



Q Search the web



Botched estimates reveal big aged care worker shortage

Zac de Silva

Wed 3 December 2025 at 6:00 am AEDT
3 min read



Australia's shortage of aged care workers is four times larger than previously thought because the federal government bungled its long-term forecasts.

Despite a series of pay rises, Labor's own figures show an extra 35,000 aged care workers are needed this financial year alone, as Australia's population gets older and more people require support.

A departmental memo obtained by AAP under freedom of information laws shows nearly 120,000 more staff will be needed by 2035/36, including nurses, nurse practitioners and personal care workers.

ADVERTISEMENT

The government has also released data showing some green shoots in the sector, with blown-out waitlists for care beginning to come down.

Over the past few months, 25,000 older Australians have moved off waitlists and into care, partly due to the fast-tracking of more home care packages.



The federal government underestimated how much care some people need every day. (Alan Porritt/AAP PHOTOS)

But 113,000 people are still waiting to be assessed for care.

Another 107,281 have been assessed, but aren't getting the support they need.

The government says 99 per cent of those are getting some help, just at a lower level.

Aged care providers have grappled with a lack of workers for years, and a number of reports have warned of crippling shortages unless urgent action is taken.

ADVERTISEMENT

Over recent years, the government has insisted staff shortages are relatively small, and falling.

Documents from the last two years put the "workforce gap" - the number of extra employees needed to properly staff the sector - at just 6890.

But a memo from March 2025 reveals a critical flaw in the government's calculations which led to a massive underestimate of the shortage.

The error relates to mandatory care minutes - a requirement that aged care residents receive at least 215 minutes of care every day.



Anne Ruston says botched projections for the aged care workforce are "alarming". (Mick Tsikas/AAP PHOTOS)

The old model assumed once a person had received their mandated 215 minutes, staff could move on to help other residents.

ADVERTISEMENT

In its updated analysis, the department conceded some older people may need help for a longer period of time.

The memo warned the change in approach created a "significant widening" of the workforce gap

Opposition aged care spokeswoman Anne Ruston said the development was very worrying.

"The government has massively underestimated the unresolved aged care workforce crisis. It is alarming to find out that the shortfall isn't a few thousand as they've been claiming," she told AAP.

The coalition is expected to pursue the issue in parliamentary hearings on Wednesday.

Aged Care Minister Sam Rae said Labor was making aged care "a fantastic and desirable career choice" by delivering better pay for workers.

ADVERTISEMENT

"We inherited an aged care sector crippled by a decade of neglect from the former Liberal government: wages that failed to reflect the skill and professionalism of the job of caring for older Australians," he said.



Labor is making it more desirable to work in aged care, federal minister Sam Rae said. (Lukas Coch/AAP PHOTOS)

In both residential and home care, a lack of personal care workers poses the biggest issue.

Personal care workers are responsible for helping older people with day-to-day tasks like showering and dressing, and also help with medical treatments and procedures.

An extra 94,000 personal care workers will be needed by 2035, according to the department's forecasts.

