



**JOINT MEDIA RELEASE
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EXCESSIVE WORKLOADS, CHRONIC UNDER-STAFFING, WORKERS PLANNING TO QUIT SECTOR

5,000 AGED CARE WORKERS SURVEYED: LARGEST EVER WORKFORCE SURVEY RELEASED TODAY

Four-in-ten workers plan to leave the aged care sector within five years, according to the largest ever survey* of the sector's workforce. And nine-in-ten residential aged care and home care workers are too stretched to offer appropriate support to residents and clients.

Responses from 5,000 workers reveal a vital workforce straining under extreme pressures of crushing workloads, increasingly complex care needs, and chronic under-staffing.

"These findings are shocking, but sadly not surprising," said HSU National President, Gerard Hayes. "Federal budget cuts have eroded the sector's margins. Our members often report anecdotes of five dollar a day food budgets or rationing of sanitary pads.

"Critically important jobs in the sector such as cleaning and catering are being outsourced to shonky operators who steal employee wages. There is simply no fat in this sector, the government has sawed into bone."

United Voice Assistant Secretary and Aged Care director, Carolyn Smith concurred, "This is a real eye-opener – here are 5,000 of our aged care workers telling us all just what is happening in their sector. The workers caring for elderly Australians are in a truly shocking situation. Billions in funding being ripped from the system by the Morrison Government has left workers with high levels of stress, understaffing, impossible workloads and navigating a system that is just not funded to deliver quality care for our elderly.

"It's heartbreaking. Workers and those in their care deserve so much better. These workers can't wait for the Royal Commission to report; they need a workforce strategy and investment now."

The clear theme to emerge from the survey is 'no time to care'. Current systems and funding levels are only allowing time for basic care for our elderly, not *quality care*.

According to the survey, **92%** of both residential and home care respondents don't have the time to offer the social and emotional support their elderly residents and clients need, while **37%** of residential and **38%** of home care respondents are planning to leave the sector in the next five years. **93%** of residential aged care respondents and **75%** of home care respondents have seen an increase in more complex care needs during their time working in the sector.

Main residential aged care worker findings:

- **87%** of respondents have to hurry residents in their care because there are too many tasks to complete;
- **94%** don't have enough time to talk to residents in their care and **97%** said 'yes', residents want them to stop and talk to them – and **91%** said when this happens they have to say 'no' because they have too much work to do;
- **75%** said 'yes', in the last two years they have seen a reduction in staff on the floor;
- **93%** said during their time in aged care they have seen an increase in residents with more complex care needs, **94%** have seen an increase in dementia;
- **75%** of respondents say overwork due to understaffing is important in deciding whether to continue in aged care;
- **44%** of residential aged care respondents have suffered a work-related injury, **79%** have been abused at work and **77%** have been in situations where they felt they could get injured or were not safe.

Main home care worker findings:

- **90%** of home care respondents say that there are not enough home care packages to provide quality care – with **53%** saying 'no there are not enough' and **36%** saying there are only enough to 'provide basic care but not quality care';
- **87%** of home care respondents don't have enough time to talk to an elderly person in their care, **97%** have clients that want them to stop working and have a chat with them, **85%** said when clients need them to spend more time with them they have to say 'no' because they have too much other work to do;
- **86%** of home care respondents have not had enough time to offer the social and emotional support an elderly person in their care needed;
- **76%** have had to hurry up elderly clients because they have too many things to do whilst in their home;
- **67%** of home care respondents say that during their time working the sector there has been an increase in workers having more complex care needs and **76%** have seen an increase in dementia;
- **45%** of home care workers have suffered a workplace injury, **69%** have been in situations in the homes of clients where they felt there were not safe, **60%** have been abused in the workplace;
- **82%** of respondents believe more worker training would assist in delivering quality care.

Main findings on workforce retention and ageing workforce:

- **37%** said 'no' or 'probably not' to working in residential aged care in 5 years' time and **38%** of home care workers said 'no' or 'probably not' to working in the sector in 5 years' time (reasons for planning to leave the sector included low pay, overwork, stressful aspects of the job, and emotional impact of the job);
- **53%** of residential aged care respondents were over 50 years old and **89%** were female;
- **69%** of home care respondents were over 50 years old and **90%** were female.

Summary of qualitative data/written responses:

- Workers are stressed, depressed and depleted, leading to 'burn out';
- Staff worry about residents receiving a lower quality of care than they should because staff are rushing constantly;
- Less staff means stressed staff trying to do everything ;
- Rather than resident-focused work it is similar to a production line;
- It is a heavy workload and causes emotional and physical fatigue;
- For residents and clients it means a wash instead of a shower, residents and clients having to stay in bed for the day instead of getting up for the day, not much time to answer bells, unable to assist in toileting or changing continence pads as much as should be done;
- Increasing numbers of residents suffering dementia, and residents with difficult behaviors;
- Care needs of residents have increased because residents are now more frail, more unwell and less mobile when entering aged care because people are staying in their own homes longer;
- More training would assist in workers delivering quality care – particularly for dementia, complex behaviours, palliative care and grief – training should be fully funded and compulsory;
- There has been an increase in residents without family or other emotional support;
- Home care workers are dealing with lonely elderly people who need more care and social contact than the scheduled time allows;
- Residents are stressed too, they are not receiving the high quality of care that they deserve.

Australian Community Research (ACR) Director Karen Luscombe said, “Our aged care workers are stressed and exhausted. The care needs of elderly care recipients are increasing because people are managing to stay at home longer, there are more people with dementia, but the number of staff has stayed the same or gone backwards.

“Workers are getting less job satisfaction – they want to deliver quality care but can only deliver basic levels of care when they are so hard pressed. It’s leading to the concerning situation of worker burnout with experienced staff planning to leave the sector.”

Workers say action can start immediately by the Morrison Government funding more care time for residents and clients, starting with at least **one more hour of care time a week**. HSU & United Voice members have joined together to list their solutions for the aged care system, with a [5 point plan](#) that puts values, respect and fairness at the forefront of our aged care system.

ENDS

SURVEY: Full Australian Community Research aged care surveys available [here](#)

WORKER STORIES: Reaction of workers to survey findings available [here](#)

5 POINT PLAN: is available on the *Our Turn to Care* website [here](#)

INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES: Gerard Hayes, HSU National President; Carolyn Smith, United Voice; and aged care workers are available for interview

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** The survey was open from February to June 2019 to aged care residential and home care workers across Australia. The 4868 worker respondents were both union and non-union members, with 4138 residential aged care respondents and 730 home care respondents. Survey results compiled by Australian Community Research (ACR), <http://www.acr-research.com.au/>.*

