

Motivational interviewing could boost well-being for aged care workers

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It's a therapy that's commonly used to help overcome addiction or substance abuse, but motivational interviewing could improve the health and well-being of frontline aged care workers, according to [new research](#)

by the University of South Australia published in the *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*.

The study found that [motivational interviewing](#) can empower disengaged aged [care workers](#) to prioritize and take control of their mental and [physical health](#), thereby boosting workplace well-being.

Working with an accredited exercise physiologist, frontline aged care workers received counseling and education on personal goal setting, actions, and coping, as well as measures of activity intensity.

After three months, their perceived autonomy in exercise increased by nearly 9% which is a good predictor of future behavior. Additionally, their fitness improved as indicated by a small increase in their six-minute walk distance at the nine month follow up.

Participants also reported [positive changes](#) in other [health](#) behaviors such as eating better, seeking more help from [health professionals](#) for the management of health conditions, and not being so hard on themselves when they slipped up.

Workplace interventions that can improve working conditions and well-being are in high demand in Australia's troubled aged care sector where understaffing, low pay, high staff turnover, lack of opportunities for upskilling, high physical and emotional job demands and low job control for employees continue to mar the industry.

Aged care is one of Australia's largest service industries with about 366,000 paid workers.

UniSA researcher and exercise physiologist, Dr. Merilyn Lock, says motivational therapy could be an effective intervention to address systemic apathy among frontline aged care workers.

"There's no doubt that Australia's aged care sector is under pressure. We have an [aging population](#), complex care requirements, funding issues, and a shortage of qualified and skilled aged care workers," Dr. Lock says.

"Supporting the physical and mental well-being of frontline aged care workers is imperative, as quality care is inextricably linked with quality jobs.

"Motivational interviewing is a personalized and empathetic counseling technique that empowers a person to explore and resolve ambivalence. It works by assuming that any change is better than nothing, and because it is goal-directed it encourages people to identify, recognize and sustain positive change.

"The workplace is a convenient means to target the health behavior of large numbers of employees. By engaging and motivating frontline aged care workers to make positive changes to their health, we're hoping to better support the aged care workforce and subsequently people in aged care."

While more research is needed to address the uptake of such interventions at organization levels, the study is a promising initiative to help aged care workers to take control of their own health and well-being.

More information: Merilyn Lock et al, The effects of a theory-informed intervention on physical activity behaviour, motivation and well-being of frontline aged care workers: A pilot study with 6-month follow-up, *Health Promotion Journal of Australia* (2023). [DOI: 10.1002/hpja.740](https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.740)

Provided by University of South Australia

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