

Making a World of Difference In People's Lives

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The Direct Care Workforce Empowerment Act

Direct Support and Direct Care Professionals: On the Frontlines of Long-Term Care

The number of Americans needing long-term care is expected to double in the coming decades—from 13 million in 2000, to 27 million in 2050. The vast majority—70 to 80 percent—of paid care will be provided by direct support and direct care workers, who are indispensable to our nation's long-term care system. Despite providing care and services that help millions of elderly people with chronic conditions and people living with disabilities maintain their dignity and autonomy, most direct care workers receive low wages, little or no benefits and insufficient training and professional development. As a result, this profession is plagued by high turnover rates that compromise the quality of care for the people they serve.

Many factors contribute to the poor compensation and lack of respect that direct care workers endure:

- Gender bias: nearly 90 percent of direct care workers are women, and occupations that are predominately filled by women are often poorly compensated.
- A lack of understanding and appreciation for the importance of the care provided by direct care workers.
- Medicaid (49%) and Medicare (21%) finance the majority of the long-term care provided in the country, and reimbursements are so low that they often prevent even full-time workers from earning a living wage.

A History of Discrimination

The poor working conditions of the direct care workforce are reinforced by existing federal law, especially the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Although FLSA was amended in 1974 to extend protections to most domestic service workers—including most direct care workers in institutional settings—the law continues to exclude home care workers from basic minimum wage and overtime protections.



Tell Congress to Pass the Direct Care Workforce Empowerment Act

Because more than 75 percent of long-term care is financed by federal programs, government needs to be part of the solution. This will help create a stable, valued direct care workforce and increase the quality of care for millions of Americans.

The Direct Care Workforce Empowerment Act will:

- Extend wage and overtime protections provided through the Fair Labor Standards Act to home care workers who provide support in community settings.
- Establish data collection and reporting requirements to monitor important workforce indicators such as size, compensation levels, turnover rates and vacancies.
- Improve the recruitment and retention of direct care workers by providing grants to states to expand and support efforts aimed at recruiting, training and retaining an adequate supply of direct care workers.

