

Partnership

Older employees are proving their worth as demand for aged care workers increases

Coming of age

Attracting older workers to the aged care sector can help counter the growing demand for employees highlighted in the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

In its final report – handed down in March 2021 – the commission estimated the need for an additional 130,000 full-time equivalent workers by 2050, an increase of 70 per cent on current staffing levels.

It's good news for older employees looking to remain in the workforce; but it's also good news for aged care employers, providing an opportunity to tap into the valuable skills and experiences younger workers lack. But older employees also bring something even more prized to the table – longevity.

In a sector where workforce turnover is almost four times that of the national average, hiring workers who are willing to commit to their role is key. And that's where older

employees shine. “Younger people move on very quickly – I know when I employ an older person, they're going to give me at least five years or longer,” says Joumana Norris, customer service manager, home and community aged care at Uniting Communities.

The not-for-profit organisation currently employs more than 150 care workers in home care, 95 of whom are over the age of 45. Some are reaching 70 years old. “Of these, 54 have been with us for more than five years; we have people who have been here more than 15, 20 years,” Norris says. “One care worker recently celebrated her 25th anniversary.”

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Another care worker, Leeanne Hurley, will be celebrating her 20th anniversary with Uniting Communities in November. “I'm hoping I can do this role until I retire,” the 57-year-old says.

But Hurley and her colleagues are feeling the pressure of staff shortages. “At the moment a lot of us are working full-time hours – we're picking up more weekend work as well,” she says. “But it's good financial security and job security for as long as I want it.”

Hurley's employer is leaning on her years of experience to help bring younger employees up to standard. “Some of us are training the new

workers – we're teaching them from our hands-on experience rather than them reading it from a book. Then they don't feel so daunted when they're out by themselves.”

Malgorzata (Margaret) Rządowski has been with Uniting Communities since May 2021. The 56-year-old works four days a week as a carer while studying for her Certificate III in Aged Care – supported by her employer. “Uniting Communities is paying for my course because they need more qualified personal carers,” she says. “They were really helpful and gave me this opportunity.”

She understands the value of an older workforce to the sector. “Older employees have more experience in life, we are more understanding about how our customers are feeling and the ageing process,” she says.

That value is also reciprocal. “Older workers always appreciate having a permanent job with a permanent income. And doing what you like is really good as well.”

Uniting Communities employees Grazyna Sciezka and Malgorzata Rządowski.