Direct Care| Context

Background

According to PHI, an organization focused on strengthening direct care, North Carolina will be required to fill 186,000+ direct care worker (DCW) openings from 2018 to 2028. That includes nearly 21,000 new jobs to meet rising demand and 165,500 vacancies due to attrition from the existing workforce. Low wages and poor working conditions have been the primary drivers leading workers to seek alternative career opportunities.[1]

119,000 There are approximately 119,000 direct care workers providing care to the citizens of North Carolina.

61% People of color make up a significant 61% of the direct care workforce.[2]

92% Women make up 92% of the direct care workforce in North Carolina.

$13.62 For 2022, the median wage of DCWs in North Carolina was $13.62.[6]

Challenges

Faced with low wages, safety concerns, and a lack of recognition, the direct care workforce has experienced disproportionate levels of attrition and turnover. Beyond these challenges directly related to the job, these workers also may have limited prospects for advancement, with no clear career path.

Low wages

In 2022, median hourly wages for DCWs in North Carolina was $13.62.[6] This includes Nursing Assistants, who earned a median wage of $15.31 and Home Health and Personal Care Aides, who earned $12.06 per hour. It is important to note that these are median figures, and thus many DCWs earn significantly less than this.

Lack of benefits

In 2021, 17% of DCWs in North Carolina had no health insurance, and 25% relied on public coverage.[3] Just half of DCWs obtained health insurance through their employer or union.[6]

Inadequate training

Few states require DCWs to participate in the continuing education that would increase their skill sets over time.[4] Furthermore, there are few federal or state training requirements for many categories of DCWs.

Lack of professional advancement

DWCs do not have a clear trajectory or career ladder. Many DCWs do not have official credentials or certifications and report that the experience and training they do earn or complete does not garner higher wages or follow them if they change jobs.[4]

Lack of respect and value

The services that DCWs provide to individuals across the country are essential yet are often undervalued by society.[5] During the COVID-19 pandemic, all states immediately identified hospital workers as a priority for the distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). However, the PPE priority designation frequently failed to include DCWs in nursing homes or home and community-based care settings, signifying less respect and value.[4]

Aging population

As the aging population continues to grow, there is a significant increase in the number of individuals who will require direct care services in the coming years. This demographic shift poses a pressing demand for well-trained and dedicated DCWs to meet the evolving health care needs of the elderly.

1. PHI, "Time to Lift up North Carolina's Direct Care Workers," 2021; 2. PHI, "Essential Jobs, Essential Care North Carolina," 2022; 3. PHI, "Resolving North Carolina's Direct Care Workforce Crisis," 2021; 4. Millbank Memorial Fund, "Direct Care Workforce Policy and Action Guide," 2022; 5. The Frameworks Institute, "Public Thinking About Care Work in a Time of Social Upheaval," 2021; 6. PHI, Workforce Data Center