

A Sustainable Model of Care for Allied Health in Residential Aged Care



**Allied Health
Professions
Australia**

Allied health services are essential for older people's reablement - maintaining their wellbeing and quality of life.

Without their allied health needs being identified and met early, older people end up experiencing costly hospitalisations and having to move into residential aged care when with the right supports, they could have remained at home.¹

The problem

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety found that insufficient access to allied health in residential aged care contributes to substandard care and neglect. It made key recommendations to embed allied health care in the aged care system, including for aged care consumers to be provided with allied health services on the basis of individual needs, to be generally paid for by aged care providers.²

But three years later, allied health minutes per resident per day are worse than they have ever been, at just over four minutes of care per resident per day.³ There is no mandatory benchmark for allied health, compared to care minutes for nursing and personal care. There is also no ring-fenced allied health funding - providers are expected to pay for allied health services from AN-ACC funding, but many are using those direct care funds for other, non-care purposes.⁴

There is still no universally consistent needs assessment process for allied health. We have no way of meeting our target of quality aged care if we do not know what people's allied health needs actually are. Data collected by AHPA shows that allied health professionals want to engage in the residential aged care sector but are being sacked or having their hours or duties reduced.⁵

Consumers want and need allied health services to support them, but are being told these services are not available or not funded through the aged care system. This forces older people and their families to privately source allied health at significant financial cost and carer burden, which increases the risk of inequity.

The solution

Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) and its Aged Care Working Group have developed a sustainable model of care for allied health in residential care. Under our model, allied health is an intrinsic component of the aged care system. Older people in residential aged care settings typically present with a range of complex health and ageing-related needs, which require a comprehensive and collaborative care approach. Allied health professionals (AHPs) bring expertise and specialist knowledge with an emphasis on reablement and wellness approaches. With a focus on client-centred care, AHPs promote functional abilities, independence and wellbeing of residents and facilitate enhanced care through staff training and systems support. AHPs are vital members of the broader care team working with general practitioners, geriatricians, nurses and care workers to provide high quality care that directly meets regulatory and compliance requirements.



Our multidisciplinary model of care

Our multidisciplinary model of care:

- 1. Embeds allied health into the aged care team** – integrates allied health across the multidisciplinary care team with existing medical, nursing and care staff and supports clinicians to deliver to their full scope of practice.
- 2. Multidisciplinary needs assessment and care planning tool** – supports the delivery of comprehensive multidisciplinary assessments, care plans and timely reviews to address changes in functioning, via the development and implementation of a standardised multidisciplinary needs assessment tool for health professionals.
- 3. Individual and service level input** – supports delivery of services at both an individual resident level and system (facility) level, using the full scope of practice of the AHPs.
- 4. Access to a range of allied health services** – allows each resident to access a range of different allied health professionals to meet their assessed needs, through a combination of approaches and funding mechanisms and via clinicians operating both in-house and as external contractors.
- 5. Workforce development** – recognises allied health as part of the aged care workforce in all workforce initiatives.

Our model provides the quality, accountability and transparency that are currently lacking from allied health provision in aged care. Nationally consistent needs assessment ensures fairness and that individual needs are met. Use of a needs assessment tool enhances accountability because whether identified needs are met is a measure of quality assurance. Transparency will be increased via a requirement that care funding is utilised for direct care service delivery only.

AHPA is the national peak association representing Australia's allied health professions across all disciplines and settings. With over 200,000 allied health professionals, including 14,000 working in rural and remote areas, allied health is Australia's second largest health workforce. In aged care, AHPA works closely with its Aged Care Working Group, which is comprised of representatives of our member professions that provide aged care services.

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1 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, *Final Report Volume 3A The new system*, 2021.

2 See eg Royal Commission Recommendations 25 and 36–38.

3 Department of Health and Aged Care, *Quarterly Financial Snapshot of the Aged Care Sector Quarter 2 2023–24, October to December 2023*; Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care, *2024 Progress Report Implementation of the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety*.

4 D Gibson & S Isbel, Reform and reverberation: Australian aged care policy changes and the unintended consequences for allied health <https://doi.org/10.1111/1440-1630.12953>; UTS Ageing Research Collaborative, *Australia's Aged Care Sector: Mid-Year Report (2023–24)*; Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care, *2024 Progress Report*.

5 <https://ahpa.com.au/advocacy/summary-of-results-from-survey-of-allied-health-workforce-in-residential-aged-care2023/>.