



Nurse staffing and standards in home and residential aged care position statement

1. Purpose

This position statement sets out the actions the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) considers governments and service providers should take to ensure quality care in home and residential aged care services. It should be read with other ANMF information related to aged care including:

- *Administering medicines*
- *Criminal history checks in aged care*
- *Delegation by registered nurses*
- *Quality use of medicines*
- *Role of assistants in nursing.*
- *Compulsory reporting in aged care*
- *Delegation by registered nurses*
- *Personal care*
- *Regulation and registration of assistants in nursing*

2. Definitions

Residential aged care provides live-in care and accommodation on a permanent or respite basis for people who are unable to continue living independently in their own homes.

Home care provides four levels of service packages to enable people to continue living at home.

3. Context

The ANMF advocates for the right of residents and clients of aged care services to receive evidence-based care from competent and qualified nursing staff.

The 2021 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety report reaffirmed what the ANMF and its members have long argued – that nursing and care-worker staffing levels are critical to the quality of residential care – and recommended that at least one registered nurse be on-site 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at each residential facility, as well as mandated care minutes.

In response, the Australian Government introduced the 24/7 RN responsibility on 1 July 2023. This responsibility requires all aged care providers to have at least one registered nurse on-site and on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at each residential facility they operate, and to report on this coverage every calendar month.¹

In addition, the Australian Government also mandated the requirement for each residential facility to guarantee an average of 200 care minutes, including 40 minutes of RN time, per resident per day from 1 October 2023. This requirement will increase to 215 minutes, including 44 minutes of RN time, from 1 October 2024.

The ANMF also advocates for fair wage outcomes for aged care staff. Wages improved in July 2023 when minimum award wages were increased by 15 per cent for staff paid under the Aged Care and Nurses awards.

¹ Aged care facilities in small rural towns and remote communities with fewer than 31 places may apply for an exemption from the responsibility until 1 July 2024 if they have appropriate alternative clinical care arrangements in place.



The ANMF recognises these positive initiatives. However, with research showing residents are entering aged care with more complex health needs than ever before, the ANMF is continuing to advocate for increased permanent nursing and care-worker capacity to plan and meet these complex care needs.² This must include recognising the importance of the enrolled nurse in aged care.

4. Position

It is the position of the ANMF that:

1. People are older and frailer when they enter aged care. In 2021–22, 54 per cent of people entering permanent residential aged care were aged 85 and over. Almost 40 per cent of people entering home care were aged 85 and over.³
2. People in aged care have higher care needs. On 30 June 2022, almost 40 per cent of residents in residential aged care had high care ratings across all three assessment areas: activities of daily living; cognition and behaviour; and complex health care.⁴
3. People in aged care have complex medicine regimes. Up to 91 per cent of people in Australian residential aged care facilities are prescribed more than five concomitant medicines, and up to 74 per cent of care recipients take more than nine medicines.⁵
4. Quality nursing care is therefore an essential component of aged care.
5. Quality nursing care requires a nursing team comprising a minimum number of registered and enrolled nurses and care-workers/assistants in nursing at an appropriate skill mix. This minimum number must accurately reflect the care needs and acuity of residents and clients; consider staff workloads; and be calculated using sector-wide, union supported methodologies.
6. Research undertaken by the ANMF shows the following minimum numbers best reflect the care needs and acuity of residents and clients:
 - an average of 4 hours 18 minutes of nursing care per day per resident
 - a skills mix comprising 30 per cent registered nurses, 20 per cent enrolled nurses, and 50 per cent assistants in nursing.⁶

² Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) National aged care staffing and skills mix project report 2016. Available at http://www.anmf.org.au/documents/reports/National_Aged_Care_Staffing_Skills_Mix_Project_Report_2016.pdf.

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2023. Aged care. Available at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australians/contents/aged-care>. Viewed 12 October 2023.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Waller, S. 2022. WHO Global Patient Safety Challenge: Medication without harm *Practical examples - Addressing medication safety in polypharmacy at the national level*. Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, Sydney, Australia. Available at: https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/patient-safety/mwh-webinar/20220712/4_steve_w_mswebinar_12july2022.pdf?sfvrsn=979975fd_3.

⁶ Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation. 2016. National aged care staffing and skills mix project report. Available at <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-08/ANM.0001.0001.3151.pdf>.



Government responsibilities

It is the position of the ANMF that:

7. Governments must continue to build on the newly introduced staffing standard of mandated care minutes in response to evidence and research to ensure ongoing provision of safe, quality care for all older people.
8. Governments must fully fund and continue regulate evidence-based staffing and skills mix benchmarks to ensure aged care providers employ sufficient staff and skills mix to meet the assessed care needs of all residents.
 - These benchmarks should consider residents' and clients' assessed needs, quality outcomes, and staff workloads.
 - These benchmarks should be based on nurse to resident staffing ratios that set a clear standard for the minimum number of qualified staff (registered nurses and enrolled nurses) and care-workers/assistants in nursing.
 - Such ratios should be legislated to provide clarity and consistency across Australia and assure residents and their families that the right numbers of staff, and the right skills mix of qualified staff and carers are available in all facilities.
9. Governments must regulate to ensure sufficient registered nurses are always on-site to:
 - provide an initial assessment of all residents and manage their ongoing assessment and care planning and delivery
 - detect early signs and symptoms of changes in health status, determine appropriate care and intervention strategies, initiate treatment measures in a timely way and evaluate health outcomes
10. Governments must regulate to ensure only registered nurses and enrolled nurses (under the supervision of a registered nurse) are responsible for administering medicines.⁷
11. Governments must regulate to ensure a full-time director of nursing or equivalent is employed in each aged care facility to provide clinical governance and advice to nursing staff on clinical and other nursing issues. This management position must be filled by a suitably qualified and experienced registered nurse and out of hours cover for this role must also be provided.

Aged care services

It is the position of the ANMF that aged care services must:

12. employ a permanent nursing and care-worker workforce to promote continuity of care and quality relationships between carers, residents and clients
13. only employ casual staff to meet short-term needs (e.g. when the staffing levels or skills mix requires bolstering to meet changing resident or client care needs)

⁷ Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation. 2013. *Nursing guidelines: Management of medicines in aged care*. Available at https://www.anmf.org.au/media/akibuo1s/management_of_medicines_guidelines_2013.pdf.



14. provide nursing and care-worker career pathways that reflect the acquisition of skills and development of competence by members of the nursing team
15. encourage and support registered nurses to take on leadership and care coordinator roles
16. put systems in place to support and advance research and evidence-based practice and enable all staff to contribute to the body of nursing knowledge.

5. Position statement management

Document type: Position statement	Review process: Federal Executive every three years
Title: Nurse staffing and standards in home and residential aged care	Last reviewed: November 2023
Endorsed: September 1994	Next review: November 2025