

THE AGED CARE WORKFORCE STRATEGY

SUBMISSION TO THE TASKFORCE

March 2018

ABOUT RESEARCH AUSTRALIA

We are the national peak body representing the whole of the health and medical research pipeline.

Our vision: Research Australia envisions a world where Australia unlocks the full potential of its world-leading health and medical research sector to deliver the best possible healthcare and global leadership in health innovation.

Our mission: To use our unique convening power to position health and medical research as a significant driver of a healthy population and contributor to a healthy economy.

Our goals:

Engage	Connect	Influence
Australia in a conversation about the health benefits and economic value of its investment in health and medical research.	researchers, funders and consumers to increase investment in health and medical research from all sources.	government policies that support effective health and medical research and its routine translation into evidence-based practices and better health outcomes.

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Summary of recommendations

The strategy should make a practical difference by assisting in identifying and training people for new roles in aged care and promoting a culture of innovation and continuous improvement.
The strategy should focus on workforce training to equip the existing workforce with the skills they need to respond positively to innovation in aged care. In particular, we need training across the workforce to explain how technologies can and will change aged care services in the future. It should also focus on exposure to new technologies in formal qualifications being obtained by the future aged care workforce.
Future opportunities lie in making better use of technology to enable people to remain home for longer. These innovations do not eliminate the need for direct human communication and interaction in the delivery of aged care, but change the tasks required and the needs that have to be met, providing an opportunity for new roles, new tasks and new perceptions of the (various) roles of aged care workers.
The future evolution of aged care services will create new roles and new opportunities for life long learning in a modern and technologically advanced sector. This evolution has the potential to change the perception of aged care, but only if technology is presented as an adjunct to the role of the aged care worker, requiring an 'upskilled' workforce, rather than leaving workers with only the more routine tasks.
Adaptiveness to change, and an ability to quickly integrate new technologies and practices into exiting routines and work patterns is one of the general skills/capabilities that will be required in the future aged care workforce.
Greater availability of data about the performance of services will help to change the nature of the relationships between aged care services, their families, carers and communities. A willingness to innovate and an expectation of increased transparency about service delivery will positively shape the leadership of the aged care workforce and the sector.
We need to increase the sector's capacity to translate 'good' innovations into standard aged care. The national aged care system needs to be more open to innovation and the adoption of new technologies and practices, and the workforce has a vital role in this. However, the workforce strategy needs to be accompanied and complemented by a national aged care innovation strategy that seeks to measure and influence existing practice, and to encourage and support innovation. Aged care services research can support innovation and improve the delivery of aged care.

THE AGED CARE WORKFORCE STRATEGY

SUBMISSION TO THE TASKFORCE

Introduction

Research Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Taskforce on the Aged Care Workforce Strategy.

Research Australia's mission is about better utilising research and innovation as a driver of a healthy population. Better health outcomes for all Australians are the goal. This is not just about finding cures, rather keeping people healthier for longer. Caring for Australians as they get older, ensuring that they remain independent for as long as possible, and have the best care when they need it, is an important element of a healthier Australia, and the Aged Care workforce is instrumental to this.

Our submission seeks to highlight how our existing aged care workforce can be better engaged and their experience better utilised to support and encourage innovation. We also look at how the future aged care workforce can be better prepared for the aged care workplace of the future.

Finally, an aged care workforce strategy needs to be integrated with other strategies and work to prepare for the future of aged care service delivery. These things need to occur simultaneously. We need a research and innovation strategy for the aged care sector to support the evaluation and integration of new technologies into aged care, and the development of new technologies and other innovations in the delivery of aged care.

This submission assumes that aged care service delivery will be changed significantly in the coming years and decades by new technology. This is implicit in the Taskforce's fifth strategic imperative: *Translating research and technology into models of care and practice*, and is the principal theme of Research Australia's submission. The Aged Care Industry Information Technology Council's 2017 *Technology Roadmap for the Aged Care Sector* provides a good outline of how this future could look.¹

Research Australia recognises that adapting to technological change and innovation is only one component of an aged care workforce strategy but it is the area where we believe we have the most to contribute.

¹ Available at http://aciitc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ACIITC_TechnologyRoadmap_2017.pdf

Response to the questions posed by the Consultation

1. Why does an aged care workforce strategy matter?

In 2016, the Australian aged care workforce was estimated to number more than 360,000.² This represents around 3% of the Australian workforce.³ This workforce provided services to 280,000 Australians, of whom 70% were in residential care.⁴ This is a significant proportion of the Australian workforce providing specialised services and support to an important and growing sector of the Australian community, currently around 10% of all Australians aged 65 and over.⁵

Beyond the statistics, it is a workforce that has an enormous influence on the quality of life of a sector of our population that is one of the most vulnerable and in most need of support.

In the future, this group will increase, and the way in which we provide care will continue to evolve to meet community expectations, incorporate new technologies, and deal with changes in Australia's workforce demographics. We can leave all this to chance, or we can plan for the future. The latter is clearly the better option. This is why we need an aged care workforce strategy, and why this strategy matters.

2. What practical difference do you hope a strategy will make?

A strategy should lead to an Aged Care workforce that is better equipped to adapt to changes in how and where aged care services are provided, including the increasing role of new technologies to support and augment the provision of care.

The Strategy should assist in identifying and training people for new roles in aged care- such as workers who provide the technological support to an ageing population that will increasingly use assistive technologies to maintain their independence.

It should also help to promote a culture of innovation and continuous improvement as a means of helping the workforce to adapt to, contribute to, and lead innovation in the provision of aged care. Ultimately this will lead to better levels of care, better standards of living for care recipients and more rewarding jobs for care providers.

² Australian Government Department of Health, 2016 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey – The Aged Care Workforce, 2016

³ Parliament of Australia, Parliamentary Library Research Series, Employment by Industry Statistics: a Quick Guide, 14 April 2016

⁴ Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, GEN Aged Care Data, <https://gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/Topics/Services-and-places-in-aged-care>, accessed on 8 March 2018

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cat. No. 3235, Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia, 2016- 15.6% of the Australian population of 24.2 million is over the age of 65.

3. How do you think a strategy can contribute to meeting future needs in aged care?

The strategy needs a focus on workforce training to equip the existing workforce with the skills they need to respond positively to innovation in aged care. In particular, we need training across the workforce to explain how technologies can and will change aged care services in the future, in addition to specific training in these new technologies. This training needs to emphasise how technologies can simultaneously improve the quality of life of care recipients, and the working environment of aged care workers.

The strategy needs a focus on formal qualifications being obtained by the future aged care workforce. As part of study for the qualifications, students and trainees should be exposed to new technologies and to the possibilities for the future, and help them to understand that a future career in aged care will change and evolve over time.

4. Tell us what you see as the changes on the horizon that aged care needs to be ready for, and how you think the workforce strategy can contribute to meeting these future needs (in the context of an ageing population calling on aged care services in a variety of settings)?

An increasing number of older people are going to be able to utilise assistive technologies to remain in their homes and communities for longer, likely increasing the existing trend towards a greater proportion of aged care being delivered in the home. At the same time, there will be greater use of technology in the residential aged care setting. Examples include remote monitoring of vital signs and affect, detecting early changes in risk factors for events such as falls, and managing medications. There will also be greater use of technology such as virtual reality to enhance the experience of aged care and promote continuing physical and cognitive fitness.

These changes in at home and in residential care will change the role of aged care workers. They will need to be able to operate new technologies and access information from new devices in a range of different ways. (Were medications taken yesterday when they should have been? Are appointments being kept?) In many cases they will also need to assist the older person to use and interface with new technologies. This tech support role will be an increasingly important component of the care role, which will require a combination of traditional care provision, interpersonal and specialist technical skills. It is likely to broaden the range of roles available within the aged care workforce. It is also a significant opportunity to shift the culture and mindset against carer careers and encourage a well-equipped, ethical and highly skilled workforce in an area of national need.

The Buurtzorg or “neighbourhood care” model developed by the Dutch not for profit organisation of the same name is a good example.⁶ It is a nurse-led model that seeks to empower clients by making the most of their existing capabilities, resources and environment and emphasising self management. It employs highly qualified nurses that have skills in coaching and supporting patients to do the things that they are able to do themselves. A 2010 Ernst and Young report said costs per patient were approximately 40 per cent less than comparable home care organisations and surveys have shown that patient satisfaction is the highest in the country.

⁶ <http://www.buurtzorg.com/about.html>

5. Tell us what is working well in the aged care workforce (across the industry, at provider or service level or through place-based initiatives) and where future opportunities lie.

Future opportunities lie in making better use of technology to enable people to remain home for longer — remote monitoring and communication. These innovations do not eliminate the need for direct human communication and interaction in the delivery of aged care, but it changes the tasks required and the needs that have to be met. This change will require aged care workers who are comfortable working with and alongside technology to deliver better care. This provides an opportunity for new roles, new tasks and new perceptions of the (various) roles of aged care workers.

6. What do you think are the key factors the Taskforce needs to consider to attract and retain staff?

The future evolution of aged care services will create new roles and new opportunities for life long learning in a modern and technologically advanced sector. This evolution has the potential to change the perception of aged care, and increase the capacity to both attract and retain staff. This potential can only be achieved if technology is presented as an adjunct to the role of the aged care worker, requiring an ‘upskilled’ workforce, rather than leaving workers with only the more routine tasks. If it is handled poorly, it has the potential to discourage and demotivate some existing aged care workers.

The taskforce should also engage with the very consumers, both those being cared for and carers in this space, to hear firsthand what kind of a workforce would constitute best practice in communities of care. Research Australia commends the Taskforce for adopting a survey approach to the consultation, but if the current phase of the consultation does not generate both a broad and deep response from the workforce and care recipients, Research Australia urges the Taskforce to undertake further and more proactive measures to seek feedback, including the use of focus groups and other research methods to elicit responses.

7. What areas of knowledge, skills and capability need to be strengthened within the aged care workforce?

Adaptiveness to change, and an ability to quickly integrate new technologies and practices into exiting routines and work patterns is one of the general skills/capabilities that will be required.

A more innovative approach to work practices is also going to be necessary, including an increased capacity to critically examine and review existing work practices. Tools for process analysis and re-engineering, to drive efficiency but also to integrate new technologies and practices will be critical to success in a rapidly changing work environment.

8. What do you think is needed to improve and better equip the workforce to meet individual needs and expectations?

Particularly in the home care environment and with an increased emphasis on consumer directed care, aged care staff are going to need good communication skills to work with aged care recipients to establish the services and types of care they want and how these are to be delivered. An awareness of available technologies and the ability to describe and/or demonstrate how they could work for a client will be one key element of negotiating the carer/client relationship.

9. What is needed for leadership, mindset and accountability to innovate and extend new way of working tailored to the needs of older people who use aged care services, their families, carers and communities?

The greater availability of data about the performance of services will help to change the nature of the relationships between aged care services, their families, carers and communities. A willingness to innovate and an expectation of increased transparency about service delivery will positively shape the leadership of the aged care workforce and the sector.

Greater visibility of the variation in performance and practice and the ability to benchmark one service provider against another will help consumers of aged care services, their carers and families to make informed decisions about the types of care they want, how and where they want it provided, and by whom.

Technology to analyse this data and provide decision making guides and tools can put more information in the hands of the consumer and redress the imbalance that can currently exist when negotiating the provision of services.

Importantly, this information can be made available much earlier on in the lifecycle as part of a healthy ageing society which brings the benefits of reducing fears around aging and providing education and promoting understanding long before it is required in practice.

10. What should aged care providers consider with workforce planning?

The future evolution of aged care services will create new roles and new opportunities for lifelong learning in a modern and technologically advanced sector. It will require aged care workers who are comfortable working with and alongside technology to deliver better care. This change to the skills mix required for the workforce is going to be an important consideration for workforce planning.

Will these workers continue to come from the usual educational and work backgrounds or will they come from other sectors? Finding people with the motivation to work in aged care and with the required mix of traditional care provision, interpersonal and specialist technical skills may be difficult. Consideration may need to be given to creating specialist roles but also 'bridging' training and other opportunities to enable people with part, but not all, the required skills to acquire the full suite.

11. In undertaking its work, the Taskforce has been asked to have regard to recent submissions to and reports of relevant inquiries on aged care workforce matters, and government responses. If you want the Taskforce to draw on a submission you have made, or evidence or materials you want to draw to our attention, please provide the details in the text box below.

Research Australia does not seek to draw on earlier submissions or other material.

12. Is there anything else that you would like to contribute to inform the Taskforce?

While the care needs of older Australians are broadly the same across the nation, the practices adopted in similar care settings vary. Some of this variation is likely to be evidence of the adoption of innovative care practices in particular locations; other variation is evidence of a failure to adopt best practice.

In recent years we have seen an increasing focus on unwarranted variations in healthcare and attempts to measure and understand it as a precursor to addressing it. We have yet to see the same focus in aged care service delivery and as a consequence there is less motivation to adopt new evidence-based practice.

We need to increase the sector's capacity to translate 'good' innovations into standard aged care. The national aged care system needs to be more open to innovation and the adoption of new technologies and practices, and the workforce has a vital role in this. However, the workforce strategy needs to be accompanied and complemented by a national aged care innovation strategy that seeks to measure and influence existing practice, and to encourage and support innovation. We need to increase the sector's capacity to translate 'good' innovations into standard aged care.

Aged care services research can support innovation and improve the delivery of aged care through:

- using existing innovations to develop best practice models and structures for aged care services and programs;
- guiding the reform process; and
- supporting the evaluation of outcomes.

There are specific areas where new skill sets are required to facilitate innovation from fields as diverse as data analytics, electronics, computing and health economics. We also need to invest in comparative effectiveness research to assist with shifting the sector to adopt practices that are proven to be better.

And we need to be clear about how we measure and evaluate: we need to focus on outcomes for care recipients and staff, as well as traditional measures of efficiency and cost effectiveness.

Research Australia encourages the Taskforce to look overseas for models of care that could be adopted and used in Australia. The Buurtzorg or "neighbourhood care" model developed by the Dutch not for profit organisation of the same name is one example in at home care.⁷

⁷ <http://www.buurtzorg.com/about.html>

Conclusion

Research Australia believes that, like many aspects for the economy, technological change will have a significant impact on the way aged care is provided in the future. This technological change will have a significant impact on the future aged care workforce, as this response to the consultation has sought to highlight.

For this reason, we are very encouraged the Taskforce has been created to develop an Aged Care Workforce Strategy. We believe however, that this strategy must be seen as one interrelated component of a broader national strategy about how we pay for aged care, the settings in which it is delivered, the impact of technology, and the role of innovation more broadly.

As stated in the Introduction, we need an accompanying research and innovation strategy for the aged care sector to support the evaluation and integration of new technologies into aged care, and the development of new technologies and other innovations in the delivery of aged care and overall to ensure a quality of life for all Australians regardless of stage of life.

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