

PHI
QUALITY CARE
THROUGH
QUALITY JOBS

BUILDING THE FUTURE OF DIRECT CARE

PHI's 2027–2029 Strategic Plan: At a Glance

November 2026



Every day, 5.8 million direct care workers assist older adults and people with disabilities to live as independently and fully as possible across long-term care settings. Demand for this workforce is steadily increasing as our population grows older, yet long-term care leaders are struggling to recruit and retain enough workers. At the same time, millions of family caregivers are strained emotionally and financially, often lacking the respite and support direct care workers can offer. Older adults and people with disabilities are going without the quality services they need.

These challenges are neither inevitable nor unsolvable. For more than 35 years, PHI has worked to transform this reality by strengthening direct care jobs and the systems that support workers, employers, and people who rely on care. We know from experience and evidence that strengthening the direct care workforce strengthens long-term care itself, benefiting workers, employers, families, communities, public programs, and the broader economy.

PHI's 2027–2029 Strategic Plan builds on that foundation and responds to the urgency of this moment, setting a clear direction for our work with partners across the country to advance practical, evidence-informed solutions and build a stronger, more equitable, and more sustainable direct care workforce for all.

Today's challenges reflect decades of underinvestment in long-term care and in a workforce made up largely of women, people of color, and immigrants, whose essential contributions have long been undervalued. Low wages, inadequate benefits, uneven access to quality training, limited career opportunities, and insufficient workplace support and resources have undermined direct care job quality and contributed to persistent workforce shortages. Today, these problems are compounded by new threats to Medicaid and other programs that finance long-term care. Recent policy changes have worsened economic insecurity for workers, undermining recruitment and retention and making services harder to access.

But a better future is possible. In fact, it is within reach. The decisions we make today will determine whether we reverse these trends and build a stronger, more equitable long-term care system that meets the needs of workers, older adults, people with disabilities, and their families for decades to come.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

The Challenge

- **Growing Demand.** Demand for long-term care is rising faster than the direct care workforce is growing to meet it, a challenge compounded by poor job quality that makes it difficult to attract and retain workers.
- **Workforce Shortages.** PHI projects that employers will need to fill 9.6 million direct care job openings over the next decade.
- **Economic Insecurity.** Direct care workers face low wages, limited career mobility, and financial hardship, with more than one in three living in or near poverty.
- **Access to Care at Risk.** Without sustained investment in the direct care workforce, millions of people and families will continue to struggle to access the care they need.

KEY FACTS

5.8M	9.6M	1 in 3
Direct care workers across the country	Job openings over the next decade	Workers live in or near poverty

"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



WHERE WE CAN GO

The Opportunity

- **Growing Recognition.** Even as federal support shifts, states, employers, health systems, and the public increasingly recognize that strengthening the direct care workforce is essential to the future of long-term care.
- **Cross-Sector Collaboration.** New and emerging partnerships across health care, aging, disability, workforce, and education are creating opportunities to develop and advance more coordinated, lasting solutions.
- **Evidence for Change.** Growing research demonstrates that investing in the direct care workforce improves care quality, strengthens organizations, and delivers economic value.

Shaped by our staff, Board, and partners across the field, this strategic plan reflects a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities ahead and a clear vision for the change PHI intends to advance. It sets an ambitious but practical direction for the next three years, focused on achieving meaningful, lasting improvements in direct care jobs and the systems that support them.

Together, these opportunities create momentum toward a more equitable and sustainable long-term care system. Building on that momentum will require intentional action and continued investment in the direct care workforce.



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.

Our Values

- **Visionary Leadership.** We challenge convention, anticipate what's coming, and champion forward-looking policies and practices.
- **Systemic Equity.** We advance solutions that enhance respect, opportunity, and economic security for all who provide direct care.
- **Purposeful Collaboration.** We bring together people and organizations to translate shared insight and evidence into meaningful change.
- **Strategic Innovation.** We turn bold ideas into evidence-informed, practical approaches that drive lasting impact.

"The future of long-term care depends on the workers who deliver it every day. This moment calls for bold ideas grounded in evidence, practical solutions that organizations can implement, and partnerships that bring people together around a shared vision for change. This strategic plan reflects our commitment to help build a stronger direct care workforce—and, in doing so, create a stronger long-term care system for us all."

JODI M. STURGEON
President & CEO, PHI





Our Impact Aims

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.

How PHI Creates Change

Strengthening the direct care workforce requires action across the long-term care system and beyond. To achieve our Impact Aims, PHI brings together six interconnected strategies, drawing on our expertise in research, policy, practice, and communications to drive lasting change. At the center of PHI's work is **360° Systems Change**, targeting meaningful, system-wide impact.



STRATEGY IN ACTION

The PHI Universal Direct Care Workforce Model™

Launched in 2025, PHI's **Universal Direct Care Workforce Initiative™** puts our 360° approach to systems change into practice, bringing together leaders across aging, disability, health care, workforce development, education, and policy around a shared vision for the future of direct care.

At the heart of the initiative is the **PHI Universal Direct Care Workforce Model™**, a practical framework grounded in PHI's expertise in research, policy, and workforce development. Through four interconnected components, the model advances multiple Impact Aims:



Together, these components aim to strengthen recognition of direct care as skilled and essential work, expand career opportunities for workers, and support greater investment in workforce solutions that can be scaled and sustained. The result is a connected, flexible, and sustainable workforce system, with quality jobs for workers and quality care for the people they support.



Join Us

Everyone has a stake in the future of direct care. Together, we can build a future where direct care workers are recognized, supported, and empowered, where older adults, people with disabilities, and families have a meaningful voice in the systems that affect their lives, and where everyone has access to the high-quality care they deserve.

Connect with us to learn more about our strategic plan and explore opportunities for collaboration.

PHI QUALITY CARE THROUGH QUALITY JOBS

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