

PHI
QUALITY CARE THROUGH QUALITY JOBS

BUILDING THE FUTURE OF DIRECT CARE

PHI's 2027–2029 Strategic Plan

November 2026



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A Letter from PHI's President & CEO



Jodi M. Sturgeon

For 35 years, PHI has worked to strengthen the direct care workforce, driven by the fundamental understanding that quality jobs are the foundation for quality care. In that time, PHI has informed, fought for, and helped to win improvements to workforce wages and benefits across the country. We've advanced policies that improve training standards and labor protections. We've pioneered and tested workforce innovations that expand how direct care workers bring their vital insights and contributions to care teams. PHI has helped shape the national understanding of this workforce and the policies and practices needed to strengthen it.

The need for PHI's leadership has never been greater. Demand for direct care workers continues to grow, while longstanding challenges of inadequate compensation, limited benefits, insufficient training, and lack of advancement opportunities continue to undermine job quality and workforce stability. Federal policy changes further threaten economic stability, access to health coverage, and fundamental labor protections for this workforce, threatening to compromise the health and wellbeing of millions of Americans who rely on direct care each day.

Yet this is also a moment of significant opportunity, as the national policy landscape evolves and policymakers, employers, and advocates increasingly recognize that strengthening the direct care workforce requires comprehensive, coordinated solutions. Building on decades of research, experience, and innovation, PHI is positioned to translate that recognition into sustainable change.

> My 20 years of leadership at PHI have reinforced a fundamental lesson: achieving lasting change for the direct care workforce requires solutions that address the cross-cutting challenges facing all whose lives and livelihoods intersect with our nation's long-term care system.

That understanding is at the heart of our Universal Direct Care Workforce Initiative™, launched in 2025. Through the PHI Universal Direct Care Workforce Model™, we are advancing an integrated approach to training, credentialing, and career advancement that lays the foundation for a more cohesive and sustainable direct care workforce system. Expanding the implementation of PHI's UW Initiative across multiple states is a central priority of our new strategic plan—and an important opportunity to demonstrate the potential of transformative systems change.

Our strategic plan reflects the collective insights and contributions of PHI's staff, Board, and select partners, as well as the expertise and lived experience of direct care workers and others across the field. It establishes an ambitious direction for PHI over the next three years, grounded in our conviction that transforming direct care jobs is essential to ensuring quality care for all.

Achieving PHI's vision will require sustained commitment and collective action. I look forward to engaging partners, policymakers, advocates, and others who share our commitment to building a future in which direct care workers are fully valued and all people can thrive.

With purpose and resolve,

Jodi M. Sturgeon
President & Chief Executive Officer, PHI



BY THE NUMBERS

The Direct Care Workforce

DIRECT CARE WORKERS AT A GLANCE

5.8 Million
Direct Care Workers

The direct care workforce includes nearly 5.8 million workers who support older adults and people with disabilities across homes, residential care settings, and nursing homes.

886,000
New Jobs

Between 2025 and 2035, direct care will add more than 886,000 new jobs, making it among the fastest-growing occupations in the United States.

9.6 Million
Job Openings

When retirements and turnover are included, long-term care employers will need to fill 9.6 million direct care positions between 2025 and 2035.

$17.99
Per Hour

Despite their critical role, direct care workers earn a median wage of only $17.99 per hour—$2.55 less than the median wage for similar occupations outside direct care.

34%

More than one in three direct care workers (34%) live in or near poverty.

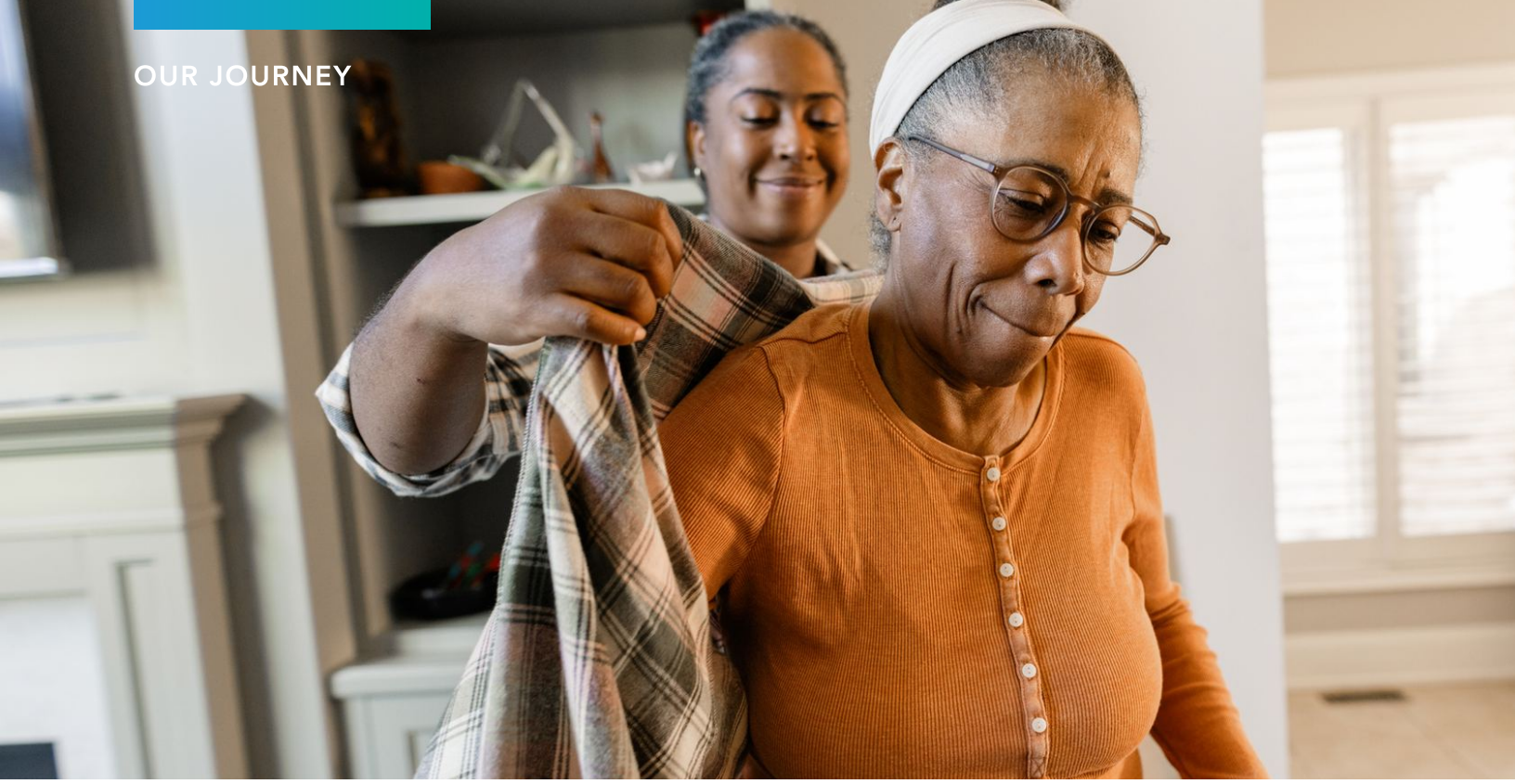
45%

Nearly half (45%) rely on public assistance programs to help meet basic needs.

12:1

By 2060, the ratio of working-age adults to adults age 85 and older will fall from 31:1 to just 12:1, intensifying demand for the direct care workforce while the population of adults who can provide care shrinks.

Source: PHI. 2026. *Direct Care Workers in the United States: Key Facts.* New York, NY: PHI. phinational.org/resource/direct-care-workers-in-the-united-states-key-facts-2026



35 Years Shaping the Direct Care Workforce

For more than 35 years, PHI has built the evidence and advanced the solutions that demonstrate why quality direct care jobs are essential to quality care for millions of older adults and people with disabilities. Quality jobs also provide workers with greater economic security, opportunities for advancement, and the ability to build sustainable direct care careers—strengthening families and communities while helping meet the nation's growing demand for long-term care.

Through this work, PHI has established itself as the nation's leading authority on the direct care workforce, bringing visibility to workers who are the backbone of our long-term care system and driving changes in how their jobs are valued, supported, and strengthened.

RECENT IMPACT

Our Reach and Results | 2025–2026

Between January 2025 and July 2026, our work reached communities across the country, strengthened the direct care workforce, shaped policy and practice, and helped build stronger long-term care systems:

National Reach

Worked in 42 states, collaborating with 222 partners to deliver 164 projects that advanced long-term care and workforce solutions.

Strengthening the Workforce

Trained 479 people and responded to 183 technical assistance inquiries, building workforce knowledge and skills while providing expertise to strengthen research, policies, and practices.

Catalyzing Change

Advanced systems change efforts through 37 contracts and 25 grant awards while contributing to policy efforts reflected in 24 pieces of legislation introduced.

Shaping the Field

Expanded the conversation through 366 earned media mentions, 86 citations in the literature, and 123 presentations, extending the reach of PHI's expertise and trusted national voice.

Sustaining Our Impact

Generated $11 million in revenue to support PHI's mission and advance workforce solutions nationwide.

These accomplishments are not the culmination of our work. They provide the foundation for PHI's next chapter—expanding our reach, accelerating innovation, and driving the systems change needed to improve direct care jobs and long-term care nationwide.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our Strategic Direction

In 2026, PHI undertook a comprehensive strategic planning process, engaging staff, Board members, and external leaders to assess the direct care landscape, examine our organizational strengths, and identify opportunities to deepen our impact. This work resulted in a renewed mission and values, a sharper articulation of our unique role in the field, and five Impact Aims that define our priorities and direction for the next three years.

OUR MISSION

PHI advances quality direct care jobs as the foundation for quality care. We transform care systems to create a future where direct care workers are fully valued and all people can thrive.

"This work is rewarding in its own right, and I like being able to support individuals' needs and help them do things they can't do for themselves. But caring for someone as your job is a lot more demanding than people think."

ZCHON POLON
Individual Provider
Colville, WA



Our Values in Action

Visionary Leadership

We challenge convention, anticipate what's coming, and champion forward-looking policies and practices.

Strategic Innovation

We turn bold ideas into evidence-informed, practical approaches that drive lasting impact.

Systemic Equity

We advance solutions that enhance respect, opportunity, and economic security for all who provide direct care. *(See note, page 10.)*

Purposeful Collaboration

We bring together people and organizations to translate shared insight and evidence into meaningful change. *(See note, page 10.)*



"My clients are very special to me. From the first day I meet them... Many of them don't have any other help and might be alone at home the entire week except for when an aide is there. Usually a couple of minutes after I arrive, they are already smiling. That's a beautiful gift you get being a home care aide. I know they appreciate the work I do for them."

MARIA MARRERO
Certified Home Health Aide
Totowa, NJ

Systemic Equity

Systemic inequities have long shaped both the direct care workforce and the lives of those who rely on care. Predominantly women, people of color, and immigrants, direct care workers continue to face the legacy of historic exclusion from labor protections, persistent discrimination, and the devaluation of caregiving by deeming it *women's work*—combined with the recent erosion of worker protections, unprecedented funding cuts, and the pursuit of extreme anti-immigrant policies. At the same time, many older adults and people with disabilities continue to face barriers that limit access to the care and support they need.

These inequities are deeply interconnected: when direct care workers lack economic security, training, and support, care quality and stability suffer as well. Building a stronger care system requires advancing equity through policies and practices that promote dignity, opportunity, and economic security for workers and those they support.

Purposeful Collaboration

PHI works with the many leaders and institutions that shape long-term care workforce policy, financing, and workforce development, including:

- State policymakers and agency leaders across Medicaid, aging, disability, and workforce development
- Health plans and managed care organizations
- Advocacy organizations and coalition partners
- Foundations and other philanthropic partners
- Federal policymakers and agencies
- Long-term care employers and other industry leaders
- Workforce development and training entities

Throughout our work, we center the experiences and advocacy efforts of direct care workers, older adults, people with disabilities, and family caregivers.

Our Unique Role in the Field

Engagement with staff, Board members, and external leaders established a clear consensus on PHI's distinctive strengths, opportunities to expand our influence, and the organizational capabilities required to lead in a rapidly evolving environment. Key findings included:

PHI is the field's trusted authority on the direct care workforce, integrating rigorous research, policy expertise, and practical implementation grounded in the lived experiences of direct care workers.

PHI's credibility draws on the full breadth of its expertise. Our distinctive value reflects the complementary strengths of research and evaluation, communications, policy analysis and advocacy, workforce training and employment models, leadership development, and technical assistance.

PHI translates evidence and expertise into practical solutions. PHI turns complex workforce challenges into actionable, sustainable strategies for change.

PHI can expand its leadership by broadening the conversation. Engaging beyond traditional long-term care stakeholders will position direct care as central to workforce development, economic competitiveness, family well-being, and health system performance.

PHI must strengthen the evidence demonstrating the impact of worker-centered solutions. Building on a strong evidence base, PHI can further demonstrate the outcomes and return on investment of worker-centered policies and interventions.

PHI's continued leadership in the field requires strategic focus, adaptability, and discipline. This means pairing an ambitious vision with a focus on the highest-impact opportunities, and staying adaptable in a rapidly changing policy and funding landscape.

PHI is positioned to shape the next generation of direct care workforce solutions.

Together, these findings affirm PHI's distinctive role in advancing evidence-informed strategies, aligning partners around shared solutions, and driving meaningful change across the long-term care system.



Our Impact Aims

PHI's five Impact Aims define the change we seek to advance in direct care jobs and the systems that support them. Grounded in our organizational strengths and strategic opportunities, each represents a distinct but interconnected area of impact. Together, they establish a framework for our organizational priorities, annual goals, and measures of progress over the next three years.

1

Direct Care Is More Widely Recognized as Skilled and Essential Work

Direct care is increasingly understood, respected, and valued as skilled, essential work that positively benefits individuals, families, and communities across the nation.

2

Long-Term Care Systems Invest More in the Direct Care Workforce

Public policies and financing systems prioritize investments that strengthen and stabilize the direct care workforce and increase access to high-quality long-term services and supports.

3

The Long-Term Care Field Advances Shared Workforce Solutions

Long-term care organizations, industry leaders, and other system partners adopt evidence-informed strategies and practices that support job quality, build the direct care workforce, and improve care quality and efficiency.

4

Direct Care Workers Experience Greater Equity and Inclusion

Across race, ethnicity, immigration status, and other identities and experiences, direct care workers are more equitably valued and included as professionals, with greater voice in the systems and decisions that shape their work and the care they provide.

5

Direct Care Offers More Competitive Jobs and Careers

Direct care workers have greater access to competitive jobs, opportunities for growth and advancement, and the ability to move more easily across employers, occupations, and states through transferable skills and credentials.

Our Strategies and Approach

360° Systems Change

PHI integrates policy, practice, research, evaluation, and communications expertise to create lasting, system-wide impact.



- **Practice Innovation.** We design, test, and scale workforce solutions that strengthen jobs, improve care, and support better outcomes for workers, employers, and the people they support.
- **Research and Thought Leadership.** Our research helps the field better understand the direct care workforce and the policies and practices that strengthen it. We translate evidence into actionable insights that guide leaders, inform decisions, and inspire innovation.
- **Policy Leadership.** We work with policymakers and partners to advance public policies that improve job quality, expand workforce opportunities, and strengthen long-term care. Our advocacy is grounded in evidence, experience, and the voices of direct care workers.
- **Public Education and Narrative Change.** By advancing public understanding of the essential role direct care workers play in our communities and economy, we shape public narratives, elevate workforce perspectives, and build broader support for change.
- **Field Building and Partnerships.** We convene diverse partners, strengthen networks, and build shared solutions that accelerate change across the long-term care system.
- **National and State Impact.** We pair national leadership with deep engagement in states, where many long-term care and workforce policies take shape. We turn national insight into state-level change and bring state lessons back to inform national policy and practice.

STRATEGY IN ACTION

The PHI Universal Direct Care Workforce Model™

Through our Universal Direct Care Workforce Initiative™, our UW Model puts PHI's 360° approach to systems change into practice, providing a practical framework for strengthening direct care jobs and transforming long-term care systems. Grounded in PHI's expertise in research, policy, and workforce development, the model brings together four interconnected components. Moving these elements forward will advance multiple Impact Aims.



- **Universal Entry-Level Competencies**
  Shared foundational knowledge and skills that prepare workers to provide high-quality care across a variety of settings and populations.
- **Stackable, Portable Credentials**
  Stackable credentials that build upon one another and are portable across employers, care settings, and state lines.
- **Integrated Career Pathways**
  Clear advancement opportunities from entry-level roles into specialty, peer support, care coordination, and other leadership positions within direct care.
- **Accessible Training Infrastructure**
  Evidence-informed, competency-based training designed for adult learners and delivered through flexible, language-accessible virtual and in-person formats.

Together, these components provide a coordinated approach to recognizing direct care as skilled and essential work, expanding career opportunities, and strengthening investment in workforce solutions across the long-term care system.

Our Commitment

Measuring Results and Progress

Over the next three years, PHI will track progress against measurable goals, evaluate results, and use those findings to refine our approach and strengthen our impact. Consistent with our commitment to evidence and continuous improvement, we will assess both what we achieve and where adjustments are needed to advance our strategic priorities.

Strengthening PHI and the Field

Delivering on our strategic priorities requires consistent investment in PHI's organizational capacity and the strength of the broader field. Over the next three years, we will develop talent and leadership, strengthen cross functional collaboration, and align our resources and investments with our highest strategic priorities.

Beyond our organization, we will strengthen partnerships, expand opportunities for shared learning, and build the capacity of employers, policymakers, and other leaders to adopt and sustain effective workforce solutions. Throughout this work, we will remain grounded in equity and ensure that the lived experiences, perspectives, and expertise of direct care workers inform our priorities, decisions, and strategies. We will assess the effectiveness of these efforts alongside progress toward our Impact Aims.



Building What Comes Next

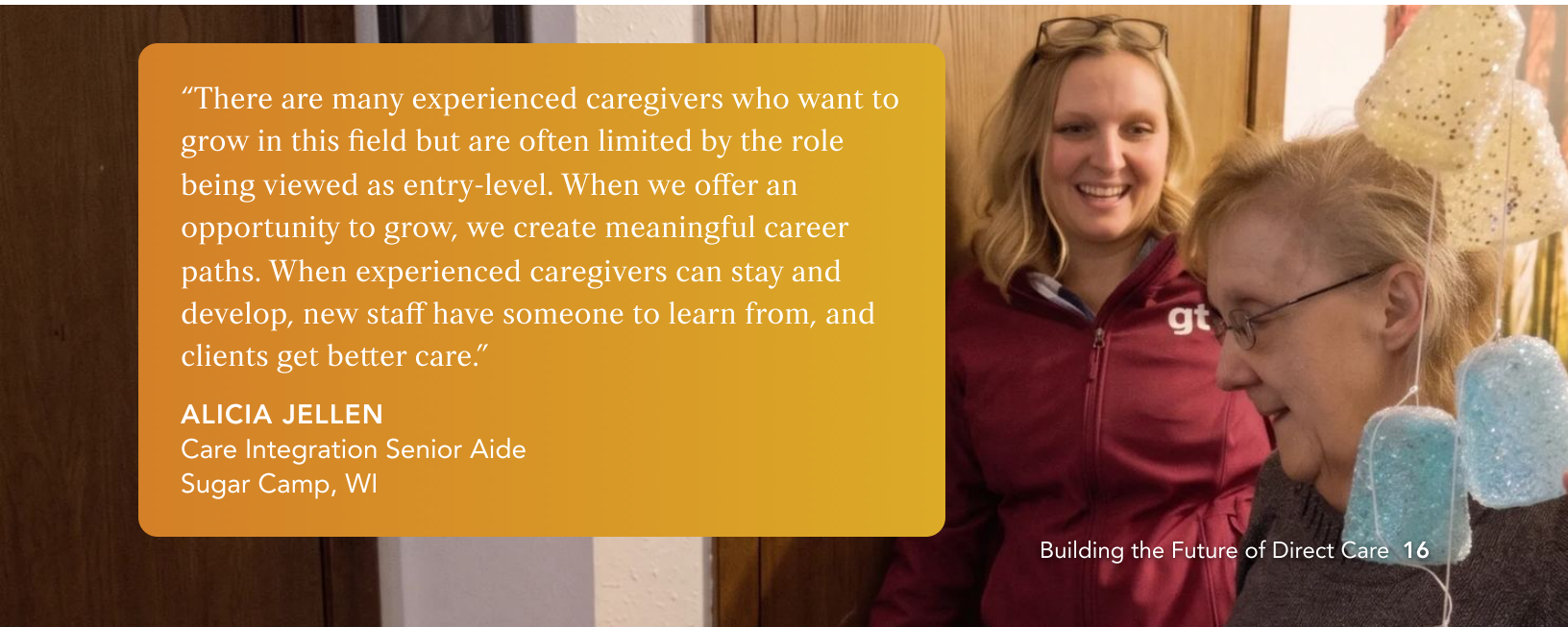
This strategic plan establishes our priorities for the next three years and the commitments that will guide our work to advance PHI's vision for the future. It reflects our determination to advance a future in which direct care workers have access to quality jobs, meaningful career pathways, and greater opportunities to shape their profession; employers have the tools and resources to recruit, retain, and support their workforces; and policymakers, payers, and philanthropic leaders recognize workforce investment as essential to a strong and sustainable long-term care system.

Achieving this vision requires collective leadership and sustained action. PHI will continue to advance evidence-informed solutions, strengthen partnerships, and build the capacity of the field to improve direct care jobs and the quality of care for millions of older adults, people with disabilities, and families across the country.

We invite you to join us.

Whether you are a policymaker, employer, payer, educator, researcher, advocate, donor, or philanthropic organization, there is a place for you in this work. Together, we can strengthen the direct care workforce and create a long-term care system that works better for everyone.

Continue the Conversation. If you are interested in learning more about our three-year measurable outcomes and annual goals, please do not hesitate to contact PHI at any time to expand the conversation.



"There are many experienced caregivers who want to grow in this field but are often limited by the role being viewed as entry-level. When we offer an opportunity to grow, we create meaningful career paths. When experienced caregivers can stay and develop, new staff have someone to learn from, and clients get better care."

ALICIA JELLEN
Care Integration Senior Aide
Sugar Camp, WI

WITH THANKS

Acknowledgments

We extend our sincere appreciation to PHI's Board of Directors, the external experts who contributed their perspectives through interviews, and PHI staff whose insights, feedback, and commitment informed this strategic plan. Their contributions strengthened the planning process and helped shape the priorities and direction that will guide PHI over the next three years.

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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ABOUT PHI

PHI advances quality direct care jobs as the foundation for quality care. We transform care systems to create a future where direct care workers are fully valued and all people can thrive.

Drawing on more than 35 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 PHI at **PHInational.org**

PHI QUALITY CARE THROUGH QUALITY JOBS

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