



# the library of aged care competencies





The Australian Aged Care sector is a sizeable workforce directly employing more than 350,000 workers representing around 238,000 full-time-equivalent jobs in 2014-15. These jobs fill a diverse range of roles, from nurse practitioners, registered nurses, allied health professionals (like pharmacists, physiotherapists, etc.), care workers to management and administrative staff.

The Aged Care workforce has become increasingly qualified over recent years, particularly workers in direct care roles. In 2012, 87% of the direct care workforce had post-secondary school qualifications, an increase from 80% in 2007.

Aged Care competencies articulate the essential requirements for success in the following framework:

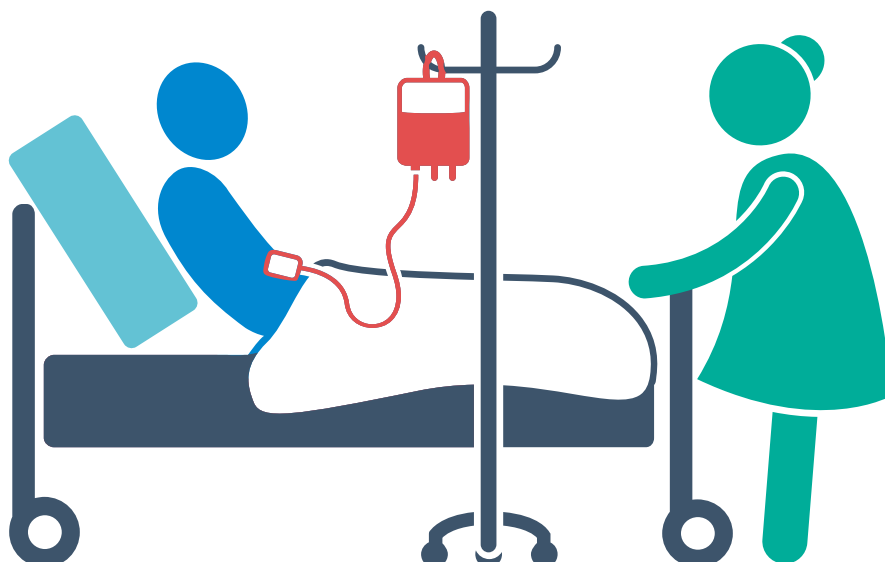
1. Resident psychological health & wellbeing
2. Professional Practice
3. Resident Lifestyle Care
4. Resident Advocacy
5. Environmental Safety
6. Teamwork
7. Accountability
8. Initiative
9. Communication



## Resident psychological health & wellbeing

Each employee recognises that psychological wellbeing and health are closely related, and the link may become more important with age, if only because the prevalence of chronic illness increases with advancing age. As life expectancy increases and treatments for life-threatening disease become more effective, the issue of maintaining and supporting wellbeing for patients in Aged Care is increasingly critical.

- Treats residents as individuals, not a job
- Shows a caring approach to each resident, being sensitive to patients emotional and social health
- Seeks to understand and attends to each residents individual needs
- Prioritises the each resident's psychological wellbeing; managing difficult behaviours with compassion and empathy while trying to gain insight into the root cause
- Demonstrates a good understanding of mental health issues and care, particularly dementia
- Is reliable and keeps commitments
- Actively promotes patient independent living and social interaction
- Provides personal care in a respectful and sensitive manner
- Is considerate and thoughtful
- Acts as a care giver not care taker
- Demonstrates a resident centered approach
- Gains valuable knowledge and skills to benefit the needs of all residents
- Has good conversational skills
- Is a willing advocate on behalf of residents when required
- Explores strategies for managing and resolving conflict
- Is skilled in calming distressed patients
- Shows understanding and consideration of normal age related physiological changes.
- Actively analyses, selects and administers valid, reliable assessment/diagnostic/screening tools.
- Identifies factors associated with increased risks specific to physiological complications (i.e. cardiovascular disease, renal disease, diabetes, thromboembolic disease and neuropsychiatric disorders) and recommends a management plan that minimises the risks for adverse outcomes.
- Collaborates with other practitioners to include complementary and integrative health care practices on health promotion and symptom management for older adults.
- Addresses health-related learning needs and develops, implements and evaluates learning plans to accommodate cognitive and sensory changes (e.g., font and letter size; additional learning time to process information; ambient light adjustments).



## Professional Practice

Each employee recognises that Aged Care is an evolving practice that is changing in accordance with demographic shifts and the growth of evidence based care. Each employee takes responsibility for their professional response to the evolving landscape as a key partner in Aged Care and recognises that successful practice in Aged Care is a partnership between professionals and patients.

- Recognises that all behaviour has cultural meaning and viewing behaviour within contextual issues that are specific to aging (e.g. in an attempt to communicate, dementia situations, aphasia in stroke, depression due to loss of long term partner).
- Recognises changes (e.g. sensory, cognitive) that affect communication with older adults and uses communication strategies to meet client's needs for optimal communication ability.
- Assesses barriers (e.g. drug interactions, dementia, delirium, disease states, depression) that impact residents' understanding of information, ability to follow directions and make needs known, and demonstrates familiarity with adaptive devices (e.g. hearing aid).
- Assesses appropriate clinically relevant tools such as: mental status (e.g. Mini Mental Status Examination-MMSE), delirium (e.g. Confusion Assessment Method-CAM) and depression (e.g. Geriatric Depression Scale-GDS).
- Supports those who are dealing with dying, death and grief of a loved one.
- Promotes quality end-of-life care for older adults, including pain and symptom management, advanced care planning, and support of families.
- Recognises and utilises assessment approaches that specifically address geriatric syndromes (e.g. falls, incontinence, delirium, deconditioning, frailty, pressure ulcers) common to care needs of older adults.
- Manages geriatric syndromes common to older adults, and the complex interaction of acute and chronic co-morbid conditions common to older adults (e.g. cancer, depression, hip fracture, influenza and stroke).
- Assesses to distinguish the clinical presentations of delirium, dementia, and depression (3D's) using validated and reliable screening tools and involving the inter-disciplinary team in care planning and management.
- Applies evidence-based standards/best practice guidelines to promote health promotion activities (e.g., rest/sleep, activity and exercise in older adults).
- Performs assessment of older adults through the use of valid and reliable tools in the domains of physical health and illness conditions, functional ability, cognitive ability, mental health, and psychological function including social support system and life course changes.
- Recognises vulnerability and risk for adverse outcomes related to aging and social changes, while also reinforcing strengths and abilities.
- Plans appropriate interventions to promote function in response to change in activities of daily living and instrumental activities of daily living.
- Completes pain assessment and management as a crucial component of health care, which includes the implications of depression, anxiety, fear, fatigue, and cognition.
- Assesses endurance capacities of older adults in supportive living arrangements, including appropriate use of technology and assistive devices to promote and maintain optimal function, independence and safety.

## Resident Lifestyle Care

Good quality lifestyle provides emotional, physical and social benefits to residents. Aged Care provides peace of mind for residents, friends and families alike, with amenities and services that enhance residents' daily well-being, peace of mind, social engagement, living comfort and independence. Outstanding Aged Care provides residents, friends and family with the assurance that loved ones in the Aged Care community are treated with the utmost respect and care.



- Assures participation of older adults and their families in decision making (e.g. advance care planning, health care proxy, informed consent, elder abuse reporting, legal guardianship, wills, and Do-Not-Resuscitate orders).
- Assesses family knowledge, skills, and needs, and their level of stress in providing care to older adults and collaborates toward best outcomes.
- Assesses family knowledge and skills to draw on their own abilities and resources for self-care and health promotion.
- Facilitates communication between families and older adults' transition across and between Aged Care services utilising communication technologies (e.g. tele-health, computer, digital speakers, and adaptive devices).
- Assists family caregivers to reduce their stress levels and maintain their own mental and physical health.
- Facilitates and recognises the benefits of inter-professional care in linking older adults and their families to community organizations, policy makers, and the public to meet the needs and issues of the growing aging population.
- Promotes team problem-solving, decision making and intra-professional collaboration by jointly assessing outcomes of care; plans interventions; implements new strategies; evaluates the impact on older adults, families and team members; facilitates continuity of care; and develops new and innovative working relationships.
- Uses decision-making tool resources, communication strategies, and makes appropriate referrals, in collaboration with interdisciplinary members, in order to provide counseling related to the needs and abilities of older adults and their families in making complex decisions that arise with aging.
- Communicates effectively, respectfully, and compassionately with older adults and their families (e.g., considering special features of cognitive impairment, ageism, hearing impairments, and literacy).
- Facilitates in collaboration with inter-professional resources, group interventions with older adults and their families (e.g. bereavement groups, reminiscence groups).
- Appreciates the influence of attitudes, roles, language, culture, race, religion, gender, and lifestyle on how families and assistive personnel provide long-term care.
- Assesses and respects need for intimacy, sexual orientation, and gender identity.
- Mediates situations of conflict between older adults and their family members by balancing client autonomy and safety decisions.
- Understands the principles of capacity, informed consent and ensuring procedures for voluntary consent.

## Resident Advocacy

Advocacy in Aged Care takes two forms; Systems or individual resident advocacy. Advocacy designed to change systems is distinct from advocacy on behalf of an individual.

Systems advocacy aims to change policy and practice at the local or national; to change the situation for groups of individuals who share similar problems. While systems advocacy works to improve the system to the benefit of all residents, it is a long-term approach to problem solving requiring sustained effort.

Individual advocacy focuses on changing the situation for an individual resident and protecting their rights.

- Analyses the effectiveness of community resources in assisting older adults and their families to retain personal goals, maximise function, maintain independence, and live in the least restrictive environment.
- Identifies and evaluates the accessibility, availability, and affordability of health care for older adults to promote their goals; maximises function, desired level of autonomy and independence and their living in the least restrictive environment.
- Forms partnerships with older adults, their families and communities, to achieve mutually agreed upon health outcomes and transition through the system.
- Identifies gaps, barriers, and fragmentation in the health care system and applies evaluation and research findings to improve the health care system in achieving intended outcomes for older adults and their families.
- Represents the older adult as requested and when the older adult is not able to advocate for self in discussions of care, preferences for care and decisions related to care within the health care team and the organisation.
- Respects and promotes older adults' rights to dignity and self-determination within the context of the law and safety concerns.
- Identifies that residents may be at risk in relation to their right to privacy and information.
- Advocates for health care services that will enhance care within the organisation and society.



## Environmental safety

Awareness of environmental safety is an essential part of successful Aged Care. Achieving safe resident care by incorporating safe work processes, programs and professional development activities reduces and mitigates unsafe acts in the Aged Care system, and the use of best practices shown to lead to optimal patient outcomes, is a critical aspect of quality Aged Care. All employees need to show that they consistently perform their jobs in a safe manner minimising risk to their health or that of their fellow workers and residents.

- Intervenes to eliminate or minimize the use of physical, chemical, and environmental restraints (e.g. alternate strategies to prevent falls, to prevent treatment interference, and to manage agitated and/or combative behavior).
- Implements fall prevention protocols, employing a valid and reliable measure of fall risk assessment, and by promoting least restraint approaches in injury prevention programs.



- Uses established criteria to identify elder abuse and follows standards of care to recognise and report mistreatment (e.g. physical, financial, sexual, neglect, emotional, and social).
- Prevents or reduces common risk factors that may contribute to functional decline, impaired quality of life, and excess disability in older adults.
- Promotes immunisations; to promote health and optimal care, enhance quality of life, prevent disease, injury and excess disability, maximise function, maintain desired level of autonomy and independence, promote rehabilitation, and provide palliative care to older adults.

## Teamwork

Teams that are cohesive and support one another improve the wellbeing of aged care residents with depression and dementia-related behaviours, and those who care for them, according to new research. Trust and cohesion between managers, nurses and personal care assistants, empowers and supports frontline workers to identify and act on issues for residents in their care related to depression and behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia. Staff in cohesive, supporting teams experience lower care strain, demonstrated by reduced absenteeism and improvements in the mental health referral process.

- Recognises the value of team building activities and the effect on morale
- Shows appreciation for good work. Regularly thanks others for their hard work
- Accepts requests from peers, team members or other business units to help address issues or concerns and seeks input as needed. Promotes networking
- Places higher priority on team and organisational goals than their own
- Sees opportunity for improvement with staff members and supports their development.
- Knows their audience and tailors message to ensure understanding. Uses terms, examples and analogies that are meaningful
- Demonstrates the value of team work through open, honest, respectful communication and recognises the importance of cooperative organizational culture.
- Takes a needs based approach to scheduling by balancing customer service and operational efficiency.
- Seeks out differing opinions and ideas from a diverse group of individuals and maximises personal effectiveness by using their particular talents and abilities.
- Understands how individual job tasks, responsibilities and projects relate to organisational goals.
- Participates actively and contributes personal knowledge, skills and abilities to achieve team goals.
- Performs assigned duties and communicates status of progress to other team members.
- Respects contributions of all team members.
- Participates in the development of team goals.
- Recognises the contributions of all team members.
- Shifts team resources to optimise team performance.

## Accountability

Accountability in the Aged Care environment is critical, because without accountability there is no learning from mistakes and patient care can be compromised. Positive accountability has a clear link to improved performance, increased participation and involvement, improved feelings of competence, increased commitment to work, increased employee morale, and work satisfaction.

- Accepts responsibility for mistakes. Is a role model by “stepping up” if things go wrong.
- Keeps in regular communication with the team to eliminate non-essential activities and maximise operational effect.

- Translates policy and procedure into day to day activities and decision making.
- Understands that avoiding the situation can be costly to the organisation.
- Employs skill in conflict management to handle tough conversations.
- Takes immediate action when confronted by a problem without being asked to do so.
- Documents expectations clearly and thoroughly through face-to-face meetings and works collaboratively to meet these expectations.
- Recognises issues, problems or opportunities and determines whether or not action is required. If needed, commits to action.
- Accurately completes established protocols and adheres to schedules.
- Manages time effectively, meets deadlines, and achieves established goals and objectives.
- Assists in the establishment, accomplishment and continuous evaluation of goals.
- Assumes responsibility for the accuracy of work processes and flow of multiple tasks.
- Assesses multiple demands and competing priorities and identifies necessary resources to handle critical work demands.
- Assumes responsibility for the actions and decisions.
- Sets and exemplifies high ethical standards and holds self and others accountable for conduct.



## Initiative

Initiative within Aged Care should be encouraged, recognised and rewarded as it improves patient care. Staff will be empowered to use their best judgment and will be empowered to make decisions that align with the organisation's goals to improve care. Initiative leads to greater success individually and organisationally.

- Identifies what needs to be done and takes action before being asked or required.
- Takes independent action to change the direction of events or to achieve positive results.
- Does more than is normally required in a situation.
- Seeks out others to learn perspectives and takes action based on input.
- Generates and considers options for actions to achieve long range goals.
- Gathers information to understand probability and benefits of success, as well as consequences of failure.
- Includes others in the decision making process. Achieves buy-in and understanding in the work environment.
- Views negative outcomes as an opportunity to learn rather than failure.
- Puts self in unfamiliar situations in order to learn and encourages others to do the same.
- Actively seeks out new learning opportunities and targets learning activities to meet required job skills.
- Addresses patient issues immediately and shares key learnings with other staff.
- Encourages self and staff to question established work processes or assumptions.



## Communication

Communication plays an essential role in maintaining resident autonomy and sense of self, and ultimately affects mental and physical wellbeing. It provides opportunities for making sense of being old and in care, elderly persons see no special significance in age, but are simply themselves grown older. Self-esteem hinges on personal control, respect and dignity. To provide the best care, all employees must effectively convey information and express thoughts and facts in a straight forward manner. Employees must demonstrate effective use of listening skills and displays openness to other people's ideas and thoughts.

- Communicates in a respectful tone and manner
- Communicates issues in a timely manner
- Is aware of and responsive to verbal and non-verbal communication styles
- Recognises cultural differences in communication
- Communicates in a clear and effective manner, using appropriate technology when applicable.
- Listens and asks questions to understand other people's viewpoints
- Listens actively to evaluate situations and responds effectively and creatively.
- Listens and understands others, adjusting communication style to suit situation and audience.
- Assimilates information and communicates alternatives.
- Establishes contacts and works with them to assemble and disseminate information.
- Communicates to diverse constituents, ensuring that all forms of communication are clear, concise and accurate.
- Represents the university and department in fostering internal and external partnerships and alliances.
- Evaluates communication strategies and fosters improvement and growth
- Understands and learns from what others say.
- Grasps the meaning of information written in English, and applies it to work situations.
- Conveys ideas and facts orally using language the audience will best understand.
- Conveys ideas and facts in writing using language the reader will best understand.

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