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Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

RE: Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comment on the Jobs and Skills Australia discussion paper.

The provision of a workforce that can deliver quality care and support for people living with dementia is critical. In 2023, there are over 400,000 Australians living with dementia. Without a medical breakthrough, this is expected to increase to over 800,000 by 2058.¹ More than two-thirds (68.1%) of aged care residents have moderate to severe cognitive impairment.²

As the peak advocacy organisation for dementia, Dementia Australia represents all Australians living with the disease as well as the more than 1.5 million Australians involved in their care. Our close engagement with individuals and communities means that we are an important advocate for those impacted by dementia and we are well-placed to provide input on current and future policy matters, both from the point of view of issues identification and solutions development.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) Dementia in Australia, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 20 January 2023.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) Dementia in Australia, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 20 January 2023.

This submission focuses on the section of the discussion paper titled 'Functions and ways of working' (pages 8-10). Primarily Dementia Australia wishes to highlight the importance of consulting with consumers, peak bodies and representatives in the development of vocational training for workers who will be involved in the care of people living with dementia.

Dementia education is crucial for all elements of the disability and aged care workforce. It is essential that staff – regardless of whether they are nurses, personal care assistants, front of house staff or support staff – are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to appropriately support people living with dementia. This skills imperative not only needs to be embedded in strategies that build the capacity of existing staff but also career and education pathways for new staff.

As is recognised across the aged care sector, residential aged care has become increasingly reliant on workers with lower qualifications to deliver direct care. Personal care workers now make up 70 per cent of the direct care workforce.³ Currently, the minimum qualification for a personal care worker involves no compulsory units in dementia competency. By enhancing the knowledge and skills of the residential aged care workforce, dementia education can improve the quality of care and support provided to individuals living with dementia and promote their wellbeing.

In essence, dementia education is essential for the residential aged care workforce to provide high-quality, person-centred care to individuals living with dementia and yet there is no consistency in career and education pathways to ensure these skills are embedded. A link to our full position statement on dementia education and the residential aged care workforce can be found here:

www.dementia.org.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/Advocacy-Policy-Position-Statement-May-2022.pdf.

As vital as it is that workers in this field are responsive to the needs of the consumers they will be serving, it is equally essential to consult with the very people who will be directly impacted by the services. As such, Dementia Australia recommends having a requirement that consumers are consulted in the development of vocational training.

³ Aged Care Workforce Census Report (2020) Department of Health, Australian Government.

Consultation with consumers and their representative bodies will not only ensure that the training is relevant and effective, but it will also help build trust and confidence in the services provided. Moreover, the involvement of peak bodies and representatives in the training process will help to ensure that the services provided are informed by best practice and current consumer needs and expectations. This will also enhance the credibility and quality of the training and the services provided, as well as demonstrate a commitment to working in partnership with key stakeholders.

Involving people with lived experience in jobs and skills training can be achieved through a variety of methods, including focus groups, surveys, and one-on-one consultations. *Half the story* is a guide to meaningful consultation with people living with dementia, families, and carers and can provide a useful tool when consulting consumers. *Half the story* can be found here: www.dementiafriendly.org.au/find-resources/half-story-meaningful-consultation. It is important to ensure that people with lived experience are given the opportunity to provide meaningful input and have their voices heard. By taking an inclusive and collaborative approach, organisations can ensure that the needs and perspectives of people living with dementia are effectively incorporated into jobs and skills training program such as the dementia unit in Cert III.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this important issue further and look forward to collaborating with Government and the sector to ensure that our workforce is equipped with the skills they need to work in an engaged, meaningful and impactful way.

Yours sincerely



Kaele Stokes
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