



Pre-pandemic burnout prevalence

STAFF BURNOUT

This evidence theme on the pre-pandemic prevalence of staff burnout in aged care is a summary of one of the key topics identified by a scoping review of staff burnout research.

Key points

- Prevalence of burnout in aged care refers to the proportion or percentage of aged care workers experiencing symptoms of burnout.
- Understanding prevalence of burnout allows informed decision-making, resource allocation, and targeted interventions to support the wellbeing of the aged care workforce.
- The review findings indicated rates of between 30-50% of burnout among aged care workers before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Aged care managers had high levels of self-efficacy; however, they reported high levels of emotional exhaustion and cynicism, which puts them at risk of burnout.

Why is understanding the pre-pandemic prevalence of staff burnout important?

The prevalence of staff burnout is a key measure that helps us assess the extent of burnout within the Australian aged care workforce. [1] It provides valuable insights into the number of individuals affected by burnout and is important for informed decision-making by health authorities. [1] High job demands, driven by an increasing aged care client population and the complexity of their needs, contribute significantly to the prevalence of burnout among aged care workers. [2] Understanding the prevalence of burnout among aged care staff is important for fostering a healthier and more resilient workforce. [1] Regular monitoring of prevalence over time allows for the identification of trends, which facilitate proactive interventions and the timely allocation of resources. [1, 3] Health authorities are encouraged to use prevalence data to inform policies, allocate resources efficiently, and implement proactive measures to support the wellbeing of aged care workers. [1, 3]

What do we know about the pre-pandemic prevalence of staff burnout in aged care?

The 2022 scoping review found two studies on burnout prevalence among aged care workers. [4, 5] In the 2023 updated search for 2023, two additional studies have contributed to our understanding of burnout prevalence among aged care workers. [6, 7] The review findings reported varying rates of staff burnout across the aged care sector prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. These range from moderate to high levels of burnout in aged care settings with approximately 30–50% of aged care staff reportedly being affected. [4, 5] In one other study, burnout was measured as individual scales of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy. [6] The most frequent profile (43.2%) for aged care workers included low levels of exhaustion, cynicism, and high levels of professional efficacy. [6]

A separate investigation into aged care managers found high levels of self-efficacy, which demonstrates a sense of control over their environment and behaviour. [7] However, it also identified elevated levels of emotional exhaustion and cynicism, which puts them at risk of developing burnout. [7]

What can an individual do?

- Foster self-awareness among aged care workers to recognise signs of stress and burnout.
- Develop and employ effective coping strategies, such as mindfulness, time management, and seeking social support.
- Prioritise self-care activities and maintain a healthy work-life balance to sustain long-term wellbeing in a demanding work environment.

What can an organisation do?

- Develop and implement support programs that focus on the mental health and well-being of staff members.
- Establish open channels of communication for staff to express concerns and provide feedback.
- Conduct regular check-ins and performance reviews to address any issues promptly and collaboratively.
- Provide incentives to staff members (i.e. provide additional time during break) can motivate employees and make them feel appreciated.

References

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