

The Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee

**Inquiry into student pathways
to in-demand industries**

**A Dementia Australia Submission
July 25, 2025**

Dementia in Australia

Dementia is one of Australia's most significant public health, social and economic challenges. It has been estimated that in 2020-21, almost \$3.7 billion of health and aged care spending was directly attributable to the diagnosis, treatment, and care of people with dementia. There are 433,300 Australians living with dementia, a figure projected to almost double in the next 30 years. Dementia is the leading cause of death for Australian women and the second leading cause of death overall.¹

Dementia causes significant cognitive and physical disability through progressive impairment of brain function, impacting memory, speech, thought, personality, behaviour, and mobility.² Despite medical advances, there is currently no cure for dementia. As dementia progresses, care needs change accordingly, with care provision dependent on both the paid (formal care) workforce and unpaid (informal care) family members and carers.

The current and future health care workforce shortage

The Department of Health and Aged Care's Nursing Supply and Demand Study shows that Australia is facing a critical shortage of more than 70,000 nurses by 2035. The largest shortage is in the acute sector, with projections indicating an undersupply of 26,665 FTE nurses by 2035, followed by the primary healthcare sector (21,765), and aged care (17,551). The Department's modelling projects a shortfall of around 9,088 First Nations nurses, and a gap of 296 FTE nurse practitioners.

The Committee for Economic Development in Australia made similar findings specifically in relation to the aged care sector noting that Australia's ageing population will require more than 17,000 direct care workers annually to meet the sector's current and future needs.³ In the absence of urgent action to increase the workforce, this would result in a shortage of at least 110,000 direct aged-care workers in a decade and more than 400,000 workers by 2050. Direct aged care workers in this analysis include nurses, allied health professionals, personal care assistants and community care workers.

The Victorian Government's own analysis shows that the health and social assistance sector is predicted to experience the highest levels of workforce growth compared with other Victorian sectors, increasing by 335,000 over the next 10 years (2024-34). This in turn reflects trends in these sectors nationally.⁴

These figures collectively highlight that guidance and support for students to enter the health and social care workforce will be critical in matching the future workforce demand in the health and social care sectors.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Dementia in Australia. Australian Government 2024.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Dementia in Australia. Australian Government 2024.

³ Fedele, R. 'Australia facing shortfall of over 70,000 nurses by 2035'. *Australian Nursing and Midwifery Journal*, July 26, 2024. <https://anmj.org.au/australia-facing-shortfall-of-over-70000-nurses-by-2035-report-reveals/#:~:text=Australia%20is%20facing%20a%20shortage,was%20done%20to%20address%20challenges>.

⁴ Victorian Government, 'Health care and social assistance and construction are expected to have the most workforce growth,' <https://www.vic.gov.au/state-victorian-labour-market-report-2024-publication/4-around-392000-new-workers-are-expected-enter-victorian-labour-market-2027/health-care-and-social-assistance-and-construction-are-expected-have-most-workforce-growth>

The case for a rewarding career in dementia care and support

Dementia Australia has had a long-standing commitment to support and advocate for a skilled and educated health and social care workforce that meets the current and future needs people living with dementia.

This workforce requires a broad skill and knowledge set that includes the following attributes:

- Understanding and ability to apply a person-centred approach to health and social care and support
- Ability to engage effectively and respectfully with a person living with dementia
- Ability to apply a flexible and responsive problem-solving approach to supporting a person with changed behaviours
- Emotional Intelligence

Dementia Australia has made numerous submissions to State, Territory and Federal Governments, and statutory and other bodies in relation to the health, disability, and aged workforce, including issues relating to mandatory dementia education and worker registration. Our position statement on **dementia education and the residential aged care workforce** outlines the importance of a competent and confident residential aged care workforce. More broadly, we support a comprehensive approach to building a dementia-capable workforce across all domains of the health and social care sector to provide quality care and support to people living with dementia. This requires a range of measures to encourage and promote the rewards of working in dementia care and support in the acute, primary, disability, community, and aged care sectors.

Equally, it also requires a range of strategies, including but not limited to ongoing education, training, financial support, and other incentives, to ensure that once workers have taken up a career in this workforce, they remain committed to staying in these sectors.

This is particularly critical for the aged care sector where direct aged care workers, (including nurses, personal care assistants and community care workers), have historically been less well remunerated than their counterparts in the acute, disability and primary health care sectors. The sector has experienced greater rates of workforce dissatisfaction, turnover and attrition related to these financial disparities.

We strongly support the Australian Government's existing offer of fee-free TAFE enrolment for those considering a new career in aged care. Depending on eligibility, this can include studying for an accredited diploma (including a Diploma of Nursing), certificate (for example, the Certificate III in Individual Support) or a short course without incurring tuition fees.

We strongly support the prioritisation of specific groups for fee-free places in this program including young people (17 to 24 years), unpaid carers and First Nations people. Dementia Australia also believes the the Australian Government should be encouraged, including by its State and Territory counterparts, to extend the current fee-free TAFE scheme to Registered Training Organisations with demonstrated and deep expertise in aged care training and education. This would provide additional incentives and opportunities for students contemplating a career in aged care.

We encourage the Victorian Government to consider similar supports and incentives to encourage students in this state to enter the health, disability and particularly the aged care workforce. Establishing clearly defined career pathways in aged care, providing scholarships (the Australian College of Nursing Aged Care Scholarships program provides a useful template), and other forms of incentives and support would contribute to making this career choice more appealing, and importantly, attainable and sustainable.

As with the Australian Government's prioritisation of priority groups for TAFE courses, we support a focus on and specific support for Victorian students who might face additional barriers to entering the health and social care workforce. This includes students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, students living in rural and regional areas, and those from First Nations communities. Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, students with different learning styles and challenges and those with limited digital literacy and/or access to the internet may also require additional support and incentives to enter the health and social care workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Vigorous promotion of the benefits and rewards of a career working in dementia care and support as an area of health care and social assistance that is skilled, valued, vital and rewarding
2. Provide defined career pathways, scholarships and other forms of incentives and support for potential students to pursue a career in dementia support and care across range of health and social care sectors
3. Prioritise support for First Nations students considering a career working in dementia care and support given the complex and culturally sensitive health care needs of our First Nations communities, including people living with dementia and their family members and carers
4. Recognise that students from culturally diverse backgrounds, those who have limited digital literacy, different learning styles and other needs may need additional support to pursue training and education qualifications

5. Identify and provide additional support and incentives for students who might face barriers in applying for and pursuing a career in dementia care and support including those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, students living in rural and regional areas, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those with additional learning challenges or poor digital literacy, and other potentially disadvantaged or underrepresented groups
6. Prioritise financial and other incentives for the completion of a Certificate III Individual Support – Ageing Specialisation, including the Providing Support to People Living with Dementia unit of competency, as the minimum qualification required for aged care workers entering the aged care workforce

Thank you for considering our recommendations for supporting student pathways into the health and social care industries in Victoria. We would be pleased to discuss any of the issues raised in our submission in more detail.

The Dementia Australia Policy and Advocacy team can be contacted via **PolicyTeam@dementia.org.au**.