



The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

Submission to the Royal Commission on Aged Care Quality and Safety

The Future of the Aged Care Workforce:

**Issues arising from the aged care workforce deficit
and the increasing reliance on a migrant workforce**

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The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) wishes to again draw to the attention of the Royal Commission, in its consideration of the future of the aged care workforce, to a number of issues arising from the increasing dependence of the sector on migrants who are overseas born and from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. An increasing number of these workers are recent arrivals and, of those, growing numbers are on temporary visas.

The increasing reliance of the aged care sector on migrant workers

1. This has been largely due to the decline of permanent residents or Australian citizens participating in the care workforce (including aged care and disability). It has even been suggested that, without the temporary migrant workforce, the current aged care system would collapse.
2. FECCA has previously raised these issues in witness statements for and testimony before the:
 - Adelaide Hearing 2 (Aged care in the home) on 20 March 2019
 - [Witness Statement](#): Exhibit 2-37 – WIT.0084.001.001
 - [Transcript](#) (from p-921)
 - Melbourne Hearing 2 (Diversity in aged care) on 7 October 2019
 - [Witness Statement](#): Exhibit 10-4 – WIT.0437.0001.0001
 - [Transcript](#)
3. FECCA has previously referred the Royal Commission to the work of an ongoing Australian Research Council-funded project – [‘Markets, Migration & the Work of Care in Australia’](#)
4. The project was led by a research team from the University of New South Wales, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, the University of Sydney, and the University of Toronto. [Fact Sheet 1](#) – Migrant Workers in Frontline Care, published in December 2018 reported the following (it should be noted that these data are predominantly drawn from the 2016 Census):
 - A significant increase in the proportion of overseas-born workers employed as aged and disability carers (ABS Occupational Definition 4231) from 33% in 2011 to 37% in 2016, and as personal care assistants (ABS Occupational Definition 423313) from 43.7% to 50.2% for the same period. In the same period, the share of overseas-born workers in Australia’s total workforce increased only slightly, from 28% to 30.6%.
 - The three main frontline care occupations (child carers, aged and disability carers, and personal care assistants) are ranked as ‘low-skilled’, at Level 4 in the five-level Australian & New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO)
 - Australia’s migrant care workers are on average younger, less likely to be male and have a higher level of formal qualifications (though not necessarily relevant to their employment in frontline care) than their Australian born peers. They increasingly come from non-English speaking countries, with recent migrants more likely to arrive on temporary visas.
 - Overseas-born care workers have higher levels of formal education than Australian-born care workers. Australian-born care workers are more likely to hold a Certificate or Diploma than their overseas-born counterparts. However, 24.3% of

- overseas-born care workers hold a bachelor's degree, compared to 8.4% of Australian-born care workers, while 7.2% of migrant care workers hold a postgraduate degree, compared to just 0.7% of their Australian-born peers.
- A distinct change in the composition of the overseas-born care workforce over time). The proportion of care workers born in the United Kingdom and New Zealand have declined dramatically over time. There is a clear growth in the proportion of workers born in Southern Asia (mainly India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh), as well as a steady increase in the proportion of workers from Africa, and since 1976 stable inflows of workers from Maritime South-East Asia (mainly the Philippines).
5. FECCA draws the attention of the Royal Commission to the evidence provided by a member of the project team, Professor Sara Charlesworth of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in her [witness statement](#) for (Exhibit 11-52 – WIT.0381.0001.0001) and the [transcript](#) (pages 6082-6099) of her appearance before the Melbourne Hearing 3 (Aged Care workforce) on 16 October 2019.
 6. Issues raised by Professor Charlesworth or, in its evidence, by FECCA include:
 - The increasing aged care work force deficit in Australia and evidence of an increasing reliance on a workforce on various temporary visas, including international students, and nurses or care workers whose overseas qualifications are not recognised.
 - While there have always been significant numbers of overseas born workers in the sector, they have, in the past tended to be permanent migrants with full rights and protections of people with citizenship or permanent visa status.
 - Temporary migrants face increased vulnerabilities, including
 - no access to social protections such as Medicare
 - insecurity in work conditions (such as temporary or limited and variable hours of work, poor understanding of entitlements under relevant awards, and potential for exploitation)
 - limited pathways to permanent residency
 - inadequate training and support in:
 - requirements of the job
 - understanding the aged care system
 - limited opportunities for professional development
 - cultural competence (the fact that a care worker may be from a CALD background does not, of itself, make that worker culturally competent and able to work with staff and consumers from Anglo-Australian or other cultural backgrounds)
 - occasional requirement to act as informal interpreters, without language skills being part of a position description, or appropriately remunerated
 - experience of racism or discrimination (both from other workers and from recipients of aged care services and/or their families).

7. FECCA draws the attention of the Royal Commission to a detailed examination of the migration issues by Professor Charlesworth and colleagues in a 2019 [paper](#) published in University of New South Wales Law Journal:
Migration Pathways for Frontline Care Workers in Australia and New Zealand – Front Doors, Side Doors, Back Doors and Trapdoors.
8. Under the 2018 Pacific Labour Mobility Scheme, applicants can apply for low and semi-skilled employment, including as aged or disability carers or personal care assistants, in rural and regional regions. Such employment is only available on temporary visas.

Sector wide oversights in addressing issues arising from the dependence on the CALD migrant workforce

9. FECCA notes that the significant and important issue of the CALD migrant workforce was not specifically referred to in Chapter 9 of the Royal Commission Interim Report of November 2019.
10. FECCA did, however, first address the issue in evidence provided for its appearance before the Adelaide Hearing 2 of 20 March 2019.
11. FECCA does acknowledge that the Interim Report was finalised before the October Melbourne Hearing 2 (Diversity in Aged Care) and Melbourne Hearing 3 (Aged Care Workforce).
12. In her evidence at the Melbourne Hearing 3, Professor Charlesworth made considerable efforts to bring the issue to the attention of the Royal Commission. At the conclusion of her testimony, counsel assisting asked Professor Charlesworth if there were *“other matters that I haven’t taken you to in your evidence that you’d like to raise at this time”*.

Professor Charlesworth responded (para 30, page 6096) *“I suppose just one thing that I was originally asked to comment on and we touched just obliquely on – but I do think it’s important – is the whole issue of the fact that we’re starting to rely on temporary migrant workers in aged care, and I think that can – that is concerning”*.

13. A by no means exhaustive perusal of workforce related evidence provided to the Royal Commission by bodies such as the Health Services Union and United Voice, shows that although the workforce deficit was acknowledged, the reliance on the migrant workforce was not fully explored
14. FECCA further notes that it has been difficult to gain traction on this issue in other contexts. For example:
 - The Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce published *A matter of care – Australia’s aged care workforce strategy* in June 2018.

References to the CALD and migrant workforce are superficial:

- *Specific consideration needs to be given to meeting the skills and competency development needs of new hires and some groups within the workforce from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who may need additional support in the workplace. (page 26)*

- *Diversity and inclusion: Although there is a diverse workforce, almost a third of employees do not feel they are treated with respect regardless of personal characteristics or background. (page 58)*
 - *... developing specific and well-targeted strategies to retain new hires and different groupings of people from culturally and linguistically and other diverse backgrounds with the values and engagement needed in the industry (page 63).*
- The published agenda for the COTA/ACSA Strengthening the Aged Care Workforce Conference (Melbourne, 4-5 December 2019) did not indicate a specific focus on the issue

Recommendations

1. That, in its final report and in its recommendations, the Royal Commission specifically highlights the increasing dependence of the aged care sector on a migrant CALD workforce and the complex issues arising from that dependence, together with an acknowledgement of the important contribution made by those workers.
2. That the Royal Commission recommends that:
 - a) The Australian Government direct the Aged Care Workforce Industry Council or establish another mechanism to develop, in meaningful collaboration with a broad range of relevant stakeholders, a CALD workforce sub-plan of the National Aged Care Strategy.
 - b) Workforce reform should not impose additional barriers that would be discriminatory against CALD workers.



Chief Executive Officer

20 February 2019