



Evidence into Action Whitepaper Series:

3: The pace of change: Transforming education and training in the Australian aged care sector

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Introduction

Education, qualifications, and training in aged care are undergoing widescale reform. The pace and scale of change is driven by legislative reform, sector-wide reviews, and structural shifts in both the education and care sectors. Yet much of this remains under consultation, meaning the final shape of training obligations, career pathways, and professional standards remains uncertain.

This paper explores the key reforms underway, from the Aged Care Act 2024 and Strengthened Standards to the National Registration Scheme for Personal Care Workers (PCWs), tertiary harmonisation, and the draft National Nursing Workforce Strategy. It highlights the potential implications for workers, providers, and the sector as a whole, while noting that the outcomes will depend on how these proposals are finalised and implemented. By mapping the reforms, this paper provides a forward-looking overview of how aged care education and training may be reshaped over the coming years.

Reforms in aged care service delivery

Major legislative reforms to funding, regulation and delivery of aged care in Australia have occurred from 2023 onwards and have a significant impact on aged care education and training for the workforce.

- **Funding reforms:** In the 2025–26 Federal Budget, the Government committed \$291.6 million over five years to support the implementation of aged care reforms.
 - No specific budget line was allocated to workforce training and development. However, it is likely, that some of this funding will contribute to building the infrastructure for training and workforce readiness within the sector. [1]
- **Legislative and regulatory reforms:** The Aged Care Act 2024, [2] Aged Care Rules 2025 (exposure draft), [3] and the Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards [4] collectively set the foundation for aged care workforce obligations.
 - Each reform measure reinforces the expectation that providers must invest in education, qualifications, and ongoing training. Standard 2.8 requires providers to undertake workforce planning that embeds capability development
 - Standard 2.9 obliges providers to ensure staff are competent, supported, and provided with opportunities for CPD
 - These obligations intersect with broader education and training reforms (see below). In this context, training reforms are not simply about compliance - they are part of the wider professionalisation and education of the workforce.

- **Delivery and implementation of aged care reforms:** The Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards [4] and the Aged Care Act [2] also introduce explicit expectations for mandated competency training and the use of structured training systems that ensure all workers receive it.
 - Providers are responsible for identifying the skills, qualifications, and competencies required for each role, engaging a sufficient number of suitably qualified and competent staff, and embedding these requirements into workforce planning
 - Providers are also expected to continuously review their training systems, and to collaborate with staff and consumers to shape training delivery so that it is both effective and relevant.

Education and training for aged care workers

The government is reshaping the way it delivers education and training related to aged care in Australia which will impact the sector, providers and the workforce.

- **Jobs and skills council for care and support sector:** The National Care and Support Economy Strategy 2023 established a variety of industry-led Jobs and Skills Councils (JSC) including for the care and support sector, now operating by HumanAbility.
- **HumanAbility:** has recently released its 2025 Workforce Plan which confirms its role in identifying current and emerging workforce needs, leading training package reviews, and addressing sector-wide issues such as labour shortages, qualification gaps, and career pathway development.
 - HumanAbility collaborates with governments, training providers, employers, and unions to ensure vocational education and training products meet industry and learner needs. They have created a sector profile which details many of the changes underway.
 - Key initiatives include reviews of the Certificate III in Individual Support and Certificate IV in Aged Care, development of Earn While You Learn models to reduce placement poverty, and mapping of career pathways across aged care and disability workforces. [5]
 - These activities place HumanAbility as the steward of contemporary, industry-responsive training for the care and support economy.
- **National Skills Agreement:** The National Skills Agreement (NSA) is a five-year, \$12.6 billion investment by the Commonwealth and states to reform vocational education and training, with TAFE at the heart of delivery. It prioritises accessible, high-quality training to build skills in critical industries, sustain essential care services, and supports lifelong learning. For care and training providers, this means expanded opportunities for workforce development, stronger links between TAFEs, universities and industry, and targeted funding to improve completions, quality, and equity in training. This includes the establishment of

two Centres for Excellence, one of which is Care and Support Centre of Excellence based in Queensland.

- **National Skills Taxonomy (consultation) for education and training:** Jobs and Skills Australia is leading consultation on a proposed National Skills Taxonomy (NST), which intends to replace the Australian Skills Classification and provide a common language across education, training, and labour markets.
 - The National Skills Taxonomy consultation discussion paper argues that an NST will better connect VET and higher education, improve recognition of prior learning, and support policy objectives such as the National Skills Passport and the Universities Accord reforms. [6]
 - Several significant challenges for the aged care workforce have been highlighted by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) .

These include risks of:

- Oversimplifying complex professional roles into discrete tasks
- Undermining scope of practice for nurses
- Enabling unsafe role substitution (e.g., Personal Care Workers (PCWs) undertaking medication administration)
- Overuse of micro-credentialling leading to fragmented training, increased worker costs, and widening inequities, particularly for women in low-paid care roles. [7]

The ANMF stresses that any NST must integrate with current reforms (e.g., PCW registration, Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) redesign), respect professional standards, and be implemented gradually to avoid reform fatigue in the VET and tertiary sectors. [7]

- **Educational system ‘harmonisation’:** Tertiary education in Australia is undergoing a process of ‘tertiary harmonisation,’ a strategic reform agenda designed to create a more coherent and interoperable tertiary system by aligning the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education sectors. This agenda, articulated in Opportunity and Productivity: Towards a Tertiary Harmonisation Roadmap and shaped by the recommendations of the Australian Universities Accord, seeks to improve the portability of learning, strengthen credit transfer mechanisms, and enhance pathways for students across both sectors.
 - The Commonwealth has committed \$27.7 million over four years to progress these reforms, including the development of a National Skills Taxonomy, updates to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), and pilot initiatives enabling selected TAFEs to self-accredit higher education programs. These measures are expected to support a more flexible and responsive education system, capable of delivering the diverse skillsets required by Australia’s

evolving labour market (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2024; Department of Education, 2024).

- **Training standards reform:** As part of the broader VET reform agenda, the Australian Government has issued comprehensive guidance on the new Standards for Training Packages, incorporated into the Training Package Organising Framework (TPOF), which takes effect from 1 July 2025. The Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs 2025) also became fully operative on that date - ensuring that both training products and provider delivery are aligned with the government's quality-driven regulatory agenda.
- **Fee-Free TAFE:** The Commonwealth is investing \$1.5 billion to deliver 500,000 Fee-Free TAFE and VET places between 2023 and 2026, with priority given to essential sectors like care. From 2027, Free TAFE will be a permanent feature of the VET system, backed by \$1.6 billion to 2034–35 and the Free TAFE Act 2025. For care providers, this guarantees ongoing access to funded training places, supporting workforce growth, skills development, and long-term sector sustainability.
- **National PCW registration scheme (consultation):** The National Registration Scheme for Personal Care Workers (PCWs) consultation (Feb 2025) proposes major changes to the training and qualification framework for the aged care workforce, including a mandatory minimum Certificate III in Individual Support for all PCWs, with expanded content covering core areas such as dementia care, palliative care, cultural safety, trauma-informed care, and elder abuse recognition.
 - The national PCW registration scheme proposes continuing professional development (CPD) requirements tied to registration, delivered primarily through nationally accredited VET or TAFE providers rather than unaccredited micro-credentials. These changes aim to professionalise the PCW workforce, enhance care quality, and create sustainable career pathways in the sector.
- **National Nursing Workforce Strategy (consultation):** This federal and state (Victoria) consultation (2023–24), in partnership with Safer Care Victoria, engaged nearly 6,000 stakeholders to address shortages, skills gaps, and retention issues in nursing.
 - The National nursing workforce strategy highlighted the need for better alignment of nursing education with contemporary and future practice needs, including nationally consistent standards, improved clinical placement structures, and stronger support for transition-to-practice programs. Stakeholders called for flexible and accessible pathways into nursing, recognition of prior learning, and expanded support for postgraduate study. Recommendations also emphasised lifelong learning frameworks, micro-credentialing, and career progression tools such as a national 'careers passport', alongside cultural safety training and tailored supports for First

Nations and internationally qualified nurses. For more information visit the [Draft National Workforce Strategy](#).

Possible workforce implications of reforms to the aged care sector and aged care education and training

Many of the proposed reforms to the aged care sector and aged care education and training for the workforce are still under consultation or in early stages of implementation, which means the full impact on the workforce remains uncertain. What is clear is that personal care workers, nurses, and providers will all be affected by changes to qualifications, training systems, and professional expectations. Understanding these potential implications is essential for preparing the sector and shaping reforms that lead to sustainable improvements in aged care.

Personal care workers

- The National Registration Scheme would make Certificate III in Individual Support mandatory, with expanded core content (dementia, palliative care, cultural safety, trauma-informed practice, elder abuse recognition).
- Proposed PCW Registration introduces CPD requirements tied to accredited VET or TAFE providers, embedding PCWs within a regulated workforce.
- Professionalisation and career pathways would be strengthened, but challenges include training costs, access in rural/remote areas, and equity for CALD workers.
- The National Skills Taxonomy raises concerns about reducing PCW roles to task lists, potentially leading to unsafe role substitution (e.g., medication administration).

Nurses

- The Draft National Nursing Workforce Strategy focuses on shortages, clinical placement structures, and transition-to-practice support.
- Tertiary harmonisation is proposed to achieve clearer articulation pathways between VET and higher education for career progression.
- Consultation on the National Skills Taxonomy raises concerns about fragmenting nursing roles into discrete tasks, diluting scope of practice, and increasing unsafe task shifting to PCWs.
- Retention depends on maintaining holistic nursing roles, supporting postgraduate study, and ensuring pathways for advancement.

Providers

- Organisations must comply with Act, Rules, and Standards by embedding workforce planning (Standard 2.8) and competency-based training (Standard 2.9).
- Providers are responsible for developing and maintaining training systems that ensure mandated competencies and CPD are delivered to all staff.

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- There is a need to align workforce development with HumanAbility JSC reforms, including updated training packages and career pathway mapping.
- Providers currently face financial and logistical challenges in delivering training, particularly in rural and remote areas, but benefit from retention and compliance gains.
- Providers will be held increasingly accountable for governance of training systems. [8]

Conclusion

The aged care reforms currently in play mark the most significant restructuring of aged care education and training in decades. Together, they promise a shift from fragmented, inconsistent training delivery towards a nationally coherent framework that supports professionalisation, clearer career pathways, and stronger governance. At the same time, they introduce uncertainty and risk - particularly if reforms are implemented in ways that dilute professional roles, exacerbate inequities, or create compliance burdens without adequate support.

For providers, nurses, and PCWs alike, the next 12–18 months will be critical. Engagement with consultations, investment in training systems, and preparation for new compliance obligations will determine whether reforms succeed in building a confident, skilled, and sustainable workforce.

Summary

- **Legislative reforms:** *New legislation and compliance requirements require providers to embed workforce planning, competency-based training, and CPD into their systems, making training a compliance and professionalisation priority.*
- **Education reforms:** *HumanAbility's Workforce Plan, the National Skills Agreement, tertiary harmonisation, and new training standards are reshaping qualifications, pathways, and course delivery, with Fee-Free TAFE and Centres of Excellence expanding access.*
- **Workforce regulation:** *Proposed registration of Personal Care Workers and the Draft National Nursing Workforce Strategy aim to mandate minimum qualifications, CPD, and career pathways, while addressing shortages and retention challenges.*
- **Provider responsibilities:** *Organisations must identify role-specific competencies, deliver structured training, and align with national reforms, while balancing financial/logistical pressures—especially in rural and remote contexts—with retention, compliance, and quality gains.*

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