



POLICY BRIEF | JUNE 2026

SUPPORT IMMIGRANTS

Protect a cornerstone of the direct care workforce.



PHI

QUALITY CARE
THROUGH
QUALITY JOBS

Support Immigrants

Congress and the states must act to protect immigrants, who are a cornerstone of the direct care workforce and our long-term care system.

INTRODUCTION

Immigrants represent more than one in four direct care workers across the United States, and more than 50 percent of this workforce in some states and localities.¹ Alongside U.S.-born direct care workers, they provide critical daily support to millions of older adults, people with disabilities, and families across America. Research has shown their outsized contribution to care stability, continuity, quality, and outcomes across care settings.² Yet immigrant direct care workers are impacted by numerous federal immigration policies and enforcement actions which threaten their safety and wellbeing, push them out of the workforce, erode the pipeline of new workers into this field, and compromise access to care for all those who rely on it.

This brief describes these recent immigration policy developments and proposes critical actions to mitigate their damage and build a strong and stable direct care workforce into the future. The brief is part of a three-part series that also addresses how federal actions on Medicaid and labor policy are reshaping the landscape of long-term care and directly harming direct care workers. These briefs are designed to help policymakers, advocates, and others understand these federal policy changes and their interconnected impacts—and champion a better way forward.

Spotlight on the Direct Care Workforce

5.4 million personal care aides, home health aides, nursing assistants, and direct support professionals

85% Female

64% People of Color

28% Immigrants

\$17.36 Median Hourly Wage

\$25,998 Median Annual Earnings

36% Live in or Near Poverty

49% Access Public Benefits

31% Rely on Medicaid

772,400 New Direct Care Jobs Projected Between 2024-2034

9.7 Million Total Direct Care Job Openings Projected Between 2024-2034

PUNITIVE IMMIGRATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Since taking office in January 2025, the current federal Administration has taken numerous actions to radically restrict immigration, increase deportations, and reduce immigrant rights.

Sweeping Immigration Restrictions and Rollbacks

Along with exponentially increasing the rate of immigration-related arrests and deportations, the Administration has proposed or enacted drastic changes to legal immigration policy, including: eliminating legal statuses for many individuals already residing in the U.S., such as Temporary Protected Status (TPS); restricting entry into the U.S. and/or suspending permanent visas for individuals from over 100 countries; and significantly increasing immigration processing fees, including through a new visa bonds program.³

Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security has proposed a new “public charge rule” that would treat the use of legally available public programs (such as Medicaid) as evidence against entry into the U.S. or application for permanent residency—forcing individuals to forgo necessary assistance to safeguard their own and their family’s immigration status.⁴

Targeting of Immigrants Through HR 1

The budget reconciliation act of 2025 (HR 1) allocated \$170.1 billion in funding for immigration enforcement actions, but also targeted immigrants through changes to Medicaid, Medicare, and other public programs.⁵ Among other changes, the law terminated eligibility for Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

(SNAP) for many lawfully present immigrants, while eliminating premium tax credits for the health insurance marketplace for some and prohibiting marketplace access altogether for others. The law also rescinded Medicare coverage for many lawfully present immigrants who were previously eligible, and radically reduced access to the Child Tax Credit by requiring at least one parent to hold a Social Security number.

Did You Know? Immigrants comprise 46 percent of the direct care workforce in Florida and California, 52 percent in New Jersey, and 57 percent in New York.⁶



WHY IMMIGRATION MATTERS FOR THE DIRECT CARE WORKFORCE

Punitive immigration policies and practices impact immigrant direct care workers both directly and indirectly, and will lead to greater instability and shortages in the workforce overall.

Most direct care workers in formal employment arrangements—i.e., who work for a home care agency, nursing home, or other organizational employer—are U.S. citizens or permanent residents, or are otherwise authorized to work. However, some have had their status revoked, for example through TPS terminations or revised visa processes. Many more are experiencing the chilling effect of immigration policy changes—exiting the formal workforce, reducing contact with public offices, opting out of services, and even “self-deporting” due to fear for their own or their family’s safety.⁷

The immigrant share of the direct care workforce has already grown in recent years, increasing from 21 to 28 percent in just over a decade—and even more immigrants will be needed to fill nearly 800,000 new direct care jobs in the decade ahead, as demand increases while the number of U.S.-born workers entering the workforce declines.⁸ Contravening this reality, punitive immigration policies and practices will serve to *shrink* the pipeline of new workers into direct care jobs.

The reduced supply of current and future immigrant workers will strain a workforce that is already experiencing shortages across the country and further undermine care access, continuity, and quality for older adults, people with disabilities, and families.⁹



Did You Know? Research shows that immigrants are more likely to remain in the long-term care workforce than U.S.-born workers, supporting workforce stability and continuity of care.¹⁰

CALL TO ACTION

Today's policy choices will determine whether the direct care workforce—and the long-term care system that this workforce sustains—can meet growing care needs into the future. The following recommendations describe what policymakers must do to mitigate the impact of harmful immigration policies and build more stable, equitable care infrastructure.

Halt and Reverse Punitive Immigration Policies

Congress must stop current efforts to dismantle the U.S. immigration system, which are disproportionately harming direct care workers and those they support as well as damaging families, communities, and the economy overall. Immediate steps should include reducing support for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), directing funds toward reducing immigration processing delays instead; reversing the travel bans and other excessive barriers to entry; and reinstating legal status for at-risk populations, such as TPS holders.

Develop Thoughtful Immigration Strategies

Going further, Congress should proactively create immigration pathways for direct care workers to prevent the collapse of the U.S. long-term care system—with attention to ensuring permanent status, employment portability, family unity, and labor protections. As one example, the Bipartisan Policy Center recommended that Congress reclassify unused green cards as health care employment-based visas, with 25,000 of those visas reserved for direct care workers.¹¹ Lawmakers should also consider immigration pathways for direct care workers that have been tested in other countries, such as Canada's pilot pathway to

permanent residence for home care workers.¹² Immigration pathways should supplement, not supplant, policies to improve compensation, training, and career mobility for U.S.-born and immigrant direct care workers alike.

Support Immigrant Direct Care Workers

Alongside federal immigration policy change and stronger local protections (such as the ICE restrictions that have been enacted at the state and local levels¹³), ongoing support for immigrants in the direct care workforce is a pressing need. State leaders and organizations alike can take steps to inform immigrant workers about their employment rights and about where to seek help; ensure employers know and adhere to their responsibilities toward immigrant workers, and are prepared for external enforcement actions; and boost access to legal services for immigrants, among other actions.¹⁴ Training on cultural and linguistic competency should also be offered to all direct care workers, employers, and care recipients to bolster trust, respect, and effective communication.

Invest in a National Direct Care Workforce Strategy

To meet our country's growing LTSS needs, state and Congressional leaders must prioritize sustained investment in the direct care workforce. A national direct care workforce strategy should include establishing universal entry-level competencies, stackable and portable credentials, and integrated career pathways, underpinned by financing structures that support wage progression and retention.¹⁵ Investing in the direct care workforce—our nation's largest workforce—will pay dividends for individuals, families and communities, our health and long-term care systems, and our economy overall.

OPPORTUNITIES TO COLLABORATE

For more than three decades, PHI has provided evidence-based, non-partisan research, analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy to policymakers, advocates, employers, and other partners in the long-term care field. Known as the nation's leading authority on the direct care workforce, we stand as a trusted resource ready to provide expert assistance in navigating complex policy and practice challenges and designing solutions that work effectively for direct care workers and those they support.

Please reach out to Amy Robins, Senior Director of Policy, for more information and opportunities to collaborate.

NOTES

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ABOUT PHI

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 more than 30 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 highquality care;
- Support policymakers and advocates in crafting evidence-based policies to advance quality care.

For more information, visit PHI at [PHInational.org](https://www.phinational.org).



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