



HEALTHCARE CAREER
ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM



Labor-Management Partnership Practitioner's Brief:

Strategies for Supporting Caregivers' Role in a Changing Climate

Overview

Climate change and climate-related emergencies—such as wildfires, excessive heat and cold, prolonged power outages, and dangerous storms—increasingly impact our communities, and care recipients and direct care workers are arguably among the most affected when disaster strikes. In many cases, caregivers are the first line of support for care recipients during emergencies and evacuations, potentially risking their personal safety with little training and support to rely on at work. Plenty of local news coverage¹ highlights how nursing facility workers are forced to make critical decisions to save or evacuate extremely vulnerable residents under their care with little preparation from facility owners²—traumatizing disasters that lead to resident deaths, especially among the most frail. Home care workers face extreme stress³ in emergencies, knowing that they are often the only lifeline⁴ the persons they care for can rely on for life-sustaining care, medication, food, water and shelter during an emergency. Home care and nursing facility workers are disproportionately low-income, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), women and immigrants due to occupational segregation in caring professions.⁵ Based on income levels, race,

and immigration status, caregivers may be statistically more likely to reside in climate-impacted areas due to intersectional environmental racism and classism.⁶

As climate-related emergencies and disasters become increasingly frequent and severe, members of the Healthcare Career Advancement Program’s (H-CAP) network of labor-management partnerships are uniquely situated to implement strategies that support and recognize caregivers’ critical role as first responders. Labor unions, healthcare industry employers, governments and workers can unite to create public workforce development initiatives around emergency preparedness that empower caregivers to respond to disasters and provide the best possible services to care recipients under challenging conditions. This practitioner’s brief collates insights from interviews conducted with two SEIU locals representing long-term care workers (SEIU 503, representing workers in Oregon, and SEIU 775, representing workers in Washington state and Montana), SEIU International, and Center for Caregiver Advancement (CCA), the labor-management training partnership affiliated with SEIU 2015 in California.

Strategies for Practitioners Building Programs

Creating climate resiliency programs and resources for caregivers is a unique opportunity for program practitioners to engage at the intersection of environmental justice, economic justice, and racial/gender justice. By building quality healthcare education advancement opportunities in climate and emergency training at the crux of these growing impact areas for workers and care recipients, labor-management partnerships can progress toward shared goals of worker empowerment, increased recruitment and retention, high-quality care and services, and good union jobs. The following recommended strategies include best practices from several climate resiliency initiatives at multiple stages of development to support labor-management partnerships in designing and implementing programs that fit the needs of their unique geographies and populations.

SECTION 1:

Conduct background research to gather information about your constituents' climate preparedness needs and state/local context and identify (creative) funding pathways.

SECTION 2:

Convene stakeholders, centering workers, service recipients, and groups most impacted to design programs and resources that empower caregivers and recipients, improve job and care quality and advance racial/gender equity.

SECTION 3:

Support the case for ongoing, expanded caregiver climate resiliency programs and sustained funding by focusing on equity and impact in the pilot design and evaluation phase.

SECTION 4:

Be creative about ways to start supporting caregivers' role in climate resiliency with resources and processes currently available to your organization.

SECTION 1:

Conduct background research to gather information about your constituents' climate preparedness needs and state/local context and identify (creative) funding pathways.

- Ask program participants and union members how climate emergencies and natural disasters impact them, and listen to their fears, needs, and hopes to develop goals around the climate resiliency programming that will be right for your organization.

☆ PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

Climate and environmental justice became an official focus for SEIU Local 775 after a visioning process in 2022 on goals for the ten years ahead revealed union members' desire to address the impacts of climate emergencies and extreme temperatures on home care clients and caregivers. From the listening process, the union set two principal goals: (1) the union would act as a hub for members to access public benefits and emergency preparedness resources, and (2) the union would connect caregivers interested in getting involved as climate activists and first responders with relevant organizations.

During the summer of 2023, SEIU 775 utilized a familiar tool to many practitioners to collect more information on union members' concerns and experiences with climate change: a member survey. The survey positions the union to understand

caregivers' most significant challenges, learn how members think and talk about the issues in their own words, and identify racial disparities so that the union can direct resources equitably. Notably, the member survey included in-depth demographic questions to support data disaggregation, which is crucial for understanding the results and designing effective, equitable interventions. Over 2,800 members responded, and findings were rich, including caregivers' lack of access to air conditioning and significant struggles to pay for air conditioning, heat, or water—reports which were more frequent among BIPOC respondents. Among many compelling results, the vast majority of caregivers reported that it was crucial to assist caregivers in learning about and accessing government programs and resources for climate preparedness and energy efficiency.

- Look into what work is being done locally and at the state level on climate change and environmental impacts on low-income communities and BIPOC, occupational safety, and emergency preparedness. Raise awareness about caregivers' essential role by collecting and sharing stories about the effects of natural disasters and weather emergencies on workers and service recipients.

☆ PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

CCA built a groundbreaking training pilot program⁷ for caregivers, the Caregiver Resiliency Teams (CRT) pilot project, which provides free training for both consumer-directed home care workers and nursing facility workers on how to prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate-related emergencies and did so effectively by taking the time to lay the groundwork. By connecting with contacts in the climate science community, workforce development

agencies and organizations, state offices of emergency services and occupational health and safety, and more, CCA was able to get the lay of the land in their service areas on the new topic quickly and thoroughly. As part of the program-building process, CCA collected stories from union members and press articles⁸ about caregivers' role in emergency response to draw attention to the need for the training pilot.



Amber Pena (center), a participant in CCA's CRT program, pictured with her mom and aunt, whom Amber cares for as an in-home caregiver.

- Map out what public/private funding may be available through the state/local budget process by tracking recent climate resiliency and workforce development legislation and locating potential grantmaking agencies and private foundations. If there is not much public funding for climate resiliency programs or supports in your area, consider advocating for legislation that funds supportive services for low-income residents and communities of color and call for including programs that support caregivers' important role.

☆ PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

CCA drew on years of experience in the California political ecosystem to identify a first-time funding stream for its program and successfully won funding from the state workforce development board's High Road Training Partnership (H RTP)⁹ program. H RTP is financed by a ground breaking statewide budget mandate directing greenhouse gas "cap and trade" dollars to initiatives that benefit the economy,

communities, and the environment. According to CCA President and CEO Corinne Eldridge, the organization is exploring creative ways to keep the program going into the future, including "puzzle piecing" together multiple funding streams across state departments that intersect on environmental mitigation, emergency response, workforce development and equity issue areas.



TIP: *If your state doesn't yet have dedicated funding streams for high-road workforce development, don't be afraid to include government agencies or funders outside the traditional training and workforce space—climate resiliency is an issue that touches multiple departments and types of funders. For example, your state or local office of emergency services, commerce department, or occupational health and safety offices may be able to help fill gaps or be a resource for finding funding from unfamiliar sources. Multiple funding streams, potentially from both public and private sources, could be utilized for different aspects of climate resiliency programming.*

SECTION 2:

Convene stakeholders, centering workers, service recipients, and groups most impacted to design programs and resources that empower caregivers and recipients, improve job and care quality and advance racial/gender equity.

- Build local and state partnerships to convene a robust stakeholder advisory table that includes climate and emergency experts, impacted community members, workers, service recipients, and state and local leaders and government agency representatives. Listen and learn from new perspectives on the science of emergency preparedness and the nuanced approaches needed to serve workers, the disability community, and older adults in traumatic and distressing times.

☆ PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

In creating their CRT pilot, CCA convened a comprehensive table of stakeholders and developed a process to present their ideas and curriculum to the table and receive feedback. The first item discussed was a list of topics for potential instruction. By

starting with a concrete request for feedback, CCA was able to keep the stakeholder advisory process streamlined and avoid unnecessary meetings, getting the group off the ground.

- Create an iterative development and implementation process to get feedback from advisory stakeholders and make the necessary changes, embracing revisions based on expert and participant feedback as part of the process to design a valuable and impactful program. Offer resulting curriculum and instruction in participants' preferred language where possible.

☆ PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

To create a curriculum that would empower caregivers in emergencies, CCA remained open to feedback from participants throughout the pilot and engaged in a “rapid cycle feedback” process to iteratively remove, add, and adjust content from the curriculum to garner the best possible responses and satisfaction rates from participants. After testing the pilot in English for two rounds, testing the program in

Spanish in the third iteration provided another opportunity to get feedback from different populations of users. In the spring of 2023, CCA expanded its CRT curriculum to a more diverse demographic of participants across the state by integrating it as one of the learning pathways in the state-funded IHSS Career Pathways program¹⁰, broadening its curriculum delivery to eight language groups.

- Work to integrate climate-related training and resources into existing or desired labor-management infrastructure, such as certifications, specialized/advanced roles, and job classifications, to increase the utility of training to both workers and employers/care recipients.

☆ PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

One of CCA's long-term goals with the CRT pilot project is to recognize caregivers for their increased skillset with a certification or job classification, including a pay increase for participants graduating with special emergency preparedness skills. CCA offered \$500 stipends to workers who completed the training to ensure participants were paid for their time and rewarded for their abilities, for over \$260,000 in stipends

disbursed. At the same time, the organization continued to work towards the longer-term goal of tying specialized skills to increased wages for both nursing facility and home care workers. CRT participants also earned skills certificates upon graduation: a CPR/AED/First Aid certificate for home care workers and continuing education units (CEU) credits for certified nursing assistants.

- Provide tangible supplies and wraparound benefits and supports that help workers prepare to respond and provide care during emergencies and stressful events like evacuations and shelter-in-place orders.

☆ PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

Labor-management training partnerships and labor unions are the primary supportive infrastructure for caregivers in many states, and the benefits and supplies provided to assist caregivers and increase climate resiliency take many forms depending on workers' needs and available resources. For example, each participant in CCA's CRT pilot received an emergency kit, which included an AM radio, first aid, rations and

emergency supplies. Additionally, as H-CAP's Center for Equity spotlighted in a previous report, one creative benefit that supports caregivers making a positive impact in a changing climate while helping workers make ends meet is providing free or reduced-cost public transportation passes —several labor unions have negotiated public transit passes¹¹ into the benefits package for home care workers.



SECTION 3:

Support the case for ongoing, expanded caregiver climate resiliency programs and sustained funding by focusing on equity and impact in the pilot design and evaluation phase.



Evaluate program design, implementation and outcomes from a diversity, equity, inclusion and access (DEIA) perspective. Programs should make targeted, culturally competent efforts to recruit and enroll BIPOC caregivers, immigrant caregivers, and participants from groups highly impacted by climate change and meaningfully engage participants about program components.

☆ PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

CCA's pilot design process included a detailed needs assessment with home care consumers, nursing facility residents, and workers to identify the topics participants most wanted training on. Those topics were then discussed and narrowed with their stakeholder advisory table, which included

subject matter experts on community resilience and disability rights. By design, all participants in the CCA pilot lived in priority populations identified by CalEnviroScreen (a state screening dashboard) as those most affected by pollution, mostly BIPOC, low-income and immigrant communities.



Be sure to collect data during the pilot (including demographic data from caregiver participants,¹² which helps assess equity internally and prove your case externally). Include an equity-focused impact study in the funding proposal for the pilot project and, if possible, contract a reputable institution to conduct it to lend credibility to efforts and outcomes.

☆ PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

CCA's CRT pilot project included a detailed impact study,¹³ which incorporates participant demographic data and background about the curriculum and program design process, as well as pre- and post-program survey results from participants across multiple categories that demonstrate clear, positive outcomes as a result of the training intervention. The impact study shows the impressive increases in skills attained by caregivers living in the highly polluted areas targeted by the pilot. For example,

due to the program, nursing facility workers exhibited a 15.3% increase in climate resiliency knowledge, while home care workers exhibited a 17.5% increase. In January 2024, CCA will launch the pilot in another California county, San Bernardino, for 500 workers using H RTP funding. The University of California San Francisco will conduct an impact study on the San Bernardino expansion, highlighting that project's unique goals and outcomes.



SECTION 4:

Be creative about ways to start supporting caregivers' role in climate resiliency with resources and processes currently available to your organization.

- Where available, utilize the collective bargaining process to bring employers, labor unions and workers to the table to support caregivers' role in climate resiliency since labor unions and many labor-management organizations already utilize the bargaining process to advance needed reforms and secure funding for programming.

☆ PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

SEIU 503 found through a unionwide listening process that members were concerned about climate change and safety during increasingly common emergencies. One of the most pressing issues that home care workers raised was whether they would have the ability and authorization to support their care recipients during an emergency, and concerns with the lack of emergency planning included in the state consumer-directed home care program. Two years ago, SEIU 503 successfully negotiated contract language that requires the state case management entity to

provide the consumer with an option to create an individualized emergency plan in their service plan. The language specifies that if the emergency occurs during work time, the home care worker will follow the consumer's direction and emergency plan unless it puts the caregiver in danger. With this language, home care workers can now be compensated for their efforts in an evacuation or shelter-in-place situation if it is included in the service plan. (SEIU International also provides a helpful resource about disaster planning for local unions).¹⁴

- Assess processes and capabilities your organization is familiar with or has access to in the short term to start building climate resiliency work with caregivers. For example, labor-management organizations can utilize their websites to collate resources for caregivers and use social media accounts and email to get the word out to caregivers about help and support in an emergency.

☆ PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

In service of SEIU 775's goal to serve as a hub where union members can access emergency and disaster-related resources and support, the union created a one-stop resource page¹⁶ on their website that launched in June 2023. In addition to resources about how to prepare for an emergency and respond, the webpage also

includes resources for extreme weather on the county level in the states of Washington and Montana, including energy assistance programs (e.g., for help with water or utility bills) and weatherization services (e.g., for little to no cost home insulation and weatherproofing).

- Integrate emergency preparedness into the training you currently provide where possible (even at an introductory level). SEIU recommends¹⁵ involving workers and worker-leaders in disaster training and exercises on-site during events or other classes and in evacuation and emergency planning for your office or training facility.

☆ PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

Labor-management training partnership SEIU 775 Benefits Group integrated emergency planning curriculum¹⁷ into their orientation and safety training for home care providers. The curriculum helps home care workers create an emergency

communication plan, build an emergency kit, make an evacuation or shelter plan, and includes additional resources from FEMA, information about post-traumatic stress, and suicide prevention resources.

Conclusion

The changing climate and accompanying weather-related emergencies and natural disasters impact our communities more each day, particularly low-income households, communities of color, and immigrants. It has become clear that caregivers are already playing a vital role in climate resiliency and emergency preparedness by providing services to older adults and people with disabilities on and off the clock. Labor-management partnership organizations, unions, and employers are uniquely positioned to respond and design programs and solutions to support caregivers and communities in navigating these extreme challenges. By providing workers with the quality education and

supportive services they need to be prepared in a changing climate, labor-management partnerships can proactively address the growing need for a trained home care and nursing facility workforce by building workers' confidence and rewarding climate preparedness skills with career ladders, improved compensation and advanced roles. Utilizing the strategies and best practices outlined in this practitioner's brief, stakeholders can come together to design inclusive, equitable climate resiliency programs for caregivers that promote worker voice, advance job quality and racial gender equity, and uplift the vital skills caregivers bring to their work and communities.

Endnotes

- ¹ <https://www.kentucky.com/news/state/kentucky/article264037446.html>
- ² <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/09/19/552042095/many-nursing-homes-arent-prepared-for-even-basic-emergencies>
- ³ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36134693/>
- ⁴ <https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2023/09/20/caregiving-in-severe-weather-a-forgotten-lifeline-for-loved-ones/70440786007/>
- ⁵ <https://centerfortcequity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CFE-Framework7.pdf>
- ⁶ <https://psci.princeton.edu/tips/2020/8/15/racial-disparities-and-climate-change>
- ⁷ https://advancecaregivers.org/impact-of-climate-resiliency-caregiver-training/?utm_source=hcac&utm_medium=&utm_campaign=&utm_content=
- ⁸ <https://19thnews.org/2022/05/climate-change-care-workers-first-responders-california/>
- ⁹ <https://cwdb.ca.gov/hrtp-rwp/>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/ihss/ihss-career-pathways-program>
- ¹¹ <https://centerfortcequity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Recruiting-and-Retaining-Caregivers-Top-5-Solutions-from-Care-Workers.pdf>
- ¹² <https://centerfortcequity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/CenterforEquity-Aug2022-Report-4.pdf>
- ¹³ <https://cca.fyi/crtreport>
- ¹⁴ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nWWqffQnh3SddrX1YJ8T9Zgi8Hh_K7zf/view
- ¹⁵ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nWWqffQnh3SddrX1YJ8T9Zgi8Hh_K7zf/view
- ¹⁶ <https://seiu775.org/climate/>
- ¹⁷ <https://www.myseiubenefits.org/disaster-preparedness-resources/>

October 2023

© The Center for Advancing Racial Equity and Job Quality in Long-Term Care, an initiative of H-CAP, Inc.
This publication was made possible by funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Author: Breanna Betts

Design: Rose Navalta, 617 Media Group

Photo Credits: Kate Baldwin Photography (Cover page, p. 9, p. 11); Center for Caregiver Advancement (p. 5)