



**dementia
australia™**

The new voice of Alzheimer's Australia

Aged Care Amendment (Staffing Ratio Disclosure) Bill 2018

Submission from Dementia Australia

October 2018

About Dementia Australia

Dementia Australia (formerly known as Alzheimer's Australia) is the peak, non-profit organisation for people with dementia and their families and carers. We represent the more than 436,000 Australians living with dementia and the estimated 1.4 million Australians involved in their care.

Dementia Australia works with consumers, all governments, and other key stakeholders to ensure that people with dementia, their families and carers are appropriately supported – at work, at home (including residential aged care) or in their local community.

Our close engagement with consumers means that we are an important advocate for those impacted by dementia and we are also well placed to provide input on policy matters, identify service gaps and draw on our expertise to collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders, including researchers, technology experts and providers.

In addition to advocating for the needs of people living with all types of dementia, and for their families and carers, Dementia Australia provides support services, education and information aimed at addressing the gaps in mainstream services.

Dementia Australia is a member of Alzheimer's Disease International, the umbrella organisation of dementia associations around the world.



4 October 2018

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport
Committee Secretariat
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Health.Reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee members,

Aged Care Amendment (Staffing Ratio Disclosure) Bill 2018

Dementia Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to The House of Representative's Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport's Inquiry into the Aged Care Amendment (Staffing Ratio Disclosure) Bill 2018.

Dementia Australia supports the **Staffing Ratio Disclosure Bill 2018** for the following reasons;

- The Bill will provide transparency for people living with dementia, their families and carers as well as the broader range of aged care service users on the ratio of aged care recipients to aged care staff;
- The quarterly break-down of staffing category will ensure a greater level of transparency on the skills mix within the particular residential facility. This is of great importance where there are people living with complex health conditions and co-morbidities, including dementia. It is also important to provide information about the numbers of Allied Health professionals as they are considered to be integral in improving the health and welfare outcomes of older Australians in residential care;
- Alerting changes of a facility's ratio (greater than 10 per cent) to the Secretary will assist to track trends and further inform future aged care planning; and
- Advertising the names of Directors or members of committees of management will increase the visibility of people in decision making roles on aged care operational committees which may contribute to better governance outcomes.

The number of older Australians with dementia is growing exponentially, and the core business of residential aged care services increasingly includes the provision of care to people living with dementia. As the prevalence of dementia increases in our community, it is critical that all aged care services are well equipped and motivated to provide safe, high quality care for people with dementia, as part of their core business.

The aged care sector workforce is a critical element in the provision of quality services, and this workforce must be available in sufficient numbers, with an appropriate mix of skills (including dementia care expertise). There are currently significant threats to the availability and quality of the future aged care sector workforce in Australia. Although greater numbers will be needed in the future, the current workforce is ageing and services already report that they are experiencing difficulty in filling vacancies. At a time when the number of people needing access to aged care services is

increasing, and the acuity of care required is also increasing, levels of direct care staff to residents in aged care services are often decreasing and the number and proportion of qualified nursing staff positions in aged care, particularly residential care, has fallen dramatically.¹ Dementia Australia is concerned that these trends are already impacting on the quality of care offered to some of the most frail and vulnerable people in our community, and that the situation has the potential to worsen in future as demand pressures increase.

Dementia Australia believes that in order for this situation to change, approaches by the government such as the Royal Commission into the quality of aged care and the proposed **Staffing Ratio Disclosure Bill 2018** demonstrates leadership in addressing these challenges by introducing a transparent strategy for consumers of aged care and their families to make informed choices about their future prospects; or conversely make decisions about their current tenure in a particular aged care service based on its current staffing ratio. Moreover, it will assist with tracking trends in fluctuations of staff availability, including under-recruitment statistics.

It is imperative that the Australian aged care workforce can meet the needs of all people within aged care, including people with complex needs such as dementia. People with dementia will always need to be supported by skilled mainstream services that can address their care needs. However, specialist support services may also need to be an integral element of the broader system, including those that build capacity in mainstream aged care services to help staff identify and proactively address unmet needs. It should be acknowledged that a lack social engagement, deficits in appropriate clinical care, inadequate treatment of pain, or a range of other environmental, physical and social deficits can lead to behaviours of unmet need. Dementia Australia has heard a multitude of stories from people living with dementia, their families and carers expressing their concerns about low staff/resident ratios, as evidenced by the following comments.

A dementia resident needs specific activities to stimulate and distract them, my parent seems to be excluded because of her behavioural difficulties, and spends hours on end in her room by herself. She is unable to operate the TV, or CD player herself so is totally reliant on staff. Mostly they don't bother or don't have the time as the staff/resident ratio is so low. My parent happily goes to activities if I take her but I didn't expect that I would have to be at the facility EVERY day to ensure this happened.

Carer of a person with dementia

Over the past decade and more, there has been a significant shift in the aged care workforce. There is a trend towards employing less skilled (and lower cost) staff in residential settings in the delivery of direct care services.² At the same time as the acuity of care required has been increasing, there has been a substantial decrease in the proportion of qualified nursing staff in the aged care workforce, and an increase in the proportion of unlicensed and unregulated personal carers.³ Therefore, whilst the advertising of staffing ratios will provide transparency on the amount and types of staff enlisted by an organisation, Dementia Australia also highlights the importance of education of staff. Furthermore, Dementia Australia stresses that priority needs to be placed on developing a cohesive, structured and integrated **national dementia training and education program for all aged care staff**. The focus of this training should be on practice changes, and on activities that lead to better outcomes for people living with dementia.

Dementia Australia considers that the introduction of mandating disclosure of a range of staffing positions and furthermore fluctuations in these positions will greatly allay the fears which many consumers and carers face when they access residential aged care, which are represented in part by the following comments:

I think a facility needs to have enough staff there to look after a person, so they can take the time to get to know the person, get to know their habits good and bad. Get to know them well

¹ Mavromaras, K., Knight, G., Isherwood, L., et al. 2016 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey – The Aged Care Workforce, 2016, p.54.

² *Ibid.*, p. 119.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

enough so that if there's a small problem, they can spot it before it becomes an enormous problem.

Carer of a person with dementia

Dementia is an ever changing and progressive condition, often with complex physical comorbidities and psychological and behavioural symptoms, which should be prevented where possible through better engagement and care as well as careful assessment and management provided by appropriately trained staff in appropriate numbers for the care of society's vulnerable elderly.

We are available to discuss any of the points raised in this submission and look forward to working with the government as this important aged care amendment is considered.

Yours sincerely

Maree McCabe
CEO
Dementia Australia