



**Aged & Community
Services • Australia**



OVERSEAS WORKERS' EMPLOYMENT

ACSA Policy

August 2008

Introduction

The current workforce shortage is one of the main issues confronting the aged and community care industry today, especially in the rural and remote areas of Australia. The shortages cut across all the health professions, including nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, podiatrists, other allied health professionals and personal carers.

Providers are often unable to fill vacancies from within Australia and may decide to recruit overseas workers in order to continue providing the best services possible to their clients and communities in the immediate term.

Aged and Community Care Services and Overseas Workers

The ACSA Federation believes every effort should be made by aged care providers to recruit workers from within Australia before recruiting from overseas.

ACSA agrees with a recent Global Forum on Human Resources for Health, where the Agenda called on all countries to give priority to training and recruiting sufficient health personnel from within their own country and to providing adequate incentives and better working conditions to ensure the retention of health workers.¹

ACSA recognizes that there are some ethical issues associated with Australia attracting staff who have been trained overseas in a developing country where similar shortages exist. However, by providing additional training and experience for temporary workers, both Australia and the country of origin benefit – Australia gains a short term labour supply and the country of origin an aged care worker with additional skills. The country of origin may also benefit from remittance payments made during the workers' time in Australia.

Overseas Workers Employment Issues

In this context, overseas workers are people without Australian citizenship or permanent residency, who are overseas and applying for a temporary Australian visa or are already in Australia on a temporary visa of one form or another.

Where overseas workers are recruited, there are obligations on employing organizations to provide adequate support for all parties:

Salaries

- All overseas workers should be paid at the current market rates of pay as for a local employee. Exceptions to this may arise under certain visa requirements, where a minimum salary level which is higher than the market rate of pay may apply.

¹ WHO, Global Forum on Human Resources for Health News release 2 April 2008

Contracts of Employment

- Proper contracts of employment detailing salary and conditions of employment should be provided to all workers.
- Where accommodation or other services are provided, these should be clearly documented along with the amount and method of payment (if any) to the Provider for supplying the service. Amounts charged for accommodation and other services should be fair and reasonable in line with local market rates and standards.

Induction

- An induction to the workplace is essential for all workers, but overseas recruits will have additional needs. Legal, language and cultural differences may impose added stresses for the worker, co-workers, clients and families. Inductions must be clear and paced accordingly. Issues to be covered should include practical information on the organization, safety, security, anti-discrimination policies and who to go to for assistance. Training on how to use equipment and technology with repeated hands on supervised practice will reduce mishaps and later embarrassment.
- A “buddy” or mentoring system should be set up to assist with the settling-in process.
- Pre-arrival information sessions with existing workers may also be beneficial.

Assistance with settlement

- Recruits from overseas must be treated with respect and dignity. The emotional stress of moving to a foreign country, experiencing the fear of loneliness and isolation, cultural and language difficulties and possibly financial hardships can quickly translate into difficulties in the workplace.
- Providers should investigate the local community resources available to help reduce the emotional and financial costs of the settling-in process and focus the worker on their job.
- Where workers are accompanied by their families, additional support should be provided in the form of assistance in finding suitable accommodation, schooling, shopping, transport, community amenities etc.

Conclusion

Recruiting overseas workers is not a long term solution to labour shortages in the aged care sector, but it can be a useful strategy to meet workforce needs in the short term.