



Good Practice Guide

CARE AND
SUPPORT SECTOR

May 2025



ACIL ALLEN



Acknowledgement of Country

HumanAbility acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders – past and present, and recognise their enduring connection to their culture, lands, seas, waters and communities.

Report prepared for HumanAbility by ACIL Allen

ACIL ALLEN

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HumanAbility would like to respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land and sea throughout Australia and extend that respect to Elders past and present. HumanAbility also recognises those whose ongoing effort to protect and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures will leave a lasting legacy for future Elders and leaders.

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1. Introduction

Background

The care and support workforce comprises a significant proportion of Australia's economy. In recognition that the sector is one of the country's fastest growing economic sectors, the Australian Government has a national care and support economy reform agenda underway, the vision of which is to develop a sustainable and productive care and support economy that delivers quality care and support with decent jobs. Objectives include there are enough workers and they have the right skills and training to deliver quality care, jobs are professionalised, and there are pathways to support career progression, further training and mobility.

The Career Pathways project

Individuals working in the care and support sector experience difficulties in understanding, navigating and pursuing potential career pathways which has contributed to significant skills and labour market shortages. In recognition of this, HumanAbility has undertaken a career pathways project which aims to:

- identify and implement new approaches to workforce development, promoting and strengthening pathways
- increase alignment of career progression opportunities within and across aged care, disability support and veterans' care
- attract more workers to the sector, ensuring the skills and knowledge they bring to roles, and develop over their career, are recognised and valued by the sector
- increase worker retention and attrition rates
- increase participation rates in training and employment, particularly from under-represented groups such as First Nations people, people with a disability, and men.

The Good Practice Guide

This Good Practice Guide (the Guide) is one of several supporting products that has been developed under HumanAbility's career pathways project. It is designed to provide practical and actionable information by outlining insights into core issues, common barriers that employers may experience, and strategies that can be leveraged to improve outcomes in workforce attraction, development and retention in aged care, disability support and veterans' care.

This Guide provides an overview of the workforce setting and roles in the care and support sector, summarises current workforce issues, and presents solutions at a high level. Detailed case studies, developed in consultation with industry employers, are provided for further reference. The purpose of the case studies is to provide examples to inspire improvement, but it is recognised that they represent only some of the potential strategies for addressing the issues.

Using the Good Practice Guide

This Guide is intended to be read and used by employers in the aged care, disability support and veterans' care sectors, and the peak bodies that represent them. It covers key issues and opportunities across attraction, recruitment and retention as illustrated below.

Employers are encouraged to reflect on the issues they are facing and explore the effective strategies implemented by others in the sections referenced.

The care and support sector

While the care and support sector is broad, the career pathways project's specific scope is aged care, disability support, and veterans' care.

Aged care

The aged care sector provides assistance to older people with daily living, personal and health needs, either in their homes or in residential aged care homes when living independently is no longer possible. Aged care services help people maintain independence and connection with their community through services like personal and health care, transport, meal preparation, and social and cultural inclusion. Aged care services are delivered by both public and private organisations, and some services are funded by the Australian Government.

Disability support

Disability supports in Australia provide assistance to individuals to meet their needs for community inclusion and wellbeing. Disability supports are primarily provided through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which funds eligible individuals to access support, treatment, and services that promote independence, skill development, employment, and quality of life. Funded activities include health supports, community participation, and educational opportunities. The NDIS has transformed the funding and delivery of disability services, supporting over 500,000 Australians with access to high-quality, professional services across various settings such as residential care, supported living, community programs, and in-home support.

Veterans' care

Veterans' care in Australia supports current and former defence personnel, including war widows/widowers, primarily through the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). DVA collaborates with government agencies, private and not-for-profit organisations, and ex-service organisations to deliver services such as physical and mental health care, counselling, rehabilitation, employment programs, and community connection. Support is provided through in-home and community care, with limited residential facilities available.

The care and support workforce

The care and support workforce represents a significant proportion of Australia's economy. Collectively, the sector employed approximately 600,000 workers in 2021 and is expected to grow to 1 million by 2049-50 and projected government investment is expected to increase from \$103 billion in 2024-25 to \$124 billion by 2027-28¹.

Significant skills and labour market shortages in the sector are impacting the delivery of services to the Australian community. Key factors contributing to workforce shortages include:

- **Attracting students to study** – Limited awareness of career opportunities, poor perception of the sector such as inadequate pay and limited career development opportunities, upfront costs of training and placement poverty among students' impact on the willingness of students to undertake study in the care and support sector.
- **Attracting workers into employment** – Historical stigma of care and support work as gendered or without opportunities, limited visibility of entry pathways into employment, differing employment conditions, and competition with other sectors that offer more competitive remuneration inhibit the ability for employers to attract workers.
- **Supporting career progression** – Unclear job pathways, casualisation of the workforce, limited professional development and supervision structures all impact on growth and development of the workforce. Funding arrangements contribute to career pathways and structures, which can reduce retention.
- **Retention in the care and support sector** – Employment instability from short-term contracts or casual positions, a lack of paid leave, high workload levels, and workplace injuries lead to high turnover, with many workers leaving the sector permanently.

While these challenges are real and faced country-wide, some employers have been able to develop innovative approaches to address these issues and support workforce growth and development.

¹ Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. 2024. Care and support economy. Accessed at <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/care-and-support-economy-state-play>.

What issue are you facing	Section in this document where can you find help
Not enough applicants for jobs	2A – Visibility of pathways 2B – Strengths of the sector 5A – RTO open days 5B – School visits
Applicants needing additional support	2C – Wrap around supports
Applicants without the right values or qualities	2D – Pre-employment programs 2E – Values based recruitment
Difficulties with traineeships	Case study – Skilled Care
Difficult supporting students on placements	3A – Partnership approaches 3B – Workplace supports
Partnerships with training providers for placements	Case study – BlueCare
Accessing funding for professional development	4A – Learning cultures 4B – Return on investment 4E – Access to funded training
Supporting staff to get accredited training	4C – Skill Sets 4D – Recognition of Prior Learning 4F – Flexible rostering
High staff attrition	5C – Pathways 5D – Mentoring
Retention of key staff	Case study – Elder Care Case study – Chorus
Growing, supporting and retaining local staff (particularly in regional, rural and remote areas)	6A – Local training
Growing the First Nations workforce	6B – Culturally appropriate recruitment 6C – Cultural grounding
Supporting workforce diversity	6D – Role redesign Case study – SKiP Case study - Scope

2. Attracting workers

Why it is important

The care and support sector is diverse, with a wide range of roles and occupations, and must grow to meet demand now and into the future. This means employers need to get more people interested in the sector through both training and direct entry pathways.

To do so, school leavers, job seekers and people changing careers need to have awareness of the career opportunities that the care and support sector offers. This is relevant to people who work exclusively in the sector (for example, disability support workers) and those that may work in other sectors (like nurses).

Improving awareness of and exposure to the care and support sector can go some way to alleviating negative perceptions about careers and encourage students and workers into the workforce. Raising the visibility of different employers, job roles and employment arrangements is also essential for increasing the attractiveness of the sector.

What are the barriers

Historical stigma

Potential workers often see the care and support sector as gendered or an 'end of career' option, rather than a lifelong career. The recent coverage of the care and support work as labour intensive, low status and with poor rates of pay has exacerbated this stigma.

Limited awareness

There is low visibility of the career pathways into the care and support sector. This creates barriers to entry, with potential workers not aware of the range of rewarding careers available or how they can best get started in the industry.

Competition with other sectors

The labour market in Australia is characterised by a scarcity of available workers to fill job openings. This means that employers in the care and support sector are competing for workers with other areas like health and social services, where job roles and career journeys are often much better understood.

Employment stability

The community sector tends to have short funding cycles which typically reduce the length of contracts and contribute to high levels of employment instability. This has led to a range of highly localised employment arrangements, including more short-term contracts and casualised roles, which can discourage potential workers who are seeking permanent full or part time positions.

Administrative burden of traineeships

The current funding model is problematic for the common traineeships entry pathway as many employers do not have the administrative, economic, or operational ‘bandwidth’ to complete their training obligations as the host employer.

Effective strategies

2A – Improving visibility of career pathways

Industry employers have partnered with training providers to raise awareness of pathways into, and within, the care and support workforce for both vocationally and higher education trained occupations.

This has included:

- hosting booths at career festivals and open days such as the [Melbourne Disability Expo](#).
- using innovative recruitment practices (like online platforms and community groups)
- connecting with school counsellors to reach high school students
- engaging with government employment services to connect with people seeking a career change.

2B – Promoting the strengths of the sector

Employers and peak bodies have used community events (fetes, festivals) to directly market the care and support sector as an attractive career choice to help overcome existing stigma and undervaluing of the workforce. Others have proactively communicated the impact that the workforce can have through websites and related collateral, or through providing positive placement experiences (discussed further in the next section).

2C – Wrap around supports

High performing employers have tended to provide the wrap around supports required to help workers succeed in the care and support sector. This has included:

- structured induction, onboarding and orientation processes for new recruits
- assistance with Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) and digital literacy skills to support with work-readiness
- pastoral care to build resilience
- access to peer support groups or buddies to provide additional assistance on a day-to-day basis.

2D – Pre-employment programs

Many employers have developed ‘taster’ pre-employment programs or partnered with providers to develop initiatives that allow prospective hires to assess whether the sector is a good fit for them before either invest their time and money. This not only provides essential skills for new entrants, but it also increases positive exposure and prepares them for the roles they may move into.

2E – Values-based recruitment

Many employers have used values-based recruitment to determine if there is a mutual fit between the organisation and the job seeker, supporting improved attraction and retention of the right candidates. This focuses on attracting workers whose attitudes, values and behaviours align with those of the organisation, something that has been found to be a strong determinant for sustained employment in the care and support sector.

The case study below shows how these strategies can be implemented, and other examples can be found in the resources section of the National Disability Services website, such as [Workforce attraction](#), and [‘Support your staffing strategy in NSW’](#), and the resources on the [Department of Health, Disability and Ageing website](#).

Case Study – Skilled Care

This case study demonstrates strategies 2A, 2B, 2C and 2E which have been delivered through an industry-training provider partnership model.

[Skilled Care](#) is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) focusing on aged care staffing, training and recruitment. It operates nationally with supporting staff in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. It is owned by the LionHouse group of companies which has a diverse portfolio of industry education and employment solutions amongst private, government, and large multi-national workforces.

Skilled Care recognised that traineeships provide a strong incentive mechanism to attract students into the care and support sector, while also supporting employers to recruit workers. Skilled Care’s model provides organisations with a structured traineeship program which brings in high-quality candidates while removing or reducing financial barriers to hosting students. Employers are supported financially through a combination of available government incentives and payroll tax savings.

Skilled Care identified that careful recruitment was a key factor in workforce attraction, and matching high-quality and motivated candidates with providers would support better retention within the sector. Skilled Care undertakes recruitment for no charge as part of its model, so the only cost to the employer is the subsidised labour cost to support the traineeship, which results in a net positive financial position for providers.

Once a partnership is established, Skilled Care recruits suitable candidates for the employer. Skilled Care’s model has a dedicated recruitment team which has a focus on ‘nurturing’ high-quality and motivated candidates for traineeships. The recruitment team targets the ‘considered career changer’ cohort rather than school leavers. It identifies individuals who show an interest in a potential career in care through web data analytics and interactions with advertising materials (such as banner ads or through SEEK). The Skilled Care recruitment team continuously engages with suitable candidates and manages all the administrative components of bringing the candidate on board into the program once they are ready to take the next step.

Skilled Care has received significant positive feedback on their model as providing a 'win-win' for both care organisations and trainees. The uptake rate for a candidate put forward for a final interview with the employer is 70%. The careful consideration and identification of suitable candidates provides organisations with a pipeline of trainees which they can invest in with confidence.

The traineeship model has also had a significant positive impact on workforce stress at partner care organisations. Due to the functional nature of the training provided by Skill Care, the trainees can alleviate workload pressures rather than add to them, which results in improved quality of care and staff satisfaction within the facilities.

Student retention and progression too has been significantly higher under this model than the full qualification pathway. The 12-month commitment of a Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing and Disability) is often difficult for a student to sustain financially. Skilled Care's approach of embedding employment into the training process motivates students to continue through to completion. Moreover, Skilled Care have achieved an average progression rate of 84% from their Certificate III into a Certificate IV.

3. Supporting placements

Why it is important

Placements are a mandatory component of many education and training programs. They also provide a positive opportunity to attract and recruit workers into employment with the organisation providing the placement. The quality of placements significantly affects whether students choose to work in the care and support sector.

Positive placement experiences lead to greater numbers of students, trainees and interns who are likely to consider careers in the care and support sector. Important factors in providing students with positive experiences are the availability, quality and range of settings in which placements are undertaken. Increasing positive exposure pre-service also helps alleviate negative perceptions about careers in the care and support sector.

What are the common barriers

Placement poverty

Placements often require students to give up paid work to complete their assessments, with many students unable to do so given their financial and personal situations. This results in missed opportunities for employers in accessing potential workers.

Supervision

Workforce pressures impact the ability of employers to provide sufficient supervision to students on placement, particularly in releasing staff with appropriate experience and mentoring and coaching skills to ensure that students have a positive learning experience.

Community settings

Workforce shortages also make it difficult to provide placements in community or home-based care and support, shifting primary exposure to residential aged care settings rather than the full suite of environments in which supports are delivered. People receiving care and support in the community may not consent to having students attend on placements. In rural, regional and remote settings, supporting placements can be even more difficult due to the lack of appropriate resources, access to trainers and diverse placement settings available in these regions.

Partnerships

Training providers often find it difficult to establish industry and employer partnerships to support quality placements, due to the perception that placements place a high administrative burden on service providers which reduces their willingness to host students.

Effective strategies

3A – Partnership approaches

Employers have worked closely with training providers to build strong placement processes. This can include establishing preferred provider arrangements to ensure availability, working with RTOs to introduce screening approaches to ensure that students on placement are a good cultural fit with an interest in working in the sector, having clear roles and responsibilities between RTOs and employers, and establishing arrangements that support supervision and mentoring throughout placements.

3B – Workplace supports

Employer practices here have included:

- the use of 'buddy shifts', where workers are paired to build peer relationships
- dedicated positions within services for mentoring and coaching
- regular check-ins with students on placement to ensure meaningful learning opportunities.

These have helped them improve placement experiences and support more students to complete, and transition to working in the sector.

The case study below shows how these strategies can be implemented.

Case study – BlueCare

This case study demonstrates strategies 3A and 3B, led by an employer to support positive placements.

[BlueCare](#) is one of Queensland's largest providers of in-home care, residential aged care, and retirement living, working to help communities live rich and full lives. It was established in 1953 and is an agency of UnitingCare, underpinned by the shared values of compassion, respect, justice, working together and leading through learning.

BlueCare has a large and growing network of aged care professionals, with 8,500 employees and 500 volunteers working together.

Like the broader aged care sector, BlueCare finds it difficult to attract sufficient workers. Although RTO partners can offer BlueCare access to a large pool of students for placement, they are not always situated in areas where BlueCare has workforce needs, especially in regional and remote locations.

When RTOs organise student placements, they often do not complete detailed screening to ensure placements are the right fit for student career goals or to determine if the student is genuinely seeking employment. As an example, BlueCare received many students for their aged care placements whose actual preference was to work in the disability sector. This was a large factor in their 24% conversion rate of placement-to-employee, sitting well below their target of 50%.

Faced with escalating demand for services, an ageing workforce, retention challenges, a skilled worker shortage, and an increasingly competitive labour market, BlueCare adopted a strategic “Grow Your Own (GYO)” approach. Pivotal in this has been the development of preferred partnership arrangements with select RTOs to boost training, traineeship and placement opportunities.

BlueCare has a dedicated coordinating team and a GROW learning management system that provides information on traineeships and placements, details on funding for formal qualifications, and access to non-accredited training courses for workforce members.

Students studying with BlueCare’s preferred RTO partners are given priority for placements. The aim of BlueCare’s student placement program is to transition students into employment, thereby creating a steady pipeline of qualified and skilled personal care workers in areas where they are most needed. Other actions BlueCare has implemented to address their workforce attraction and training needs are:

- increasing education partners for student placements from 3 preferred providers to 7 to better meet demand for student placements
- creating a request template for placements to ensure student availability, interest and employment availability aligns with organisational need and purpose
- implementing a workforce attraction strategy that allows personal care students to be hired before or during their placement as unqualified personal carers, with paid placement shifts once employed, or to be employed in a qualified role after their placement, if a vacancy is available.
- providing paid personal carer practical placements to existing employees to incentivise existing workers without qualifications to participate, upskill and progress their career
- expanding placement opportunities to include health administration and hospitality where hosting capacity and vacancies exist
- developing resources (such as handbooks) to support inducting students into ways of working
- assigning ‘Personal Care Worker Coaches’ to provide quality mentoring for upskilling
- running a ‘Peer to Peer’ course for building buddying skills to increase professional development and leadership capacity
- holding online information for students prior to their placement to highlight career opportunities in BlueCare and encourage them to apply for employment
- regular check-ins between trainees and leaders to manage wellbeing and learning progress.

All these actions are combining to improve workforce attraction and retention and build a strong culture of supported learning and development at BlueCare. Paid placements have also supported existing workers to upskill with a qualification and progress to new roles internally.

4. Developing skills and recognising experience

Why it is important

Continuous learning and skill development are important to equip the workforce to meet the unique challenges of the care and support sector, improve outcomes for individual and their families. People working in the care and support sector need to have the contemporary skills to support person-centred and culturally safe approaches. This requires employers, and education and training providers to work together to build the capabilities of new entrants and existing workers.

What are the common barriers

Cost for workers

Many entry-level roles have employment conditions that involve upfront fees (for example, paying for police checks). Training courses also often have upfront fees. This reduces the ability for students and workers to self-fund their training. Entry level workers in the sector typically do not have the resources to support themselves to complete the required training. Even where they can, the lack of pay increases for completing additional training discourages workers from pursuing further professional development opportunities.

Resourcing constraints

Other factors that can limit professional development are heavy workloads, shortages of skilled supervisors, lack of management commitment to training, and organisational systems that cannot adapt to the required workforce flexibility. These all create challenges in finding time to undertake professional development and are exacerbated by the high proportion of casual and part-time workers in the care and support sector.

Training availability

There are limited training options that relate specifically to each of the different needs within the care and support sector. A particular gap is the various skilling needed for career progression, such as leadership or more managerial roles. This makes it hard for employers to find 'off the shelf' products that meet their needs, and more expensive to support professional development.

Recognition of Prior Learning

The care and support workforce could benefit from the many people who have significant relevant experience working in, or even outside, the sector but no formal qualifications. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a key mechanism for these workers but is difficult, and costly, for both employers and training providers, with limited guidance on how RPL processes can best be applied to support workers to gain formal qualifications.

Effective strategies

4A – Learning cultures

Employers have established effective learning cultures through activities that include valuing the role of educators (often with dedicated roles or pathways within organisations), committing to evidence-based practice, structuring process for orientation and learning opportunities, codifying relationships with providers and employers, and providing access to appropriate facilities and environments. These have all enabled them to better support high quality professional development.

4B – Recognising the return on investment of training

Employers have successfully supported training development by clearly articulating the return on investment from funding training for members, outlining the benefits in terms of increased employee satisfaction, higher productivity, greater retention and avoided costs of additional recruitment. This has been further enhanced by also outlining the clear costs of not training the workforce.

4C – Use of skill sets

Employers have leveraged nationally recognised skill sets to build the capability of their workforce in particular areas (such as the *CHCSS00114 Entry into Care Roles Skill Set*, *CHCSS00069 Advocacy Skill Set* and *CHCSS00067 Administer and Monitor Medication Skill Set*). This has proven to be a cost-effective approach to formal education and training, with lower administrative burden and need to cover staff to be released for training.

4D – Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Some employers have established partnerships with RTOs to provide existing workers with cost-effective RPL to attain nationally recognised qualifications. This has helped with employee satisfaction and retention, with staff feeling more valued as a result of having their skills and experience recognised.

4E – Flexible rostering

Flexible rostering can support training by providing opportunities for staff to participate in training while maintaining work schedules. These practices allow workers employees to choose shifts based on their personal commitments, facilitating scheduling around training modules.

4F – Access to funded training

There are various government programs in place to support workers to access training in the care and support economy, given the priority for workforce developments, including [Fee Free TAFE](#). Employers can work with their staff to apply for these training places to reduce costs to the worker.

The case study below shows how these strategies can be implemented. Another available resource is the eLearning modules for NDIS workers on the [NDIS website](#).

Case study – Crosslinks

This case study demonstrates strategy 4D, which has been successfully implemented through an industry-training provider partnership.

[Crosslinks](#) is a not-for-profit registered NDIS provider who has been supporting people with disabilities for over 27 years. It delivers services across metropolitan Perth that cover Supported Independent Living – long term accommodation, Community Participation and Activities, and Support Coordination.

It has more than 240 staff working under the guiding principles of collaboration, effective listening, experiencing fun, doing what's right for participants, and striving every day to make a positive difference. Crosslinks prides itself on having a workforce with the right skills and access to the resources necessary to provide the highest quality support for each participant.

To foster growth and empower the Crosslinks workforce, as well as benefit the broader community of entry level workers in the disability support sector, Crosslink established a new approach for accessing and completing formal qualifications on-the-job – called the 'Fast Tracking a Skilled Workforce' (FTSW) initiative.

The FTSW initiative was designed to build on the existing Crosslinks employee training and previous on-the-job experience within a Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) framework to contribute to and fast-track completion of selected formal qualifications (including Certificate III, IV or Diploma in Community Services, and Certificate IV in Disability). The RPL and any gaps in credits required for graduation are supplemented with a tailored learning program for each person to achieve their qualification goal.

In doing this, Crosslinks collaborated with [iinduct](#) (who provide a specialised online learning product able to evidence student knowledge and facilitate personalised learning needs analysis for course completion) and the Bradford Institute of Advanced Education (an RTO experienced in community service professionals) to bring the concept to life. Two disability services organisations were initially engaged to pilot the program, alongside Crosslinks itself, to demonstrate success and scalability. After the first year, the partnership included eight organisations in total. The initiative was supported by funding through the Department of Communities 'Disability Workforce Development and Retention Fund' procured by the NDS.

Each participating service organisation had flexibility to define the level of support provided to employees including flexible rostering to attend training, assisting with preparation of RPL evidence, creating workplace learning experiences, and completing performance reports. Crosslinks allocated a dedicated learning and development team member to provide weekly in-person support for all participating employees, as well as ensuring supervisory support for RPL evidence collection.

The FTSW has transformed professional development for Crosslink's Disability Support Workers and has had a tangible impact on their careers, the business they work for, and for people with disabilities accessing services. Specific outcomes across the varying participating service providers have been:

- Enabling 203 Support Workers across the disability sector (within the Crosslinks partnership) to complete 213 formal qualifications and enhance their professional capabilities
- Increasing participating Support Workers job satisfaction, skill sets and self-confidence in their role
- Providing clarity on career paths and practical opportunities to pursue and reach career goals
- Decreasing staff turnover through increased engagement, leading to reduction in need for casual staff and enabling more consistency of staff for people with disabilities
- Enhancing the creativity and focus of support to enable more person-centred care to assist people with disabilities in achieving their goals
- Building more confidence with families and carers in service quality and reliability
- Improving business' efficiency and service quality with staff more equipped to deliver quality care. For Crosslinks, 113 Disability Support Workers have gained formal qualifications with 90% of employees now having a formal qualification (compared to the industry standard of 11%). Service demand, recruitment and retention has grown, and casual employment and agency staff dependence has reduced.

5. Building pathways and retaining experience

Why it is important

Career pathways within the care and support sector are essential to supporting retention. They provide individuals with a clear roadmap for personal and professional growth, helping retention of knowledge and expertise in the sector. For employers, career pathways help attract, develop, and retain talent, ensuring a motivated and skilled workforce. Awareness and accessibility of pathways can be challenging because of the diversity of approaches between employers and contexts.

Retaining staff is key to becoming a high performing organisation as it reduces recruitment and training costs, enhances productivity, and preserves institutional knowledge. Long-term employees bring experience, stability, and deep understanding of contemporary practice, which improves the quality of care, treatment and support. Ultimately, a stable workforce supports innovation, growth, and consistency, contributing to long-term success.

What are the common barriers

Entry pathways

There is low awareness of the range of entry pathways, diversity of job roles on offer and available career opportunities for workers in the care and support sector. In part, this is because the aged care, disability support and veterans' care sectors have been packaged and promoted as a uniform sector, which does not reflect the reality of the industry and discourages individuals from considering careers in care and support.

Progression points

Opportunities for advancement in role, level, and responsibility are key to career satisfaction. However, these progression opportunities and career structures are not visible in many roles in the care and support sector, such as personal care workers (PCWs), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers, lived experience (peer) workers, occupational therapists, and social workers.

Availability of roles

Opportunities for role progression are also restricted by the size of service providers, their funding envelope, team structures, and service delivery models. This makes other sectors, such as healthcare, more appealing to workers as they are perceived to offer better prospects for career growth.

Workplace culture

The organisational pressure in the care and support sector means that employers often face challenges in providing the supportive workplace culture that is essential for a resilient workforce. High workloads, stress, and fatigue all combine to produce significant burnout and workforce attrition. These issues are heightened in regional and remote areas, where the challenges of limited support resources and infrastructure are more pronounced.

Workplace injuries

Workplace injuries are another a major reason workers leave the care and support sector. Community and personal care and support workers have the highest rates of work-related injuries, including back, neck, and shoulder strains, as well as serious musculoskeletal disorders caused by improper handling or a lack of equipment.

Effective strategies

5A – RTO open days

Industry bodies have partnered with RTOs to co-host RTO Open Days, where prospective students and workers can meet with employers to learn more about the industry, training options, RTO's facilities, and supports available. This has helped to increase interest of potential students in the care and support sector by giving both a feel for the learning environment before enrolling in a course, and the realities of working in the sector after completion.

5B – School visits

Employers have connected with local schools to raise awareness of career pathways with students, talking about career opportunities, industry trends, and the skills required for related roles. These visits help students understand the different career pathways available to them after school, whether through further education, apprenticeships, internships, or direct entry into the workforce.

5C – Structured training and development pathways

Employers have invested in offering scaffolded development through regular training sessions to enhance both technical and non-technical skills. This can build from entry level content to more advanced and specialised care or support, with potential branding to mentoring, coaching and leadership.

5D – Mentoring

Employers have created designated workplace mentors with a small-time release or a focus on buddy shifts for students on placement and new workforce entrant. Targeted recruitment programs that focus on identifying existing workers with an affinity for mentoring have helped make these initiatives effective, increasing employee satisfaction. Mentors also report higher satisfaction because of career progression.

The following case study shows how these strategies can be implemented.

Case study – Elder Care

This case study demonstrates strategies 5C and 5D, led by the industry.

[Eldercare](#) is a large not-for-profit aged care provider delivering care in South Australia since 1959. Service delivery spans 13 residential aged care sites (with approximately 1,000 residents in greater Adelaide and Yorke Peninsula regions), 200 independent living units across 12 retirement villages (many co-located with residential sites), and an allied health day therapy centre (assisting over 300 clients in Hendon).

Service delivery is based on a person-centred approach to care that celebrates diversity and nurtures each person's unique mind, body and spirit. The Eldercare Model of Care guides staff in their case management, wellbeing assessment and planning, resident engagement, and in putting core values of respect, accountability and connection into action.

The care team includes over 1,600 staff (clinical, allied health, personal and spiritual care) and over 200 passionate and skilled volunteers. To deliver a high standard of care and contribute to meeting Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission Standards, the Eldercare workforce must hold a range of qualifications and experience relevant to their role.

Eldercare has a strong culture of learning and development, with focus on internal promotion and career progression to ensure staff feel satisfied at work and are supported to reach professional goals. This includes progression pathways from Personal Care Worker to enrolled and registered nurse, and from clinical leadership, to site manager and executive leadership.

Eldercare has invested in implementing a Transition to Practice program that supports entry to sector and retention. This is a 1-year program that provides trainees with focused mentorship on the job before they transition to afternoon or night shift work. The program is executed in small numbers, with only 1 per site at any given time to ensure high quality mentorship. Most trainees have transitioned successfully to permanent RN employment after the program.

Eldercare has also invested in improving the onboarding process through delivering competency-based induction training to better support staff to build skills before going onto the roster. The training aims to deliver clear messaging on purpose and values within the workforce, with leadership demonstrating this culture from the top down. Identifying trainers and funding to roll out this training across all staff is an ongoing process. Onboarding surveys are run at 1, 3 and 6 months to understand the experience of new starters and inform improvements the overall onboarding process.

While attributing the impact of individual initiatives is difficult to determine amongst the range of reform and changes in the broader aged care sector, Eldercare run a biennial employee engagement survey to monitor and understand internal workforce satisfaction. In 2024, 83% of employees found Eldercare a great place to work, 94% felt work is meaningful, 84% felt valued at work, 91% were proud of their work, and 89% felt they made a difference. Overall, there is a strong sense among staff that their work matters and has purpose.

Eldercare's forward thinking is to build a positive perception of the aged care sector as a valued and respected career choice and remain committed to investing in supporting the growth of their trainees and graduates.

Case study – Chorus

This case study demonstrates strategies 5C and an innovative approach to role design.

[Chorus Australia](#) is a not-for-profit organisation that supports local communities in metro and regional Western Australia with over 1,000 employees and volunteers. They aim to help people live the life they choose through providing relationship focused, meaningful and safe care and support at home and in the community. They have a particular focus on seniors and people living with disability and mental illness.

Chorus' approach is underpinned by a flat structure that is moving away from hierarchical and transactional relationships with reducing employee attrition as one of its objectives. Location is the organising principle of service delivery and management, with each small geographic area providing all service types and receiving funding through multiple streams. This structure has promoted deeper connection with community and encouraged both autonomous and collaborative practice within the local team.

This change was motivated by the fact that working as an individual supporting people in their home and community can lead to a high level of disengagement with fellow staff. Additionally, the historical practice of fully prescribing employee directions in how they provide care and support was inhibiting employees to act autonomously and collaboratively in identifying problems, determining resolutions and developing for future professional growth.

Chorus undertook extensive consultation to understand what was needed and to co-design a new operating model and way of working. Launched in late 2021, the "Fresh Approach to Community Service" model and culture is based around 5 key principles focusing on local needs, relationship networks, building on community strengths, teamwork, and a deep understanding of local care and support ecosystems.

Following introduction of this new approach, Chorus undertook radical decentralisation – moving from centralised to local team led service planning and coordination; from siloed to holistic care and support; from hierarchical management to self-organising stewardship and accountability; from centralized and individual decision making to collaborative practice, guided by an evidence and community informed playbook; and from having a central administrative team to having all employees involved in customer engagement.

A customer-centric model was also adopted, enabled by the multi-skilled team approach, where care and support recipients now connect with a small team of local workers who provide tailored and shared care and support.

Chorus also developed and implemented a remuneration concept (the Contribution Diamond) where skills and capability, and leadership qualities are central in determining compensation. This recognises and reflects each person's unique values and has improved the organisational culture.

The approach overall has improved the experience and outcomes for all employees, volunteers, customers, and communities, as well as Chorus as a business. The new small multidisciplinary teams – each with a local lead fostering regular collaboration -- have reduced the siloing of work, increased employee engagement, and empowered local teams to better tailor care and support to their community's need.

This shift also stimulated employee career aspirations and supported staff in progressing and growing within the organisation. Wellbeing measures at Chorus show high levels of self-determination and purpose, an above average level of overall wellbeing, and reduction in intent to leave. Productivity of local teams has improved 15% over 2 years, moving Chorus from an operating loss to surplus. Staff turnover has also reduced well below industry average, being under 20% for the last 6 months.

6. Supporting diversity

Why it is important

Workplace diversity is crucial for an inclusive, representative and safe environment for individuals. A diverse workforce brings the range of perspectives, cultural competencies, and experiences, which are essential for understanding and addressing the unique needs of an increasingly diverse population. By fostering an inclusive environment, employers can enhance communication, improve care and support delivery, and reduce biases, ultimately leading to better outcomes.

What are the common barriers

Role models and representation

The Australian care and support workforce is broad culturally in some areas. For example, the Australian Government's Aged Care Worker Survey 2024 report showed 40.8% of respondents spoke a language other than English at home. However, in other areas the lack of diversity is discouraging the entry of critical cohorts. Due in part to historical perceptions of the sector, the workforce has low male and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People representation and lacks workers with lived experience.

Availability of training

Limited access to education and training available in rural and remote areas makes it hard to attract students from these regions. Many individuals in these areas move to metropolitan locations to pursue their studies, resulting in a workforce that is lost to and not representative of the local community.

Gendered perceptions

The care and support sector is often perceived as 'women's work', the result of the currently highly gendered nature of the workforce. This gender bias has reduced the interest of men in engaging in care and support roles, particularly when there are options of higher paid or more secure roles in traditionally masculine industries.

First Nations

The underrepresentation of First Nations people in the care and support sector is a complex issue. Contributing factors range from ongoing impacts of colonisation and trauma, discrimination and racism, limited awareness of pathways, few culturally safe workplaces, geographical barriers and financial barriers to engaging in education and training.

Effective strategies

6A – Localised training partnerships

Some employers have provided localised education, training, and placement opportunities for students to develop, grow and sustain the regional, rural and remote care and support workforce. This aligns with community preferences to undertake training on country, and in their own community.

6B – Culturally appropriate recruitment

Tailored programs that target First Nations communities and offer support in the form of training, scholarships, wrap around supports and culturally safe work environments have been used by training providers and employers to increase representation of First Nations workers.

6C – Cultural grounding

Some employers have supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through developing culturally responsive curriculum and teaching approaches, undertaking community outreach to improve awareness of job opportunities, establishing peer networking groups to improve the cultural load, and developing structured pathways to support workers to progress in their careers.

6D – Role re-design

Some employers have re-designed job roles to encourage workers with lived experience by adopting flexible, inclusive practices that focus on the individual's abilities rather than limitations. These have involved offering flexible work hours, developing small teams to provide care and support, and using assistive technologies to support employees in performing their tasks. Job descriptions have been adjusted to focus on core competencies and essential functions, allowing for adjustments in the way certain tasks are performed. Training for other staff on inclusivity, and fostering a supportive work culture, has also helped create an environment where inclusion is prioritised.

The following case study shows how these strategies can be implemented.

Case study – SKiP

This case study demonstrates 6A and 6B, led through employers, staff and training providers.

[SKiP](#) is a program in Victoria coordinated by RMIT's Workforce Innovation and Development Institute and brings together employers, employees and RMIT as the training and assessment provider. Workers need to be on at least a 12-month fixed term contract and meet "priority industry group requirements" – such as workers with disability and workers from cultural, linguistic and religious communities.

SKiP operates as a triangulated model between TAFE, employers and workplace mentors, and its approach works backwards from employment vacancies, matching a worker to an employer and providing the training necessary to support them into skilled work. The development of human resource-oriented

assessment centres also filtered out candidates and helped workers ensure they had complete information on this sector and profession.

Workers accepted into the program receive an integrated two-week pre-service induction program, supported by workplace mentors. Mentors are funded by the program and are independent to workplace supervisors to ensure clarity of roles, expectations and functions. Existing worker entrants are paid at the rate of SCHADS SACS 2.1 to reflect that they are an unqualified worker, not a trainee wage that is well below standard industry pay rates.

Workers are released for training off-job once a week, and paid to do so by the employer, to gain a full Certificate IV in Disability. Where employers cannot afford to pay for training, they can apply for financial assistance from the SKiP program. Workers are employed for a minimum of 20 hours a week.

The program supports both entry level skill development and can be linked to an ongoing higher apprenticeship program that supports upskilling into advanced positions. The systematic approach to work integrated learning (WIL) across the spectrum of skills required has increased uptake of the program.

While the administrative burden of apprenticeships has prevented some providers from taking up the program, others have found mitigation options, such as the funding provided under the Working for Victoria to cover HR costs with the program.

Case study – Scope

This case study demonstrates 6D and the supporting organisational structures required for successful delivery.

[Scope](#) is a large not-for-profit disability service provider operating across NSW and VIC and spanning over 400 service and office locations. In the 2023-24 financial year, support was provided to more than 5,200 people with complex intellectual, physical and multiple disabilities. The Scope workforce consists of almost 7,000 employees with a large frontline operational service delivery workforce.

Scope is driven by its Disability Inclusive Workforce Strategy (the Strategy), encompassing nine recommendation and 71 initiatives developed in collaboration with Scope employees. It is currently working to implement five priority initiatives:

- Representation: forming a representative body for employees with disability
- Workplace Adjustments: developing a Workplace Adjustment Policy and Protocol
- Disclosure: Creating a Disclosure Policy and Protocol
- Leadership: Prioritising people with disability for senior roles
- Prioritised and Partner roles: Creating roles for people with disability in key and strategic positions.

Specific actions underway include forming a talent acquisition working group, building partnerships with recruitment service providers for people with disability, exploring deliberate and systematic job design including principles for adjustments, and directly communicating accessibility and adjustments as core elements of job design to potential and current employees.