

## Decent Work Good Care

International approaches to aged care



### PROMISING PRACTICES:

#### Home care worker supports - Paid monthly meetings

**This promising practice describes a model for paid monthly meetings for home care workers that recognises their knowledge of individual clients, reduces worker isolation and improves client care.**

#### Background

Home care workers typically work alone and contact with their team leaders and rostering staff is mainly by text, email or phone. While many workers enjoy the autonomy of their role, they can feel isolated and unsupported, particularly when they are concerned about a deterioration in a client's health or well-being. Although they are usually part of a team supporting a client, face-to-face contact with other workers is infrequent.

In Australia under individualised funding models, government funding beyond that allocated to direct services for clients is limited. Home care providers report that team meetings with home care workers are increasingly difficult to organise due to worker shortages, the increased fluctuations in demand for services under consumer directed care (CDC) and the lack of funding for these meetings. Where homecare worker meetings do occur, they tend to be large, infrequent and on unpaid time. Discussion of individual clients may also be prohibited to protect client confidentiality. This team meeting model diminishes the value for workers, and in turn, client care may suffer.

In all four countries in our study aged care policy is now strongly focused on supporting older people remaining in their own homes for longer. This means that growing numbers of older people are living at home, often alone, with increasingly complex health conditions, including dementia. Home care workers can be a client's main or only consistent visitor. Therefore ensuring workers are supported, including by meeting on a regular basis, is critical to helping frail older people maintain their independence.

#### Regular team meetings in paid time

One New Zealand home care provider views regular home care workers' meetings as an essential investment to improve client care. Home care workers are part of the multidisciplinary team supporting the client to achieve outcomes, and their input into how the client is progressing is essential to good outcomes. Team leaders hold monthly meetings for home care workers caring for clients in the same geographical area. Workers are paid for their time and travel costs to attend the meetings. The one-hour structured meetings are held in a local office/venue so home care workers have regular face-to-face contact with others working with the same group of clients, as well as team leaders, rostering staff, managers and support staff. This helps reduce workers' sense of isolation, provides them with support and helps them feel connected to their organisation.

These meetings are based on two-way information sharing, problem-solving and discussion. Workers can flag non-urgent client issues, request client reviews, and raise health and safety issues with team leaders. As examples, a client may be declining regular showers so the team might discuss strategies to address this situation. Another client may be growing noticeably less steady on their feet, so a worker might request more time for personal care or a client review. A worker might also ask the team leader or service coordinator to speak to a client's family about an issue.

These meetings have multiple benefits. Team leaders and home care workers can agree on a consistent approach with deteriorating or challenging clients. They also provide on-the-job development, offering an opportunity for team leaders and more experienced workers to share strategies with newer workers or workers unfamiliar with a particular client. These meetings also provide a forum for team leaders to brief workers on new referrals and provide updates on any clients being admitted to or discharged from hospital.

This regular face-to-face contact fosters strong connections between the home care workers and team leaders, which the leadership team sees as fundamental to supporting good quality care. They see this investment pays off in terms of better understanding each client's situation, which leads to better client care and assessment.

#### **Key features**

- Meetings are led by a team leader who is a registered health professional
- Meetings are monthly, small and held in a local office or venue
- Home care workers are paid for their time and mileage to attend meetings
- Home care workers raise concerns about clients, work organisation or broader issues

#### **Benefits**

- Helps ensure consistency of care by and between support workers
- Enables discussion on clients' progress towards their goals and any concerns
- Enables staff to learn and share strategies and jointly problem-solve
- Fosters relationships between home care workers and team leaders
- Provides an opportunity for face-to-face contact with rostering staff
- Keeps workers up-to-date on organisational changes, new policies and staff changes
- Promotes camaraderie, teamwork and connection to their employer

#### **Implementation challenges**

- Little external funding to support paid meetings
- Challenging for the rostering team to find a time all support workers can attend
- Not all home care workers attend support meetings on a regular basis
- Monthly meetings mean support workers on leave may have weeks between meetings