

FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES: STRENGTHENING THE DIRECT CARE WORKFORCE



PHI

QUALITY CARE
THROUGH
QUALITY JOBS



Executive Summary

Across the country, direct care workers provide the majority of paid, hands-on care for millions of older people and people with disabilities. They represent a critical segment of a long-term care sector that must expand dramatically in the years ahead to meet the rapid growth in older adults. Unfortunately, this necessary expansion is jeopardized by low wages, thin benefits, and limited career advancement opportunities, yielding high turnover rates and a growing workforce shortage in paid caregivers. Our families increasingly rely on home health aides, personal care aides, and nursing assistants for support, but the supply of workers simply isn't meeting demand.

This report provides detailed recommendations across five areas critical to the stability of the direct care workforce. For decades, PHI has worked successfully on bipartisan policy initiatives. We trust this collaboration will continue, and we welcome the conversation—America's older people, people with disabilities, and our families depend on it.

DID YOU KNOW?

The typical home care worker makes \$10 an hour, works part-time and irregular hours, and relies on public benefits to manage her health and remain financially secure. She is part of a rapidly growing occupation, spurred by an aging America. Yet despite the value of direct care and the growing demand for these workers, she will likely leave her job within a year, exacerbating the workforce shortage that looms heavy over older people, people with disabilities, and their families. In turn, millions of people are left without proper care.

Recommendations for Federal Policy Action

\$10.11

Median hourly wage
for home care workers
in 2015

Source: PHI, 2016

WAGES AND BENEFITS

Low wages, part-time work, and a reliance on public benefits shape the economic realities of most direct care workers. In turn, many home care workers live in households below the federal poverty line. Federal lawmakers should enforce wage and overtime protections for this workforce; protect Medicaid and tax credits that expanded health coverage; promote the Earned Income Tax Credit; and support family and medical leave policies that are critically important to this workforce.

TRAINING AND ADVANCED ROLES

Quality training ensures that direct care workers have the skills to deliver excellent person-centered care. Unfortunately, training standards for this workforce are inadequate. Federal lawmakers should adopt training standards for personal care aides; encourage states to meet the 120 hours of training for all direct care workers recommended by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; and fund training programs related to advancement and working with chronic conditions.

DATA COLLECTION AND QUALITY

Neither state nor federal long-term care systems gather the data necessary to inform public policy and workforce initiatives. Federal lawmakers should work with states to gather and report data on staffing statistics, workforce turnover, vacancy rates, wages, annual income, and benefits; incorporate direct care workforce quality measures into federally funded LTSS programs; and promote programs related to managed care, chronic care delivery models, and telehealth interventions.

EXPANDING ACCESS AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Millions of Americans rely on long-term services and supports, yet access to these supports is hindered by tight eligibility requirements, a lack of resources in one's geographic area, inadequate federal and state funding, and a dearth of culturally and linguistically appropriate resources. Federal lawmakers should strengthen Medicaid; improve low-cost services; expand demonstrations that enable people to remain in the community; and promote culturally and linguistically appropriate training and services.

FAMILY CAREGIVERS

Home care workers and family caregivers often work together to support older people and people with disabilities in their homes and communities. Without paid assistance, family caregivers are increasingly strained, incurring significant costs and toiling with the physical and emotional pressures associated with caregiving. Federal lawmakers should support research and initiatives that promote a holistic approach to care management among home care workers, their clients, and family caregivers.

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Number of states without training requirements for personal care aides across all programs

Source: PHI, 2017

26%

Percentage of home care workers without health coverage

Source: PHI, 2016

We believe that caring, committed relationships between direct care workers and their clients are at the heart of quality care. Those relationships work best when direct care workers receive high quality training, living wages, and respect for the central role they play.

To read the full report, including detailed recommendations, a historical timeline of PHI's record of bipartisan federal action, and research citations, please visit PHInational.org.

