

# Lower Limb Foot Initiative: establishing a Podiatry Student Led Clinic in residential aged care

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## Introduction

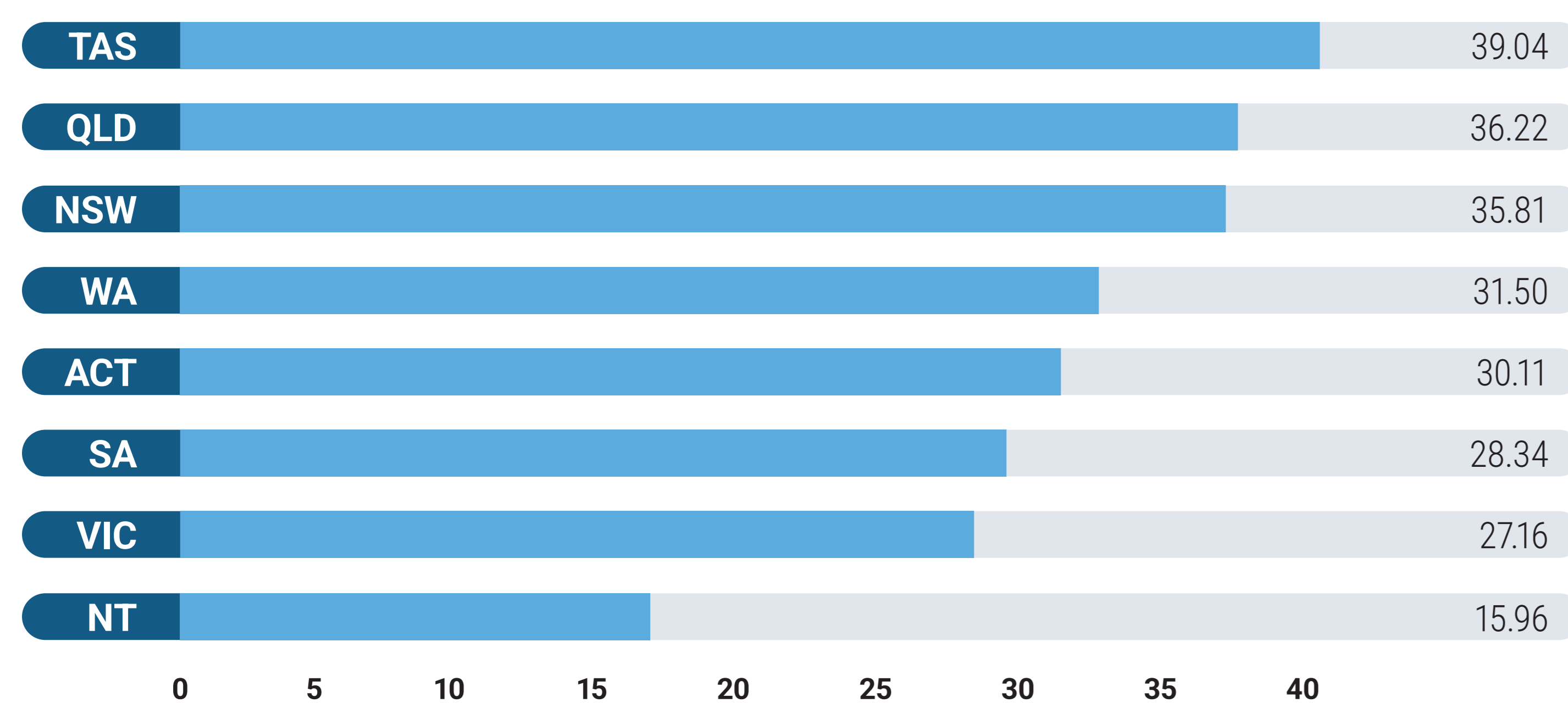
Brightwater Care Group has been providing care for people with aged care and complex needs in Perth, Western Australia for nearly 125 years. With over 750 residential aged care beds, including transition care beds, Brightwater has a long history of providing comprehensive allied health services embedded into the model of care.

In Western Australia, there are currently 566 AHPRA-registered general podiatrists. Anecdotal evidence suggests that integrating podiatry into residential aged care (RAC) remains a significant challenge, even though nearly all residents require podiatric care. With 17,800 individuals living in residential aged care across the state, the resident-to-podiatrist ratio stands at 31:5 – markedly higher than the 3:4 resident-to-physio ratio.

Australia's demand for residential aged care is projected to double over the next two decades, driving a corresponding increase in demand for podiatry services.

The University of Western Australia (UWA) remains the only local training institution offering podiatry as a 3-year extended masters program. In 2024, only 20 students completed the program. During training, podiatry students typically have limited exposure to complex needs within residential aged care. While they may see gerontological conditions in private practice or outpatient settings, these encounters often lack the depth, consistency, and context necessary to fully grasp the nuanced, multifaceted needs of aged care residents. Moreover, placements in these settings are often reliant on practitioner availability and may not offer a holistic understanding of system-wide care processes, team collaboration, or the high-risk foot conditions that are commonly seen among this vulnerable population.

**Figure 1. Ratio of RAC residents per podiatrist by state**



## Podiatry Student Led Clinic

The Lower Limb Foot Initiative is a collaborative partnership between Brightwater Care Group and the University of Western Australia Podiatry Department, introducing student-led podiatry services within Brightwater's residential aged care setting. Launched in early 2024 at Brightwater Inglewood, the clinic aims to provide podiatry students with meaningful, holistic clinical experience while delivering timely, clinic-based foot care to residents.

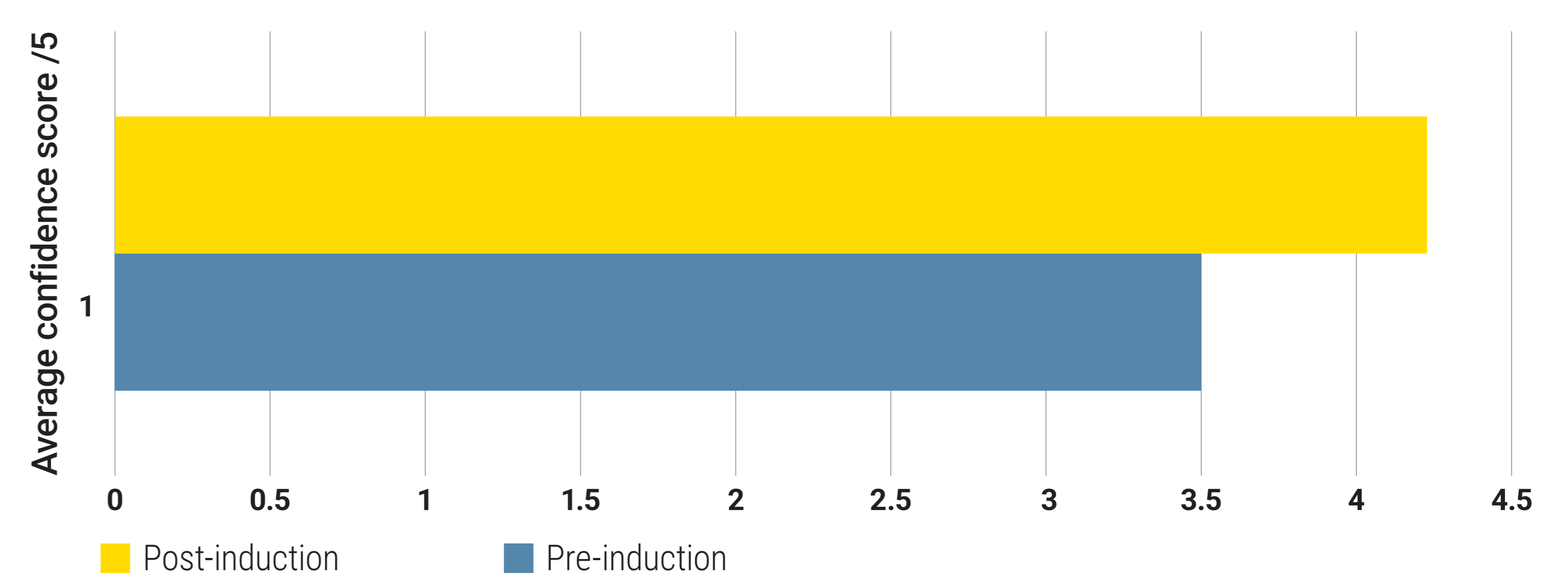
A standard operating procedure was developed to define clinical expectations and governance standards, ensuring quality care and client safety. Brightwater also developed a tailored induction program for UWA students and supervisors, incorporating dementia-specific and manual handling training to address knowledge gaps related to the RAC environment.

Through this initiative, students gain practical experience managing complex foot health conditions common in aged care - such as diabetic foot complications, peripheral arterial disease, dermatological conditions, musculoskeletal disorders, and neurological impairments. They also strengthen communication skills by engaging with residents with cognitive impairments and working alongside multidisciplinary teams, including nurses, physiotherapists, and occupational therapists. This broad exposure not only sharpens clinical skills but also deepens student's understanding of aged care, potentially shaping future career interests in this critical field.

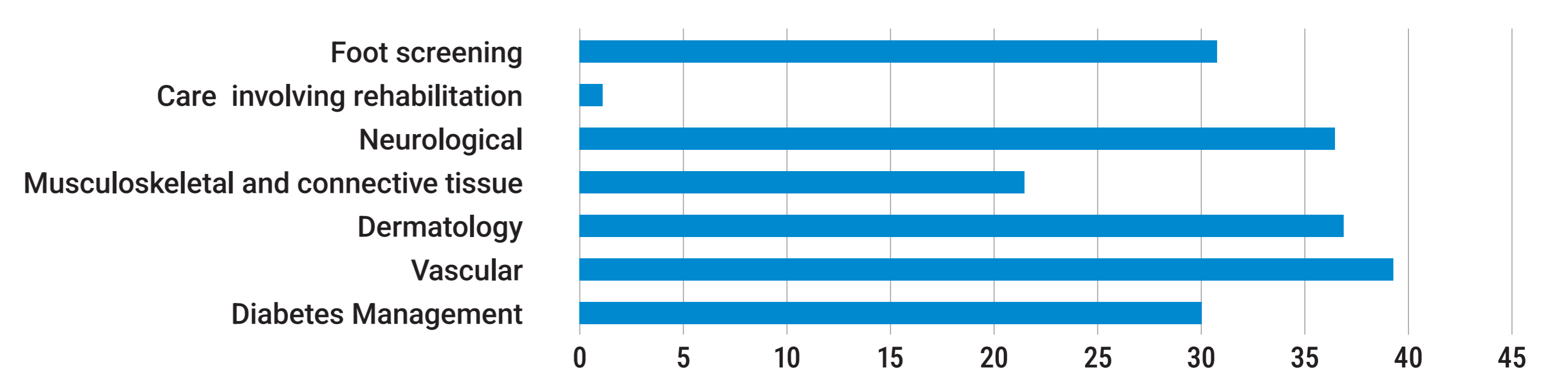
## Student & Client Outcomes

Between March 2024 and May 2025 podiatry students delivered 10,160 minutes of client-attributable podiatric services to residents at Brightwater Inglewood. The student-led clinic was well received by clients, with many choosing it over their regular visiting private podiatrist. The multidisciplinary team actively supported the clinic, referring complex cases – such as wounds and fall-related foot issues – and collaborated closely on care. Notably, the visiting private podiatrist became a key referrer, recognising the student clinic's value as a complementary service.

**Figure 2. Knowledge of aged care, dementia and frailty pre & post induction**



**Figure 3. Sub-population group recording by students (Feb - May 2025)**



## Conclusion

Following graduation in 2024, Brightwater was proud to employ two students who participated in the inaugural Podiatry Student-Led Clinic. Their recruitment demonstrates how high-quality placements in residential aged care can shift student perceptions, build confidence, and inspire career paths in this often-overlooked sector.

Now in its second year, the Brightwater-UWA Podiatry collaboration has expanded to include research into knowledge, attitudes, and access to podiatric foot care in aged care settings. This work aims to address service gaps and inform future delivery of podiatric care that better address the complex needs of older Australians. As one student reflected: *"I feel like I have 100 grandparents. I feel like a part of their community. They've embraced us and are appreciative of our service."*

**Disclaimer:** The data presented in the figures has been obtained from the practice management software of Brightwater Care Group