

# Aged Care Expansion program

## Information for Approved Employers (V2)

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The purpose of this document is to provide Australian Approved Employers, under the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, with information to assist them in preparing their application to employ workers as part of the Aged Care Expansion (ACE) program. Information contained in this document is for general information purposes only and is subject to change.

## The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme

The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme allows eligible Australian businesses to hire workers from 9 Pacific islands and Timor-Leste when there are not enough local workers available. Through the PALM scheme, eligible businesses can recruit workers for seasonal jobs for up to 9 months or for longer-term roles for between one and 4 years in unskilled, low-skilled, and semi-skilled positions. This helps to fill labour gaps in rural and regional Australia and allows workers to develop skills and send income to support their families and communities.

The PALM scheme is administered by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) in partnership with the Pacific Labour Facility (PLF). DFAT and DEWR retain responsibility for key program aspects requiring government oversight, including program integrity and assurance, while working closely with responsible government agencies including the Department of Home Affairs, Australian Border Force, Attorney General's Department, and the Fair Work Ombudsman.

## The Pacific Labour Facility (PLF)

The PLF works with DFAT and DEWR to support the administration of the PALM scheme and facilitate opportunities for Australian employers to connect with workers from the Pacific and Timor-Leste. The PLF is managed by Palladium and has been established as a trusted intermediary in supporting Australia-Pacific circular labour mobility.

## Rationale for supporting the Aged Care sector

There is strong demand in Australia for Pacific and Timorese workers in the aged care sector. The Australian Government is committed to increasing the number of aged care workers in Australia and will support an expanded number of PALM scheme workers to help Pacific countries take advantage of this opportunity.

There is also strong interest from the Pacific and Timor-Leste in supplying PALM workers for the aged care sector. Australian aged care employment and associated training presents a significant potential skills dividend to sending countries with nascent but growing care related industries. Aged care also represents an opportunity to improve opportunities for women under the PALM scheme.

Guided by the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, future policy may require that carers working within aged care facilities in Australia will have, or will be working towards, a Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing). However, it is acknowledged that a lack of funding and limited pathways for formal training of Pacific and Timorese inhibit worker flow into the sector.

PALM workers are not eligible for state or federal funding for the provision of accredited training by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). It has generally been seen as cost prohibitive for Approved Employers (AEs) to privately fund training for PALM workers. Funding available through the PLF's existing Skills Development Program has limitations and is insufficient to support a workforce development strategy. The Australian Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) is a fully Australian Government funded source of workers with the qualification. Alone, however the APTC is unable to scale delivery of training to meet the significant industry demand.

## The Aged Care pilots

In response to the supply issue described above, DFAT, with support from the PLF, ran two pilots consisting of three groups, with new and alternative aged care training pathways. One onshore and workplace based with an Australian-based Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and one blended, offshore/onshore program with the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC). Both pilots were designed to increase the number of qualified aged care workers available under the PALM Scheme.

Both options have shown strong potential and there is interest from PALM sending countries to participate in future aged care programs. AEs also provided very positive feedback about the carers. Workers were seen to assimilate well into their Australian workplaces and were well suited to their roles. Residents highlighted the carers gentle and caring manner which made them enjoyable to interact with.

### Pilots

1. In the first pilot, the Northern Territory - Samoa pilot, Samoan workers with health and community service qualifications studied the Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing) while engaged as PALM scheme workers in aged care facilities in Alice Springs, Katherine, and Tennant Creek.
2. In the second pilot, students completed a course of theory and practical skills at APTC in Fiji, followed by ten weeks in a supervised work placement in an Australian aged care facility to complete the remaining theory and practical components of the Certificate III.

Overall, the pilots had a 90% completion rate. This is an excellent result when compared to a national completion rate of training package qualifications of 47% (NCVER, Statistical report, 30 August 2022).

## Overview of the Aged Care Expansion program

In response to the positive reception from the pilots and ongoing demand, the Australian government has committed to expand the number of funded aged care training places for PALM participants. The Aged Care Expansion (ACE) program is designed to support both large and small aged care providers to secure qualified, long term care workers from the Pacific and Timor-Leste. The intent is to partner with aged care AEs to deliver at least 500 new trained workers in 2023.

Workers will complete their Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing) and have the right to work with the same AE for up to a total of four years. AEs must commit to paying PALM workers the same as other workers who are in the same role (pay parity). Workers must receive a minimum of 30 hours paid work per week for the duration of their studies, increasing to full time contracts on attainment of their Certificate III qualification.

Through the ACE program, AEs can apply for funding that covers the costs of the Certificate III training for workers. In applying for ACE funding, an AE is expected to work with a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) to develop a comprehensive and integrated training program that supports the learning, working, and welfare needs of workers throughout their qualification.

A key requirement is that workers are supported to manage the challenges they will face living and working in a new country while undertaking a training program. To ensure strong workforce protections, employers will be required to invite the Fair Work Ombudsman and relevant union representatives to the workers' arrival briefing.

ACE will build on the lessons learned from the pilots and will encourage innovation in the development and delivery of ACE training programs, including blended training models that include both offshore and onshore elements. This is outlined in more detail below.

## What we are looking for from ACE (essential elements of success):

- **Innovative, scalable models** for training and employment of Pacific and Timorese care workers, with participants receiving a Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing) and employment for up to a total period of four years in Australia with the same AE.
- AEs who are committed to leading and taking full responsibility for the **holistic wellbeing, employment, and educational progress** of workers.
- AEs must commit to paying the PALM workers the same as other workers who are in the same role (**pay parity**).
- Workers must receive a minimum of 30 hours paid work per week for the duration of their studies, **increasing to full time contracts** on attainment of their Certificate III qualification.
- Engagement with ACE must be via **AEs who carry Deed obligations** (not by RTOs).
- AEs that have (or can quickly establish) strong **relationships with RTOs** that can deliver the appropriate Australian standard qualifications.
- An overarching objective for ACE is that we're looking to have a **breadth of participating countries** involved so we will be looking to ensure a spread of countries are identified by AEs.
- Proposals will be favourably assessed where:
  - they include an element of **in-country capacity building or skills development**. For instance, delivering part of the formal training or other in-market worker preparation with a Pacific-based training provider.
  - an AE is looking to fill roles in locations where there is **high demand** for aged care workers and a small labour pool - i.e., rural, regional, and remote Australian locations.
  - AEs propose to undertake **interviews/recruitment of workers in-country** with LSU support.
  - **Additional strategies to support the success of workers** are included, such as a holistic approach to worker welfare, pastoral care and community engagement in the context of a new worker experiencing the additional pressure of integrated study.

## Other important considerations for Approved Employers

- AEs must avoid recruiting workers who are already formally employed in the medical, nursing, or aged care sectors within the sending country.
- The ACE program is only for new offshore recruitments. Proposals will not be accepted to redeploy existing PALM scheme workers to commence work under ACE.
- AEs should consider including, upon arrival, an upfront preparation program to prepare workers for the workplace and cover initial safety units. For example, a four-week program might include two weeks learning program + two weeks of buddy shifts/learning delivery (all paid).
- AEs should consider the work and learning support needs of workers participating in a training pilot, for example, Buddy shifts for a necessary period.
- In consultation with partner RTOs, AEs should consider any travel, technology, equipment, or other requirements needed to support the training component of the program.
- A Training Plan (included in tender) should consider the timelines for delivery with the objective that all participants complete their training by 31st December 2023 (but identify where and why there is a potential need to rollover any training component into 2024).
- AEs may consider a process that ensures the selection of workers that are well suited to the intensive role of a carer; for example, appropriate supplementary health and fitness checks, police checks that meet other requirements such as NDIS, community, and well-being programs.
- Funding proposals need to represent best value for money based on Australian Government procurement principles of Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Equity and Ethics.

## Engaging with Labour Sending Units

- PLF briefed all Labour Sending Units (LSUs) on the ACE program in January 2023. Countries that have confirmed their participation in ACE include:
  - Fiji
  - Kiribati
  - Nauru
  - Papua New Guinea
  - Solomon Islands
  - Timor-Leste
  - Tonga
  - Tuvalu
  - Vanuatu
- In engaging with LSUs, it would be expected - as with any other PALM scheme recruitment - that AEs:
  - Engage with LSUs in a professional and culturally respectful manner.
  - Respect existing timeframes to identify workers, and other sending country rules, and not seek to bypass them.
- Following issuance of the EOI by PLF, AEs should start having detailed conversations with LSUs about their (and the LSUs) needs, and RTOs about delivery strategies. Once an AE is shortlisted, they should begin pulling together a recruitment application for those cohorts to be submitted with their tender documents.
- AEs will need to be mindful of concerns about ‘brain-drain’ in sending countries and seek guidance on mitigating risks around this from the LSUs. AEs should work collaboratively with LSUs to avoid recruitment of current and former health care workers - and ensuring that ACE participation ultimately results in a net ‘skills gain’ for sending countries.
- AEs proposing (or interested) to work with in-country training providers are encouraged to discuss and agree on an approach with LSUs.
- Note that ACE recruitments will not be prioritised over other PALM workers.
- All workers participating in ACE will be required to be registered with the sending country’s LSU, meet LSU’s Work Ready Pool requirements, meet Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) requirements to be able to successfully participate in further studies, meet visa requirements such as panel health and police clearances, and be supported by AEs to submit their visa applications.

## Application Process

AEs will be selected to participate in the ACE program through a two-stage process. We welcome all responses and are willing to work with AEs to develop their proposals to ensure the maximum benefits of the program are realised. We will preference the participation of direct employers in the ACE program. This call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) invites AEs to register their interest at Stage 1 in the process. EOI submissions must be lodged as per the terms of this document and the attachments. EOIs will be assessed in accordance with [Commonwealth Procurement Rules](#) and will be reviewed by a panel comprised of Australian Government and PLF representatives to determine whether they meet requirements outlined above.

AEs with eligible EOIs will be invited to participate in Stage 2. In Stage 2, AEs will submit additional information that may include a fully developed recruitment application, accommodation plan, plans

to address worker welfare, salary and cost of living information, information regarding their proposed RTO partner, a training plan, and a final budget proposal. With ongoing changes in the aged care sector, AEs should also consider how issues such as the NDIS Worker Screening Checks, and the update to the Certificate III Individual Support (Ageing) will affect workers.

There is no cap on the number of AEs that may be selected to participate in ACE, and all methodologies and concepts will be considered. Depending on initial interest received from AEs, PLF reserves the right to run another EOI round later in 2023 to account for additional interest and opportunity within the government's policy and funding commitments.

**Applications close at midnight (AEST) 26 February 2023.** EOIs should be submitted to: [ACE@pacificlabourfacility.com.au](mailto:ACE@pacificlabourfacility.com.au)

## Program Timelines

### Stage 1

- PLF invites **Expressions of Interest:** 10 February
- Submission window closes: 26 February
- PLF to notify AEs of outcomes: Week of 13 March

### Stage 2 \*

- PLF seeks **fully developed proposals:** TBC
- Submission window closes: TBC
- Initial contract negotiations: TBC

\* Final dates to be communicated to shortlisted applicants.

## Proposed Mobilisation

To provide the best possible support to ACE workers, and help LSUs manage workloads, PLF can stagger the mobilisation of ACE participants throughout 2023 if needed.

Based on applications, PLF will review AEs proposed timelines for mobilisation, LSU capacity, as well as how ready the AEs are to mobilise and train workers. They may have well-advanced plans or strong working relationships with RTOs, LSUs for instance. This assessment will determine when workers can realistically be mobilised. Those AEs that are well-placed to proceed quickly are likely to get prioritised.

On the other hand, if a tender requires additional work, but is still considered viable, AEs will be able to work on it (with PLF support) with a view to mobilising later in the year. However, until such time as PLF enters a contractual arrangement with an AE for funding, there is no guarantee that an AE will get to participate in the ACE.

All participants funded under ACE will need to be employed and have commenced (and ideally completed) training by the end of 2023.

## Funding Model

We propose to implement a reimbursement model for agreed costs (which might include things like travel, or other equipment or technology for training purposes).

All costs will need to be specified in application documents and relate to the training of workers. These costs will also need to be approved within the subsequent contractual arrangements and until that time, there is no guarantee that an AE will get to participate in the ACE.

Other funding models may be considered where a strong Value for Money outcome can be presented based on existing commercial arrangements under current government funding.

With the reimbursement model, PLF will make payments directly to the AE and will not make any payments to your training provider. AEs will need to manage their own commercial arrangements with RTOs.

### **Payment Schedule:**

AEs should outline their proposed payment (reimbursement) model in their proposal, including a rationale for their approach. An example might be as follows:

1. Upon evidence of enrolment and invoice from RTO - 50% of total value of program
2. End of Program - remaining 50% upon evidence of a result.