, for example, providing training, making sure policies and procedures are easily accessible and taking action to make sure that the workforce meets the Code of Conduct for Aged Care.

Factors to consider in workforce management

It is important for governing body members to understand and consider the requirements of aged care workers when implementing strategic workforce plans. Good workforce management should take into consideration the mix of full-time staff, brokerage arrangements, volunteers, overseas workers, trainees, and casual workers and contractors (as appropriate), and how the composition of that workforce can support consistent, safe and consumer-centred care.

Some other factors to consider in workforce management and strategic planning include:

- the number of consumers and the types of services being provided
- the skills, qualifications or training required by staff to deliver those services
- emerging risks, trends and consumer demands
- legislative and regulatory requirements.

Strengthening provider governance

A new requirement was introduced 1 December 2022, where the governing bodies of *existing and new* approved providers are required to:

- Ensure and have direct oversight that staff have the appropriate qualifications, skills or experience to provide safe and high-quality aged care services and are given workforce professional development opportunities.
- Apply due diligence in gathering information and assessing staff's initial and ongoing suitability. and notify the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner of any changes to key personnel or changes to the suitability of key personnel.

Governing bodies must:

- consider all key personnel against suitability matter at least once every 12 months
- be reasonably satisfied key personnel are still suitable to provide care
- keep records of the suitability matters you considered and details explaining why you are reasonably satisfied

Key personnel will also be required to notify the provider if they become aware of changes in their circumstances relating to a suitability matter.

Code of conduct

The Code of Conduct for Aged Care (the Code) was introduced 1 December 2022 to improve the safety, health, wellbeing and quality of life for people receiving aged care, and to boost trust in services. The Code describes the behaviour expected of aged care providers, their governing persons (e.g. board members and Chief Executive Officers) and aged care workers.

Providers are expected to support, equip and prepare aged care workers to carry out their role. This includes, for example, providing training, making sure policies and procedures are easily accessible, and taking action to make sure their staff meet the Code.

24/7 registered nurse responsibility

Based on requirements introduced 1 July 2023, approved providers must have at least one registered nurse (RN) on-site and on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (24/7), at each residential facility they operate. The 24/7 RN responsibility reduces the risk of resident harm by ensuring qualified and experienced care staff are always available to identify and address potential risks.

Governing bodies and executives should consider whether their current workforce plan supports these requirements and consider what recruitment, rostering and retention strategies may need to be implemented.

Worker registration

Understanding which care and services should be provided by adequately skilled and qualified individuals requires that governing bodies consider the qualification and registration requirements in their recruitment strategy.

The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS), administered by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), provides mandatory registration for specified health professionals. There are certain mandatory reporting obligations that apply to AHPRA registered professionals. Should their ability to provide quality and safe consumer-centred care be in question, practice restrictions may be imposed. These restrictions would need to be understood by governing bodies to ensure that any quality and safety risks are being managed appropriately.

Notably, while there are worker screening requirements in aged care (police check), care workers are not currently required to be registered under the NRAS or otherwise have third-party or external registration requirements.¹ This can cause a provider to have less visibility over a worker's work history (beyond a police check) and less control over reporting concerns, which increases the risk that workers who are unsuitable to provide care to aged care consumers enter or remain working in the sector.

It is important that governing bodies implement processes and frameworks to ensure that the care and services being provided by (otherwise) unregulated care workers meet the expected requirements of safe, high quality, consumer-centred care.

Fair wages

The *Fair Work Act 2009*, along with any associated modern awards and enterprise agreements, set the minimum remuneration requirements and conditions of employment that must be met. Labour costs are the single largest driver of financial costs incurred by any aged care provider. At a minimum, aged care providers across Australia must remunerate their direct care staff under the Modern Awards (and in accordance with the minimum Employment Standards and Fair Work Act 2009). Many providers pay above these conditions either through an enterprise agreement or individual common law contract to recruit and retain a high-quality workforce.

The workplace relations arrangements can become a critical strategic decision as residential aged care providers operate with a need to be financially sustainable whilst also under pressure to meet quality and safety requirements. Deliberate underpayment of wages or failure to meet conditions of employment can result in penalties for governing bodies and therefore needs to be monitored and understood.

Diversity and inclusion

When it comes to workforce planning, it is important the governing body and executives consider the diverse needs of the workforce, consumers and the broader community. Delivering culturally safe and appropriate consumer-centred care considers the diverse needs of consumers in a way that respects their identity, culture, and diversity in the care and service choices they make. It is important that these needs are considered in workforce planning and reflected in a recruitment plan.

Attraction and recruitment

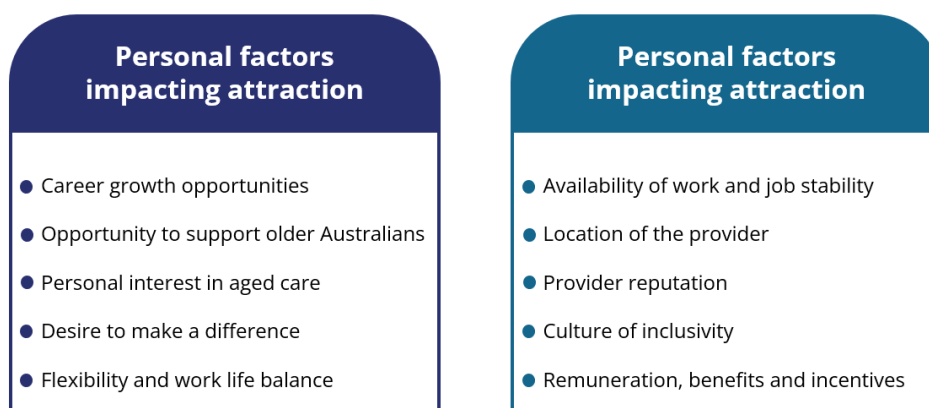
Attraction and recruitment of skilled workers continue to be an ongoing challenge that faces the aged care sector. With the gap between supply and demand for aged care workers continuing to increase, governing bodies should consider ways in which strategies can be updated or enhanced to offer a complete employee value proposition to attract and recruit new talent.

¹ As at the date of this Topic Guide, care worker registration is not required. However, a national Aged Care Worker Regulation Scheme forms part of the current proposed reforms.

Factors affecting attraction and recruitment

There is not one single reason why there is a shortage of skilled workers in aged care. However, it is relevant for governing bodies to have an understanding of the factors that may influence attraction to work in the sector in order to develop effective workforce recruitment strategies and to create a dynamic and competitive value proposition for workers. An employee value proposition (EVP) should set out why someone should work for the provider. The governing body and executives should consider what employee benefits and rewards are being offered (both financial and non-financial) that may be a unique selling point for the provider. Developing a clear employer brand and reputation with a strong EVP can be a critical driver for increasing attraction and recruitment.

Generally, workers are attracted to the aged care sector over other care industries for altruistic reasons and are motivated by a desire to support and interact with consumers.² Other factors affecting attraction to employment in the aged care sector include:



Aligning personal and external factors that impact attraction can improve recruitment and, ultimately, the retention of employees. Governing bodies play an important role by setting the strategic direction of the provider and encouraging a culture of genuine commitment to safe, quality, consumer-centred care. This strategic leadership should, in turn, be reflected in the recruitment strategies to attract workers whose personal values and objectives align with the provider's strategic objectives.


² Aged Care Workforce Industry Council, Workforce Narrative 2020

Training and development

Training

The aged care sector requires a skilled workforce to deliver safe and high-quality care to consumers. This often requires workers to have specific training, qualifications and experience in order to perform their roles. As online or remote training becomes more widely accepted, it is important that the governing body and executives critically consider what elements of training are suitable for online delivery and how online training will be embedded in the delivery of care in a sustainable way. There is a need to ensure the workforce can meet the skills, capabilities and requirements of their role and work to their full scope of practice. In some instances, this will require supervision and training support.

The aged care reforms have also highlighted key skill areas that need to be demonstrated by the aged care workforce, including:



Consumer-centred care	Dementia care
Minimising the use of restrictive practices	Palliative care
Trauma-informed care	Cultural safety
Incident management	Wound care
Mental health	Quality of life and well-being

Development

Effective training programs and clear development pathways not only upskill current workers but can be used as employee incentives and can assist in bolstering the attraction, recruitment, and retention of workers. The same applies to the governing body and executives, who should also participate in training and seek continuous development opportunities to upskill or deepen understanding in their areas of responsibility.

As such, it is important for governing bodies to consider how and what resources they are investing in training for their workforce and balance the costs, benefits and outputs

of participating in any training. Good workforce management implements a plan for workforce training that is not only fit for purpose (in that it assists in the delivery of better care and services) but also presents opportunities for professional career development. It is the role of the governing body to implement frameworks that empower executives and the workforce to take advantage of training opportunities that would benefit the organisation and to be aware of grants and programs available. The governing body, as part of its risk management responsibilities, should have effective oversight over the mandatory training required of the workforce and what is being considered discretionary or desirable training.

Staff performance management

Staff performance management frameworks help to maximise and encourage the performance and potential of the workforce. Some key elements of staff performance management include:



Clear roles and responsibilities

An integral part of workforce governance is the clarity of roles and responsibilities of employees. It is important there are job descriptions and appropriate grading standards in place, benchmarked against key performance indicators. Job role ambiguity, inaccurate job descriptions and inadequate rewards can lead to the workforce feeling undervalued and lead to resourcing issues.

Onboarding processes

All new workers (clinical and non-clinical) should complete a comprehensive induction programme to understand their roles and responsibilities, reporting lines, and safety and care culture within the provider. It is critical to have an induction programme to support new workers at all levels of the organisation, including volunteers, to understand the systems, processes and policies. It is the role of the governing body to determine the mandatory training requirements for new employees and volunteers before they are able to undertake any consumer-related or care-related activities.

The onboarding and induction process is also important to ensure workers have been appropriately recruited based on their skills, experience, qualifications and behaviours against their role descriptions and that their behaviours and values align with the culture and objectives of the provider.

Performance reviews

Governing bodies should consider what performance assessment systems are in place to understand gaps in an employee's skills and competencies and ensure behaviours are aligned with the provider's values. Meaningful and regular performance assessments can help an aged care provider evaluate the quality of care across the workforce, manage risk effectively and implement support initiatives for ongoing training and continuous improvement.

As part of workforce management, performance reviews should be combined with discussions on employee development and succession plans to maximise the performance and potential of the collective workforce.

The role of consumers

Though line managers will be best placed to deliver onboarding for new staff and to monitor their performance as they undertake their role, it may be appropriate to include consumers in onboarding processes (to ensure consumers are visible) and performance reviews (to ensure that their own experiences with staff are taken into consideration).

Culture

Governing bodies play a key role in workplace culture by setting the tone from the top. A provider with a positive reputation for good workplace culture can be an important driver in workforce attraction, recruitment and retention.

Governing body members who are compassionate leaders that listen to and support the workforce to understand their challenges and needs will generally have a more satisfied workforce. To create a supportive organisational culture, it is important that governing bodies and executives are approachable, show empathy and listen to the challenges facing the workforce when developing strategic workforce plans.

Workplace obligations

It is important to note there are other human resourcing obligations and arrangements that governing bodies should be informed of as they manage the workforce.

Requirements may differ depending on employment models or different settings and jurisdictions. These include:


- occupational health and safety obligations (e.g. workplace injuries and use of equipment)
- employment requirements for overseas trained workers
- requirements for different employment model options, such as independent contractors.

Employees have a right to a safe work environment that is free from discrimination, bullying and harassment. This is reflected in the legal obligations of employers, which should be captured in the policies, procedures and culture that is set by the governing body.

Retention

In addition to recruitment, retention of a skilled workforce is also a challenge facing the aged care sector. Retaining a quality, skilled workforce is fundamental to a provider's ability to deliver consistent, quality care to consumers. The governing body is responsible for implementing initiatives, programs and strategies at an organisational level to support workforce retention and reduce turnover.

Challenges to workforce retention in aged care



Aged care work can be physically and emotionally demanding	Limited access to qualified and skilled staff
Competition from other sectors (such as disability under the NDIS)	Lack of budget or incentive to motivate staff to upskill
Lack of job security	Rise in consumer expectations and increasing demands in care needs
Heavy workloads with insufficient worker support	Lack of resources, training and career progression opportunities
Lack of reward or recognition	Disillusionment and reform fatigue

Strategies to overcome challenges

While there are challenges to attraction and retention of the aged care workforce, these challenges also present opportunities for governing bodies to implement workforce strategies to develop and build an efficient and empowered workforce.

Retention strategies need to be tailored to the individual needs of the provider and the workforce, such as:

- investing in onboarding processes and well-developed induction programs for new staff members, and quality training opportunities for existing staff members
- creating pathways for professional development for current and prospective staff members
- considering implementing reward and recognition initiatives

- encouraging coaching and mentoring support to more junior staff to set them up for success, progression and connection
- establishing a high-performing culture that supports the psychological safety of the workers
- reflecting and evaluating the recruitment processes to consider what has worked in the past and what could be improved.

Useful references and links

[Aged Care Act 1997](#)

[Fair Work Act 2009](#)

[Standard 7. Human resources | Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission](#)

[Standard 8. Organisational governance | Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission](#)

[2020 Aged Care Workforce Census | Australian Government Department of Health](#)

[Responsibilities of approved aged care providers | Australian Government Department of Health](#)

[Aged care workforce strategy | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

[Introduction to the National Employment Standards | Fair Work Ombudsman](#)

[Strengthening provider governance | Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission](#)

[Consider suitability of key personnel - fact sheet | Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission](#)

[Staff qualifications - fact sheet | Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission](#)

[Aged care 24/7 registered nurse responsibility | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

[Code of Conduct for Aged Care – information for workers | Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission](#)