



Evidence into Action Whitepaper Series:

2: Training for Retention: Building Skills and Staying Power

Training for Retention: Building Skills and Staying Power

Introduction

Training and worker retention are closely connected in aged care. Workers value access to high-quality training, continuing professional development, and opportunities to build their skills, which help them feel valued and more confident. This support strengthens their commitment and increases the likelihood that they will remain in the sector.

However, training alone does not guarantee retention. Workers are more likely to stay when training is embedded within wider organisational supports such as mentoring, recognition, leadership opportunities, and fair working conditions. Leveraging workforce data to guide training needs, alongside systems to manage provision and records, ensures that training contributes meaningfully to staff satisfaction, belonging, and loyalty.

At the same time, providers face challenges in sustaining investment in workforce capability while maintaining financial viability. Rising recruitment and attrition costs make retention not just a workforce issue but a strategic imperative. Training is a driver of retention enabling providers to meet compliance obligations under the Aged Care Act 2024, while also strengthening staff stability and organisational resilience.

The value of training for aged care worker retention

Labour shortages remain a defining challenge for the sector, already creating cascading impacts on service delivery. Providers report heavier workloads for existing staff, rising costs of recruitment and retention, greater reliance on agency labour, and long-term threats to care quality and service capacity. [1] These shortages extend beyond providers and workers, affecting families, older people, and the health system more broadly, leading to poorer health outcomes and additional strain on the remaining workforce. [1]

Worker access to training and ongoing career opportunities plays a critical role in retaining satisfied staff. [1]

The Aged Care Research and Industry Innovation Australia (ARIIA) review into workforce retention found that training and development opportunities are shown to:

- increase worker satisfaction
- strengthen workers' intentions to remain
- reduce the likelihood of turnover.

Training benefits both workers and organisations. Workers report that training helps them to feel more confident, valued, and supported in their roles. [1] While home care providers, in a sector survey, identified training and development as their leading strategy for improving workforce retention. [2]

The 2025 HumanAbility [Workforce Plan](#) highlights that sustainable retention for the care sector also depends on clear career pathways, fair pay and conditions, and supportive models such as Earn While You Learn. Together, these reforms and initiatives emphasise that a skilled, stable and valued workforce is essential to delivering safe, high-quality aged care. [3]

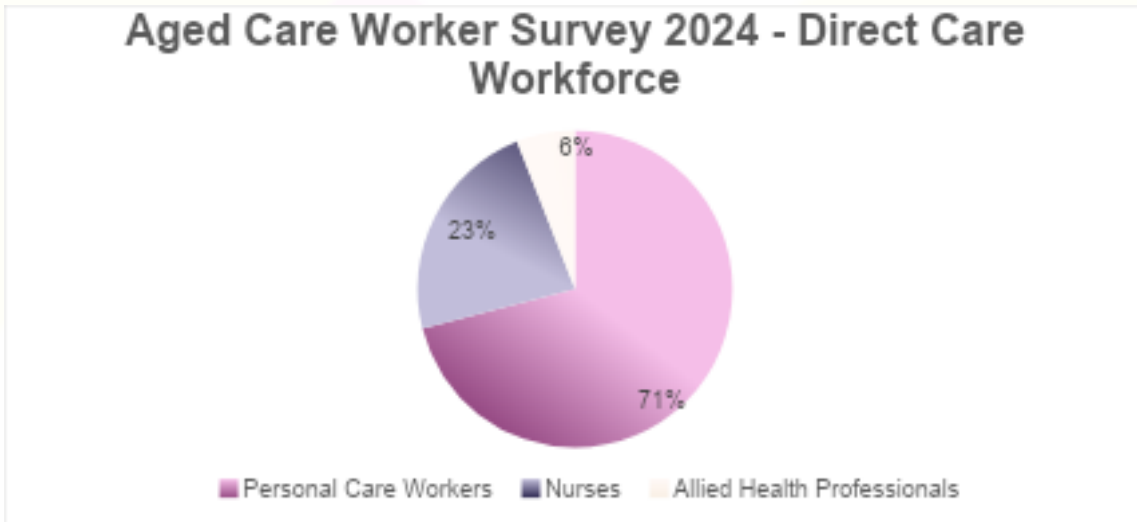
“In a sector challenged by workforce retention issues, stakeholders highlight the need for training and professional development opportunities beyond entry or early career level. Up-skilling of the existing workforce also needs to be responsive to the increasing use of inter-disciplinary teams to provide holistic and personal care. This would enable specialisation, open up more career paths, and support worker retention”.

[3]

For aged care providers, investment in workforce training offers advantages beyond compliance, it strengthens competitiveness in the aged care market and can position organisations as an ‘employer of choice.’ [1] Well-designed training programs also increase workforce confidence and capability, ensuring the delivery of care aligns with both regulatory expectations and consumer needs. [4]

Workers identified training as a key motivator to entering the aged care sector

Figure 1: Aged Care Worker Survey 2024



The 2024 Aged Care Worker Survey exclusively contained workers delivering direct care and found that 71% (10,084) delivered personal care in their roles as, personal care or home care workers, or nursing assistants. While a further 23% (3,208) were employed in nursing roles such as registered or enrolled nurses, clinical care managers or nurse practitioners. The remaining 6% (785) workers were allied health professionals delivering direct care. [5]

Overall, 1,359 workers (13.8%) reported joining aged care because of training and development opportunities, and 2,372 (24.1%) were motivated by career progression. The strongest motivator was making a positive difference in the lives of older people 7,048 (71.7%), while the least cited was the rewarding nature of the work itself 66 (0.7%). [5]

Among those who did not intend to remain in aged care in the next year, 123 workers (26.7%) cited limited career progression, 210 (45.7%) identified lack of workplace support, and only 10 (2.2%) mentioned health-related reasons. [5] Confidence in skills was high, with 90.1% (6,263 respondents) agreeing or strongly agreeing they had the abilities needed to do their job well. Similarly, 77% of 5,495 respondents agreed or strongly agreed they had received the right training, although 7.3% disagreed and 15.7% were neutral. [5]

These findings highlight the dual role of training in aged care: it not only supports compliance and quality outcomes for providers but also influences workers’ decisions to enter, remain in, or leave the sector. Put simply, opportunities for education and training are a decisive factor in whether staff remain in, and are committed to, the aged care sector. [6]

Training for retention in aged care – a strategic and legislative priority

Retaining staff in aged care continues to be crucial to ensure the delivery of safe, high-quality and person-centred services. Workforce stability is now embedded in legislation: the Aged Care Act 2024, [7] Strengthened Quality Standards, [8] and supporting Rules [9] require providers to maintain enough qualified

staff, supported by workforce planning systems and competency-based training. These measures position retention as both a compliance obligation and a strategic priority, recognising that effective training and career development not only meet regulatory requirements but also build staff satisfaction, reduce turnover, and strengthen sector resilience.

The likelihood of retention of aged care workers is strongest when combined with additional organisational supports

Reviews highlight that training and career development opportunities are important supports for workforce retention, with many studies showing positive effects. Organisations that invest in skill development, specialist training, and clear career pathways realise greater commitment and satisfaction among workers. While some studies found that benefits from initiatives like peer mentoring were strongest in the short term, programs such as compassion fatigue training or nurse residencies, showed limited impact over the longer term. [10]

Overall evidence suggests that training is highly valued by staff and can strengthen their intention to stay. Importantly, training is most effective when combined with broader strategies such as mentoring, recognition, career progression, and strong organisational support, helping to create the wider conditions for increased workforce retention. [10]

Training as an investment in retention of the aged care workforce

In 2021, the average cost of hiring a new aged care worker more than doubled from \$10,500 in 2020 to \$23,860 per employee, although actual costs vary between providers. High turnover also imposes a broader economic burden, with staff attrition estimated to cost \$3.8 billion annually in lost productivity across Australia. [11]

Across all sectors, including aged care, it is consistently more cost-effective to upskill existing staff than to recruit and train new employees. [11]

Despite government support for training access, providers continue to absorb substantial indirect costs, including wages for staff undertaking training and the resulting loss of workplace capacity. Professional development must also be delivered in alignment with compliance and legislative obligations. The total cost burden is difficult to quantify, as it depends on training content, delivery method, availability, and the financial capacity of providers. [11] Further, recruitment costs directly displace opportunities for staff development, underscoring the need to prioritise training as a retention strategy.

Structured training and development programs have been shown to increase retention by up to 14%. [11] To achieve both compliance and workforce stability, providers require strategies to manage training costs effectively. These include:

- adopting workforce planning tools that align training with organisational priorities
- pooling training resources through regional networks
- embedding cost–benefit analysis into professional development planning
- leveraging digital learning management systems to reduce administrative overheads
- utilising electronic record systems such as industry passports to avoid unnecessary duplication of training for new and existing employees. [12]

Such approaches can help providers to sustain investment in staff capability while maintaining financial viability, ensuring that training delivers both compliance and retention benefits. Rather than being treated as an unavoidable expense, retention initiatives should be recognised as strategies that generate substantial economic gains. [13]

Data-driven insights to guide training and retention

Harnessing workforce data gives aged care providers a powerful tool to anticipate and respond to training needs and emerging worker trends. Analysis of rostering (absence) patterns, turnover rates, exit interview data, and staff or consumer / proxies' satisfaction surveys can reveal where skills gaps are most acute and which factors are driving staff attrition. [1]

Digital workforce and learning management systems strengthen these insights by capturing real-time data on staff competencies, mandatory training completions, and role-based requirements. This directly supports Standard 2.8 (Workforce Planning), which requires providers to ensure the workforce is appropriately skilled and sufficient in number, and Standard 2.9 (Training and Competency), which requires systematic approaches to staff training, monitoring, and evaluation. [1]

Practical examples of data driven insights for training and retention include:

- HR dashboards flagging teams with high sick leave or turnover, prompting early interventions such as mentoring or workload redesign
- Learning Management System (LMS) analytics identifying under-completed training modules, enabling timely refresher sessions and role-based training compliance
- Workforce skill maps showing gaps in dementia care or cultural safety training across different service sites, guiding targeted upskilling strategies
- Exit interview analysis categorising reasons for leaving, which can inform workforce planning and link to improved professional development opportunities
- Predictive modelling that uses historical turnover data to forecast roles or regions at greatest risk, allowing proactive recruitment, training, and retention planning.

By using data-driven insights to ground retention strategies providers can invest in training programs that both satisfy compliance obligations and strengthen worker engagement, confidence, and loyalty. In this way, data-driven workforce planning turns training into a proactive retention lever, ensuring providers remain responsive to evolving workforce dynamics.

Conclusion

Education is no longer just a compliance requirement, or a 'nice to have' - it is a decisive factor in whether aged care workers stay or leave. Evidence consistently shows that when staff are supported through structured training, CPD, and career pathways, they feel more valued, confident, and committed to their roles. [1] Yet training on its own is not enough. Retention is strongest when education is combined with wider organisational supports such as mentoring, recognition, leadership opportunities, and fair conditions. [10] Sustained investment is essential, especially in an environment where the costs of recruitment and attrition continue to rise. [11] For providers, investment in workforce capability yields a double return: it strengthens compliance with the Act, Rules, and Standards while also reducing costly turnover. [7-9, 13] The next phase for providers is not simply to deliver training, but to embed it as part of a broader workforce strategy - one that links education with progression, culture, and governance. Doing so positions training as a driver of both staff satisfaction and organisational resilience.

Recommendations

Personal care workers (PCW)

ARIIA and Altura Learning

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- Link Certificate III training and CPD directly to career advancement, so PCWs see long-term value in staying in the sector
- Offer funded or subsidised training to reduce financial barriers that often drive workers to leave aged care for other industries
- Create structured career pathways (PCW → EN → RN) to encourage workers to remain in aged care while progressing professionally.

Nurses

- Strengthen transition-to-practice programs to reduce early career attrition by supporting new nurses during the critical first year
- Provide ongoing specialist CPD opportunities (dementia, palliative, cultural safety) to enhance job satisfaction and professional pride, reducing the likelihood of nurses leaving for other sectors
- Create leadership and mentoring roles as career development pathways that encourage experienced nurses to remain in the sector longer.

Summary

- **Training is valued as a retention strategy:** *Training is consistently identified by stakeholders as essential for equipping workers with the skills they need to perform effectively, which in turn strengthens their commitment to remain in their roles.*
- **Training is part of a wider framework of implementation:** *Training and career development, combined with organisational supports such as strong leadership and organisational culture, peer mentoring, and defined career pathways, create a comprehensive framework that underpins staff retention.*
- **Training is worth the investment in for existing staff:** *The cost borne to providers of recruitment, onboarding and training of new staff members is considerably more expensive than investing in the training and development of existing staff.*
- **Technological data-driven insights will drive training needs:** *Harnessing data-driven insights through technologies and systems is critical to enabling providers to engage in proactive, forward-looking workforce planning.*

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