

AM2020/99 - Application to vary the Aged Care Award 2010

AM2021/65 - Application to vary the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010

Dear Associate to the Honourable President Ross,

Evergreen Life Care is a single-site not-for-profit aged care provider in West Gosford on the Central Coast of New South Wales. We have a residential aged care facility where we provide high care services to 96 residents; as well as a retirement village with 147 units where we provide varying levels of home support.

To care for our residents, we have 135 staff who work as carers, nurses, housekeeping, kitchen, leisure & lifestyle, and customer care, as well as in administration and leadership. Our staff are highly skilled individuals who care deeply for our residents and provide them with the care and support they need to live their lives with enjoyment and dignity.

We are currently finalising a new Enterprise Agreement which will be going to the Fair Work Commission shortly. In this Enterprise Agreement, we are proposing a 2.5% annual pay increase. For FY23, this will increase a carer's hourly rate from \$25.30 to \$25.93 and a Registered Nurse's rate from \$44.10 to \$45.20. The majority of our staff are permanent part-time, with carers working on average 28 hours per week and RNs at 33 hrs per week. This means that a carer will take home \$640 per week, and a Registered Nurse \$1,160 per week.

This wage is by no means a fair reflection of the work our staff do, however due to limitations with the way aged care is funded, this is the maximum that Evergreen is able to afford. We believe that the aged care award, nurses award and SCHADS award should be increased in line with the HSU's recommendations and that the government should provide an equivalent increase funding to aged care providers to cover the associated increase in wages. Our reasons for supporting this increase are as follows:

Increased care needs for residents

The current funding model (ACFI) drives providers to admit residents with high care needs as this brings in greater income. Whilst traditionally a residential aged care facility would have a blend of low, medium, and high care residents, the focus now is much more on high care residents and those living with dementia. To demonstrate this, the average ACFI at Evergreen has increased from \$170-\$180 to \$195. These high care needs bring an increased workload and stress for staff; however wages have not lifted in line with these additional pressures.

Increased skill requirements

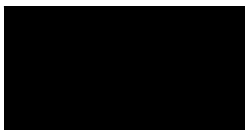
The increased level and complexity of residents, particularly those living with dementia, means that our staff are required to have a higher skill level to effectively perform their roles and ensure Evergreen is not only meeting the standard of care required under the Quality Standards, but is achieving resident expectations. Evergreen has 15 dementia-specific beds, though over 70% of its residents are living with some level of cognitive decline, with staff required to manage the associated behaviours. These additional skill requirements are not reflected in their pay, which is lower than significantly less skilled and demanding roles in other sectors, such as retail.

Staff shortages

Finding quality staff to fill shifts in aged care is an increasing challenge that the covid pandemic has exacerbated. At Evergreen in January, 3 out of 21 shifts were staffed at lower levels than the preferred roster as it was not possible to find any permanent, casual or agency staff to fill those shifts. Staff are moving to the acute sector or out of the sector completely due to the higher wages on offer and because they are less likely to need to deal with challenging dementia-related behaviours. If they choose to work in aged care, they often look to increase their weekly pay by working multiple jobs across multiple locations, increasing issues around infection control. An increase in the award rates would help address these issues.

Our team provide a happy environment where seniors receive great care and are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect. They do this despite the low wages and increasing demands of the job. We strongly believe that they should receive a fair wage that reflects the difficulty, complexity and pressure that comes with working in aged care; and that this wage increase should be fully covered by the government.

Regards,



Kate Morton

CEO, Evergreen Life Care