



Aged Care Workforce Remote Accord Response to the Productivity Commission Interim Report on Delivering Quality Care More Efficiently

September 2025



About the Aged Care Workforce Remote Accord

The Aged Care Workforce Remote Accord (the Remote Accord) is a group of service providers and industry experts delivering aged care services in regional and remote areas of Australia.

The Remote Accord was formed based on the belief that every community – including those in remote and very remote areas of Australia – has an equal right to accessible, high quality aged care services.

The Remote Accord saw its genesis in the 'A Matter of Care: Australia's Aged Care Workforce Strategy' report; Strategic Action 11 recommended that the Government and industry support the establishment of a Remote Accord.

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Introduction

This submission to the Productivity Commission is made by the Aged Care Workforce Remote Accord (Remote Accord) in response to the September 2025 interim report on Delivering Quality Care More Efficiently. In giving this response, the Remote Accord wishes to ensure that the unique challenges facing service providers and their clients in remote and very remote Australian communities are given consideration. This submission draws on direct feedback from providers working in Modified Monash Model (MMM) regions 5 to 7 who have highlighted effective ways to deliver quality care in remote and very remote communities.

➤ Key Recommendations

The Remote Accord is responding to section 1.1 with a focus on worker screenings and regulators. The Remote Accord strongly believes that delivering quality care in remote aged care services requires streamlining worker screenings and ensuring the cultural safety of regulators.

- Streamline worker screening processes for remote aged care workers.
- Ensure regulators are trained to work in a culturally safe manner when evaluating aged care services in areas with a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



➤ Recommendation 1: Streamline Worker Screenings

Workers in remote Australia face disproportionate barriers to completing worker screenings, such as police checks and working with vulnerable people checks. Workers that need to verify identity documents in person, but live in remote communities, may need to drive up to four hours to attend a post office where they can verify their documents. Additionally, some workers in remote Australia do not have enough documentation to meet the minimum 100 points required to complete worker screenings or have a previous criminal record that will disqualify them on a police check. Remote services need discretion to reduce or remove occupational entry requirements for prospective workers who cannot complete worker screening requirements but are otherwise fit to work in aged care.

Logistical barriers to a national registration system in remote areas

Workforce shortages in remote and very remote Australia are a well-documented and entrenched issue, particularly in the aged care sector. Service providers face challenges in attracting and recruiting a workforce to meet the growing needs of remote communities. Additional registration processes risk further exacerbating this problem, particularly if these processes fail to account for the logistical challenges of recruitment and worker screening in remote Australia.

Service providers in remote Australia already struggle to overcome the challenges of worker screening. Community members in remote areas have limited access to internet, services, and resources required to complete background checks, making it burdensome to meet compliance requirements. Some community members do not have identity documents such as birth certificates or licences. This burden has already grown as screening is standardised with NDIS processes.

National screening clearances must be easy to access and accommodating for remote workers with limited literacy, computer skills and access to personal documents. Screening must be instantaneous and affordable for individuals with minimal financial resources. Screening must not represent a further barrier to entry for local remote workforces.

The need for local discretion

In remote areas, the needs of those accessing care differ from people in metropolitan areas, with a greater emphasis placed on cultural and community needs. It is vital that the unique nature of remote



communities be accommodated in registration processes, with employers having discretion over the registration of local workers. Restricting employer discretion in worker registration could disincentivise the engagement of local, culturally appropriate workforces, deepening the workforce gap in an already stretched sector.

The need to avoid discouraging local workforces cannot be overstated. It is important to note that even the perception of an additional barrier to working in aged care can harm engagement of local workforces in remote communities. Word of mouth and employer-referrals are a vital part of the remote employment ecosystem; if the perception spreads that there is no room for discretion for individuals who know their background checks may raise concerns, potential employees are likely to self-select out of the aged care workforce entirely. Discretion sitting with employers allows a trusting relationship to be developed within community and improves provider/community relationships. Discretion sitting with an external entity risks further entrenching mistrust in the system. In remote Australia, removing discretion from community-based entities and moving discretionary decisions to an external national regulator risks eroding trust in the system.

A national registration scheme must have scope to involve local employers on the ground in remote Australia, who know their communities best. Employers are well placed to assist locals with registration and make key decisions around worker suitability and training. This could be achieved by creating a carve out with increased discretion for MMM 6 & 7 communities.



➤ Recommendation 2: Ensure Regulators are Culturally Safe

While a single regulator can create a more efficient system, there is a significant risk that regulators will not have the cultural safety necessary to evaluate aged care services in remote and very remote areas. In 2021, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up 19.6% of people living in remote areas and 47.1% of people living in very remote areas¹. Overall, 1 in 7 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lived in remote and very remote areas².

Remote and very remote aged care services work with and care for a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Regulators evaluating services in remote and very remote areas need to understand how to engage in a culturally safe manner with staff and clients who may be from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Regulators also need to understand that services might look different to typical residential aged care services found in metropolitan areas, but it does not mean that these services are less effective at providing support to the populations they work with.

Having a central, singular regulator is likely to foster equality in how services are regulated.

However, remote aged care services need a regulator that focuses on equity over equality: because remote services need to operate, provide care, and support older people in a diverse range of ways.

Any central regulator must be appropriately trained in remote cultural safety

For a national regulator to operate effectively, it is essential that its staff receive comprehensive training and clear guidelines. Inadequate training risks undermining the integrity of the system, leading to delays, inequities, or a loss of trust in the agency's processes. Well-developed guidelines supported by examples and case studies will ensure staff have the tools to apply standards fairly, transparently, and consistently across a wide range of contexts.

Training should be designed to build awareness of cultural considerations, particularly for services

¹ National Indigenous Australians Agency. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework - Summary report [Internet]. 2021. Available from: <https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/report-overview/overview/summary-report/2-demographic-and-social-context>

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Census of Population and Housing - Counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians [Internet]. 2022. Available from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/census-population-and-housing-counts-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release>



and workers in remote and very remote communities. By embedding cultural competency, knowledge of regulatory frameworks, and practical strategies for assessing complex cases, the agency can ensure its workforce is equipped to respond appropriately to diverse circumstances. **A structured process of review and validation, drawing on expertise from aged care providers, consumer representatives, and Indigenous organisations, will strengthen the quality and relevance of the training materials.** In this way, the agency can establish a robust foundation of skilled staff, underpinned by consistent guidance, to support equitable and safe regulatory outcomes across the sector.