

PRESS RELEASE
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Visa reforms to benefit older Kiwis in care

Reforms to employer-assisted temporary visas will enhance outcomes for older New Zealanders in aged residential care, says the New Zealand Aged Care Association (NZACA).

Simon Wallace, Chief Executive of the NZACA says the changes announced today by Immigration Minister Iain Lees-Galloway indicate that government has largely listened to the concerns of the sector.

“In aged care, migrant workers make an incredible and increasingly vital contribution to the health and well-being of New Zealand’s older and more vulnerable citizens who live in the country’s 669 rest homes,” says Mr Wallace.

“We have lobbied hard for policies that help aged care providers recruit and retain this valued workforce and provide the all-important continuity of care for residents. The changes are a strong acknowledgement of the significant supply issues faced by not only our industry, but also others that rely on migrant labour to fill the gaps in the local labour supply.”

Moving to an employer-assisted process will be a step change for all businesses, says Mr Wallace. As long as the system is responsive and user friendly it should improve the current onerous processing of visas.

“The NZACA welcomes being one of first two cabs off the rank to negotiate a sector agreement and will quickly be assembling a group of industry representatives to inform this process.”

The sector also welcomes the shift from using the outdated Australia and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations system (ANZSCO) as a proxy for determining skill to a \$25 per hour income threshold.

“We have lobbied long and hard for this welcome change. Not only will it provide greater certainty but will incentivise employers to invest in upskilling and training staff to higher levels.”

Mr Wallace says while the sector applauds this shift, the system still leaves lower income threshold workers under the existing three-year stand-down system implemented by the previous government.

“Effectively this means New Zealand is still serving as a training ground for the world for these workers, investing in upskilling workers who are sent home after three years for a one year stand down and most likely taking their new skills to other countries.

“Through the negotiation of the sector agreement we will demonstrate the real value in investing in these workers on the lower income thresholds.”

Another positive change is introducing regional skills shortage lists (RSS) so that migrants work where there is a genuine shortage, delivering the flexibility needed and greater certainty for employers.

“However, there are still aged care workforce shortages in the bigger cities, and this is another area we will be looking to discuss with government as part of the sector agreement process.”

Mr Wallace says the decision by Minister Lees-Galloway to bring back family visas shows this Government is kind in acknowledging the importance of partners and children supporting the primary visa holder.

“The increase in threshold for the work to residence visa category is not so welcome, but at least the Government has grand-parented those migrants already on this pathway.”

Aged care nurses who were placed on the long-term skills shortage list in May this year will not be affected by these announcements.

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