



*The Long-Term Care Workforce:
Addressing Shortages and Improving the Profession*
Full Committee Hearing
United States Senate Special Committee on Aging

April 16th, 2024

Statement of Testimony

The Moving Forward Nursing Home Quality Coalition is submitting a statement for the record on the urgency and importance of enacting policies to strengthen and support the long-term care workforce. *Direct care professionals are the backbone of this workforce*, providing care to older Americans and people with disabilities across settings, especially in home care, assisted living, and nursing homes.

Despite their difficult and essential role, direct care professionals' wages and benefits remain low and many live in or near poverty. The direct care profession must be improved in terms of training, compensation, and value.

- Enhanced recruitment and, as importantly, retention of direct care professionals are vital to optimize quality of life for older adults and individuals living with disabilities. Historically, most of the initiatives to grow and strengthen this workforce have occurred at the state level, but that approach alone will not resolve this complex issue – it will require a long-term strategic plan at the federal level to elevate the profession of caregiving.
- Improving wages and benefits and addressing social determinants of health such as housing, transportation, and childcare are critical to attract more people into the long-term care workforce and retain them over time. Grant funding and one-time payments are important but insufficient approaches for bringing caregivers up to a family-sustaining wage. Updating State Medicaid payment rates, incentivizing states to consider how to dedicate sufficient payments for direct care professional compensation, and addressing the lack of long-term care financing are important approaches to achieving the goal of adequate direct care professional compensation. There must be transparency and accountability so that increased funding received by providers goes towards the intended purpose of increasing wages and benefits.
- States also need assistance in operationalizing workforce programs and working across state agencies such as Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and others. Current systems are fragmented, and cross-agency communication is often limited. Inter-agency collaboration is vital to promoting and standardizing comprehensive long-term care workforce efforts within and across states.

- Identifying potential funding sources (state, federal, private) is essential to develop and sustain comprehensive, integrated long-term care workforce programs. Again, state grant programs will help but will not likely be sufficient to create systemic, national change. Long-term care employers of direct care professionals including home health and home care agencies, nursing homes, and assisted living communities generally do not qualify for Health Professional Shortage Area designation to access many existing federal workforce development programs under HRSA. Therefore, state programs should continue to include and expand advanced training and career advancement programs through scholarships, stipends, registered apprenticeship, and demonstration projects of career lattice and ladder models.
- Inter-agency efforts to oversee expansion and growth of the long-term care workforce are vital. These efforts must include direct care professionals and representatives of different care settings to inform strategic planning. Greater inter-agency collaboration would represent an important step forward in building and sustaining the long-term care workforce.
- There should be more active policy work at the federal level to promote the safety and well-being of direct care professionals across settings.

We applaud federal leaders for recognizing and prioritizing the needs of direct care professionals in long-term care, to build this essential workforce that supports millions of older adults and people with disabilities across our nation.

