

FEELING VALUED BECAUSE THEY **ARE VALUED**

A Vision for Professionalizing the Caregiving Workforce in the Field of Long-Term Services and Supports



Professional caregivers—including nursing assistants, personal care aides, and home health aides—have always played an important role in the field of long-term services and supports (LTSS). We're calling on all Americans to reimagine the role direct care professionals can play within our health and LTSS systems—for the good of older adults, their families, and their professional caregivers.

The coronavirus pandemic shed new—and much-needed—light on the valuable role these professionals play in nursing homes, assisted living communities, and home and community-based settings across our nation. It also gave new relevance to LeadingAge's long-standing efforts to encourage policymakers and consumers to reexamine how they view direct care professionals and the work they do.

REIMAGINING THE DIRECT CARE WORKFORCE

The challenges facing direct care professionals—at work and at home—are long-term and systemic. They must be addressed deliberately and immediately. Without permanent solutions, our nation simply will not be able to continue providing high-quality services and supports to a rapidly growing older population.

Our nation must reimagine the direct care workforce by facing three critical realities:

- **Value:** Despite the valuable work they do, direct care professionals are not valued by our society or its health care system.
- **Compensation:** Too many caregivers earn low wages, receive inadequate benefits, and endure poor working conditions while carrying out an extremely labor-intensive job.
- **Quality:** Inevitable staffing shortages and workforce instability lead to lower-quality care, lower-quality of life for consumers and their families, and unmet needs among care recipients ([Ruffini, 2020](#)).

WHAT WOULD A REIMAGINED DIRECT CARE WORKFORCE LOOK LIKE?

LeadingAge envisions a direct care workforce that is a professionalized workforce. Just like professionals in other fields, direct care professionals would:

- Receive high-quality, competency-based training.
- Earn a living wage and meaningful benefits commensurate with their competency levels.
- Enjoy good working conditions and skilled supervision.
- Have access to a variety of career advancement opportunities.
- Be respected and appreciated by their employers, care recipients, and the public.

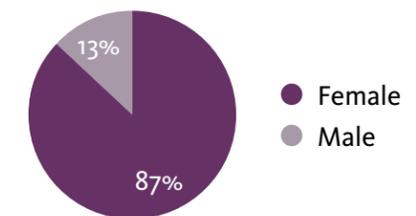


HOW DO WE GET THERE?

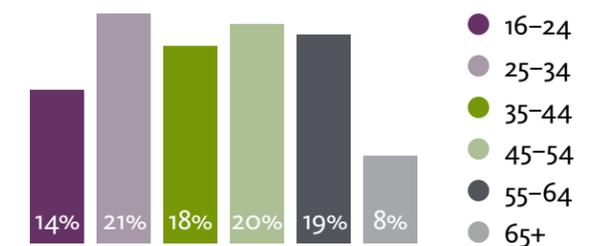
This white paper proposes **six strategies** for professionalizing the direct care workforce so caregivers feel valued because they are valued.

WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS

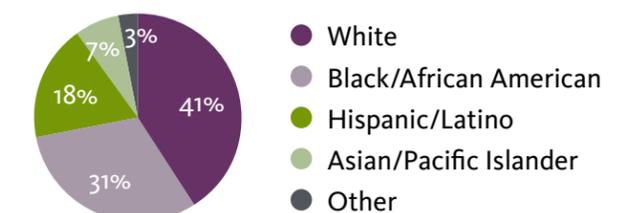
GENDER



AGE



RACE & ETHNICITY



STRATEGY 1

EXPAND THE CAREGIVER PIPELINE

The LTSS field is experiencing a workforce crisis. There are simply not enough professional caregivers to provide high-quality support to older adults and younger people with disabilities. This crisis calls for new and concerted efforts to:

- Target recruitment efforts to nontraditional workers like high school students, displaced workers, and older people who want or need to work past retirement age.
- Change immigration policies so we can expand the potential labor pool for LTSS jobs by increasing the number of foreign-born individuals who can work in the United States.

STRATEGY 2

ENHANCE TRAINING AND EDUCATION

The LTSS field depends on direct care professionals to help deliver high-quality LTSS across a variety of settings, and implement delivery and payment reforms focusing on care coordination and integration. To attain these goals, policymakers must:

- Identify competencies that direct care professionals must demonstrate.
- Support the development of training that addresses those competencies.
- Establish public/private partnerships to invest in initial and specialized training that is relevant and high-quality.

STRATEGY 3

FACILITATE CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Direct care professionals are the eyes and ears of the health system. Their long-standing relationships with care recipients allow them to observe subtle changes in condition before serious health issues emerge. These observations, when shared with care teams, can inform clinical decision-making and therapeutic interventions.

To carry out this critical role, professional caregivers must be given opportunities to:

- Become condition-specific specialists.
- Take on advanced caregiving roles.
- Join multidisciplinary care teams.
- Perform health maintenance tasks under the supervision of a registered nurse.
- Follow a variety of career paths, including nursing, social work, therapy, and management.

STRATEGY 4

INCREASE COMPENSATION

Professionalizing the direct care workforce can improve the recruitment and retention of caregivers (Weller et al., 2020a). One step in that process calls for increasing the pay of direct care professionals to a living wage in their states of residence. A 2020 LeadingAge study demonstrated that this level of compensation would:

- Provide caregivers with enhanced financial security.
- Reduce turnover and staffing shortages at aging services organizations.
- Boost worker productivity.
- Enhance quality of care.
- Increase overall economic growth in communities where direct care professionals live.

STRATEGY 5

PREPARE UNIVERSAL WORKERS

Federal policymakers could identify competency-based training standards designed to prepare individuals to work across all LTSS settings as “universal workers.” Such a strategy could give professional caregivers the flexibility to work across settings and even across state boundaries, responding to caregiver shortages in specific markets.

STRATEGY 6

REFORM THE LTSS FINANCING SYSTEM

The Medicaid program, the primary source of LTSS funding, is under severe budgetary stress. For this reason, a growing number of states are exploring social insurance approaches to financing LTSS. The infusion of insurance-based dollars into the LTSS system can provide additional and more consistent financing that, in part, can help ensure more adequate wages for the LTSS workforce.

The pandemic gave new relevance to LeadingAge’s long-standing efforts to encourage all Americans to reexamine how they view direct care professionals and the work they do.



READ THE FULL REPORT

Feeling Valued Because They Are Valued: A Vision for Professionalizing the Caregiving Workforce in the Field of Long-Term Services and Supports



READ THE COMPANION REPORT

Making Care Work Pay: How Paying at Least a Living Wage to Direct Care Workers Could Benefit Care Recipients, Workers, and Communities