U.S. NURSING ASSISTANTS EMPLOYED IN NURSING HOMES

KEY FACTS
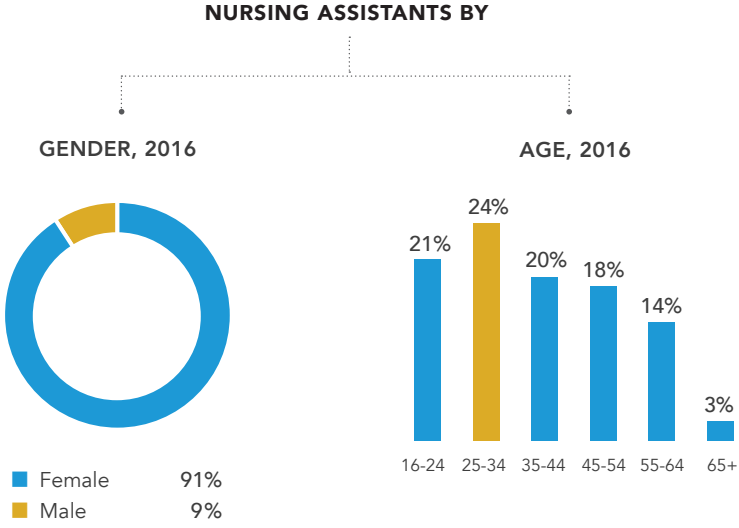
PHI — QUALITY CARE THROUGH QUALITY JOBS

Nearly 600,000 nursing assistants deliver personal care, assistance with daily activities, and clinical support to 1.5 million nursing home residents across the United States.[1] While the balance of service delivery is shifting toward home and community-based settings, nursing homes still play an integral role in the long-term services and supports system, providing 24-hour care for people who cannot live comfortably or safely at home.

The work of nursing assistant is challenging and offers few material rewards. Due in part to the physical nature of the job, nursing assistants are injured 3.4 times more frequently than the typical American worker.[2] Further, nursing assistants may be required to work overtime to support the health and wellbeing of their residents.[3] These risks are insufficiently compensated: nursing assistants earn a median hourly wage of $12.84 and a median annual income of $21,200.

The poor quality and inadequate compensation of nursing assistant jobs makes it difficult for nursing homes to attract and retain enough workers to meet demand, resulting in a persistent workforce shortage. These staffing challenges will be exacerbated as changing demographics drive up demand in the years ahead. By 2050, the population of adults aged 65 and over – who constitute 83 percent of the nursing home resident population – is projected to nearly double, from 47.8 million (in 2015) to 88 million.[4]
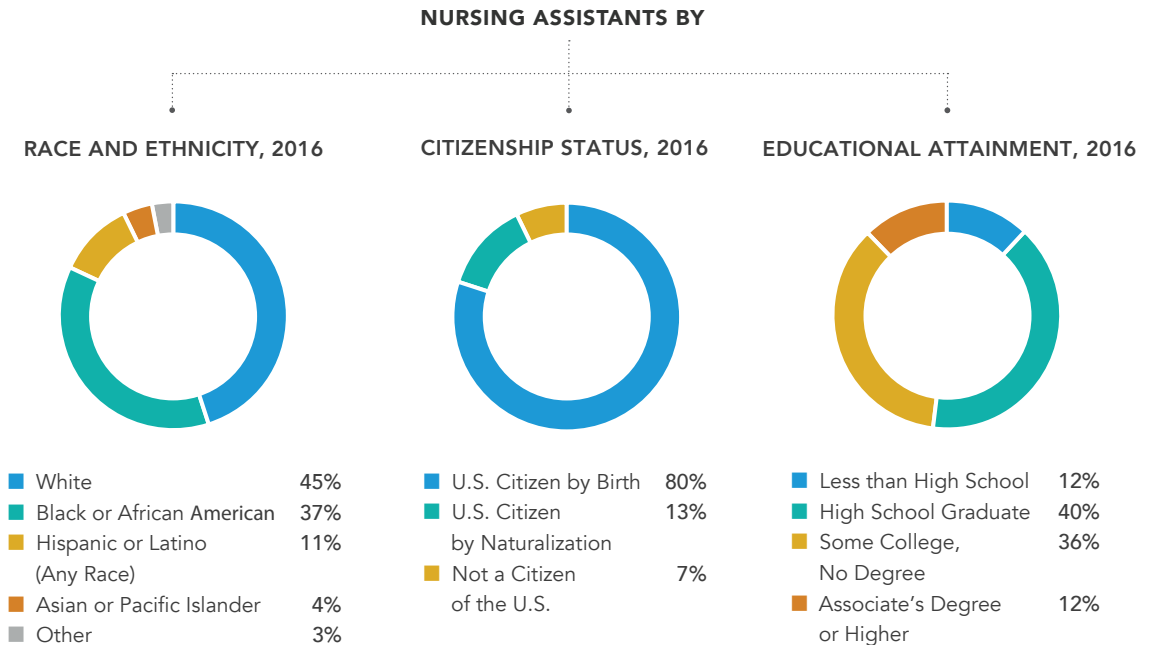
NURSING ASSISTANTS BY

GENDER, 2016

■ Female	91%
■ Male	9%

AGE, 2016

21%	24%	20%	18%	14%	3%
16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+

WHO ARE NURSING ASSISTANTS?

- **More than 9 in 10 nursing assistants are women, and their median age is 37.**
  Nursing assistant jobs generally have minimal legal and employer-based requirements with regards to education, experience, and training. As a result, workers who typically encounter educational or discriminatory barriers may be more successful in obtaining nursing assistant jobs.

- **While people of color make up just over one-third of the total U.S. workforce, they comprise more than half of the nursing assistant workforce.**[5] Thirty-seven percent of nursing assistants are Black or African American.

- **Twenty percent of nursing assistants were born outside the United States.** Over 90 percent of all nursing assistants are U.S. citizens.

- **Less than half of nursing assistants** have completed any formal education beyond high school.

NURSING ASSISTANTS BY

RACE AND ETHNICITY, 2016

■ White	45%
■ Black or African American	37%
■ Hispanic or Latino (Any Race)	11%
■ Asian or Pacific Islander	4%
■ Other	3%

CITIZENSHIP STATUS, 2016

■ U.S. Citizen by Birth	80%
■ U.S. Citizen by Naturalization	13%
■ Not a Citizen of the U.S.	7%

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, 2016

■ Less than High School	12%
■ High School Graduate	40%
■ Some College, No Degree	36%
■ Associate's Degree or Higher	12%

Chart Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2017. *American Community Survey (ACS), 2016 1-year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS).* https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/pums.html; analysis by PHI (July 6, 2018). White and Black or African American exclude people who identify as Hispanic or Latino.

THE NURSING ASSISTANT ROLE IN NURSING HOMES

There are nearly 18,000 nursing homes across the United States, which provide nursing care and 24-hour personal assistance to 1.5 million residents.[6] The number of nursing home residents has stayed relatively constant over the last decade.

Nursing assistants provide intensive assistance to nursing home residents with daily tasks such as dressing, bathing, eating, and mobility.[7] They also help residents participate in a range of social activities such as classes, guest performances, and religious services. Further, nursing assistants perform certain clinical tasks under the supervision of licensed professionals.

(See Notes on Occupational Titles and Industry Classifications, page 10, for more details.)

- **Nursing assistants comprise over one-third of the nursing home workforce**, outnumbering every other occupational group in this workforce. The number of nursing assistants – 594,460 workers – has remained fairly constant over the past decade.

NURSING HOME EMPLOYMENT BY OCCUPATION, 2017

Occupation	Employment	% of Industry Employment
Nursing Assistants	594,460	37%
Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurses	208,740	13%
Registered Nurses	155,450	10%
Other Health Care and Personal Support Occupations	207,050	13%
Food Preparation and Serving-Related Occupations	153,540	9%
Business, Administrative, and Social Services Staff	159,810	10%
All Other Workers	142,520	9%

Table Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Division of Occupational Employment Statistics. 2017. *May 2017 National Industry-Specific Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates.* https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oessrci.htm; analysis by PHI (July 6, 2018). "All Other Workers" comprises a range of occupations including Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance occupations and Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media occupations.

• Nursing assistants constitute 13 percent of the total direct care workforce, which also includes workers employed in home care and a range of other settings.[8] The total number of direct care workers across all industries is **4.3 million workers.**

NURSING ASSISTANTS IN THE DIRECT CARE WORKFORCE, 2016
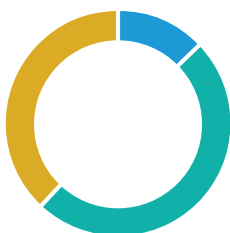
■ Nursing Assistants	13%
■ Home Care Workers	49%
■ Other Direct Care Workers	37%

• Among all nursing staff, nursing assistants spend the most time assisting residents, **providing a median of 2.2 hours of direct care per resident per day.** Because of their frequent interactions with residents, nursing assistants are well-positioned to observe changes in resident condition and report these changes to licensed nursing staff.

MEDIAN STAFF HOURS PER RESIDENT PER DAY BY OCCUPATION, 2018
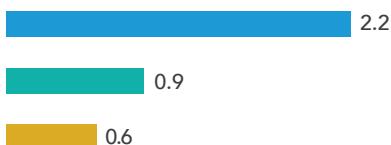
2.2
0.9
0.6

■ Nursing Assistants
■ Licensed Practical / Licensed Vocational Nurses
■ Registered Nurses

• Nursing assistant jobs are predominantly government-funded. **Payments from public programs (primarily Medicare and Medicaid) constituted 69 percent of the industry's more than $122 billion in annual revenue in 2016.**

NURSING HOMES REVENUE BY SOURCE, 2016
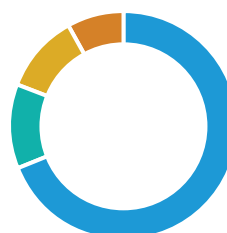
■ Public Programs	69%
■ Private Insurance	12%
■ Out-of-pocket	11%
■ Other	8%

Chart Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Division of Occupational Employment Statistics (OES). 2018. *May 2017 National Industry-Specific Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates.* https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oessrci.htm; U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). 2018. *Nursing Home Compare Datasets: Staffing.* https://data.medicare.gov/data/nursing-home-compare; analysis by PHI (July 8, 2018). Staffing data reflects Medicare- and Medicaid-certified nursing homes; U.S. Census Bureau. 2017. *Service Annual Survey, Estimated Sources of Revenue for Employer Firms: 2013 through 2016.* https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2016/econ/services/sas-naics.html; analysis by PHI (July 13, 2018).

THE CHALLENGES FOR THIS WORKFORCE

- **Wages for nursing assistants have failed to keep up with inflation over the past decade.** Inflation-adjusted wages were $12.84 in 2017, compared to $12.78 in 2007. This means that while goods and services increased in price, the purchasing power of nursing assistant wages did not meaningfully increase in the past decade.

NURSING ASSISTANT MEDIAN HOURLY WAGES, ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION, 2007 TO 2017

$12.78 $12.84

2007 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15 '16 '17
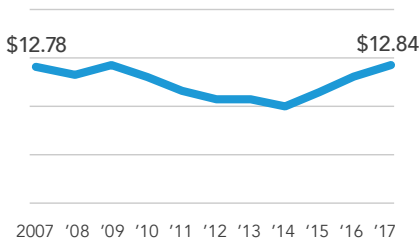
- Due to low wages, **nursing assistants working in nursing homes earn a median income of $21,200 per year.**[9]

Chart Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Division of Occupational Employment Statistics. 2018. *May 2007 to May 2017 National Industry-Specific Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates.* https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oessrci.htm; analysis by PHI (July 2, 2018); U.S. Census Bureau. 2017. *American Community Survey (ACS), 2016 1-year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS).* https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/pums.html; analysis by PHI (July 6, 2018). Any public assistance includes food and nutrition assistance, public health insurance, and cash assistance.

- **Because of low annual earnings, nursing assistants experience a high rate of poverty.** Fifteen percent live below the federal poverty line, compared to 7 percent of all U.S. workers.[10]

NURSING ASSISTANTS BY POVERTY LEVEL, 2016

45%

25%

15%

<100%   <138%   <200%

Federal Poverty Level
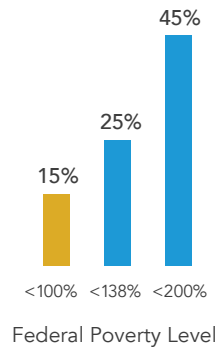
- Because poverty rates are high among nursing assistants, **37 percent rely on some form of public assistance.**

NURSING ASSISTANTS ACCESSING PUBLIC ASSISTANCE, 2016

37%

26%

21%

2%

- Any Public Assistance
- Food and Nutrition Assistance
- Medicaid
- Cash Assistance
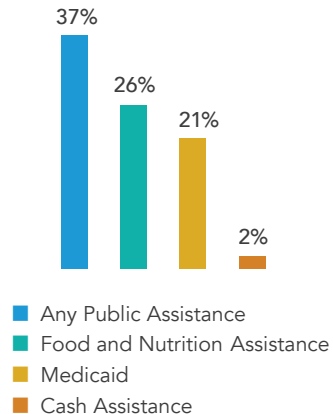
- Nursing assistants are **over three times more likely to experience workplace injuries** than the typical U.S. worker.
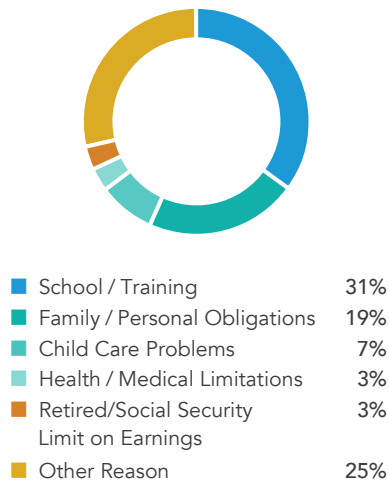
**ANNUAL INJURY RATES
PER 10,000 WORKERS, 2016**

- All Workers
- Nursing Assistants
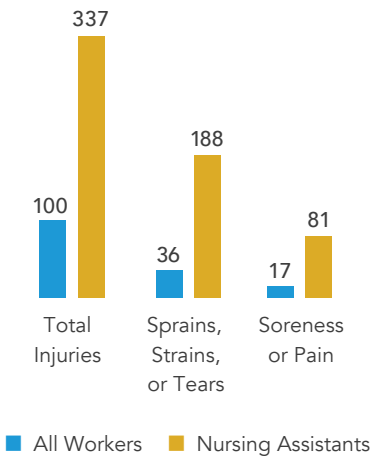
- **Three-quarters of nursing assistants work full time.**

**NURSING ASSISTANTS
BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS, 2016**

Full Time, Full Year	76%
Part Time or Part Year	24%
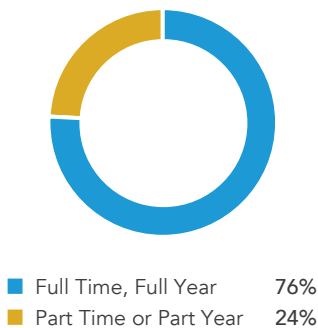
- **Among nursing assistants who work part time, 88 percent cite "non-economic reason,"** which include attending school, personal or family obligations, or health problems. Twelve percent work part time for "economic reasons," which means they are not able to find full-time work due to business conditions at their workplaces or employment challenges in the broader labor market.

**NON-ECONOMIC REASONS
FOR PART-TIME EMPOYMENT AMONG
NURSING ASSISTANTS**

|	
School / Training	31%
Family / Personal Obligations	19%
Child Care Problems	7%
Health / Medical Limitations	3%
Retired/Social Security Limit on Earnings	3%
Other Reason	25%

Chart Sources: Campbell, Stephen. 2018. *Workplace Injuries and the Direct Care Workforce.* Bronx, NY: PHI. https://phinational.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Workplace-Injuries-and-DCW-PHI-2018.pdf; U.S. Census Bureau. 2017. *American Community Survey (ACS), 2016 1-year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS).* https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/pums.html; analysis by PHI (July 6, 2018); U.S. Census Bureau. 2017. *Current Population Survey (CPS), January 2017 to December 2017 Basic Monthly CPS.* https://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps_ftp.html; analysis by PHI (August 16, 2018).

- **The uninsured rate among nursing assistants is 13 percent.** More than half of nursing assistants have employer-sponsored insurance, while one-quarter rely on public coverage, particularly Medicaid.

NURSING ASSISTANTS BY HEALTH INSURANCE STATUS, 2016

87%
60%
24%
10%

- Any Health Insurance
- Health Insurance Through Employer / Union
- Medicaid, Medicare or Other Public Coverage
- Health Insurance Purchased Directly

Chart Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2017. *American Community Survey (ACS), 2016 1-year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS).* https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/pums.html; analysis by PHI (July 6, 2018).
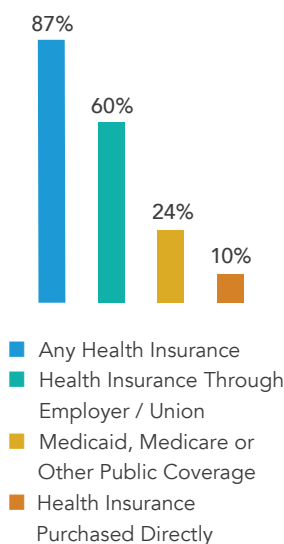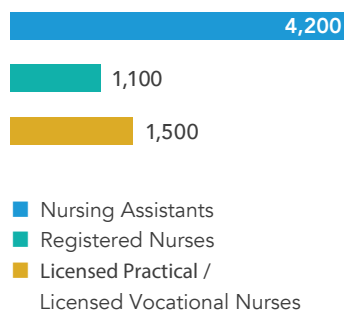
THE FUTURE DEMAND FOR NURSING ASSISTANTS

- In the years ahead, nursing assistants will contribute more to nursing home employment growth than any other occupation. However, due in part to the rebalancing of services toward home and community-based settings, nursing home job growth will be modest, with an estimated 4,200 new nursing assistant positions added between 2016 and 2026.

NEW NURSING HOME JOBS BY OCCUPATION, 2016 TO 2026

4,200
1,100
1,500

- Nursing Assistants
- Registered Nurses
- Licensed Practical / Licensed Vocational Nurses

Chart Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Employment Projections Program. 2017. *Employment Projections: 2016–26, National Employment Matrix - Occupation.* https://www.bls.gov/emp/; analysis by PHI (April 28, 2017).
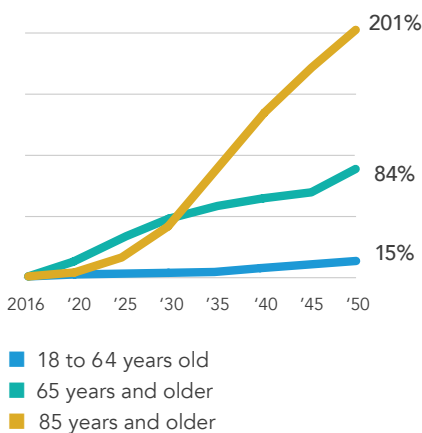
- However, changing demographics may drive employment growth in nursing homes beyond these projections, which only account for recent industry and employment trends, not demographic shifts. **By 2050, the population of adults aged 65 and above – who comprise 83 percent of the nursing home resident population – is expected to nearly double, from 47.8 million (in 2015) to 88 million.** The number of adults aged 85 and above – who account for 40 percent of nursing home residents[11] – is expected to more than triple over the same period, from 6.3 million to 19 million.

The rapid growth in the older adult population contrasts sharply with the marginal growth among working-age adults (aged 18 to 64). Currently, there are 32 working-age adults for every adult over the age of 85. By 2050, that number is projected to plummet to 12.

Despite persistent demand for nursing assistants, widespread job vacancies remain. The poor quality of nursing assistant jobs and competition from other industries, especially when unemployment rates are low, make it difficult to fill these positions. Rapid growth in the population of older Americans will continue to create a need for nursing homes, even as home and community-based alternatives become available. Taken together, these trends make it imperative to develop strategies that strengthen and stabilize this workforce.

PROJECTED POPULATION GROWTH BY AGE GROUP, 2016 TO 2050

2016 '20 '25 '30 '35 '40 '45 '50

201%
84%
15%

- 18 to 64 years old
- 65 years and older
- 85 years and older

Chart Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2014. *National Population Projections Tables, Projections of the Population by Sex and Selected Age Groups for the United States: 2015 to 2060.* https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2014/demo/popproj/2014-summary-tables.html. Projections are shown as cumulative percentages, which indicate growth for each age group relative to 2015 population estimates.

DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

Employment projections were sourced from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Employment Projections program, and hourly wage and employment trends were sourced from the BLS Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) program. Wages were adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for All Urban Consumers (Current Series).

BLS data indicate that a small number of personal care aides and home health aides—which are other direct care occupations – are employed in the Nursing Care Facilities industry, but federal regulations require Medicare- and Medicaid-certified nursing homes to employ nursing assistants only.[12] Given that 97 percent of nursing homes are Medicare-certified, and 95 percent are Medicaid-certified,[13] personal care aides and home health aides were excluded from the hourly wage analyses and employment estimates in this report.

Conversely, home health aides were necessarily included in analyses of the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) and Current Population Survey (CPS) because its occupational classification system is less precise than the BLS Standard Occupational Classification system. These surveys were used to calculate nursing assistant demographics, median annual earnings, poverty status, use of public assistance, health insurance status, and full-time/part-time status.

NOTES ON OCCUPATIONAL TITLES AND INDUSTRY CLASSIFICATIONS

The analyses in this fact sheet include nursing assistants who are employed in the **Nursing Care Facilities (Skilled Nursing Homes)** industry category according to the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) developed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Industry definitions can be found at http://www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/.

TITLE	EXAMPLES	INDUSTRY DESCRIPTION
Nursing Care Facilities (Skilled Nursing Homes) (NAICS 623110)	Skilled nursing facilities, nursing homes, rest homes with nursing care, retirement homes with nursing care, group homes for the disabled with nursing care, homes for the aged with nursing care, and inpatient hospice.	This industry comprises establishments that are primarily engaged in providing inpatient, 24-hour nursing, rehabilitative, and personal care services. The care is generally provided for an extended period. These establishments have a permanent core staff of registered and licensed practical/vocational nurses who provide care along with nursing assistants and other staff.

Nursing assistants are defined by the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system developed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) at the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). Occupation definitions can be found at http://www.bls.gov/SOC.

TITLE	OTHER TITLES	JOB DESCRIPTION
Nursing Assistants (SOC 31-1014)	Certified Nursing Assistant, Certified Nursing Aide, Nursing Attendant, Nursing Aide, Nursing Care Attendant	Nursing assistants assist individuals with daily tasks such as eating, dressing, and bathing. They may also perform certain clinical tasks under the supervision of a licensed professional.

NOTES

1. U.S. Census Bureau. 2017a. *American Community Survey (ACS) 2016 1-year Estimates, Characteristics of the Group Quarters Population by Group Quarters Type.* https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/16_1YR/S2601B; analysis by PHI (July 6, 2018).

2. Campbell, Stephen. 2018. *Workplace Injuries and the Direct Care Workforce.* Bronx, NY: PHI. https://phinational.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Workplace-Injuries-and-DCW-PHI-2018.pdf.

3. Bishop, Christine E., Marie R. Squillace, Jennifer Meagher, Wayne L. Anderson, and Joshua M. Wiener. 2009. *Nursing Home Work Practices and Nursing Assistants' Job Satisfaction.* The Gerontologist 49(5): 611-622.

4. U.S. Census Bureau, 2014. *National Population Projections Tables, Table 3. Projections of the Population by Sex and Selected Age Groups for the United States: 2015 to 2060.* https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2014/demo/popproj/2014-summary-tables.html.html.

5. U.S. Census Bureau. 2016. *American Community Survey (ACS), Sex by Age by Employment Status form the Population 16 Years and Over (White Alone, Not Hispanic or Latino).* https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/15_1YR/B23002H.

6. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages: Number of Establishments. 2017. *State and County Wages.* https://www.bls.gov/cew/; analysis by PHI (July 13, 2018); U.S. Census Bureau, 2017a.

7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 2016. *Long-Term Care Providers and Services Users in the United States: Data from the National Study of Long-Term Care Providers, 2013–2014.* Hyattsville, MD: CDC. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_03/sr03_038.pdf.

8. Other industries employing direct care workers include (but are not limited to) continuing care retirement communities, assisted living facilities, residential facilities, employment services, and vocational rehabilitation services.

9. U.S. Census Bureau. 2017b. *American Community Survey (ACS), 2016 1-year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS).* https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/pums.html; analysis by PHI (July 6, 2018).

10. U.S. Census Bureau, 2017b. Federal poverty thresholds, which are updated each year by the U.S. Census Bureau, can be accessed here: https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html.

11. U.S. Census Bureau, 2017a.

12. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). 2016. *Reform of Requirements for Long-Term Care Facilities.* 81 FR 68688.

13. CDC, 2016.

PHI works to transform eldercare and disability services. We foster dignity, respect, and independence for all who receive care, and all who provide it. As the nation's leading authority on the direct care workforce, PHI promotes quality direct care jobs as the foundation for quality care.

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- Implement best practices through hands-on coaching, training, and consulting, to help long-term care providers deliver high-quality care;

- Support policymakers and advocates in crafting evidence-based policies to advance quality care.

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