

Public Perspective, Part One

*FOCUS GROUPS & INTERVIEWS WITH CONSUMERS,
FAMILIES, & AGING SERVICES WORKERS*

*Opening Doors to
Aging Services*

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Focus group research

Five focus group discussions were convened with five audience segments:

- Potential aging services staff (CNAs)
- Potential aging services consumers
- Family members of potential aging services consumers
- Current aging services staff
- Current families/consumers

Participants were drawn from across the country.

Each group lasted approximately 90 minutes and consisted of between three to seven people. The groups were led by LeadingAge research partner 3W Insights.

Discussions were held via teleconference March 5-16, 2021.



Agreement that we do not treat older adults well in the United States



Factors cited:

- **United States lacks cultural emphasis** of respect and care for older adults
- **Negative assumptions** that seniors provide less value
- **Ageism**

“We tend to think of when someone ages, they’re ‘not my problem anymore and we can’t possibly live with them.’ And I think we lose.”

-- Potential family member

Little understanding of care and service options across the sector

- **Lack of understanding of the sector:** most people think only of nursing homes when they think of aging services
- Sector **defined predominantly by health care**, even among current consumers
- Consumers cite **lack of advocates** to help families navigate and identify needed resources, services, and payment solutions

“We got bigger fish to fry [now], but in 30 years, 50 years, or when all of us are needing this level of care, [fixing the system] is going to be expected.”

-- Potential family member

COVID-19 crisis: resource problems and isolation



- A **lack of preparation** was most often cited among potential and current staff as the primary cause for bad outcomes in the field during pandemic
- **Isolation and anguish, as well as lost time**, were most cited by aging services consumers and staff
- Most participants agreed there are **resource deficiencies for aging services (money and information)**
- Consensus, particularly among current staff and consumers, that **media emphasizes negative stories**, and does not report on positive ones

Workforce views

- Current consumers expressed **gratitude toward staff** for devotion to residents, often filling in as family
- Current and prospective staff cited **powerful bonds forged during the pandemic**
- Current staff are quite positive about their work and **expressed dedication to caring for older adults**
- Most agree that **care workers are underpaid**
- Some potential staff said **workers in the field are less qualified** than other health care workers; that for some it is just a job or stepping stone to other health care work

“[The staff] do favors for us. They go out of their way. It’s not just that it’s their job, it’s that we’ve grown to be friends and family and care about each other.”

-- Current consumer

“Depending upon whether you’re providing in-home services or maybe working in a nursing home, what you are paid is nowhere near the worth of what it is you do.”

-- Current consumer

Differing views of providers among care workers



- Some prospective staff believe **providers focus on the bottom line** and place business needs over care for seniors. Current staff more positive
- **No consensus in differentiating between for-profit and nonprofit providers**

Government has a responsibility to support older Americans, but its role is unclear



Participants said government has a responsibility to help **ensure that older adults are cared for**, but were unclear of the government's role



Some want government to find solutions to **pay for services and care**





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*For member inquiries, contact Gwen Fitzgerald
gfitzgerald@leadingage.org*