

I offer the following submission on “A workforce to care for the elderly”

Introducing ‘Community Services’ as an educational option for Years 11 and 12 may be instrumental in providing a pathway for students wishing to pursue a career in aged care. Aged care as a full time career may only be financially viable in a residential setting where the hours are regular. For inexperienced care workers the residential setting provides suitable work experience through practical training following the theoretical knowledge gained at school. As residential care currently employs 63.6% of staff as personal carers (including assistants in nursing), educational policies targeting young men and women at high school, may provide training options and career pathways, to engage them in aged care early in life.

Community care workers constitute 82.6% of the direct care for older people in the community. Online courses for aged care may be convenient for a mum or dad at home, but they need to be affordable and must contain a component of work experience to determine the suitability of an individual for aged care work. One attractive feature of the community care provision of aged care is the flexibility of hours for workers. For young mothers (or fathers) with school-aged children, it may be a very attractive option for them to be able to work 2 or 3 hours a day. The extra income is useful, without having work hours that intrude on the care of children. To be able to work only when the children are at school is of great benefit to full time mums (or dads) wishing to supplement their income, while satisfactorily fulfilling their parental duties. For mature aged workers, who may not be reliant on a full time wage to satisfy the increased income need through teenage and mortgage years, community care may be an attractive option. The hours of employment are sustainable physically for the mature aged worker and the income may supplement the Pension.

Many people in the community who are recipients of some form of government payment may in fact be quite capable of providing some support for older people. There are many options for support ranging from meal preparation and delivery, to dispersal of information, to social activities within a structured setting. This has the added advantage of providing those people on a limited income with an incentive to supplement their income, to contribute to a superannuation plan and become more socially active within the community.

The timely introduction of domestic services for older people may relieve physical stress for older people, reduce social isolation and delay or reduce the need for other services. An increase in domestic training specifically tailored to the requirements of ageing clients may alleviate some of the burden for community care workers capable of providing more complex services such as personal care. Domestic assistance may particularly benefit informal carers and provide the support necessary for them to continue longer in the role of primary carer. It is well documented that for many older persons the areas of greatest need are for property maintenance, housework and transport (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007). Increasing services in these areas provides additional avenues for the provision of information concerning respite and other services, as well as promoting social engagement.

Sincerely,
Janet K Pearce