

Mike Woods
Deputy Chairman
The Productivity Commission
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Dear Deputy Chairman

Please find attached our response to the draft report "Caring for Older Australians". The Aged Care Channel currently provides training to over 90,000 staff working in the residential aged care sector and later this year we will be launching a community aged care channel to address the learning needs of staff working in the community aged care sector and an on-line platform in addition to our satellite transmission platform and DVD library.

In our response we have addressed the recommendations relating to the training needs of the aged workforce and informal carers.

Yours sincerely

June Heinrich
Chairman
Strategic Advisory Committee

RESPONSE TO THE PRODUCTIVITY DRAFT REPORT

"CARING FOR OLDER AUSTRALIANS"

Introduction

The draft report of the Productivity Commission into Caring for Older Australians acknowledges the significant increase in demand for aged care services with the ageing of Australia's population accompanied by workforce shortages because of an ageing workforce.

It has been estimated that the workforce will need to almost triple by 2050 at a time when the overall employment to population ratio will be declining. These two factors will place pressure on the services to older Australians.

In the Scope of the Inquiry the Productivity Commission was required to :

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

It is this requirement which this submission seeks to explore.

The Paid Aged Care Workforce

I have worked as a senior manager in the Aged Care Sector for 16 years. During that time the workforce issues were a major concern to me as I sought to ensure my organization was delivering high quality care.

The aged care workforce consists of registered nurses, personal carers, allied health professionals and a range of support staff. However the largest group of workers in the aged care workforce are the Personal Carers or Care Workers. This group is predominately part-time or casual and workers usually hold a Certificate 3 qualification. The work is often heavy and unpleasant and involves shift work. The turnover rates in for these staff in most organization is in excess of 20%.

The remuneration level for Care Workers is low (\$15.90 per hour) and it is difficult to recruit these staff. Many of these workers speak English as a second language, sometimes poorly and find it difficult to communicate with the clients.

Yet this group is the backbone of the aged care workforce and are the front-line workers both in residential aged care facilities and community aged care programs. Without staff willing to work in these roles the aged care system in Australia would collapse.

The Productivity Commission has made a number of recommendations in its report which relate to the training of staff working in the aged care sector to equip them to carry out their roles and it is the issue of staff training which is the focus of this submission.

Draft Recommendation 11.3 in the report states

"The Australian Government should promote skill development through an expansion of courses to provide aged care workers at all levels with the skills they need including: advanced clinical courses for nurses to become nurse practitioners and Management courses for health & care workers entering management roles"

The report comments on the lack of vocational training and recommends the promotion of skills development through an expansion of courses to provide aged care workers at all levels with the skills they need. I strongly support this recommendation.

The Report comments that "opportunities for skills development, career paths and increased scopes of practice are important aspects for aged care that can be improved to attract and retain quality direct staff and to develop management skills. A challenge for the aged care sector is the delivery of more training opportunities for staff in remote locations, particularly for community aged care staff." And I fully support this observation.

The care of older Australians, whether in a residential aged care facility or in their own homes involves meeting personal care needs associated with activities of everyday living as well as meeting their clinical needs.

Staff working in the aged care sector need to have both caring skills and relationship skills as these play a significant role in the quality of the care experience. Of particular importance is the need for staff to be culturally sensitive to the needs of the people they are caring for. Training needs to be provided to assist staff in this area.

The Unpaid Carers

The report also identified the need to develop a national strategy to address the training and skills development of carers.

As summed up by the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council there is a clear focus needed for greater skills development to facilitate models of service delivery which "emphasize maintaining functional independence for individuals and meeting complex demands"

As the Productivity Report has stated "Family members and other informal carers provide most of the care for older people".

However demographic research has revealed that there will be a decline in the relative availability of informal carers coinciding with the increased demand for aged care services and this must be a concern for government going forward.

Draft Recommendation 11.1 of the Report recommends

"Carer education and training for informal carers and states that carers should be better supported in their endeavours through a variety of measures including greater access to information, more education and training, better access to respite and greater workforce flexibility."

How to Meet the Challenge

In order to meet the challenge of ensuring staff working in the aged care sector and informal carers have the skills and support needed to assist them in their roles there is a need to ensure

that staff can undertake professional development activities which increase their skills, including increasing their cultural awareness of the needs of their clients. There are a number of small, stand alone residential aged care facilities, that struggle financially to survive and have limited funds for staff training.

Fortunately Australia already has a world class system which utilizes the technology available to deliver high quality training which is cost effective. Currently 60% of all residential care facilities in Australia are members of the Aged Care Channel. This organization currently delivers training by satellite transmission and the production of DVDs of the transmitted programs based on industry best practice. An on-line transmission system is being piloted and will be launched in July this year. This on-line system will enable staff to access training programs via their desktop, either in their workplaces or in their homes. This system will be of particular advantage to community care workers, particularly those in rural settings.

The Aged Care Channel has identified the need for a common induction series to equip staff at the beginning of their careers with the critical skills needed. I would like to recommend that consideration be given to ensuring that all staff working in the Aged Care Sector receive appropriate induction training before they commence and that this be a mandatory requirement for Approved Providers to have in place. Such a system exists in other occupations and given that the Aged Care Sector is about caring for people such a requirement is especially important.

Using the technology already developed by the Aged Care Channel the support needs of the unpaid carers raised by the Commissioners can also be addressed very economically.

At a time of growing workforce pressures the Government cannot afford to ignore the training needs of staff and unpaid carers in the aged care sector. The provision of appropriate training will both help retain staff and ensure they have the skills to undertake their important roles of caring for older Australians.

The recommendations in the draft report of the Productivity Commission on "Caring for Older Australians" which deal with the training needs of staff working in the aged care sector and informal carers of older Australians are strongly supported.

June Heinrich
Chairman
Strategic Advisory Committee
Aged Care Channel