AUSTRALIA NEEDS CARE YOU CAN COUNT ON.

Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation

AGED CARE RATIOS: ONE STANDARD. NO EXCEPTIONS.

The ANMF's ask for safe staffing in every nursing home, every shift.

Australia's nursing homes already have a legislated care minutes standard: 215 minutes of nursing and personal care per resident per day, including 44 minutes from a registered nurse. The problem is not the number, but the way it is delivered.

Care minutes are currently measured as a facility-wide daily average. A home can meet its target on paper while residents go without safe staffing on the shifts that matter most: nights, weekends, and periods of peak demand. A good shift on Tuesday can offset a dangerous one on Saturday. Averages hide the gap. Residents feel it.

THE ASK

Legislate the existing 215-minute care minutes standard, including 44 minutes from a registered nurse, as a mandated staffing ratio of direct care time that applies on every shift, in every nursing home.

No new number. No new cost to Government. The same standard already in law, delivered as a real-time staffing floor, not an average providers can navigate their way around.

The care minutes requirement would be translated into minimum staffing numbers for each shift, based on the residents in the home and their care needs, set out in the Aged Care Rules using the same methodology that already produces the 215-minute target.

Why a ratio, not an average

A ratio is simple: a fixed minimum number of staff for the number of residents actually in the home, on that shift. It cannot be met in theory and missed in practice. It cannot be banked on a quiet Tuesday and spent on an unsafe Saturday. It is either being met right now, or it isn't, and everyone, including residents, families and assessors, can see which.

This is how safe staffing already works in public hospitals around the country, where nurse-to-patient ratios are mandated by law or industrial instrument, shift by shift. Older Australians living in nursing homes deserve the same certainty as those receiving care in hospitals.

WHAT MAKES IT WATERTIGHT

- Applies on every shift, in every home, not as a facility-wide or roster-period average.
- Counts only the registered nurses, enrolled nurses and personal care workers actually rostered and present.
- No averaging across wings, units or the whole facility to mask a short-staffed shift elsewhere.
- Non-compliance is a breach on the day it happens, not something to be explained away in a quarterly report.

CARE TIME ACTUALLY MEANS CARE TIME

- A nurse in charge, clinical manager or coordinator is staffed in addition to the ratio, never counted within it, so supervisory and administrative time cannot be booked as care time to make a roster look compliant on paper.
- Personal care means personal care. A worker assisting a resident to eat counts; delivering meal trays to the dining room doesn't. One-on-one engagement with a resident counts; running the group activities program doesn't.

NO NEW COST. NO NEW DELAY.

This is not a new funding ask and not a new standard. Government has already legislated 215 minutes, including 44 registered nurse minutes, per resident per day. Providers are already funded to deliver it.

The only change is enforcement: turning a standard that can be met on average into one that must be met in fact, on every shift, for every resident.

What this looks like in practice

A 90-bed nursing home currently delivers, on average, 215 minutes of care per resident per day, including 44 registered nurse minutes, across the whole facility and the entire roster period. Translated into a ratio, that same standard sets a minimum number of staff for each shift instead of a facility-wide average. For illustration only, using a typical morning-heavy shift pattern rather than the actual Rules-based methodology, it would look like this:

Morning shift: approximately 16 staff - enrolled nurses (ENs) and personal care workers (PCWs), including 3 registered nurses.

Afternoon shift: approximately 14 staff, ENs and PCWs, including 3 registered nurses.

Night shift: approximately 10 staff, ENs and PCWs, including 2 registered nurses, maintaining round-the-clock registered nurse cover.

The real split would reflect the actual residents and care needs on each shift, and be set out in the Aged Care Rules, not an assumed pattern. A home cannot run short on Saturday night and make up the number on Wednesday. The standard is met on the day, or it is not.

How we get there

1. Government amends the Aged Care Rules 2025 to convert the existing 215-minute, 44 RN-minute care minutes standard into a mandated ratio. No new Act and no new appropriation: the standard is already law and already funded.
2. All parties and crossbenchers commit to passing the amendment this term, with no further review or consultation period. The evidence has already been gathered; the Royal Commission reported in 2021.
3. The ratio takes effect on commencement. Providers are already funded and already staffed to the 215-minute average, so there is no transition required to deliver the same minutes as a floor instead of an average.

Older Australians were promised 215 minutes of care a day. It's time the law made sure they actually receive it: every day, on every shift, in every home.

Authorised by ANMF Federal Secretary, Annie Butler.