

# **Australian Catholic University**

**Online submission to the Australian Government  
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC)**

***Draft National Care and Support Economy Strategy  
2023***

**June 2023**

## ACU response to the *Draft National Care and Support Economy Strategy 2023*

(Submission made online through web portal)

### Vision

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Vision: A sustainable and productive care and support economy that delivers quality care and support with decent jobs				<b>X</b>	

*Please provide an explanation for your rating, or suggest any changes to the vision (100 word limit).*

ACU supports the Strategy’s overall vision.

As a university whose history and identity has been built around educating successive generations of workers in the caring professions, ACU especially acknowledges the Strategy's focus on developing a skilled workforce and looks forward to the opportunity to contribute to the Strategy as it evolves.

In particular, ACU hopes the forthcoming “Priority Workforce Initiatives Action Plan” will provide more detail on workforce development, including support for more and better clinical placements, and incentives for healthcare professionals to supervise more placements.

### Goal 1

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Quality care and support: Person-centred services that recognise care and support recipients as individuals and deliver quality outcomes					<b>X</b>

*Please provide an explanation for your rating, or suggest any changes to Goal 1 (100 word limit)*

ACU strongly supports the goal of providing quality, person-centred care and support, which resonates deeply with our values and mission. ACU firmly believes in the intrinsic worth and dignity of every individual, and we are committed to promoting compassionate care that respects the uniqueness of each person. One way of achieving this is extending mandatory care minutes to other professions besides aged care. ACU’s education programs, research, and community partnerships strive to equip future healthcare and early childhood education and care (ECEC) professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to deliver person-centred care.

*In considering the policy objectives for Goal 1, are there any changes or additions you suggest? (150 word limit)*

The goal of personalised quality care requires an adequate number of suitably qualified care workers. Addressing the shortage of qualified workers must therefore be a top priority.

In Goal 1, the Strategy states that “not only do there need to be enough workers, but those workers need to be suitably skilled”. Objective 1.2 seeks to ensure that Australia has a workforce that “has the right skills and training to deliver quality care and support”. It will be necessary for government to carefully consider measures to achieve this objective and to alleviate existing capacity constraints. Such measures include expanding student placements and providing financial incentives and student scholarships to increase the pipeline of future workers and support their retention in the sectors. Increased support for education, professional development, and partnerships between educational institutions and healthcare and ECEC organisations should also be mentioned.

## **Goal 2**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Decent jobs: Secure, safe jobs with decent wages, conditions and opportunities for career development					X

*Please provide an explanation for your rating, or suggest any changes to Goal 2 (100 word limit)*

ACU strongly agrees that competitive compensation packages, safe working environments and avenues for professional growth can help to address the shortage of skilled healthcare and ECEC professionals. Positive working conditions will attract talent and encourage existing health and ECEC workers to stay and contribute to the sector.

ACU agrees with the Strategy’s observation that there is the potential for workers in the care economy to utilise their skills to move between sectors. Improving working conditions across all these sectors will therefore reduce the risk of workers migrating between the sectors in pursuit of improved conditions.

*In considering the policy objectives for Goal 2, are there any changes or additions you suggest? (150 word limit)*

ACU recommends another policy objective for Goal 2 to create a learning culture that supports new and aspiring health and ECEC workers through sufficient placements. Increasing the number of available placements for students to gain practical experience and enhance their skills is a crucial aspect of a learning culture. Streamlining the placement process and enhancing collaboration between educational institutions and healthcare facilities and ECEC providers, and providing financial support to students during placements, are other aspects of a learning culture. ACU also supports investing in mentorship programs and creating opportunities for continuous professional development in developing a strong learning culture, with additional financial support for workers in rural, region and remote

communities. Finally, increasing levels of compliance reporting and data input in the support and care economy should be reviewed as a contributor to workforce burnout. Innovation is required to achieve both accountability and job satisfaction in the sector.

### Goal 3

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Productive and sustainable: A care and support economy that has functioning markets, sustainable funding and generates productivity gains.			X		

*Please provide an explanation for your rating, or suggest any changes to Goal 3 (100 word limit)*

ACU understands that an efficient and sustainable healthcare and ECEC system is vital, and supports initiatives that promote market reforms, innovative funding models, and productivity improvements. While Goal 3 emphasises the need for efficient resource allocation and financial sustainability, it does not outline specific strategies and mechanisms for achieving these objectives. For example, each objective answers the question, “how will we get there?”, by reference to future work plans. ACU supports the goal in general but takes a neutral stance in the absence of more information on the proposed market reforms, funding models, and productivity improvement measures.

*In considering the policy objectives for Goal 3, are there any changes or additions you suggest? (150 word limit)*

ACU agrees in principle with the five policy objectives that sit under Goal 3, but recommends more detailed information to ensure transparency, accountability, and effective execution in creating a sustainable and productive care and support economy. For example, the current funding systems could support interdisciplinary work more, particularly in allied health where provision of services has increasingly become siloed.

ACU agrees that a broader national conversation is needed about the expectations on government-funded service provision and the relative contribution between governments and individuals where they have the means to contribute. A Productivity Commission review identifying areas of improvement would be a valuable investment to provide greater public awareness.

### The current state

*In your view, what are the current key challenges for the care and support economy? (100 word limit)*

The major challenge is the shortage of skilled professionals and limited opportunities for practical experience. The shortage of qualified health and ECEC workers poses a significant barrier to delivering quality care, demonstrated by the Royal Commission into Aged Care. The growing demand for healthcare and ECEC services requires an expanded, valued, and

qualified workforce, and therefore, the crisis in sourcing enough placements that are crucial in training and preparing future health and ECEC workers, is serious. It will be challenging to match workforce demand with placement supply and increase that supply without burdening existing health and ECEC workforces and facilities.

*In your view, what is currently working well in the care and support economy? (100 word limit)*

What is currently working well is the recognition of the importance of person-centred care and the commitment to addressing health and learning inequities. The promotion of collaboration from various disciplines has also resulted in holistic and integrated care delivery, even though this can always be improved. These positive developments lay a foundation for building a more inclusive and effective care and support economy.

### **Actions to achieve the vision**

*In your view, what is the **first thing** Government(s) should do to achieve the vision of a sustainable and productive care and support economy that delivers quality care and support with decent jobs? (100 word limit)*

Of the various action plans proposed, ACU agrees that the one scheduled to occur first, “Priority Workforce Initiatives: priority actions to improve conditions for care and support economy workers and address workforce shortages”, is the most important and should be completed first. Consideration should also be given to workforce retention initiatives, such as reducing burnout through the reduction of red tape whilst maintaining appropriate accountability.