Throughout New Mexico—in private homes, nursing homes, and a variety of residential care settings—older adults and people with disabilities rely on nearly 36,000 direct care workers to meet their daily needs and participate in their communities. Further, when properly trained, supported, and integrated into care teams, direct care workers can promote better care for consumers and prevent costly outcomes. Unfortunately, despite their enormous value, direct care workers struggle with low compensation, insufficient training, and limited career paths, which drive many workers out of this sector. The COVID-19 crisis has amplified these challenges, leaving many workers without safe, high-quality jobs—and consumers without the care they deserve.

Now is the time to transform New Mexico’s direct care workforce.

MICHELLE GODWIN, Certified Nursing Assistant
New Mexico’s Direct Care Workforce

Direct care workers—formally classified as personal care aides, home health aides, and nursing assistants—support older adults and people with disabilities with activities of daily living (bathing, dressing, eating, toilet care, and mobility) and instrumental activities of daily living (preparing meals, shopping, housekeeping, managing medications, and attending appointments).

Systemic racism has long harmed the lives and jobs of people of color in direct care—from the creation of these jobs, through the exclusion of home care workers (and other domestic workers) from federal wage and overtime protections in the 1930s onwards, to the widespread racial discrimination that people of color continue to face in regard to employment, housing, education, and access to health care, among others. We must center and uplift women, people of color, and immigrants in strategies that transform direct care jobs. Direct care workers—who are largely women and people of color—deserve good jobs rooted in equity and justice.

**BY THE NUMBERS**

- **83%**
  - Women

- **82%**
  - People of Color

- **15%**
  - Immigrants

- **$10.89**
  - Median Wage

- **$14,700**
  - Median Annual Earnings

- **64%**
  - In or Near Poverty

- **75,500**
  - Projected Job Openings 2016-2026

RICARDO ARAUJO
Home Health Aide
Why These Workers Need State Policy Solutions

In states around the country, leaders and advocates from different sectors are coming together to advocate for policy reforms that support direct care workers and improve their jobs. Recognizing the essential role and unique needs of these workers, state policy leaders in turn are leading the way in strengthening and stabilizing the direct care workforce.

**Lifting workers from poverty.** Low wages impoverish direct care workers and compel high turnover in this sector. As a result, states around the country are pushing for higher wages and benefits for these workers, as well as paid leave and other financial security safeguards.

**Investing in workforce innovations.** From training to advanced roles and many other interventions that enhance the quality of direct care jobs, states are exploring a variety of innovative measures to boost recruitment and retention in this workforce.

**Improving data to strengthen this sector.** Robust data on the direct care workforce allows states to identify where shortages exist and track trends related to volume, stability, compensation, training, and other dimensions of job quality.

“It’s a lot of work emotionally. Physically, it takes a toll on us. But it’s rewarding in the end because the people we support become like family.”

**JESSALYNN BAYS**
Care Partner
The New Mexico Caregivers Coalition and PHI have joined forces to lead a multi-year statewide advocacy initiative to transform jobs for New Mexico’s direct care workers. By focusing on three critical policy areas—improving compensation, enacting workforce innovations, and strengthening data collection—in collaboration with a wide and diverse range of stakeholders across the state, this initiative will advance crucial policy reforms that strengthen this workforce and improve care for New Mexico’s older adults and people with disabilities.
To learn more and get involved, please contact our state leads:

**ADRIENNE SMITH**
New Mexico Caregivers Coalition
adriennersmith@aol.com
505-710-1024

**STEPHEN CAMPBELL**
PHI
scampbell@PHInational.org
718-928-2053

The New Mexico Caregivers Coalition was created to enhance and promote family and professional direct care workers, supporting their professional development and advancing issues of importance to the field of long-term and direct care. Learn more at nmdcc.org.

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. Learn more at PHInational.org.


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