

2 August 2024

Mr Paul Denman
Assistant Secretary, Immigration Policy and Planning, Immigration Policy Group
Department of Home Affairs

Via email migration.policy@homeaffairs.gov.au

Dear Mr Denman

Review of Regional Migration Settings discussion paper

The Aged and Community Care Providers Association (ACCPA) is the national Industry Association for aged care providers offering retirement living, seniors housing, residential care, home care, community care and related services.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback to inform the review of regional migration settings.

This submission has been prepared from an aged care perspective, to highlight migration policy settings that could better support a critical sector in need to attract and retain a sufficient migration workforce. This includes supporting requirements to meet mandatory staffing levels, such as those in residential aged care.

Attracting migrant workers to regional aged care and making it easier to employ them

Members report that attracting migrant workers to regional localities is very challenging, given the appeal and amenity of the larger capital cities. However, they strongly highlight that the outcomes are very beneficial to the workers, to the provider and those in their care, as well as the local community.

There is an opportunity to harness the long-term potential of our older workforce and retain their experience and skills in the aged care sector and in our regional communities.

We refer to the precedent of occupations in need such as the current age concessions for medical practitioners who have spent 3 years immediately before applying for a 186 visa sub-class, and have worked in that occupation in a designated regional area of Australia¹.

R1: Attract migrants to regional Australia by raising the age beyond 45 years for those who choose to work in aged care in a regional location, and also ensure a pathway to permanent migration.

Members report the costs and complexity involved in sponsoring migrant workers in regional Australia can be prohibitive.

We propose the introduction of a locality waiver program for aged care providers and workers, modelled on the successful rural and remote workforce incentives for doctors.

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This program would offer scaled financial incentives to aged care providers and workers based on the degree of rurality of their location. By linking support to the remoteness of the area, the program would encourage providers to recruit and retain migrant workers in increasingly isolated regions.

The rural incentive program would provide direct financial incentives to cover costs associated with recruitment, relocation, and accommodation of migrant workers. Additionally, it would enhance support for migrant workers through tailored settlement assistance and community integration services, ensuring they are effectively supported and well-adjusted in their new roles.

R2: Introduce a Locality Waiver Program for Aged Care Providers.

Members report that the growing administrative complexity of the Pacific Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme is causing significant costs and undue burden on providers.

R3: Review the administrative requirements of the PALM Scheme with a view to reducing complexity and red tape.

Wrap-around supports for regional migrant workers and their families

Our members share the objective of successfully settling and sustaining migrant workers in Australia in a way that is worker-centred and welcome the development of Government initiatives to assist them provide dedicated and tailored support.

Supporting migrant workers with wraparound supports such as housing, is an essential part of their ability to attract and retain a migrant workforce who will want to remain with them for the long-term.

R4: Ensure there is government support through funding, policy and bilateral opportunities for 'wrap-around' services for aged care workers across Australia to address employees' other needs, including availability of accommodation, schooling for children, and transport. A possible model may be the Family Accompaniment Pilot within the PALM Scheme.

R5: Reduce the cost of education for workers' children (currently between \$6,300 and \$7,500 in 2024), such as through a Federally funded relocation grant or via a National Cabinet agreement.

R6: Assist newly arrived workers, particularly those providing home care services, to promptly apply for a driver's license.

Housing of aged care workers in the regions

As housing is a critical component of effective migration, particularly for regional, rural, and remote areas, related strategies must be aligned to migration needs. Members report this is a dependency for them and many are looking at land or existing stock, such as independent living units, as possible options but lack the capital margins to build or upgrade.

R7: Identify options for housing support for migrant workers. Options may include infrastructure grants for on-site accommodation; and Federal-State partnerships to bring about local solutions in regional areas.

R8: Ensure any supports provided by aged care providers in regional areas can be recognised as a contribution in policy settings.

Improving policy settings that will sustain aged care in regional Australia

Regional, rural and remote Australia is particularly vulnerable to workforce supply shortages in aged care and the intersection of Federal and State migration levers and points systems are critical to future opportunities for migrant workers to settle in these locations.

Members in Tasmania reported that when nursing visas were listed as a priority visa around the country, the unintended consequence was that nurses no longer needed to spend time in Tasmania to progress their pathway to permanent residency. While the prioritisation of the nursing visa had many benefits and was welcomed by the sector, this made it very difficult to attract a much-needed migrant workforce in a particular region.

R9: Ensure that the design of the migration system avoids unintended system disincentives for migrants to move to localities in need of workforce supply (such as the interrelationship of the migration points system across states and territories and operation of Designated Area Migration Agreements, or other levers), or allow sufficient flexibility to adjust the system to respond to unintended consequences.

R10: Ensure the priority currently given under Ministerial Direction No. 105ⁱⁱ to regional aged care migrant workers, is maintained or enhanced in the top two of priority classifications, to avoid adverse impacts to the health and aged care sectors under the planned decrease of Skilled Independent visas granted.

Collectively, our recommendations will result in a more stable environment for Australia's aged care residents and care recipients, increased confidence in the care they will receive, assurance for the regional migrant workers about their future opportunities and greater provider confidence that they will be able to deliver the care needed, when it is needed.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this submission, please contact me.

Yours sincerely

Anne Liddell

Head of Policy

ⁱ Department of Home Affairs, *Employer Nomination Scheme (subclass 186) Temporary Residence Transition stream – Be this age*, <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/employer-nomination-scheme-186/temporary-residence-transition-stream>

ⁱⁱ Department of Home Affairs, *Skilled visa processing priorities - Processing priorities for skilled visa applications*, <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-processing-times/skilled-visa-processing-priorities>