



**Australian Government**

**Department of Health**

# **Transcript of Pacific Labour Scheme webinar**

15 December 2021



# Pacific Labour Scheme webinar

The [webinar recording](#) and [presentation slides](#) are also available.

## Transcript

[Opening visual of slide with text saying 'Ageing and Aged Care', 'Australian Government with Crest (logo)', 'Department of Health', 'Pacific Labour Scheme', 'Emma Gleeson, Assistant Secretary', 'Aged Care Workforce Branch, Department of Health', 'Wednesday 15 December 2021', 'health.gov.au/aged-care-reforms']

[The visuals during this webinar are of each speaker presenting in turn via video with reference to a PowerPoint presentation being played on screen, with Ramas McRae the Auslan interpreter signing to the right of screen]

### **Emma Gleeson:**

Thank you all for attending today's webinar on the Pacific Labour Scheme. My name is Emma Gleeson. I'm the Assistant Secretary of the Aged Care Workforce Branch at the Department of Health.

Before we begin today, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet today and pay our respects to Elders past and present. I would also like to extend that respect to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people on the call with us today.

In terms of housekeeping there will be a series of presentations followed by around 30 minutes of Q&A. You are welcome to take the opportunity to post questions throughout the session via the question submission box on your screen. Thank you to those people who have already sent through questions in advance. Note there is no option for attendees to turn on their video or microphone during the session. For your convenience the session will be recorded and uploaded on to the Department of Health website. PowerPoint presentations will also be uploaded.

So today we've got a number of presenters from a variety of Government agencies. We'll be hearing from Michelle from the Department of Home Affairs, Anna from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, we've also got Alison from the Pacific Labour Facility and finally Elizabeth from Bolton Clarke who will provide an employer's perspective of the Pacific Labour Scheme.

The main purpose of the webinar is to introduce you to the Pacific Labour Scheme which can help rural and remote providers struggling to fill vacancies with local Australians to access Pacific and Timorese aged care workers. However, before I begin I'm going to take you briefly through a small number of aged care workforce measures available to assist providers to help grow a skilled aged care workforce.

Just a bit of context before we launch in also is I just want to just remind everyone who may not be familiar with all the Budget announcements that have been occurring. Back in the Budget there was a \$17.7 billion aged care reform package focused around five pillars. Those pillars are home care, residential aged care services and sustainability, residential aged care quality and safety, workforce and governance. Our focus today is on the workforce pillar of reform which is designed to support the growth, training and upskilling of the aged care workforce.

Some of the key elements of this response are up on your screen. We've got a \$91.8 million investment to grow the home care workforce with an aim of attracting around 18,000 additional personal care workers. This will include a dedicated program to attract 13,000 of these workers with grant opportunities currently being progressed for announcement.

We've also got \$135.6 million to provide financial support to registered nurses working for the same employer over a 12 month period, \$49.4 million in increased funding towards training to improve workers' knowledge and practice in dementia and palliative care, an additional 33,800 training places for personal care workers to attain aged care qualifications.

So as part of these reforms there is a smaller measure that I want to draw your attention to that is open and available for aged care providers now and that is the Workforce Advisory Service. This service can provide providers with free, independent and confidential business advice. This service can also support providers to develop local strategies to recruit, retain and grow the skills of workers and develop coordinated approaches to workforce skills and training. This could include utilising the scheme that we'll be talking about today. This service is provided by PricewaterhouseCoopers and you can access it by following the link that we've provided as part of the slides. [<https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/workforce-advisory-service>]

Another key measure that could help your organisation attract workers is our Registered Nurse (RN) payment program that I mentioned briefly earlier. This is similar to the aged care retention bonus that was rolled out during the first year of the COVID pandemic. For RNs working for the same aged care provider over a 12 month period they will be eligible for a payment of \$3,700 for full time employees per year and part time and casual registered nurses will receive payment on a pro rata basis. There will also be additional payments of up to \$2,300 per year for those working in rural and remote areas or holding a relevant postgraduate qualification or who take on additional training responsibilities.

And also, I just want to mention the Rural Local Assistance Program which will be relevant to many of you on the call today. So that's \$25.1 million over three years. This expansion will assist aged care providers affected by high staff turnover or sudden departures of key personnel in rural and regional areas by providing access to a temporary surge workforce while they recruit. An incentive scheme for permanent placements in regional and remote areas will also increase staff retention. It is expected that the first locum placements under the expanded program will occur in early 2022. For more information again we've put the link on the screen and so you can visit that website or you can also follow up directly through our inbox which we've got the details of later in the presentation. [<https://www.rurallap.com.au>]

Now I would like to hand over to Michelle.

[Slide with text saying 'Michelle Tuchin', 'VIC/TAS Business, Industry and Regional Outreach Officer', 'Skills Visa Branch, Department of Home Affairs']

**Michelle Tuchin:**

Good afternoon everyone and thank you very much for allowing me to join in this presentation. Firstly, I'll start off by introducing myself. I work for the Department of Home Affairs and I'm a Business, Industry and Regional Outreach Officer. On the line is Sue Michail who's also a Business, Industry and Regional Outreach Officer (BIRO) for the Department. These roles were put into place to basically promote the Skilled Migration Program throughout the country and also liaise with businesses and industry and regional areas. So some of you may be familiar with the old Regional Outreach officer role and that was just purely focused on the regions of Australia. Now our role covers both regional and metro areas. We are Australia wide. So we have BIROs based in Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne and Perth and Sydney, and some of those BIROs look after a couple of states. For example, we are responsible for Victoria and Tasmania.

So basically our aim is to engage with businesses and also industry and find out what the skills shortages are that are affecting I guess your workforce. And that can be through a number of methods. So it can be conducting information sessions, just receiving detailed emails and then doing more sort of formal events like this one or attending bigger functions and sussing out what's happening in your particular area.

We're not migration agents so we can't provide specific advice on visa applications or give you advice in terms of what pathway to take for the migration program. But we can provide you with guidance and support. So obviously as many of you would know we have multiple visa options and it can be quite overwhelming when you look at our website. So that's what Sue and myself are here to do from the Victoria/Tasmania perspective.

We do have a very big interest in the COVID-19 recovery piece and we will definitely be focusing on that in the future and reaching out to businesses to assist you with getting appropriate

workforce in place where Australian workers are not available. And we've seen that recently and throughout the year with the mass shortages that are happening in various industries.

In terms of industry sectors recently the Business Industry and Regional Outreach Officers were provided with industry specific focuses and this is where we come into place in today's meeting. So the Vic and Tas team were allocated the medical and allied health sector as a focus. So we're meeting with different businesses, industry groups to hear about the shortages in the various healthcare sectors.

In terms of the Skilled Migration Program I obviously can't go into all the details on the visas today because it's a very short introduction but there are options and I would encourage people to look on the website if they want to explore the Skilled Visa Pathway Program. Now we also have something called Labour Agreements and Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMA) and for some of you, you may not have heard about that and that's fine but I know within your sector there has definitely been talks about Labour Agreements for businesses and that's definitely something that our team can talk about as well. The benefit of having people like myself and Sue as your contacts is that once we sort of establish a relationship and find out what your needs are we can then point you in the right direction. And that includes for the Labour Agreements and the DAMA team. So we have a specific Labour Agreement team who can actually provide you more guidance if that was something that you were interested in.

In terms of the post-COVID landscape as most of you would know the borders are opening today which is a huge relief for many and hopefully they stay open. So that's exciting. So basically the biggest news from that is that I guess fully vaccinated international students and skilled visa holders will be able to travel into Australia without having to apply for a travel exemption and that will help many businesses who are struggling for staff. They still will be required to meet quarantine requirements but obviously quarantine is a state by state basis and that would have to be something that gets looked at by the individuals coming into the country and the quarantine requirements. But it is a big positive moving forward so that's something to keep in mind.

One of the main things as well that I wanted to turn your attention to today and which will be relevant for your planning into the new year is that our team so the Vic/Tas Business, Industry and Regional Outreach Officers along with our Labour Agreement section and the Department of Health and the Aged Care Workforce Industry Council will be looking at doing a webinar that's specific to your sector early in the new year and we will go into more details about relevant visa options and labour agreements. So that will be something that we'll probably put together for January. So I encourage all of you that are on the call today to keep an eye out for some communications that will come out in the new year around that and then register if that's something that's of interest for you.

The contact details including our contact details and some relevant website links will be available and if you've got specific questions relating to the webinar or just want to say that you're interested in attending you can contact the Aged Care Workforce Reform email that will be provided at the end of the session. [[AgedCareWorkforceReform@Health.gov.au](mailto:AgedCareWorkforceReform@Health.gov.au)]

So thank you all. I know it was a very brief introduction but you know we exist and we are here to help and help fill those skill shortages. So thank you very much and I'll hand back to Emma.

**Emma Gleeson:**

Thanks Michelle. And now I'd like to hand over to Anna.

[Slide with text saying 'Anna McNicol', 'Director, Pacific Labour Policy & Programming', 'Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade']

**Anna McNicol:**

Many thanks Emma. Lovely to join everybody today. And I just want to say a particular thanks to the Department of Health for hosting this webinar today and bringing us all together. It's really great for us to be able to use our connections with our whole of Government colleagues to promote the work that DFAT's doing for the PALM Scheme which we'll run you through in a

minute. But also thanks Michelle as well for your comments there as well. I think there's a range of options for employers in Australia and it's good to sort of lay them all out.

So my name is Anna McNicol. I work for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I'm the Director of Pacific Labour Policy and Programming in our Department. Shortly I'll be handing over to Alison Boundy who's from our implementing partner, the Pacific Labour Facility, and she'll discuss all things PALM Scheme and how to access the scheme to fill your workplace shortages with Pacific and Timorese care workers.

Firstly, just a quick note about our labour mobility programs that we run through DFAT and also Department of Employment at the moment. So some of you may be familiar with the existing Pacific Labour Scheme which is the way you can actually access long term workers and also the Seasonal Worker Program which is managed by Department of Employment. These programs allow eligible Australian businesses to employ workers from nine Pacific countries and Timor-Leste when there are not enough local workers available in unskilled, low skilled and semi-skilled roles and it can be up to nine months under the Seasonal Worker Program or for a period of between one to three years for the Pacific Labour Scheme. For the aged care sector workers can generally be recruited to work across Australia except in Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong, Melbourne and Perth metropolitan areas.

So the Australian Government recently announced that from the 4th of April 2022 the two programs will be consolidated and renamed as the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme, the PALM Scheme, and it will be all managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. However, in the meantime the Seasonal Worker Program and Pacific Labour Scheme will continue to operate under current program settings. The PALM Scheme, the new scheme, responds to stakeholder calls for a consolidated, improved and more efficient Pacific Labour Program to increase the benefits for workers, employers and participating countries. In addition to streamlining and strengthening Pacific labour the consolidated program will build on the Australian Government's commitment to working with our Pacific neighbours to increase the number of workers in Australia to 25,000 by March 2022.

So a key part of our work is identifying opportunities across Australian sectors to fill workforce shortages across regional and remote Australia. And just to deviate from my prepared remarks I note that right now aged care workers are working in Australia under the PALM Scheme. In fact nine are due to fly in to Australia today from Fiji, the first group we've had in Fiji because of those border openings that Michelle mentioned before with the change in border settings. So all of our countries are now able to send labour through to Australia which is fantastic. So we're hoping that the PALM Scheme is an attractive opportunity for you and your businesses. Many thanks for coming and attending today and we look forward to your thoughts and reflections after Alison's had a chance to provide her information. Thank you so much Emma.

**Emma Gleeson:**

Thanks Anna. And now for the key presentation of today I hand over to Alison Boundy.

[Slide with text saying 'Alison Boundy', 'Industry Engagement Manager, Aged Care and Social Sector', 'Pacific Labour Facility']

**Alison Boundy:**

Hi everyone and good afternoon. Welcome from a very sunny Brisbane and our head office here in Queensland.

My name is Alison Boundy and I'm the Industry Engagement Manager, Aged Care and Social Sector at the Pacific Labour Facility. Today I'm going to give you a brief employer's overview of the PALM Scheme. And prior to joining the Pacific Labour Facility in early 2019 I brought the scheme in to an aged care provider that I worked for at the time. We were the first provider to undertake in country recruitment and I had the honour of travelling to Kiribati in late 2018 to recruit workers for our most remote location. So I do have a little bit of experience in this scheme.

[Slide with text saying 'PALM', 'Pacific Australia Labour Mobility', 'PALM Scheme', 'Providing reliable workers to fill labour gaps in Australia', 'Alison Boundy', 'Industry Engagement Manager –

Aged Care and Social Sector, Pacific Labour Facility', 'Australian Government with Crest (logo)', 'Australian Aid']

I might just move to the next slide.

[Slide with text saying 'PALM', 'Pacific Australia Labour Mobility']

Thank you Michelle. As Anna said PALM is the new joined up name covering both short term and long term roles in Pacific Australia Labour Mobility. It is an employer sponsored program open to all industries in regional and rural Australia. It offers employers access to a reliable workforce when there is not enough local Australian labour to meet demand and we test the market to make sure that that occurs. In aged care and disability our focus is on longer term roles.

So who's the Pacific Labour Facility. Well the PLS or the Pacific Labour Scheme has been the name of the program connecting Australian employers to low and semi-skilled workers from nine Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste. As mentioned the name has recently changed to PALM but I will still refer to current workers under the name PLS because that's the visa that they're currently employed on. So forgive me. I just will have to keep doing it for a minute.

On the screen are some workers that I actually recruited from Kiribati so I've got some personal photos throughout this presentation.

As Anna mentioned the Pacific Labour Facility is contracted to administer and implement the scheme on behalf of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Through the PLF approved employers have been supported to source qualified workers from the Pacific into semi-skilled roles in aged care and disability. Currently we have no workers from Timor-Leste.

The key industries for the whole of the PLF have covered hospitality, aged care, tourism, maintenance and trades, fisheries, agriculture, horticulture, meat processing and forestry. So wherever you are in Australia if you know someone else that needs some solutions to their workforce shortages we can cover those industries too.

I'll give you a brief snapshot as of last Friday for the PLS. The total number of workers currently in the country is 5,361. We have 13 aged care and disability approved employers. We have 149 aged care and disability workers. The gender split is 115 women to 34 men. Aged care workers are currently employed in the Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales, with the ACT getting its first workers early in the new year.

So the suitable roles that we focused on in aged care are personal care workers, hospitality, cleaning and laundry workers, allied health assistants and maintenance and groundskeepers. But we do also have the potential to source allied health assistants and maintenance grounds people even though we have yet to employ any of those. I just also wanted to point out reception is another area that a number of our approved employers have asked about sourcing workers in and that's another one we can definitely assist with.

So what are the business benefits for getting involved? I'm just going to go through these. This is probably my main slide and here's one of our workers in the Southern Highlands in New South Wales. The first of these is the minimisation of recruitment costs. Our approved employers or AEs as we like to say report that they have significantly reduced or in some cases completely stopped recruiting vacant roles since taking on PLS workers. Real savings have been made from ceasing advertising on multiple recruitment sites. These savings have been redirected into other parts of the business. Reliance on high cost agency staff has also been dramatically reduced and at some sites the use of agency staff has completely stopped. Most recruitment and pre-employment activities currently used by our AEs has been incorporated into in country recruitment so there's been no need to create new processes to recruit workers.

Secondly staff turnover has been contained. A reduction in staff turnover has had a positive impact on team performance and staff morale. This ability of long term staff promotes a nurturing environment and peace of mind for aged care residents and their families. Instead of employing two or three casuals, one PLS worker can be employed for a minimum of 30 hours per week across roles allowing for greater flexibility with rosters. HR staff, payroll, learning and

development teams and on site supervisors have no longer been required to repeatedly spend time inducting and training as many new staff.

Thirdly approved employers have found qualified engaged workers. Our work ready pools include candidates with qualifications relevant to the aged care sector including individual support, community services, disability support, hospitality and catering. This includes successful completion of work placements. Qualifications to the most part are AQF [Australian Qualifications Framework] standard and training has been primarily delivered by the Australian Pacific Training Coalition an Australian Government funded vocational education institution operating across the Pacific or their allied TVET institutions. Our AEs report that they find their workers engaged, motivated and keen to learn. They have successfully settled into their new communities and engage with local life. Workers undertake health screening in country as a visa prerequisite and workers must have health insurance while they're in Australia. They receive COVID vaccinations prior to leaving.

Finally and the fourth benefit, the one I feel most particularly proud of as being someone who's had both of my parents in high care in a wonderful residential facility, is the increase in consistency of care. As you all appreciate consistency of care is fundamental to effective service provision. This is one of the most significant outcomes for our AEs. Residents are enjoying the benefits of this improvement where genuine relationships have time to develop and grow. Caring for elders in a respectful and meaningful way is part and parcel of the fabric of Pacific communities and workers demonstrate this daily in the way they connect with residents and colleagues. Critically workers are proud to work in aged care and feel honoured to be representing their families and their countries.

So now just a brief outline of the approved employer process. Further information can be found on our website at [www.palmscheme.gov.au](http://www.palmscheme.gov.au).

So there are five key steps to becoming an approved employer. The first one involves preparation, understanding the scheme's requirements for employers and your obligations. This includes understanding the accommodation and welfare components of the scheme. It includes gathering key information including financial information, workforce data and how you will support workers in the new community they'll be living in. If you've had previous experience with Pacific workers or have previously sponsored workers through other visas it will be great for you tell us about that in your application. You complete the application form online including detailing any previous interactions with the Fair Work Commission, Home Affairs or any issues of non-compliance or sanctions.

We assess your financial situation, your reputation and your overall business to ensure that you have the capacity to meet the requirements of the scheme. This also can include site visits to locations where workers will be recruited for which is considered a critical step in the worker safeguarding elements of the program. The PLF makes a recommendation to DFAT for their approval. If provisionally approved employers must gain temporary activity sponsorship through Home Affairs, you're then offered a Deed of Agreement with the Commonwealth of Australia which allows you to recruit workers.

Once you have an executed deed you commence labour market testing and recruitment planning process. Depending on where you are in Australia this may currently involve state approvals to access quarantine. But let's just say this is changing very regularly at the moment so I'm not going to focus too much on that part. Labour market testing though must show that no Australians were available to fill your roles. This is also a critical element of the Australia First policy. Recruitment proposals and plans cover the country and roles you're recruiting for and how mobilisation will work. The PLF supports employers to learn this process.

Now this slide looks super busy but I'm not going to cover it all. You can read it at your leisure. I'll cover a couple of key points here though. There are no costs to apply or join the scheme. There's no cost for site visits to any of your facilities. To become a temporary activity sponsor with Home Affairs is a one off cost of \$420. AEs are required to pay the upfront cost of worker mobilisation including the international flight and visa costs but you are legally allowed to deduct these costs from workers' wages over a minimum period of 12 weeks. You are required to organise health

insurance and accommodation but these are also allowable ongoing deductions. Accommodation must be legal, safe and appropriate in cost, proximity to the workplace and the weather for your location.

AEs also need to factor in reasonable costs for mobile phones and any additional clothing required outside your normal uniforms such as closed in shoes which we'll hear about a little later. These are all allowable deductions. AEs cannot pass on the cost of quarantine. And for some countries where commercial flights are still limited you can only charge a flat price for the international ticket. This is just to even out the playing field. We encourage you to use the most effective, domestic travel to your work site and the most common way that workers would travel back and forth to your locations themselves so they become familiar with how to do it.

The main reason people participate in this scheme is to support their families and the bulk of worker income will be returned to those families and to communities at home. On average aged care workers have been sending about 40% of their earnings home so keeping the cost of living low and deductions reasonable is critical. AEs are monitored as part of assurance activities to make sure this is occurring.

I'm now just going to briefly touch on the role of Labour Sending Units who are our key partners in making this scheme work.

Each country has their own processes and systems for managing recruitment and mobilisation. And I can't wait to see the Auslan interpreter do this. The participating countries are Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Well done. We currently do not have any aged care workers from Timor-Leste as I mentioned but that reflects a lack of training opportunities currently in that country. They're very keen to get involved though. We have PLF staff, engagement managers and coordinators currently based in all countries except Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu due to current COVID travel restrictions.

The Labour Sending Units are our key partners. It's important to note that sending countries have signed up to circular labour mobility with Australia through implementation arrangements. As sovereign nations our partner countries have their own ways of working. LSUs are responsible for recruitment and preparation of workers through the work ready pool, registration, interviews, fitness tests, pre-departure briefing and team leader training. Engagement with key in country stakeholders on priorities include training in TVET providers, panel doctors, immigration and police. Organising reintegration activity support workers when they return to country is also key.

Recruitment and mobilisation doesn't happen without the LSU. They have many stakeholders in the labour mobility ecosystem and they rely heavily on others to support us in this program. We currently work on a ten week timeframe, five weeks for recruitment activities and a minimum of five weeks for LSUs to support workers to gather the relevant documentation and to attend pre-departure briefings and get their visas. LSUs help manage worker expectations on a number of topics which are really, really important including accommodation, deductions, payslips, hours of work, health insurance.

COVID-19 has had major impacts on budgets in the Pacific where Governments have had to put more resources into COVID-19 response measures. PLF through DFAT is providing surge support but approved employers must understand that they work under very different conditions to what we do here and they do an astounding job doing it. LSUs also work with families to ensure that they are supported too as participating in labour mobility is a family and sometimes village decision.

I'm not going to read this one. It's for looking at later. But just to highlight the steps to take on the path to get to Australia. This is a handout in this case provided by the Solomon Islands LSU to potential workers so that they can understand the process.

So in country recruitment follows a number of the key steps that I just mentioned. Registration, entry into the work ready pool, police checks, interviews, fitness tests, a job offer and a visa and pre-departure training.



Worker recruitment and mobilisation pre-COVID was quite different to what we've been doing now but we have brought thousands of workers in since restart which has been really amazing. Currently recruitment is occurring via video link but when it is possible again we highly encourage in country recruitment as this will really help your organisation to develop close people to people links with the country your workers come from. Once you've interviewed and chosen your candidates workers sign a letter of offer outlining their contract of employment. This details their conditions of employment, deductions and mobilisations.

Approved employers apply for visas or you may choose to use a migration agent. You can't pass on the cost of using an agent to your workers.

Worker welfare is a really key part of PALM and it takes a community of care approach. So this is just a couple of final slides. This one's a really critical element of the scheme. We're here to help you learn how to get the best out of your workers and worker wellbeing is a shared responsibility. Our worker welfare team offers a range of supports and tools that you can add to your own induction and training processes including setting the scene to help settled workers become productive workers faster, accessing local services, churches and sport, healthy relationships here and at home, advice on driving, alcohol and substances in Australia, appropriate communication in the workplace, and understanding shared cultural norms. We also work really hard in helping our employers and workers to develop cultural competencies together. And our worker welfare team can help you access a number of other available resources in the communities where your workers are.

In conclusion I wanted to say that apart from the enormous contribution remittances make to workers' families and communities there's an important net skill gain for workers and Pacific nations in working in aged care settings in Australia. Pacific populations are experiencing similar acute and chronic conditions as more people live longer. At the same time there's been an increase over time in the consumption of refined and/or highly processed food which is impacting individuals as they age as we have also seen here.

So while residential care facilities are extremely rare in the Pacific delivering care for those with complex healthcare needs is not. The settings might be different but the impact of further technical skill development is enormous. Just to name a few on the list this includes critical areas such as dementia care, stroke management, chronic heart conditions, diabetes and amputation management and palliative care. But a quality care mindset is also hugely beneficial for healthcare delivery in Pacific nations so workers taking home more highly developed skills in the facilitation of dignity and choice, person centred care, reablement, zero tolerance of elder abuse, the family's role in care and highly developed observation skills are key outcomes for this scheme.

Thank you for listening and hopefully there will be some questions. Thanks so much Emma.

[Slide with text saying 'PALM', 'Pacific Australia Labour Mobility', 'Alison Boundy', '042 933 8112', 'alison.boundy@pacificlabourfacility.com.au', 'www.palmscheme.gov.au']

**Emma Gleeson:**

Thanks Alison. And just a reminder you can post the questions in the Q&A box. There's one that went into the chat but we're moving that over into the Q&A so we won't miss out on that one. So next we have Elizabeth from Bolton Clarke who will give a bit of an employer's perspective on the scheme.

[Slide with text saying 'Elizabeth Mandelkow', 'Talent Acquisition Manager', 'Bolton Clarke']

**Elizabeth Mandelkow:**

Thank you Emma. Good afternoon everyone. My name is Elizabeth Mandelkow and I am the Talent Acquisition Manager for Bolton Clarke and today I've been asked to take you through our experience with the Pacific Labour Scheme.

So firstly who is Bolton Clarke? We are a customer led not for profit organisation specialising in aged care services. We are the largest non-faith based aged care provider in Australia and we

were formed from the merger in 2016 of RSL Care and RDNS in Victoria, two names you may know well. We offer a combination of home, nursing and assistance, retirement living communities, as well as best practice, community based aged care facilities in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania.

So why did Bolton Clarke look at the Pacific Labour Scheme? Like many aged care providers Bolton Clarke has been faced with an increased demand for services which in turn creates a demand for highly skilled and qualified staff. National and international shortages in nursing and care workers meant that Bolton Clarke expanded our talent search internationally and the Pacific Labour Scheme was seen as an ideal program that supported not only our talent needs for personal care workers but also gave back to the Pacific Island communities through better career and financial opportunities for Pacific Islander families.

Our journey started in 2018 with the initial intake of 14 workers under the Pacific Labour Scheme. During COVID Bolton Clarke had a further three workers join our organisation when their original employer in hospitality ceased operations. As these workers were from a country with closed borders an exemption was given to transfer to another local approved employer. In mid-2021 Bolton Clarke had 17 PLS workers between sites at Longreach and Bowen. In September 2021 an opportunity arose to bring a further 23 workers to Bolton Clarke between the sites of Longreach, Bowen and Emu Park.

The 2021 process was undertaken in a highly compressed timeframe of approximately six weeks when ordinarily for Bolton Clarke we would plan a four to five month journey. Adding to the tight timeframes was an additional requirement to have Emu Park accredited as an approved site as well as at short notice organising all of the necessary labour market testing for the recruitment plans. All interviews were undertaken by Microsoft Teams. A panel of representatives from Longreach, Bowen, Emu Park and my team worked through 26 candidates over two nights of interviewing.

As you might have experienced using online platforms for interviews building engagement and rapport in a virtual setting can be challenging. We found the rapport challenge was compounded by the fact that English was a second language for many candidates. What mitigated this in our experience was having the presence of the residential manager from Longreach who had a lot of experience managing Kiribati employees and the talent acquisition team member who was from personally a Samoan background so she was able to help with understanding the correct name pronunciations. And I think that little attention to detail helped develop a rapport and created a warm and engaging experience for the candidates allowing them to be more comfortable.

The last interaction we had with the workers prior to their departure was a short briefing about what it was like to work for Bolton Clarke, information about the three locations such as social and cultural support, shopping and transport.

On arrival at the Brisbane International Airport the PLS workers were taken to Grantham for mandatory quarantine for 14 days. Once the quarantine requirements had been satisfied the workers were transferred back to the domestic airport where they were met by Bolton Clarke staff, provided with their mobile phones, cash advance and assisted to board their domestic flight. Most PLS workers commenced shifts on site within four days of arriving in Australia after the quarantine. All have settled in well and as we experienced with previous intakes all have been welcomed with open arms by the residents in the aged care communities and by the towns in which they now live.

Some of our learnings from the experiences to manage the time differences with interviews and engaging with site availability for the residential managers to be present, the timing meant that candidates were being interviewed at close to midnight their time. This is not ideal especially for the last few candidates who may have been experiencing fatigue. Ideally, we would like to interview at a time that best suited the candidate so that they could present their best self and future interview times will be negotiated around this point where possible.

Different document exchange platforms presented some challenges for us in Bolton Clarke. Kiribati preferred the use of Dropbox which is not an allowed site or platform for Bolton Clarke. So we'll need to consider an alternative means of document exchange for future uplifts.

In country recruitment which was the 2018 model potentially gives more of a beneficial outcome than the virtual arrangement that was created due to COVID travel restrictions.

Ensuring all the required documentation was provided to support the visa application is linked to the challenges of the use of Dropbox and to the fact that some of the documents didn't necessarily meet the format expected or required from our migration agent.

Tight deadlines and needing immediate and high level approvals for financial expenditure is something that happens in many sensitive projects. A positive learning for Bolton Clarke is that our current internal processes allowed those things to happen very smoothly without any delays.

The PLS workers did not have flu vaccinations which only became evident after their arrival in Australia. As this is a mandatory requirement for working in a Bolton Clarke residential aged care community clinics had to be set up at site in order to give them the required vaccination before they could commence a shift.

Lastly some of the PLS workers came to Australia without closed in shoes which is a necessity for working in a residential aged care community. This was most problematic in Longreach where clothing options are somewhat limited. So a learning for us to take into account for future uplifts.

The last two slides I have are of the arrival of the Kiribati workers in October 2021 at the Brisbane Domestic Airport ready to travel to their new homes and this is the Emu Park cohort when they started on day one. Thank you.

**Emma Gleeson:**

Thanks Elizabeth. Those photos are wonderful. So thank you for your insights. So now we'll start our Q&A session. There's a few questions and I'll just go to our various presenters to help me answer them. I think there's a couple around the applicability of the scheme to the home care environment. So Alison can I throw to you?

**Alison Boundy:**

Yeah. Thanks so much Emma. Probably the number one question we get asked and the best way that I can describe it is we seek opportunities to partner with organisations about this but it's probably not something we're ready to do just yet. We recognise the complexity of the home care environment particularly for supervision is quite substantially different to the ones that our current workers are experiencing in residential care facilities. We do have disability workers working in a mixed environment in NT but it's an extremely small community and has very limited driving. So I think the number one risk that we as a program have identified with home care is around driving being quite substantially different from the Pacific as well as not all Australian states recognising Pacific licences. Though this is the biggest growth area that we have in aged care so we're definitely open to partnering with employers to work out how we can do that in the future. And potentially my dream has always been that we would move experienced workers from residential care where you've identified people with great independent skills that you could see working in the home care environment and train those people up to deliver home care in your communities.

**Emma Gleeson:**

Thanks Alison. Now we've also got a question – it's probably for you again – about the AQF training and work placements and the question asker is asking for a little bit more detail about how that works.

**Alison Boundy:**

So APTC has been delivering aged care qualifications in the Pacific for a number of years now. This started because obviously the workforce need was seen coming a mile away. The program is delivered over six months. It's currently primarily delivered in Fiji where there are residential care facilities and students do both, a work placement in a village setting, more home care

related, and they also do the rest of their placement in an aged care facility. What we would like to do in the future and the way for us to expand quite rapidly is to join forces with both Pacific institutions and with providers in Australia to create a blended learning model which allows workers to be able to undertake their work placements in Australia. This would give them the opportunity to talk a lot more in detail about using Australian terminology and words that providers often expect that they'll be able to talk about but is really quite difficult if it's been a couple of years since you've done your qualification.

The goal of APTC is to broaden and encourage the development in Pacific partner institutions. So we have a number of countries who have already identified that this is an area that they want to grow their cohorts in. So we see plenty of opportunities in the future to deliver that kind of training in a mixed model.

And sorry. And the focus has been Certificate III in individual support, Certificate III in community services, a Cert IV in disability and a Cert IV in allied health assistance being the primary qualifications.

**Emma Gleeson:**

Thanks Alison. I can see Anna's got her hand up. Have you got something to add?

**Anna McNicol:**

Yeah. And Alison thanks so much for taking that one. I also wanted to mention that DFAT have been funding a pilot in Northern Territory with Samoan aged care workers where there's been work done with an Australian registered training organisation and those workers in terms of them actually doing training on site in Australia. And DFAT's interested in exploring whether or not we can move beyond that model in the future. There's a small amount of funding at the moment within the Pacific Labour Facility for skills development and it is possible within that to do some vocational education training qualifications. And in the future we may look to see if we can partner with employers who would like to co-sponsor and co-fund some training and see if we can actually have a model where we can have employers commit to help with that training cost as well as perhaps a small contribution from the worker and/or DFAT through our development funding.

So the idea of the qualifications, we think the APTC may not be able to meet all of the demand that there is in Australia for qualifying workers and so interested in exploring whether we can get it done within Australia. So just additional information from me and Alison feel free to pitch in if you've got a bit more information on the pilot.

**Alison Boundy:**

One thing I'll say about the pilot is the approved employer has let us know that the workers have been putting their learning into practice straight away and picking up people on different things that they've learnt in their training already and been putting their new learning into practice straight away. So that's a positive for all of us.

**Emma Gleeson:**

Thanks both. I think maybe a further question for Anna. Are these workers able to do more than one placement? So come to Australia, go back home and then come out again?

**Anna McNicol:**

I'm going to stumble on this one so I think Gavin might be on the line or Alison can work with me. So there's different ways that the workers can come to Australia. They can come on a seasonal work visa which is a short term visa for up to nine months but they can also come on a one to three year visa for a longer period and in fact underneath the new program announcement which will start from the 4th of April that will be extended to four years. So in that one to four year period as it would be obviously they'll take regular leave like any Australian employee takes and they can head back in country and visit their family and come back out again. But if they do seasonal work where they come in and out they can also rotate through that way. But for something like aged care we would see seasonal work those short term ones not perhaps the best model. I think

the better model is that longer term process. So actually in fact maybe Alison and Gavin correct me we may not actually be able to bring them on the short term visas anyway. That might only be for agriculture. So apologies if I've messed up. But that long term they can come in and out. And if they did a two year, three year placement they could go back home and then after a couple of years they could come back to Australia again as well. So all of that is possible.

**Alison Boundy:**

Yeah. There are some mandatory offshore periods for people to be able to connect back to country but ultimately the program facilitates returning workers as a big part of what we offer. But I don't know. There will be some of you on the line that four years would seem like a very, very long time to keep staff. So three to four years is a great outcome as well.

**Emma Gleeson:**

Thanks Alison. Another question for you. This is around police checks and working with vulnerable people checks. So do they need to get the Australian checks in that regard?

**Alison Boundy:**

So depending on which state you're in currently you'll need to do whatever checks you'd normally do. To get a visa to enter Australia you need to have a clean police record from your own country. If you've ever been to Australia before for a particular period of time you also need to have an AFP check done via Federal Police. But participants in work ready pools are not allowed to have previous convictions and things like that. A number of our employers have had to do working with children checks particularly in the NT and there's been some challenges about doing that prior to departure but there's been no problems with getting them once they've been here.

**Emma Gleeson:**

Thanks again. Now we've also got one about the locations where people can move to and a question specifically about whether Perth is covered in the scheme. Anna are you able to take that one?

**Alison Boundy:**

Perth is a very funny one for us. Perth has a very narrow region that is excluded but it's one that we're very happy to talk about because aged care is certainly something the WA Government is really interested in supporting employers. So it's definitely one for us to have a conversation about.

**Anna McNicol:**

And just to add to that Alison and Emma Michelle might actually have a little bit more on that as well because I think that there are some options if there are regions where there's a clear shortage of workers and they can put in place the DAMAs etcetera that allow for some exemptions in some cases. And I'm new to the program Pacific Labour Facility and PALM but it may be that there's options there as well that Michelle may be able to speak to.

**Michelle Tuchin:**

Yeah. In regards to the DAMAs and the Labour Agreements I mean that's quite a large topic to discuss in this forum because they are so detailed. So the whole purpose of the Labour Agreement and the DAMA is for – well the DAMA is a Designated Area Migration Agreement which is for a region and the Labour Agreement is for a business if you like. So the benefit of those types of agreements – and they're not easy agreements to put in place – is that the whole point of them is designed around negotiating concessions. So where you have a visa type, a standard visa product where there may be an age limit of say 45 for example one of the concessions that you may negotiate as a part of your DAMA or Labour Agreement would be that you want to bring in skilled workers who are around 50 or 55 and that could be your age cut off.

So the other concession for example that you may organise is like English language proficiency because obviously there's English language testing that goes into some skilled visa products as well. And in terms of regions depending on where you're located in Australia there are different

visa options for regions. So regional areas do have a wider variety of options that are in the standard visa product category and a lot of those regional visas were designed to bring in people to live and work in regional areas and retain those people in regional areas. So on our website, on the Home Affairs website there are definitely links to working in regional Australia and the visa options will come up. And it's definitely a focus of trying to keep and retain people in those regional areas because there's obviously a shortage of people as well. I'm not sure if that helps you.

**Alison Boundy:**

And I'll add that on our website as well if you go to the employers page you can have a look on eligibility. If you scroll down you'll see a full list of all of our postcodes. I'm pretty good on a map but I sometimes get the numbers mixed up so don't put me on to a trivia team for that one. But it does say with Perth excluding Perth metropolitan areas only for PLS. But talk to us. Always talk to us.

**Emma Gleeson:**

Okay. Thanks. And now we've got another question around accommodation. So we've got someone on the line who is making reference to I guess some of the challenges around accommodation and in Fitzroy Crossing in this particular question. So we want to know a bit more about what the expectations are around accommodation.

**Alison Boundy:**

So the current deed has an expectation that the employer will provide accommodation for a minimum of three months. If that's the case then there needs to be a plan for what's going to happen after the three months. Majority of our AEs organise leased properties and operate in some very, very challenging locations as Elizabeth can attest to. So we certainly understand that there's some challenges in that.

Where providers have short term accommodation on site that often is really fantastic for the first three months as it allows workers to save up their money for their bond and their rent. You're not responsible for that accommodation if they lease a property themselves. But if you lease directly or you own property that they live in then you can set the lease conditions just as you would any Australian worker. Accommodation can be deducted back as well.

As I mentioned we expect that accommodation is safe, it's legal, and it's reflective of where you live. So it's really important that costs are considered. It's something that we look at really closely. People are willing to share because they're trying to keep their costs down as well. And a lot of our workers have never lived in a world where they've had their own room so sharing rooms is not something that's unfamiliar but they need to do that with privacy and safety and security in mind. It's a big part of the work that we do when we talk to AEs. So we probably can't go into each and every aspect of it but we appreciate that there's some real challenges in certain places in Australia around accommodation including Canberra. The workers go into Canberra in January. It's been a real challenge to get affordable housing in our nation's capital. So regional and rural Australia can be even tougher than that.

So I'm not entirely sure that I answered but it's very location specific so we'd talk to you about that, sort of provider to us.

**Emma Gleeson:**

Thanks Alison. And we've got another question around the checks and this relates to the NDIS worker screening checks that also apply to many aged care services with people with disability residing there. So there's quite a long processing time at the moment for those NDIS checks. So wondering what the arrangements are for those and can they be done before the person leaves their home country?

**Alison Boundy:**

Yeah. We actually did attempt that with the recent cohort that's come from Samoa to work for an NDIS provider. There were some challenges around that though I think with a little bit more – it

was kind of sprung upon the LSU – with a bit more training for our LSUs to be able to support the workers to do it we would be able to undertake it. But understanding for the LSU to understand what needs to be done is the critical point. We actually found that it was quite easy for the provider to ask for an exemption for just starting and they were given that so that they were allowed to do their forms and photos when they arrived in Australia. So that's ended up what we did and they got their cards very, very quickly. So it's unlikely for people not to pass because they've done a whole heap of checks to get into the country. So that's a good surety around that.

**Emma Gleeson:**

Thanks Alison. And I think back to Anna. I've got a question around the blended training model that you were talking about earlier and how that relates to the visa process.

So I think the question is I think normally the visa requires some level of qualification before you arrive so how does that work when you're doing the training onshore?

**Anna McNicol:**

So there actually isn't a requirement under the PALM visa for a qualification to be in place. There's no requirement there at all so that's not a problem. Workers can come in without a qualification and then they could do that qualification at the same time as working.

**Alison Boundy:**

And the pilot that we've been running in partnership in NT the first four weeks it's been blended. So one cohort has been doing training in the morning and then working on site in the afternoon and vice versa as a really good way of both earning income and getting their training done and putting it into practice straight away.

**Emma Gleeson:**

Okay. I've just got a couple more questions to go. Michelle this might be one for you and it might be a bit beyond the Pacific Labour Scheme and in regards to visas more generally. But someone's asked about what is the commitment that the employee has to make? They've had an experience in the past where they've met their visa conditions but then the employee heads off to the bright lights of the big city. So is there any arrangements around that sort of situation?

**Michelle Tuchin:**

Yeah. So the regional visas that I mentioned before – and I'm assuming that's directed at sort of they started regionally and then left and went metro – so the regional visas that were introduced I guess a couple of years ago have a permanent residency pathway. So I'm talking about the sub-class 491 and the 494. And one of the conditions attached to that visa is that the person must stay in regional Australia for three years to be eligible to apply for that permanent residency visa. That permanent residency visa will come into play in November 2022 and it was basically put into place for that reason, to keep people in the regions, to attract them to that permanent residency option. So it's definitely a good visa. There's not too much info out on it because obviously it hasn't come into play. As I said it will come into play November 2022. And that's probably the best incentive. Unfortunately without things like that then people do have the freedom to up and go and that's just the way it is. But obviously if they want their permanent residency which majority of people coming here do then they have that opportunity to apply for the permanent residency if they stay in the regional location for that period of time.

**Emma Gleeson:**

Anna?

**Anna McNicol:**

Thanks Michelle. Just to note that the PALM visa is not a temporary skilled visa at all so it's a different visa class. So for the workers who come to Australia under the PALM Scheme it's true sometimes workers do abscond from their employers. They do that for different reasons. Sometimes they're not happy with the situation that they find themselves in. Sometimes there's a misunderstanding about wage deductions. Sometimes there's rogue employers who are trying to

lure them in to other roles elsewhere. When these things happen the Pacific Labour Facility works really hard to reconnect with those workers and to understand what's going on. There's a lot of different underlying reasons and one of the features of the Pacific Labour Facility and the PALM Scheme is a wraparound service for the workers that provides them with opportunities to call hotlines and to work with caseworkers and the like to really kind of understand their individual needs.

So I think we shouldn't say it never happens. It does happen. There are often reasons for it and I think that where you have employers who are dedicated to their workers and work hard with them like I think that we've seen Elizabeth talking today about what her organisation does I think you'll get a lot of loyalty and commitment from those workers. So I don't know Alison if you want to add or whether Elizabeth you want to add anything to that from your perspective.

**Alison Boundy:**

We've had absolutely no absconding in aged care because we've got excellent AEs who keep their workers engaged and motivated and happy. And yes as Anna said this program is a circular labour mobility program. The intent of it is that people return home with those net skills and it's a real feature. And I think while migration to Australia is something that's really important for many, many people what's really important to the workers that we engage with is their own country and their own communities. It's not something that they want to leave forever. They want to come here for a short period of time to develop skills, to send money home, but they want to be home. It's what they want to do. That's actually where they want to be in the world. So it's not really an issue. Absconding is an issue in small pockets but definitely not one that we've seen on the aged care side of things.

**Anna McNicol:**

And Emma maybe I can pick up another question I see in the chat box which I don't think we've answered yet which is about the minimum wage in line with the TSS visas. So that's not applicable for the PALM Scheme visa. They need to be paid Australian award wages but they don't actually have to reach that temporary skilled migration income level. So it's a different visa class.

**Emma Gleeson:**

Thanks Anna and a very important question. I think we're done with all the questions. Yep. All right. So I would like to thank all of the people who've participated in the webinar today. We've got our inbox email address up on the screen so please feel free to send through any further questions to that inbox and we're happy to talk to our colleagues about how we respond to those or we can also answer questions about our aged care workforce measures that we are implementing. I'd also like to thank my fellow presenters today. They've offered some very engaging presentations. And to our Auslan interpreter thank you very much.

Also I'd like to thank the team back here at Health who've put in a lot of effort to organising this webinar today. So thank you everyone and have a great afternoon.

[Closing visual of slide with text saying 'Ageing and Aged Care', 'Australian Government with Crest (logo)', 'Department of Health', 'Thank you', 'For more information, please contact the Department of Health', 'AgedCareWorkforceReform@Health.gov.au', 'health.gov.au/aged-care-reforms']