Because We Care Delivers for Registered and Enrolled nurses and AiN’s in Aged Care

The ANF commenced the Because We Care campaign nearly four years ago, and we have been fighting for Quality Care for Older Australians since. One of the key objectives of the Because We Care campaign was to address the wages for nursing and care staff so that workers in this sector could provide quality care for every resident.

Months after the conclusion of negotiations for an aged care industry Compact between employers and aged care unions (ANF, United Voice and HSU), the Prime Minister and Minister for Aged Care will announce the details on Tuesday.

The ANF Congratulates the Gillard Government

We congratulate the Gillard Government on its commitment to tackling workforce issues in aged care – including the wages gap.

This long awaited action on the problem of low wages in aged care is crucial in an industry which determines the quality of life of over 250,000 older Australians – a number which will rapidly increase in the coming years. Calls for action have been made by several Productivity Commission reports, the last being the Caring for Older Australians Report in 2011, which set the platform for the Gillard Government’s aged care reform package Living Longer. Living Better in April 2012.
The Compact delivers significant increases for workers, remembering that the $1.2 billion over four years spread over almost 200,000 residential aged care workers and 100,000 home and community care workers can never do more than begin to address the problem of low wages. Still, by the end of the Compact in 2016 aged care workers and nursing staff will have received a significant boost to wages of about:

- $29 per week or $1510 a year for personal care workers/AINs
- $35 per week or $1820 a year for enrolled nurses, and
- $46 a week or $2390 a year for registered nurses

These figures are based on average national enterprise agreement rates across the three classifications of $762, $908 and $1203 per week respectively. These higher rates will flow to other allowances and shift and weekend penalties.

The Compact won’t solve the current attraction and retention issues in the industry, especially for Registered and senior Enrolled Nurses – the gap between the new rates and public/private sector acute hospital rates of around $200-$300 per week is just too great.

**The Aged Care Compact is a Good Start**

However, it is a good down payment and we now await the recently established Aged Care Financing Authority to undertake its work on the true cost of care, including what reasonable wage levels should be.

To be eligible to receive the Compact monies through the regular Conditional Adjustment Payments (CAP) each employer of 50 beds or more in residential or any residential or community employer who already has an agreement, must renew or vary their enterprise agreement with their staff and unions to reflect the Compact requirements. Smaller residential providers, or community care providers without EAs, must enter a binding contract with the Department of Health and Ageing.
What’s in the Compact for Aged Care Workers?

We congratulate the Government for ensuring that new or varied enterprise agreement must include provisions that:

• Every aged care worker will receive at least a 1% additional wage increase on top of employer funded increases in each of 2013, 2014 and 2015, and a 0.5% increase in 2016.
• In addition, employers must provide annual employer funded wage increases of at least 2.75% per annum or the Fair Work annual wage review increases whichever is higher.
• Agreement rates for Personal Care Workers/AINs and support staff must be at least 3% above the Aged Care Award 2010 and the agreement rates for Enrolled and Registered Nurses must be at least 8.5% and 12.65% above the Nurses Award 2010 respectively. This can be phased in over three years by those few employers who are currently on the award rates.
• Employers must absorb the on costs as they normally would when wage increases are awarded.
• Are in addition to those in the modern award – such as a workload management clause, a disciplinary clause, an occupational health and safety clause and provisions allowing a casual worker to convert to permanent employment or for a part-time worker to have their hours reviewed to reflect actual hours worked.

The ANF calls on the Opposition to commit to implementing the Compact should they win the federal election in September.

The Compact is a vital first step to improving both the wages and careers of aged care nursing staff and the quality of care for older Australians. These two things go hand in hand. If we are to have enough staff with sufficient skills to look after the rapidly aging population then we must provide professional pay and reasonable conditions.