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**ISSUE BRIEF**

# **Localized Strategies for Addressing the Workforce Crisis in Home Care**

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The United States is facing a home care workforce crisis that profoundly impacts older adults, people with disabilities, and family caregivers. While resolving the crisis will require concerted action at the state and national levels, there is an important role for local governments and stakeholders to play, too. This report presents a range of localized strategies for strengthening the home care workforce, along with real-world examples.

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# INTRODUCTION

The number of Americans aged 65 and above is rapidly increasing, placing ever-greater demand on the long-term care system, and on home care in particular.<sup>1</sup> As demand grows, however, the home care sector struggles to recruit and retain a stable workforce, given the reduced supply of potential workers (relative to the growing older population) and the poor quality of home care jobs (including low wages and benefits, limited opportunity for advancement, and inadequate training).<sup>2</sup>

These trends have produced a workforce shortage that impairs home care consumers’ access to care—which can worsen their health outcomes and lead to avoidable hospitalizations and/or early nursing home placement.<sup>3</sup> And the shortage of home care workers places increased pressure on family caregivers—impacting their employment, exacerbating their stress and strain, and undermining their own health.<sup>4</sup>



The repercussions of the home care workforce crisis reverberate across local regions, states, and the nation, and must be addressed at each of these levels. Addressing the crisis is vital for meeting growing demand for community-based long-term care that enables people to live and age in place (often at a lower cost than institutional care). Federal and state governments and other stakeholders can set minimum workforce standards and protections, lift the floor by raising the minimum wage and increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates, test new recruitment and retention strategies, scale-up successful approaches, and much more. But action at the local level—including by individual cities or counties, or by groups of cities or counties—is also critically needed.

Local governments have far greater levels of interaction with residents than state or federal governments,<sup>5</sup> providing them with greater understanding of the unique needs of workers and consumers in their region. Likewise, other local stakeholders, such as home care providers, managed long-term care plans, unions, and community-based organizations, have a deep understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced by the communities they serve. Further, local governments and other stakeholders already have infrastructure in place for delivering services and supports to residents. With this combination of information and infrastructure, local stakeholders are well-placed to identify and implement targeted strategies for strengthening the home care workforce.

This report highlights strategies that can be employed at the local level to address the workforce crisis, presented in five categories.

Home Care Workers in the U.S.	
<b>Number of Home Care Workers</b>	2,259,570
<b>Total Job Openings, 2018-2028</b>	4,738,600
<b>Openings due to growth</b>	1,054,400
<b>Openings due to separations</b>	3,684,200
<b>Median Annual Earnings</b>	\$16,200
<b>Median Hourly Wage</b>	\$11.52

Source: PHI. “Workforce Data Center.” Last modified October 11, 2019. <https://phinational.org/policy-research/workforce-data-center/>. “Separations” reflect the anticipated number of job openings caused by workers leaving the labor force (due to retirement, disability, or other reasons) or moving into other occupations.

# 1. Recruiting New Workers

To ensure there is a sufficient supply of home care workers to meet demand, local stakeholders must explore strategies for building the workforce pipeline, reducing costs associated with new-hire turnover, and ensuring that workers are prepared to provide high-quality care.

## Localized Recruitment Strategies

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Description</i>
Launch a recruitment campaign	A recruitment campaign can help raise the profile of home care jobs. Depending on local demographics, a recruitment campaign can be designed to attract workers who do not typically seek home care jobs, such as men, college students, or retirees.
Create and disseminate a worker screening tool	A screening tool can be used to determine if potential workers are a good fit for the job, thereby reducing worker turnover, as well as unnecessary training and onboarding costs. The tool can be disseminated within the local workforce development system and to employers.
Fund high-quality entry-level training	Entry-level training for home care workers is provided by community colleges, vocational schools, other educational institutions, and employers. Local stakeholders can invest workforce development funding in high-quality entry-level programs, while minimizing costs for trainees. Training programs should also include bridging elements to help candidates prepare for successful careers, such as job readiness training, high school diploma or equivalency programs, and/or English language classes.
Sponsor a matching service registry	A matching service registry connects home care consumers with workers using an online platform, most commonly for Medicaid consumer-directed programs. Matching service registries can be used to promote recruitment and retention, since these registries make it easier for workers to find clients and build sustainable schedules.

### A County-Level Matching Service Registry in Pennsylvania

Transitional Paths to Independent Living (TRIPIL) is a non-profit center for independent living in southwestern Pennsylvania. With state funding, TRIPIL established a network of Direct Care Workers' Centers in Fayette, Greene, and Washington counties in 2005 to address workforce concerns.<sup>6</sup> Among other supports and services, TRIPIL offers the Direct Care Workers' Center Registry to connect workers and consumers in those three counties. After passing a background check and attending a four-day training, workers may join the registry and are matched with consumers based on location, gender, and availability. Workers can also include experience, means of transportation, and additional information on their profiles. Workers use the Direct Care Workers' Center Registry to build and sustain caseloads that meet their needs.

## 2. Supporting Workers' Success

Home care workers face multiple barriers to success both on and off the job, given their isolated and challenging role, their low earnings, and more.<sup>7</sup> Local stakeholders can support home care workers by connecting them with existing resources or creating new ones, as well as safeguarding their employment rights.

### Localized Strategies to Support Employment

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Description</i>
Strengthen employment supports	Local stakeholders can connect workers with existing programs and create new ones that help to mitigate barriers to work, including childcare or transportation assistance programs. Additional supports, such as peer mentors, <sup>8</sup> can further facilitate success on the job.
Establish a home care worker advocate	A public home care worker advocate helps workers and employers navigate complex labor laws, and connects workers with other employment supports, such as public benefits, training, and career advancement opportunities. A home care advocate could be established within local government or through a public-private partnership.
Enforce existing labor laws	Stakeholders can take steps to enforce existing local labor laws on behalf of home care workers, as well as collaborating with appropriate partners to enforce state and federal laws.
Create or expand local laws	Local laws can be created or expanded to improve employment protections for home care workers (or for all low-wage workers), making the job more attractive and sustainable. Examples include paid time-off and minimum wage laws, among others.

### A Citywide Paid Care Advocate and Enforcement Entity in New York City

In 2015, the New York City Council passed a law creating the Office of Labor Policy & Standards, a city-level office charged with enforcing local labor laws, conducting labor-related research, and developing policies to assist workers.<sup>9</sup> The following year, the City Council passed another law that created the Paid Care Division (within the Office of Labor Policy and Standards), a public advocate for home care, childcare, and housecleaning workers.<sup>10</sup> With these two offices, New York City is able to support home care workers in new ways, including by: conducting research on the challenges facing home care workers; directly assisting home care workers, such as by mediating wage disputes, connecting workers to public benefits, and more; and enforcing existing city laws through investigations that can result in restitution, corrective action plans, and/or fines.

### 3. Building Viable Careers

Due to poor job quality—including low compensation, insufficient training, and few advancement opportunities—workers struggle to build viable careers in home care. Local stakeholders can improve home care job quality, bringing more workers into the field and convincing them to stay.

#### Localized Strategies to Build Viable Careers

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Description</i>
Create higher-paying positions	Workers often cite low wages as their primary reason for leaving the field. <sup>11</sup> Local stakeholders can explore ways to increase wages or turn home care jobs into salaried positions. For example, where applicable, stakeholders can ensure that locally administered, non-Medicaid home care programs <sup>12</sup> pay a living wage, while also pushing for wage parity for all home care workers (regardless of payer).
Boost benefits for workers	Benefits are an important component of a worker’s total compensation. Localities can improve benefits for home care workers by offering locally subsidized health insurance or promoting group or third-party benefit programs. <sup>13</sup>
Elevate the quality of ongoing training	Ongoing training is as important as entry-level training, enabling workers to continue developing their skills and to stay engaged in their roles. Local stakeholders can bolster training opportunities by funding the development of new modules, providing technical assistance to training programs, compensating workers for their attendance, publicly recognizing high-quality training programs, and more.
Promote existing career pathways	Local stakeholders can play a role in identifying existing career pathways for home care workers; educating workers about their options; encouraging uptake by providing scholarships, college credits, or other incentives; and otherwise utilizing the workforce development system to promote those pathways.
Establish new advanced roles	Advanced roles, such as peer mentors <sup>14</sup> or senior aides, <sup>15</sup> provide career pathways that increase pay for workers while improving the quality of care for consumers. Local stakeholders can directly fund the development, testing, and implementation of new advanced roles or convene key stakeholders to lead this effort.

#### Employment Benefits in San Francisco

San Francisco has offered health and dental insurance benefits to home care workers in the Medicaid consumer-directed program (called In-Home Supportive Services, or IHSS) since 1999.<sup>16</sup> To be eligible to enroll in the health insurance, IHSS workers must be authorized to work in the program for two consecutive months and must have worked for at least 25 hours in one of those months. To be eligible to enroll in the dental insurance, IHSS workers must have worked in the program for at least 25 hours per month for 6 consecutive months.

## 4. Fostering and Sustaining Innovation

One major barrier to addressing the workforce crisis is the lack of robust evidence about what works, especially at the local level. To fill this gap, local stakeholders can take the lead in testing innovative strategies and scaling-up successful ones.

### Localized Strategies to Foster Innovation

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Description</i>
Establish a home care workgroup	A home care workgroup, comprised of a variety of local stakeholders, can identify key issues facing the home care workforce and recommend strategies for improving recruitment and retention.
Create a Home Care Jobs Innovation Fund	A Home Care Jobs Innovation Fund can be used to finance a variety of recruitment and retention innovations, such as recruitment campaigns, retention bonuses, or new communication systems. <sup>17</sup> After pilot-testing, the most successful innovations can be scaled-up at the local or state level.
Recognize high-road employers	High-road employers invest in their workers by providing higher compensation, better training and career advancement opportunities, comprehensive employment supports, and more. Local stakeholders can recognize high-road employers—and boost their recruitment efforts—by creating home care employer awards, employer scorecards, or a quality-based credentialing system.
Encourage worker-centered models	Worker co-operatives and other worker-centered models empower workers to meaningfully engage in their organizations and, in some cases, share the financial rewards. Local stakeholders can support the development and success of these models in order to increase recruitment and retention, for example by providing technical assistance or funding.

### A County-Level Direct Care Workgroup

The Kenosha Long Term Care Workforce Alliance is a coalition of public and private organizations that helps “recruit, recognize, and retain [direct care workers]” in Kenosha County, Wisconsin.<sup>18</sup> The Alliance focuses on raising awareness about direct care workers’ contributions and developing local and state solutions to the direct care workforce shortage. Activities include quarterly member meetings, educational opportunities for members and direct care workers, an annual Caregiver Recognition Luncheon, and legislative advocacy.

## 5. Measuring Progress and Impact

Better data is needed to understand the scope of the home care workforce crisis and measure how it is being addressed. Stakeholders can establish local workforce data tracking and reporting systems to supplement the limited state- and national-level data that is available—thereby generating a clearer picture of the opportunities and challenges faced by their local workforce.

### Localized Strategies to Measure Progress

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Description</i>
Review existing data sources	Data on the home care workforce may be gleaned from a range of sources, such as background check and unemployment insurance databases, among others. A thorough review of existing local and state data sources should be conducted to identify information on the home care workforce.
Conduct worker and employer surveys	Surveys can be administered to home care workers and their employers to gain a more detailed understanding of the current workforce, identify opportunities to increase recruitment and retention, and gauge the impact of new policies.
Foster better data infrastructure	In order to build a workforce data system, mechanisms for collecting and reporting that data must be in place. Local stakeholders can help build infrastructure through direct funding, by building public-private partnerships with technology companies, and/or by offering technical assistance to employers.
Track and share training program information	Despite the importance of high-quality training, prospective and current home care workers must often select training programs with very little information about their options. Strategies for tracking and reporting information about training programs (such as cost, employment outcomes, and other quality indicators) should be explored.
Issue regular reports	To generate an accurate understanding of the home care workforce, data from various sources must be compiled and analyzed. Drawing from available data sources, local stakeholders can publish regular reports on the status of the home care workforce, including challenges, opportunities, trends, successes, and best practices.

### Minnesota's Home Care Survey

Although it was conducted at the state level, Minnesota's home care survey serves as an example that could be easily adapted to a local level. In 2016, the Minnesota Department of Human Services issued online surveys for both home care consumers and home care workers as part of a larger effort to address the home care workforce shortage.<sup>19</sup> Using a mix of closed- and open-ended questions, the worker survey collected information about demographics, length of service, and likelihood of staying in the job (with reasons). The findings from the survey helped to inform recommendations for addressing the workforce shortage in Minnesota.



## FUNDING FOR LOCALIZED STRATEGIES

Funding is a central factor in decisions about how to address the workforce crisis, and it is critical to consider the full range of funding implications of any strategy before taking action—from up-front capital to long-term investments, depending on the approach.

Local funding sources that may be leveraged to benefit the home care workforce include health, economic development, workforce development, local government, and private and corporate philanthropic sources. In many cases, it may be necessary to combine funding sources to achieve the necessary funding level.

It is also important to delineate the return on investment in the home care workforce for current and potential funders. Example returns include: the savings that result from improved health outcomes for consumers and reduced reliance on public assistance among workers; the economic benefits that accrue when low-wage workers' earnings are increased, older residents remain in the community, and family caregivers stay in their jobs; and more.

Local stakeholders can seek new funding sources, as well as explore how current local funding mechanisms and policies can be adapted for the benefit of home care workers. For example, stakeholders can investigate how contracting processes within local government can be used to encourage job quality in home care, such as by providing higher compensation, more consistent hours, or transportation assistance.

## CONCLUSION

Across the United States, communities are facing a home care workforce crisis that, without targeted action, will only worsen over time. Local governments and other stakeholders can take the lead in exploring and implementing strategies to improve home care worker recruitment and retention—serving as much-needed “learning labs” by testing new approaches, sharing best practices with other local areas, and creating the evidence base for statewide expansion. In this way, local stakeholders play a key role in ensuring that workers have access to high-quality home care jobs and consumers have access to high-quality care within their communities.





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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. Drawing on 25 years of experience working side-by-side with direct care workers and their clients in cities, suburbs, and small towns across America, PHI offers all the tools necessary to create quality jobs and provide quality care. PHI's trainers, researchers, and policy experts work together to:

- Learn what works and what doesn't in meeting the needs of direct care workers and their clients, in a variety of long-term care settings;
- 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

For more information, visit our website at [www.PHInational.org](http://www.PHInational.org).

Hand in Hand: The Domestic Employers Network is a national network of employers of nannies, housecleaners and home attendants and family caregivers who believe that dignified and respectful working conditions benefit worker and employer alike. In collaboration with local domestic worker organizations and our core partners the National Domestic Workers Alliance and Caring Across Generations, we are elevating a shared vision of what care and support in the home should look like for workers and employers. Hand in Hand is a co-convenor of The New York Caring Majority—a campaign of seniors, people with disabilities, family caregivers, and home care workers from across New York State. The Caring Majority focuses on organizing to build a sustainable and just caring economy that enables all New York families to access and afford dignified home care and other community-based services, and that supports the direct caregivers whose work allows seniors and people with disabilities to live healthy and independent lives.

For more information, visit our websites at [www.domesticemployers.org](http://www.domesticemployers.org) and [www.nycaringmajority.org](http://www.nycaringmajority.org).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau. 2018. “2017 National Population Projections Tables.” <https://census.gov/data/tables/2017/demo/popproj/2017-summary-tables.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid; Home Care Pulse. 2019. *Home Care Benchmarking Study 2019*. Rexburg, ID: Home Care Pulse. <https://benchmarking.homecarepulse.com/>

<sup>3</sup> Espinoza, Robert. 2017. *8 Signs the Shortage in Paid Caregivers is Getting Worse*. Bronx, NY: PHI. <https://phinational.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/workforce-shortages-phi60issues01.pdf>; LaPlante, Mitchell P., H. Stephen Kaye, Taewoon Kang, and Charlene Harrington. 2004. “Unmet Need for Personal Assistance Services: Estimating the Shortfall in Hours of Help and Adverse Consequences.” *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 59(2):S98-S108. doi:10.1093/geronb/59.2.S98.

<sup>4</sup> Rainville, Chuck, Laura Skufca, and Laura Mehegan. 2016. *Family Caregiving and Out-of-Pocket Costs: 2016 Report*. Washington, DC: AARP Research. <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00138.001>

<sup>5</sup> USHistory.Org. “State and Local Governments.” Accessed September 10, 2019. <http://www.ushistory.org/gov/12.asp>

<sup>6</sup> Direct Care Workers’ Center. “Frequently Asked Questions.” Accessed October 1, 2019. <http://wcr.tripil.com/faq.php>.

<sup>7</sup> PHI. “Workforce Data Center.” Last modified August 30, 2019. <https://phinational.org/policy-research/workforce-data-center/>.

<sup>8</sup> Scales, Kezia. 2018. “The Benefits of Peer Mentorship in Direct Care.” <https://phinational.org/the-benefits-of-peer-mentorship-in-direct-care/>

<sup>9</sup> NYC Consumer Affairs. “Office of Labor Policy & Standards.” Accessed September 9, 2019.

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dca/about/office-of-labor-policy-standards.page>

<sup>10</sup> NYC Consumer Affairs. “Paid Care Division.” Accessed September 9, 2019. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dca/about/paid-care-division.page>

<sup>11</sup> Home Care Pulse, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Paying for Senior Care. 2019. “Home Care Financial Assistance and Payment Options.”

<https://www.payingforseniorcare.com/longtermcare/paying-for-home-care.html>.

<sup>13</sup> One example is a company called Alia, which provides an online platform for employers to regularly contribute toward domestic worker employees’ benefits; Alia. 2019. “How it Works.” <https://www.myalia.org/howitworks>.

<sup>14</sup> Scales, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> PHI. “Care Connections.” Accessed September 12, 2019. [https://phinational.org/case\\_study/care-connections/](https://phinational.org/case_study/care-connections/)

<sup>16</sup> SFIHHS Public Authority. “Background Checks and Benefits Factsheet.” Accessed October 1, 2019. <http://www.sfihspsa.org/about-us/uploads/PA%20Criminal%20Background%20Checks%20and%20Benefits%20Factsheet.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> PHI. “The Home Care Jobs Innovation Fund.” Accessed September 12, 2019. <https://phinational.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Home-Care-Jobs-Innovation-Fund-PHI-Jan-2018.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Kenosha County Long Term Care Workforce Alliance. “Kenosha Caring Careers.” Accessed October 1, 2019.

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<sup>19</sup> Minnesota Department of Human Services. 2016. *Direct Care/Support Workforce Summit*.

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