

What Does Helping Hand Think About:

Staff Ratios

The Issue

There is increasing public concern about the quality and number of people employed in delivering residential aged care services. One solution proposed by a number of people and organisations is to mandating fixed staff ratios, particularly for nursing staff eg 1 nurse for 5 clients.

Helping Hand's Position

Helping Hand does not support mandated staff ratios at this time given there is on-going debate about the evidence connecting staff ratios to outcomes for clients.

Why we think this

While a ratio seems a simple solution, the reality of the aged care workforce is much more complex, as identified in a major investigation into the aged care workforce led by Professor John Pollaers in 2017/18. The resulting review, "A Matter of Care" identified other issues, including:

- The need for sufficient numbers of direct care staff across the workforce;
- Ensuring appropriate staff skills mix to meet the needs and expectations of older people identified in their care plans;
- Better workforce planning and management to reduce staff turnover and improve employee engagement;
- The cost implications for the Federal budget should ratios be mandated.

The Review recommended 14 areas for action to support the development of a sustainable workforce and industry but did not recommend staff ratios. In fact, the report noted the significant costs which would be incurred with prescribing ratios and hours of care across the industry.

While always welcoming any increase in Australian Government funding which would enable us to employ more staff, we believe we must strive to do the best within the money we have, with a focus on high quality care and services. We also believe that our people are our greatest asset and we will continue to support them in a range of ways to enable them to be the best they can be.

Our current strategies include:

- Balancing the roles within our services including registered nurses, enrolled nurses, care workers, senior clinicians, allied health, lifestyle, hotel services and administration staff;
- Matching current care needs with the staff structure determined for each site and against our internal service standards (for example, we have a registered nurse always on shift or on-call; we apply no time limits on delivery of care);
- Review and redesign of service structures in response to changing care needs;
- Annual review, through the budget process, of staff and cost ratios, including comparison with industry benchmarks;
- Recognising the immense benefit of the roles that volunteers play in our residential care facilities.

We also have invested in significant initiatives, particularly The Helping Hand Way values program and My Home Life Program, which aim to enhance staff development, performance and satisfaction.

