

BUILDING THE DIRECT CARE WORKFORCE MOVEMENT

THE ESSENTIAL JOBS, ESSENTIAL CARE
MULTI-STATE ADVOCACY INITIATIVE



Direct care workers provide essential daily support to millions of older adults and people with disabilities across the country. Working in private homes, residential care communities, nursing homes, and other settings, direct care workers play a critical role in helping individuals maintain their health, wellbeing, independence, and safety.

Yet direct care jobs—filled primarily by women, people of color, and immigrants—are persistently undervalued, as revealed by direct care workers' low wages, inadequate training and advancement opportunities, and more. In turn, poor job quality drives many direct care workers out of the field and discourages other job seekers from considering these jobs in the first place.

These direct care workforce challenges are produced and perpetuated by a range of factors—including the escalating need for long-term services and supports (LTSS), inadequate LTSS financing, and insufficient understanding of LTSS issues among policymakers and the public. Compounding these challenges are the deep-rooted structural inequities that define LTSS and direct care jobs.

Now is the time to overcome these entrenched challenges. While the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the workforce crisis in LTSS, it has also catalyzed unprecedented federal attention—and funding.¹ Advocates from across sectors are coming together like never before to promote policy reforms that improve direct care jobs, stabilize this workforce, and expand access to LTSS.

And state leaders are listening.



“

Until you're in a crisis situation, sometimes you can't get the attention of policymakers. And I firmly believe we're at that crisis state now.”

HEATHER BURKHARDT

Executive Director, North Carolina Coalition on Aging, and State Partner in *Essential Jobs, Essential Care*

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Introducing Essential Jobs, Essential Care

Recognizing this growing wave of organizing and advocacy around direct care workforce issues across states—and witnessing the unique challenges and opportunities faced by individual states—PHI launched the *Essential Jobs, Essential Care*[™] multi-state advocacy initiative in 2020.

In the first stage of this initiative, we are collaborating with advocates in three states (Michigan, New Mexico, and North Carolina) over three years (2020 through 2022) to pursue three broad goals:

1. Addressing LTSS financing and direct care worker compensation;
2. Investing in recruitment, training, career advancement, and other workforce innovations; and
3. Improving data and research to strengthen the direct care workforce.

Our *Essential Jobs, Essential Care* partners are IMPART Alliance in Michigan, the New Mexico Caregivers Coalition, and the North Carolina Coalition on Aging. With these organizational partners and a broad

coalition of advocates in each state, we are helping to achieve immediate policy wins while also building an advocacy movement that can be sustained into the future.

The aim of this brief report is to summarize progress on *Essential Jobs, Essential Care*, celebrate our successes so far, and preview next steps. We will release a final report on this initiative in Spring 2023.



Who We Are

The Essential Jobs, Essential Care initiative is a collaborative effort between the following organizations:

PHI

PHInational.org

As the nation's leading authority on the direct care jobs, PHI promotes quality direct care jobs as the foundation for quality care—through research, advocacy, public education, and workforce interventions.

IMPART ALLIANCE

impartalliance.org

IMPART Alliance is a program affiliated with Michigan State University that is committed to supporting direct care workers through advocacy, culture change, coalition-building, research, resources, and opportunities for comprehensive, person-centered training and career pathways.

NEW MEXICO CAREGIVERS COALITION

nmdcc.org

New Mexico Caregivers Coalition strives to enhance and promote family and paid direct care workers, supporting their professional development and advancing issues of importance to the field of LTSS and direct care.

NORTH CAROLINA COALITION ON AGING

nccoalitiononaging.org

The North Carolina Coalition on Aging is a dynamic group of consumer, provider, and advocacy organizations and programs that represents North Carolina's aging population and gives voice to issues that affect older adults through collective advocacy, education, and public policy work.



“

We can't be a good advocate if we don't exist. So that's a great outcome of this initiative, in terms of credibility and name recognition and ability to generate revenue that will help us to build staff and keep going and be there for the long run.”

CLARE LUZ

Founding Director,
IMPART Alliance (Michigan)
and State Partner in
Essential Jobs, Essential Care

Evaluating Our Efforts

We are evaluating the *Essential Jobs, Essential Care* initiative to maximize our impact and inform future state-based advocacy. This short report draws from the full evaluation of the initiative, which is designed to address the following five questions:

1 IMPLEMENTATION

Were the activities of the initiative implemented as intended and on schedule in each state?

2 OUTCOMES

Did the initiative increase knowledge, supportiveness, engagement, and/or advocacy capacity related to direct care workforce policy issues and racial equity in each state?

3 IMPACT

Did the initiative contribute to measurable advancement in policy related to direct care worker compensation, workforce innovations, and/or data collection?

4 CONTEXT

What demographic, economic, cultural, political, organizational, or other factors might have influenced the initiative's implementation and outcomes?

5 LESSONS LEARNED

What were the main lessons learned from this initiative?





What We've Done

Although we began laying the foundation of this initiative from Summer 2020 onward, *Essential Jobs, Essential Care* truly took off in February 2021, when we hosted a virtual two-day convening in each state. Bringing together hundreds of advocates across the three states, the convenings raised awareness of direct care workforce issues, strengthened relationships and networks, built momentum for action, and generated concrete advocacy priorities. Participants engaged enthusiastically in the convenings and provided overwhelmingly positive feedback in their post-convening evaluations.

A key element of success was the diversity of content and perspectives represented; according to a journalist who covered North Carolina's convening, "Speakers unrolled data and figures alongside human stories, each piece of information giving a sort of witness to the others."²

Following the statewide convenings, we established an *Essential Jobs, Essential Care* steering committee in each state. These committees, which have met regularly since April 2021, have helped define the main goals, objectives, and target activities for the initiative in each state based on stakeholder input gathered during the convenings and on an ongoing basis.

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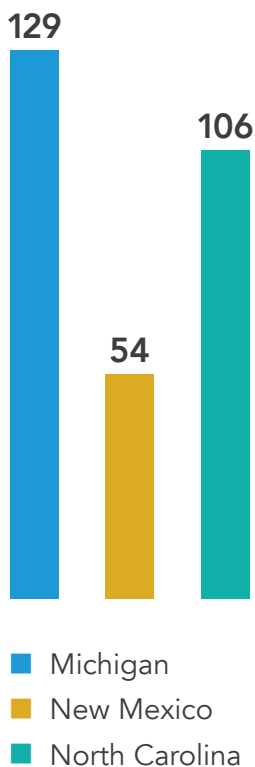
Honestly, I have no extra time in my days at work and was kind of thinking, jeez, I really don't have time for this [convening]... BUT, my experience on those two days has stayed with my heart and I'm more inspired and want to continue to be involved with this most worthy cause.”

**STATEWIDE CONVENING
PARTICIPANT**





Number of advocacy activities documented across the three *Essential Jobs, Essential Care* states through December 2021



From there, we completed nearly 300 advocacy activities across the three *Essential Jobs, Essential Care* states through December 2021, including 129 activities in Michigan, 54 in New Mexico, and 106 in North Carolina. Those activities included meetings (45 percent), policy proposal development (10 percent), lobbying-related efforts (8 percent), public education (8 percent) and policymaker education (4 percent), relationship-building with decisionmakers (4 percent), and other activities (7 percent).

In addition, since the start of the initiative, we have created and utilized the following unique resources to support our strategy and boost our impact:

OUTREACH BROCHURES

As a first step, we developed and disseminated state-specific brochures that provide context on direct care workforce issues and outline key opportunities for policy reform.

These brochures have bolstered our education and relationship-building efforts from the outset of the initiative.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCANS

To help advocates identify and prioritize advocacy opportunities, we completed a scan of pivotal policy moments related to direct care workforce issues in each state, including legislation, regulations, research, workgroups, COVID-19-related events, and more.

ISSUE MENUS

Alongside the environmental scans, we also researched and compiled an extensive list (or “menu”) of concrete, state-tested strategies for accomplishing each of the three main goals of the initiative (i.e., financing and compensation, workforce innovation, and data collection). The issue menus informed the development of a customized advocacy agenda in each state.

ADVANCING EQUITY

Systemic racism has long harmed the lives and jobs of people of color in direct care—from the creation of these jobs, through the long-standing exclusion of home care workers (and other domestic workers) from federal wage and overtime protections, to the ongoing racial discrimination faced by people of color in employment, housing, education, health care, and more. Acknowledging this reality, we are committed to bringing a racial equity lens to *Essential Jobs*, *Essential Care*.

So far, we have strived to fulfill this commitment by: developing a common understanding of systemic racism and racial equity across our core team; explicitly incorporating content on racial and gender equity (among other equity concerns) in *Essential Jobs*, *Essential Care* activities, such as the statewide convenings; proactively partnering with organizations that have expertise and experience in this area; and measuring our racial equity efforts through our program evaluation. In the year ahead, we will continue to build new strategic partnerships and strengthen our racial equity approach.

STAKEHOLDER ECOMAPS

As part of our efforts to engage a broad coalition of advocates, we designed an interactive online tool for mapping stakeholders in each state according to their locations, priority issues, and organization types. The ecomaps were helpful for documenting known stakeholders, identifying gaps, and engaging new stakeholders over time.

ADVOCACY ROADMAPS

To help each steering committee in their strategic planning process, we developed an advocacy roadmap template. Now populated with specific goals, objectives, activities, and related considerations, the advocacy roadmap provides a detailed path forward for each state—but will be revisited and revised over time as new opportunities emerge.





What We've Achieved

Through *Essential Jobs, Essential Care*, we aim to build knowledge, supportiveness, engagement, and advocacy capacity in each state related to direct care workforce policy issues and achieve measurable policy reforms.

During the past year, we collected baseline data that will allow us to assess these intended outcomes by the conclusion of the initiative in November 2022.

Already, through qualitative interviews with the three state partners—IMPART Alliance, New Mexico Caregivers Coalition, and the North Carolina Coalition on Aging—we have learned that the initiative is helping strengthen their advocacy capacity. Three themes emerged from these midpoint interviews: the initiative has provided much-needed *additional support* for their efforts; the initiative has helped *strengthen their credibility* by bringing in expertise from other states and a national organization; and the initiative has

strengthened connections between advocates, leading to a more coordinated and sustainable approach.

We also celebrated several positive developments related to direct care workforce policy in the *Essential Jobs, Essential Care* states within the last year. Highlights include:

IMPROVED COMPENSATION

As a result of joint advocacy efforts in **Michigan**, the state budget for fiscal year 2022 includes a \$2.35 per hour raise for direct care workers—sustaining the temporary wage enhancement offered during the COVID-19 pandemic.³

We helped raise public awareness of direct care workforce issues in Michigan, New Mexico, and North Carolina by writing and widely disseminating seven original articles about *Essential Jobs, Essential Care* and helping generate or inform 17 external news articles across the three states.

In **North Carolina**, thanks to joint advocacy from nearly 100 organizations,⁴ the state budget for fiscal years 2021 to 2023 includes wage increases for direct care workers in home and community-based services (HCBS) and intermediate care facilities, plus a one-time bonus of up to \$2000 for direct care workers who meet certain criteria.⁵ And **New Mexico's** spending plan for enhanced funding for its Medicaid HCBS program through the federal American Rescue Plan Act⁶ ("HCBS spending plan") includes a rate increase for HCBS providers with a wage-pass through for direct care workers.⁷

WORKFORCE INNOVATION

Thanks to sustained efforts in **Michigan**, IMPART Alliance was awarded a grant from the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity to lay the groundwork for a statewide direct care training infrastructure,

including by: developing consensus on core competencies, training, and credentials; pilot-testing training curricula; developing a credentialing plan and career pathways; and more.⁸ In **New Mexico**, we initiated a partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta to bring their

Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of the February 2021 statewide convening participants identified in advance as “policy advocates” for direct care workers. Even so, participants who completed a post-convening evaluation (N=74) reported an 18 percent increase in knowledge and a 14 percent increase in commitment to direct care workforce advocacy due to their participation.

Career Ladder Identifier and Financial Forecaster (CLIFF) tools⁹ to the state to help strengthen the social safety net for direct care workers and other low-wage workers.

In **North Carolina**, several of our recommendations were included in the state’s HCBS spending plan, including the creation of a Direct Care Jobs Innovation Fund to support recruitment and retention strategies in the state.¹⁰

BETTER DATA

In **New Mexico**, we were successful in promoting the introduction of a bill to improve direct support professional compensation and data collection under the state’s Developmental Disabilities Waiver program.¹¹ Although the bill did not pass, our advocacy led to the inclusion of related workforce data collection provisions in the state’s HCBS spending plan—which could inform future legislative success. Similarly, **North Carolina’s** HCBS spending plan also includes, on our recommendation, a workforce survey initiative designed to identify key workforce challenges and generate recommendations for statewide, systems-level solutions.



“

This initiative is going to bring a huge bump to our organization’s visibility. The administration has got to reckon with us now. They know we’ve got good ideas and great policy proposals.”

ADRIENNE SMITH

President and CEO,
New Mexico Caregivers
Coalition, and State Partner
in *Essential Jobs*,
Essential Care



What Comes Next

To date, the *Essential Jobs, Essential Care* initiative has been implemented successfully in all three states. Leveraging both new and long-standing partnerships and opportunities, we have engaged in a plethora of advocacy activities and achieved measurable impacts on the policy landscape in each state.

In the final year of this three-year initiative, we will continue to strengthen relationships, build advocacy capacity, and pursue a range of advocacy activities. Our immediate next steps are to reconvene advocates through a second-annual statewide gathering in each state—to share updates, revise the advocacy roadmaps for the year ahead, and build momentum for action related to the upcoming legislative session, potential federal funding developments,¹² implementation of the states' HCBS spending plans, and more.

We are also planning to host a series of virtual advocacy skills-building sessions for advocates from across all three states, based on their identified interests.

We will also focus in 2022 on amplifying the impact of this initiative in three ways. First, we will take steps to strengthen the infrastructure of this initiative and support its sustainability—including by creating additional tools to help carry the work forward, cultivating leadership within the steering committees and broader coalitions, seeking further funding to extend the capacity of the three state partner organizations, and more.

Second, we will compile the tools and resources that we have created and field-tested into a digital state advocacy toolkit.

This comprehensive toolkit, which will be accessible to advocates and organizations across the country, will offer concrete, practical support for efforts to advance direct care workforce policy measures.

Finally, we will complete and publish a full evaluation of *Essential Jobs, Essential Care*. By assessing and sharing the lessons learned from this initiative, we aim to help inform future advocacy initiatives, as well as encourage other advocates to evaluate their own efforts. Robust evaluation will enable us to celebrate our collective achievements, replicate successful strategies across the field, and sustain momentum on this long journey toward equitable, effective direct care workforce policy.



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For more information about *Essential Jobs*, *Essential Care* or this evaluation, please contact **Kezia Scales**, PHI Director of Policy Research, at kscales@phinational.org or 718-928-2093.

PHI is a national organization committed to strengthening the direct care workforce by producing robust research and analysis, leading federal and state advocacy initiatives, and designing groundbreaking workforce interventions and models. For 30 years, we have brought a 360-degree perspective on the long-term care sector to our evidence-informed strategies. 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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