

An Aged and Ageing Workforce: challenges facing the aged care sector

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The ageing of the workforce is well described and understood. There is no shortage of research that identifies the factors that can extend an individuals working life and those drivers that will see people exit, often “prematurely”.

It is widely recognised that increased life expectancy coupled with growth in the complexity of conditions will drive the demand for aged care. Not only will there be more older people but with the ability to do more to support them to live well, it is expected we will do so. But will we have the workforce?

In a 2012 Australian surveyⁱ it was found that 60 per cent or 348,000 direct care workers in the residential and community care sectors were over the age of 45, with 29 per cent over 55. In New Zealand a 2009 studyⁱⁱ found that the demand for labour in the health and disability services sector would grow by between forty and sixty nine per cent by 2021. The 2012 Human Rights Commission enquiry into the aged care workforce concluded, “*a more strategic, sustained approach to the carer workforce was urgently required.*”ⁱⁱⁱ

At a national level the implications for recruitment, retention and training have been well described. High-level recommendations continue to be made. What has not been sufficiently explored from a provider perspective is the impact this is having on a day-to-day basis.

These agencies are increasingly relying on a workforce that is aged and ageing, female, often migrant and comparatively not well remunerated. Individual providers face significant workforce, financial and consumer pressures along with increased accountability. This poises significant management and governance challenges and risks.

This presentation will explore the workforce risks and challenges from the provider perspective. It will discuss the implementation of a customised program aimed at addressing issues of retention, recruitment, training, transition and health, wellbeing and safety in two organisations.

ⁱ Department of Health (2012) *National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey – The Aged Care Workforce, 2012 – Final Report*. Canberra Australia

ⁱⁱ Department of Labour (2009) *The future demand for paid caregivers in a rapidly ageing society*. Wellington, New Zealand

ⁱⁱⁱ Human Rights Commission (2012) *Caring Counts: report of the Inquiry into the Aged Care Workforce*. Wellington, New Zealand