



Direct Care Worker Shortage Squeezes AAAs PASSPORT Rate Hike Planned for Jan 2017

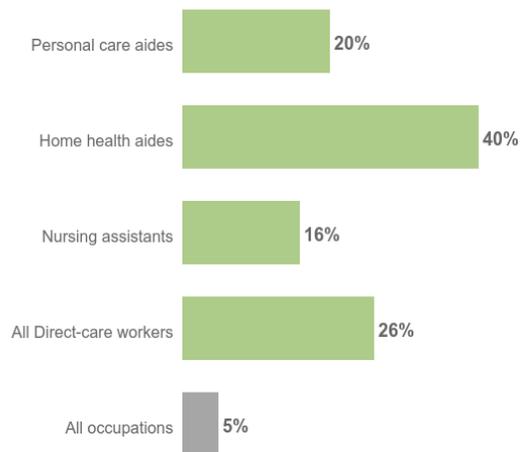
In Dayton, Robin organizes an elderly client’s medication for the week. In rural Appalachian Ohio, Ruth soothes a distressed dementia patient. In Cleveland, Maria makes sure that her client has her dinner on time and is comfortable and safe for the evening.

Ohio’s move to raise rates for home care aides—effective January 2017—is good news for a state that will see its older population balloon in the coming years. Every day, direct care workers (DCWs) supplement the support provided by millions of unpaid caregivers. They also care for those who may not have loved ones able to help. Yet, **our state is facing a shortage of these essential workers precisely when they’re most needed.** Why?

First and foremost, direct-care workers are not compensated well for their difficult, vital labor. Low, stagnant wages mean that many direct-care workers actually have to rely on food assistance and other benefits just to make ends meet. This means that taxpayers are essentially subsidizing a field notorious for low wages and meager benefits.

“In Ohio, through the PASSPORT program, the state, through the Medicaid program, sets the rates for these services,” said the Ohio Association of Area Agency on Aging’s Chief Policy Officer Beth Kowalczyk. “Unfortunately, the rates were cut several years ago and have not been restored. The cost of doing business—including employee wages,

Ohio: Occupational Growth Projections, 2014-2024



Source: PHInational.org

Ohio: Direct-Care Worker Households Relying on Means-Tested Public Assistance, 2012-2014



Source: PHInational.org



health care, transportation, training and other costs--continue to grow, but rates have remained stagnant. Fortunately, we are thrilled that the state will soon be announcing a rate increase for PASSPORT personal care services for next year.”

The Ohio Department of Medicaid, the Ohio Department of Aging, and Ohio’s Area Agencies on Aging will work together to implement changes.

“As a result of feedback from individuals, families and providers regarding possible access to care issues related to rates, the Ohio Department of Medicaid worked with its partner state agencies to review certain personal care aide and nursing rates,” said Kim Donica of the Ohio Department of Medicaid. “Effective January 1, 2017, the new rates will go into effect for PASSPORT waiver personal care services provided by an agency, PASSPORT waiver nursing services provided by agency and Non-Agency Providers-RN and LPN Services and the personal care component of the PASSPORT waiver home care attendant services.”

“In addition to better rates, wages and benefits, support for consistent training and career development would go a long way towards recruitment,” said Kowalczyk.

The current shortage means that Area Agencies on Aging (funded by the Older Americans Act) and their consumers are left scrambling to fill the gap.

“The Ohio District 5 Area Agency has experienced barriers and challenges associated with the shortage in State Tested Nurse Aides in home health,” Duana Patton, CEO of Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging, Inc. “The impact on our consumers is concerning. It takes our team sometimes as long as four weeks to secure a home health agency with the capacity to serve the consumer. On occasion, the absence of an in-home health care worker has resulted in nursing home placement.”

Rural area face extra challenges. As Patton notes, “It is difficult to find a state tested nursing aide willing to drive into the most rural parts of our region. Many are not reimbursed for mileage.”

Jody Carstensen of Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio agrees that the Office’s rural communities in particular suffer from a lack of DCWs. “The effects from this includes: more staff time spent calling multiple providers trying to find staff; long-term nursing facility



placement for consumers who cannot get their needs met in the community; fewer opportunities for consumers to change agencies when requested; more aides with limited home care experience; and the need to use multiple aides/agencies to adequately staff cases, making continuity of care an issue.”

Direction Home Akron Canton is experiencing a shortage of direct-care workers across the board. “It doesn’t matter if consumers live in Akron City or in our more rural areas of Wayne or Portage counties—everyone is affected,” said Abigail Morgan, vice president, Planning & Quality Improvement. “Providers used to race to respond to referral requests. Now, we spend many hours working with our providers to best figure out how they can best staff the needs of our community members. Sometimes this means that consumers may have multiple aides or agencies working with them. We have to maintain a waitlist for individuals who are assessed and eligible and enrolled for services but are waiting to find aides.”

Direct care work requires emotional intelligence, physical stamina, attention to detail, and reliability. Most DCWs are women, and many are Latinas, African Americans, or immigrants.

“The country relies heavily on unpaid caregivers to provide this care right now, to the tune of **\$470 billion a year** of value,” noted Kowalczyk. “However, in the coming years, the U.S. will see the pool of informal caregivers shrink, from 7.2 potential caregivers per person in need down to 2.9 potential caregivers per person in need in 2050. With the baby boomer population continuing to age, our unpaid caregivers will shrink, and our direct care workforce shortage will only grow, unless we do something to address the problem.”

o4a is evaluating whether the proposed rate increase is sufficient to address the immediate shortage. If it isn’t, we will advocate that the next state budget *must* address this pressing issue.

Qualified DCWs have never been more important. Ohio’s Area Agencies on Aging and their consumers see this need every single day. We encourage advocates, experts, and policymakers to embrace fair wages and benefits for DCWs--for the sake of DCWs’ families, older adults, individuals with disabilities, and millions of caregivers.

Questions? Share your thoughts on [o4a’s Facebook page](#), where you can connect with other Aging and Disability Network advocates and experts.