



PALM AGED CARE TRAINING PILOTS: SUMMARY OF INSIGHTS FROM PILOT EVALUATIONS

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SUMMARY OF INSIGHTS FROM PILOT EVALUATIONS

About this paper

The Australian Government sees significant potential for more PALM workers with the Certificate III in Individual Support (Aged Care) to be engaged in the aged care industry. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Pacific Labour Facility (PLF) piloted two approaches to delivering the Certificate III training, which were subject to independent evaluations. This paper summarises key insights from these pilot evaluations. Some insights are training-related, while others are more general.

About the pilots

Northern Territory - Samoa Aged Care Pilot

The pilot involved 26 people (19 female and seven male) from Samoa who were recruited by an aged care Approved Employer (AE) operating in the Northern Territory. The carers began with a four-week intensive course in Alice Springs delivered by a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) to prepare them with the necessary basic work skills to ensure the safety of both the carers and the residents before they entered the workplace. Carers were then placed in six aged care facilities in three NT locations where the RTO supported them to undertake study over an 11-month period (or shorter duration) for the Certificate III while carers worked fulltime.

The pilot coincided with COVID-19 lockdowns which delayed the RTO's visits to the carers. Carers were also unable to study due to working additional shifts to cover sick staff. By the end of the pilot (October 2022), 23 carers had completed the qualification.

APTC Aged Care Plus Pilot

The Australia - Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) delivered a 22-week Certificate III program in two stages. The first 12-week theory and practical skills component was delivered at its Suva campus to 40 Fijian students (37 female and three male). All students were recruited by an AE (a labour hire company) that placed them with a Queensland-based Host Employer across nine separate aged care facilities. Carers completed the remaining Certificate III units and their supervised work placement over a 10-week period while working at least 30 hours per week (the minimum number of hours required under the PALM scheme visa) supported by an Australian-based APTC trainer. By the end of the pilot (November 2022), 38 carers had completed the qualification.

Pre-mobilisation

Insight: How AEs can prepare applicants for the carer role

What the carer role involves

Since there is no formal aged care sector in most Pacific countries, people who are interested in becoming a PALM aged carer are likely to lack understanding about clinical and care requirements of older Australians in aged care and more particularly, what it "looks like" in an Australian context e.g. person centred care and choice. It's important that prospective applicants be given information about the carer role so they can make an informed decision about applying for the job, in particular:

- the physically demanding nature of the carer role. This is particularly relevant for older prospective applicants – they need to know they will be on their feet and busy for an entire shift.
- the emotional demands of caring for residents with challenging behaviours.
- they may be working with employees from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, not only Australians.

What's involved in studying for the Certificate III

If carers will be doing the majority of Certificate III study while working full-time, prospective applicants need to know they will be required to study in their time off work and complete the Certificate III within a reasonable timeframe. This will involve them being self-directed and self-managing.

Insight: Additional health check recommended

In addition to the health check required by some Pacific countries for a visa application, it is helpful if the AE arranges an additional health check (at the AE's expense) for recruited applicants to identify any previously undiagnosed medical conditions (eg. high blood pressure, diabetes) so these can be addressed before the person leaves home.

AEs may also want to confirm whether recruited applicants have had the number of COVID-19 vaccination doses and flu vaccinations required to work in an Australian aged care facility so these can be arranged for carers on their arrival in Australia, as required. (Most Pacific countries do not have a routine influenza vaccination programme).

In the workplace

Insight: Preparing the workplace for PALM carers

It is essential that facility managers and workplace supervisors understand the country-specific cultural norms and practices of their PALM carers through receiving cultural training. This will help to avoid workplace communication issues and misunderstandings.

While Pacific countries have some shared cultural values (eg. respect for the elderly), there are country-specific cultural norms which may influence how specific groups of PALM carers interact with managers, work colleagues and residents. For example, in some Pacific countries:

- cultural norms such as respect for authority may make some carers reluctant to raise work-related issues, or to decline a manager's request for them to work an additional shift to cover staff shortages even if they are tired or have other commitments.
- women are expected to behave in a quiet and reserved manner. In an Australian workplace this could be misinterpreted as female carers being uncommunicative or lacking initiative.

While the carers from the two pilots were from Pacific countries, the PALM scheme also includes Timor-Leste, a south-east Asian country with its own distinct culture.

Insight: Creating a robust AE - carer connection

Pacific peoples are relational people. Their worldview is based on the collective, whether that be their extended family, village, church or workplace.¹ Given the importance of relational connections in Pacific cultures, **“effective engagement with Pacific peoples involves creating strong and sustainable relationships. This involves a significant investment from the outset.”**²

The AE’s and Host Employer’s investment in establishing and maintaining relationships with their Pacific staff is fundamentally important to carers. Employers who show interest in the carers and are receptive to their issues and concerns are trusted by carers in return. Without a solid AE - carer connection, some carers are likely to feel reluctant about approaching the AE to discuss work and welfare matters.

Insight: Supporting carers to make a successful transition into the job

Well-planned, in-depth inductions are needed for PALM carers. This is especially important for carers who have not worked in a clinical/care environment before. Even if carers have worked in a hospital at home, an Australian care facility is likely to be different, for example, greater use of technology-based equipment.

Some PALM carers recruited for their experience in looking after elderly relatives at home may not have worked in paid employment before. They need additional support to become familiar with employment-related matters such as workplace rights and responsibilities, workplace etiquette, tax, pay deductions and rosters.

The carers in both pilots reported that workplace buddies were a valuable source of support and confidence-building as they became familiar with the job and workplace.

Insight: Setting carers up for study success

Study

- It is important for AEs and RTOs not to make assumptions about carers’ preferred learning styles. While some carers may prefer traditional paper-based ways of learning, others may enjoy digital learning approaches.
- In both pilots, the RTO’s online group tutorials were not as well attended and effective for carers as face-to-face group tutoring and virtual one-on-one communication.
- If the study programme includes on-line material (eg. watching a YouTube video of a care procedure), carers need to have access to a laptop with an internet connection. Carers are unlikely to bring a laptop from home. Low-cost cell phones have limited or no streaming capabilities. Even if carers have a phone that can stream, using a small screen for study is less effective for learning purposes. AEs should consider how they can provide access to IT and other training-related equipment to support their carers’ study.

¹ Yavu - Foundations of Pacific Engagement. New Zealand Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022, <https://www.mpp.govt.nz/assets/Resources/Yavu-Booklet.pdf>

² Ibid, page 11.

Combining study and work

Many of the carers who completed the majority of Certificate III study while working full-time found that work-related tiredness impacted on their ability to study in their time off work. Carers could be supported to better manage work and study in the following ways:

- Carers' rosters could be limited to morning and afternoon shifts only, with no (or minimum) overtime until they have completed the Certificate III. The promise of overtime in the future can act as an incentive for carers to finish the qualification.
- If carers are doing overtime, it needs to be monitored to ensure their study and their own health and wellbeing is not being negatively impacted. Alternatively, an upper limit on overtime hours could be put in place until carers complete their study.
- Carers could be allowed to work reduced hours (if they wish to do so) until they complete the Certificate III, providing the 30 hours work per week minimum requirement for PALM workers is met.

Working and living in Australia

Insight: Supporting carer wellbeing

Carers, especially those with partners and children, are very motivated to work additional shifts so they can send more money home. Some carers often want to work overtime to distract them from thinking about how much they miss their family at home. However, carers need to understand the importance of taking care of themselves and not working too many additional shifts at the expense of their physical and mental health.

A critical aspect of carer wellbeing is for carers to keep in daily or regular contact with family at home. Information in the AE's orientation material about low-cost internet and phone plan options available from local providers will help carers to choose the most suitable plan for them.

Carers are given a lot of information when they arrive that is difficult to digest all at once. Written information may subsequently get misplaced. A list of key welfare contacts (eg. Welfare Officer, local medical centre, emergency services, Country Liaison Officer, PLF hotline etc) could be copied onto a laminated magnetic card that is displayed on the refrigerator in carers' rentals.

Insight: Accommodation

Before they leave home, recruited carers need to understand that the location where they are placed will determine the amount of rent they pay, which can be highly variable. For example, carers in the Northern Territory pilot pay a subsidised fortnightly rent of \$120. The average fortnightly rent of carers in the Queensland pilot is \$340, and the highest fortnightly rent is \$500.

Carers prefer accommodation close to where they work so they don't have transport costs. Carers, especially females, want to live in a neighbourhood where they feel safe particularly if public transport is unavailable and they have to walk home after a late shift. Some carers get a taxi or Uber which adds to their living costs.

If possible, it's helpful to ask carers who they would like to live with. This will avoid any subsequent personality clashes among housemates.

In many Pacific countries, there are cultural sensitivities around males living with females who are not related through family. In addition to disregarding cultural sensitivities, such living arrangements can

cause stress to the carer's partner back home given the length of separation from their spouse. Wherever possible, male carers should live in separate accommodation from female carers.

Insight: Expectations about community support of PALM carers

AEs play a critical role in helping workers connect with a range of people in their new community, including through sport or volunteering.

While recognising the important role that Pacific churches and other community groups play in providing support to PALM workers, it is important that these groups (with finite resources) are not put under too much pressure. For example, in one of the pilots, a Pacific church congregation consisting of 11 families and a pastor who has full-time employment outside of the church is supporting 20 PALM aged carers and 11 other PALM workers living in their town.