

# BUILDING A STRONGER WORKFORCE

APRIL 2025



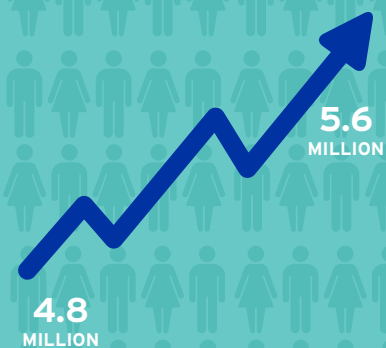
## Why Care Workers Need Skills Training, Career Pathways, and Support Services

BY ROBERT ESPINOZA AND AMANDA BERGSON-SHILCOCK

**A**cross the United States, millions of workers in every industry rely on the availability of childcare and long-term care for their loved ones in order to stay employed and financially stable themselves. Unfortunately, these vital services are often difficult or even impossible to access, both because they are out-of-reach and unaffordable to many, and because the childcare and long-term care industries are chronically understaffed due to a lack of investment in the workforce. Even though childcare and direct care workers are essential, these sectors experience high turnover due to poor job quality, which fails to reflect the skills, dedication, and expertise these dedicated caregivers bring to their work. When workers have access to the adequate training, career pathways, and support services they need to thrive, they can continue to provide the essential care that workers, families, businesses, and communities rely on.

This issue brief examines the challenges facing both childcare and direct care workers and describes why skills-focused policies can strengthen this essential workforce. It highlights why workforce development leaders should improve training and career pathways and expand access to these crucial services. Finally, the brief illustrates how National Skills Coalition is taking action to ensure care workers have access to skills training, career pathways to good jobs, and supportive services, especially in an ever-changing economy where working people increasingly need care to prosper.

### DID YOU KNOW?



THE NUMBER OF DIRECT CARE WORKERS IS PROJECTED TO GROW FROM 4.8 MILLION IN 2022 TO 5.66 MILLION IN 2032<sup>1</sup>



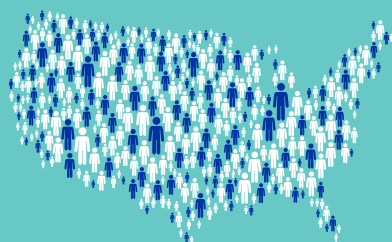
## DID YOU KNOW?



MORE THAN  
**SIX MILLION**  
PEOPLE ARE  
CARE WORKERS<sup>2</sup>



MEDIAN EARNINGS  
FOR DIRECT CARE  
WORKERS ARE JUST  
**\$25,015**  
PER YEAR.<sup>3</sup>



BY 2060, THE NUMBER OF  
AMERICANS OVER AGE 85  
WILL NEARLY TRIPLE –  
GROWING TO  
**17.5 MILLION.**<sup>4</sup>

## THE REALITIES OF CARE WORKERS

**More than 6 million people are currently employed as care workers in the United States.** They include about 5 million home care workers, nursing assistants, and other direct care workers,<sup>5</sup> and 1 million early childhood education and childcare providers.<sup>6</sup>

The vast majority of direct care and childcare workers are women and people of color, with a significant share being immigrants and older workers aged 55 and above. These care workers bring a wealth of experience, cultural knowledge, and caregiving expertise to their work, yet they are often underpaid and face limited opportunities for formal education and training beyond high school. Care workers play a foundational role in supporting our economy by making it possible for others to work. Investing in their contribution is essential to building a more equitable and prosperous future for everyone.

**The demand for direct care workers is expected to surge in the years ahead.**

Researchers estimate that between 2022 and 2032, a total of 8.9 million

direct care jobs will need to be filled. This includes new positions as well as vacancies resulting from workers transitioning to other occupations, leaving the field (primarily because of low-quality jobs in direct care), or exiting the labor force.<sup>7</sup>

**Demand for care work is widespread and growing nationwide as more families rely on skilled care.**

For example, there are 23 million children age five and under in this country, and 71 percent live in households where all parents are working—making access to childcare essential.<sup>8</sup> In the direct care context, more than 20 million adults aged 55 and older need assistance with activities of daily living (e.g., bathing, dressing, eating, etc.),<sup>9</sup> which direct care workers provide. As the US population ages, the need for care workers will continue to rise. Between 2022 and 2060, the number of adults aged 65 and older is projected to increase from 57.8 million to 88.8 million, while the number of people aged 85 and older is expected to triple, from 6.5 million to 17.5 million.<sup>10</sup>



I think if we give up on home care, then people with disabilities and older adults won't have their own lives. If they don't get the care they need in their homes, they will end up having to go to nursing facilities when it's not necessary, and they don't deserve that. This job is sort of like fighting on the front lines to keep people afloat.

*Sam Owen, Home Care Specialist at Community Living Alliance, Madison, Wisconsin.*

*Story is courtesy of the PHI Direct Care Worker Story Project.*



## DID YOU KNOW?



NEARLY  
**1.1 MILLION**  
PARENTS REPORTED FACING  
CHILDCARE-RELATED WORK  
DISRUPTIONS IN 2023,  
AN INCREASE OF 19 PERCENT  
FROM PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS.<sup>17</sup>

**MOST AMERICANS  
THINK SKILLS TRAINING  
IS ESSENTIAL IN THE  
CARE WORK INDUSTRY.<sup>18</sup>**



THINK SKILLS  
TRAINING IS  
ESSENTIAL IN  
THE CHILDCARE  
INDUSTRY



THINK SKILLS  
TRAINING IS  
ESSENTIAL IN  
THE HOME HEALTH  
CARE INDUSTRY



**\$13.07**  
THE MEDIAN HOURLY  
WAGE FOR CHILDCARE  
WORKERS.<sup>19</sup>

## WHY SKILLS POLICIES MATTER TO CARE WORKERS

**Despite their contributions to our country and economy, care workers are too often undervalued.**

They face inadequate compensation and benefits, limited training and career advancement opportunities, unsupportive work environments, and a general lack of respect and recognition by policymakers and industry leaders for their critical roles. One study conducted early in the COVID pandemic found that direct care workers “described feeling overlooked and deprioritized, even expendable.”<sup>11</sup> Another survey of early care and education workers found that 46% were dealing with increased levels of burnout.<sup>12</sup>

**As a result of these persistently low wages and limited advancement opportunities, too many care workers are forced to leave these fields, despite their skills and dedication.**

Workers often depart care work for modestly higher-paying jobs, which impacts the availability of care services for workers and families.<sup>13</sup> A recent study found that one-third of childcare centers experience high turnover.<sup>14</sup> While field-wide statistics on turnover in the direct care industry are limited, studies have documented annual turnover rates at 80 percent for home care workers and 100 percent for nursing assistants working in nursing homes.<sup>15</sup>

**Revitalizing the care economy requires bold state and federal investments in education and training to meet workforce demands.** Labor and education departments, worker advocacy groups, and training providers can lead the way by expanding skills training, career pathways, and supportive services for care workers,



**Quality care depends on a skilled, supported workforce. When we invest in training and career growth for care workers, we’re strengthening our businesses, our communities, and our economy.**

*Nicole Sohn, President/CEO  
Journey Discovery Center*

while aligning with leaders in other fields to improve wages and financing, among other interventions. Investing in training and support for workers in direct care jobs yields economic benefits like reducing turnover for employers, decreasing public assistance expenditures, and stimulating consumer spending and job growth.<sup>16</sup> A holistic approach to improving direct care jobs must combine multiple, complementary approaches.

By investing in the skills and support care workers need, we’re not just improving jobs—we’re expanding access to economic prosperity for workers, families, and entire communities.



## DID YOU KNOW?



FOR EVERY **\$1 INCREASE** IN HOURLY WAGES, THERE IS AN ESTIMATED **13% REDUCTION** IN CAREGIVER TURNOVER RATES.<sup>20</sup>

SNAPSHOT OF DEMAND:  
**9,000,000 JOBS**



THE AMOUNT OF DIRECT CARE JOBS NEEDED BY 2032.<sup>21</sup>

## HOW NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION IS TAKING ACTION

**National Skills Coalition has convened a distinguished advisory group of 19 experts in direct care and childcare to inform our advocacy.**

This approach builds on the success of our Industry Recovery Panel, which in 2021 harnessed the expertise of over 60 workforce leaders to shape federal workforce investments in the wake of the COVID pandemic. Now, through this Care Workforce Advisory Council, we are learning from key leaders to help us drive policy recommendations and strategies that strengthen care jobs and ensure that those who care for our communities have the skills, support, and recognition they deserve.

**In the coming months, we will release a comprehensive policy report and launch a public education campaign focused on expanding skills training and career pathways for care workers, as part of an effort to these jobs.**

The report will offer a range of policy solutions for workforce leaders to strengthen job quality measures such as skills training, career pathways, and supportive services. Importantly, implementing such solutions will expand access to high-quality direct care and childcare services for all workers.

**Later in 2025, we will announce our long-term commitment to strengthening care work jobs** as part of our broader vision of ensuring that every person in America is guaranteed skills training, good jobs, and economic prosperity. We value the work of fellow advocates and will collaborate with experts, allies, and our SkillSPAN and Business Leaders United networks—alongside other key stakeholders—to turn these policy recommendations into action.



There should be more training opportunities, especially for older adults returning to the workforce. Most programs are geared toward people 25 and under, leaving those of us over 40 without many options to grow. I think policymakers need to invest in in-house and on-the-job training for older workers. I've been asking for cross-training in radiology and I know I could be a real asset. More training and better pay would not only improve job satisfaction—it would also make me more marketable to work in other departments.

*Carasha Isaac-Porter, PTC at Manning Children's Hospital, New Orleans, Louisiana*

## ENDNOTES

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**National Skills Coalition (NSC)** is a national coalition that works to meet the ever-changing needs of America's workforce. We organize diverse networks that help to change the conversation about work and advocate for workforce-strengthening policies so that more working people have access to a better life, local businesses around the country see sustained growth, and more communities experience prosperity.

Learn more at [nationalskillscoalition.org](https://nationalskillscoalition.org).

