



Working Together

Why we need this campaign

The Australian Nursing Federation was established in 1924 and has a membership of more than 170,000 nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing.

At a time when Australia's population is ageing and more and more people need nursing home care, the number of registered and enrolled nurses working in aged care has dropped significantly.

In 2003 there were 27,210 (FTE) registered and enrolled nurses in the aged care system. In 2007 that number dropped to 23,103 (FTE) – a decline of more than 4,000. Between 2003 and 2007 the number of assistants in nursing rose by a staggering 7,500.

As the number of registered and enrolled nurses leaving the aged care sector increases, they are being substituted by unlicensed carers – assistants in nursing – who now represent the bulk of the workforce providing aged care services.

The ANF says this reduction in the number of nurses and the subsequent changes to the skills mix is putting greater pressure on remaining staff in the sector and this in the long run will have an impact on care outcomes.

At the same time, the number of people in residential aged care rose from 140,297 in 2003 to 154,549 in 2007 – an increase of around 15,000.

Not only is the number of people requiring nursing home care increasing, but so too is the level of care with 70% of residents now classified as needing a high level of care. This is an increase of 12% in the last decade.

Older Australians fortunately now have the opportunity to stay home longer because of the home and community services that are available, however many still require residential care as their health deteriorates due to chronic illness, dementia, or both.

Wages

Nurses working in the aged care are paid significantly less than their counterparts in other sectors.

In fact aged care nurses receive, on average, about \$300 a week less than their colleagues working in other areas of the health system.

Aged care providers claim funding mechanisms in aged care have hampered their ability to provide pay parity.

The ANF says this disparity in wages makes it increasingly difficult to attract sufficient nurses to the sector.



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Funding model

Residential aged care facilities in Australia are essentially funded in two ways:

- Federal Government funding the operators of aged care facilities, and
- charges levied on residents by facility owners.

The Federal Government pays operators of aged care facilities money based on the care needs of each resident they have in their facility.

However, there is no requirement for the operators to spend that money on direct care or even wages.

The ANF believes this lack of directed financial resourcing to care or accommodation is why staff in this sector are paid significantly less than their counterparts in other sectors.

Campaign objectives

There are four campaign objectives, they include:

- seeking mechanisms that ensure openness and accountability in the way taxpayer funds are spent
- fair pay for nurses and care staff in aged care who are now paid up to \$300 a week less than nurses in other sectors
- introducing the right balance of skills and working hours so that nurses and care staff can provide quality care
- recognition of the professional skills of assistants in nursing and care staff through a national licensing system.