

Recognising and supporting the role of enrolled nurses in Australian nursing homes

TO THE EDITOR: Nursing homes need enough qualified, skilled staff to care for residents with diverse clinical needs and preferences. Even though most staff are personal care workers, registered nurses and enrolled nurses represent the majority of registered health care professionals. The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety heard that, by 2050, best practice nursing home care will require about 7170 more enrolled nurses.^{1,2} Despite this, the importance of enrolled nurses in the sector is overlooked. Newly legislated minimum time standards and requirements for registered nurses' presence 24/7 do not explicitly include enrolled nurses.³ This means employers are incentivised to use other staff, particularly personal care workers. There are already reports of providers making enrolled nurses redundant despite staff shortages, risking further

workforce deprofessionalisation and possible worse outcomes for both residents and staff.⁴

Although evidence specific to enrolled nurses is limited and must increase,⁵ they are valuable, regulated staff members in nursing homes and their role represents an important step in career progression between personal care workers and registered nurses. If Australia is to develop a world-class aged care sector that prioritises the best possible resident outcomes and experiences and matches staffing levels and skills to the needs of residents, then enrolled nurses must be valued multidisciplinary team members. Necessary legislative change should mandate a minimum time standard for direct care staff that includes clear specification of the enrolled nurses' role and contribution.

Micah DJ Peters 

Rosemary Bryant AO Research Centre, University of South Australia, Adelaide, SA.

micah.peters@unisa.edu.au

Competing interests: No relevant disclosures. ■

doi: [10.5694/mja2.51878](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.51878)

© 2023 AMPCo Pty Ltd.

- 1 Deloitte Access Economics. Research Paper 11 — Aged care reform: projecting future impact. Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, Commonwealth of Australia; 2020. <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/research-paper-11-aged-care-reform-projecting-future-impacts> (viewed Nov 2022).
- 2 Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. 2020 Aged Care Workforce Census report. Commonwealth of Australia, 2021. <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/2020-aged-care-workforce-census> (viewed Jan 2023).
- 3 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. Final report: care, dignity and respect. Commonwealth of Australia, 2021. <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report> (viewed Nov 2022).
- 4 Wise S. Staffing policy in aged care must look beyond the numbers. *Aust Health Rev* 2020; 44: 829-830.
- 5 Leon RJ, Moroney T, Fields L, Lapkin S. Exploring the role of the second-level regulated nurse in the Australian nursing workforce: an integrative review. *Contemp Nurse* 2022; 58: 285-295. ■