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CATHOLIC HEALTH AUSTRALIA CALLS FOR INDUSTRY-WIDE VISA SPONSORSHIPS IN AGED CARE TO ADDRESS ONGOING AGED CARE WORKFORCE CRISIS

The government should introduce industry-wide visa sponsorships for the aged care sector to help plug a huge workforce shortage, says Catholic Health Australia.

The peak body, which represents 12 per cent of Australia's aged care facilities, is also calling for personal care workers to become eligible for sponsorship and for the cumbersome visa application process to be streamlined.

In its pre-budget submission, CHA notes the aged care sector is facing a mammoth workforce shortage, with at least 60,000 care and nursing job vacancies.

This is set to worsen with modelling commissioned by CHA finding that 6,000 more nurses and 10,000 more personal care nurses will be needed to meet minimum care minutes requirements by October.

To help plug this gap, the Catholic aged care sector is calling for an industry-wide approach to the Pacific Australia Labor Migration (PALM) scheme that would involve both training and work for Pacific migrants.

Under the CHA plan, an industry-wide approach would recruit job-ready applicants from the Pacific region for training and work experience in Australia and support their return as skilled and experienced workforce to their nations at the end of the agreed work period. This would both support workforce challenges in Australia and better develop a future skilled workforce in partner nations.

CHA is also pushing for a new health and careworker passport to streamline compliance checks and for a reduction in visa application costs and waiting times.

The government should also immediately enact the Fair Work Commission's 15 per cent pay rise for aged care workers and consider union calls for a 25 per cent rise as poor pay is a major barrier to recruiting and retaining staff.

Catholic Health Australia Aged Care Director Jason Kara said the government needs to act fast before workforce shortages bring the sector to its knees.



“In under a year all operators will be required to give 200 minutes of care a day per resident, of which 40 must be by a registered nurse. Unless there is drastic action on the current trajectory many aged care operators just won’t have the staff that’s needed.

“Industry-wide visa sponsorship, a recommendation of the Jobs and Skills Summit, would help reduce the shortage by coordinating recruitment, training and onboarding, reducing overheads and other barriers for providers and applicants.

“Incorporating training in Australia into the programme will help develop a future skilled workforce in partner Pacific nations when migrants return home, giving back to our neighbours and their communities.

“On top of migration changes, the government must also boost pay after the Royal Commission and the Fair Work Commission accepted that workers are underpaid and that this is a key reason for ongoing staff shortages and negative perceptions of the value of working in aged care.”

Notes to editors: Catholic Health Australia (CHA) is Australia’s largest non-government grouping of health and aged care services accounting for approximately 10 per cent of hospital-based healthcare in Australia. Our members also provide around 25 percent of private hospital care, 5 percent of public hospital care, 12 percent of aged care facilities, and 20 percent of home care and support for the elderly.