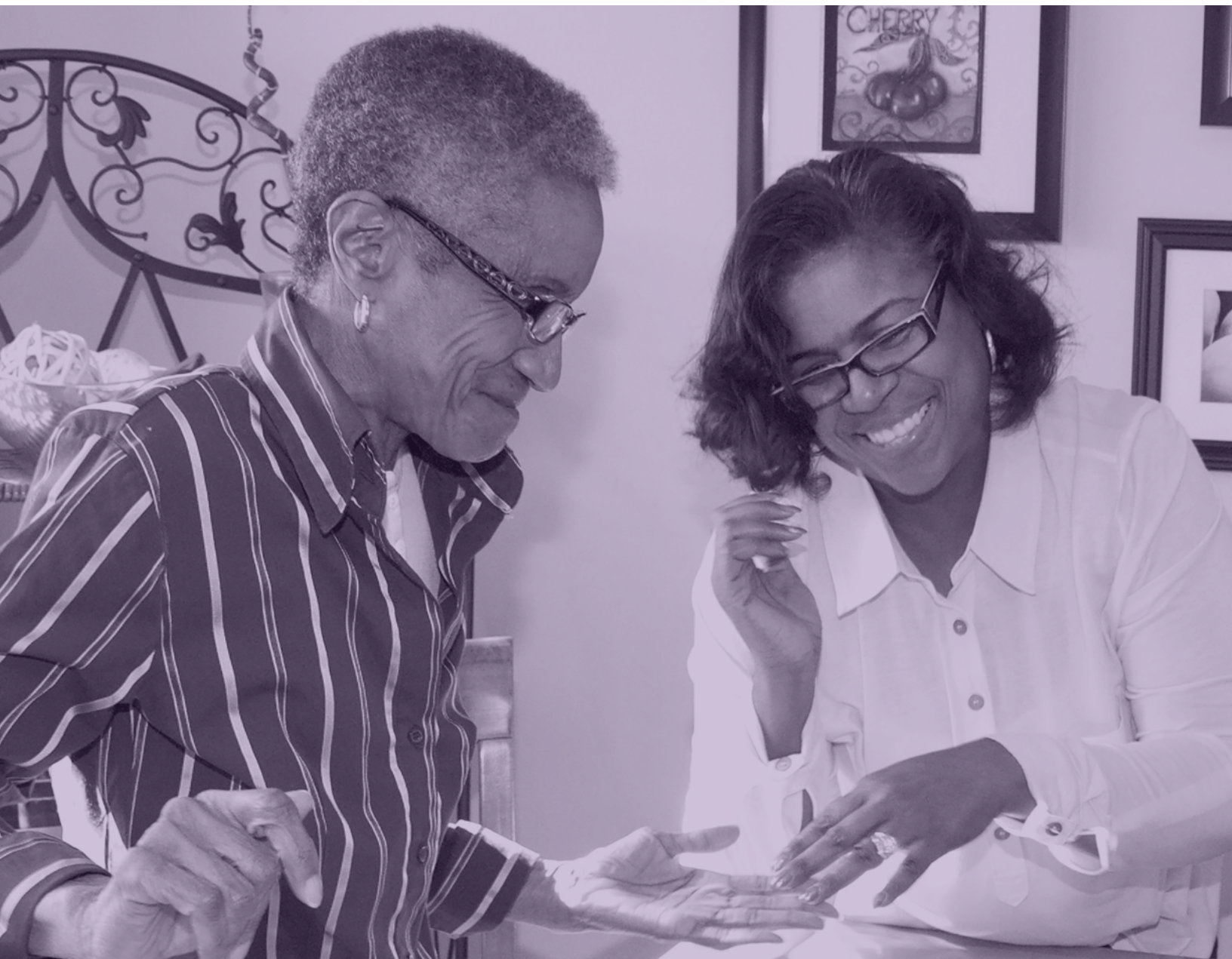


Recruiting and Retaining Caregivers:

Top 5 Solutions from Care Workers

Executive Summary



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The direct care industry struggles to recruit and retain workers due to low wages, few benefits, part-time hours, and little opportunity for advancement.¹ H-CAP's Center for Equity focuses on policy innovations that create “good jobs” for direct care workers and advance racial and gender equity in caregiving. A keystone of our operational and theoretical framework is worker voice and the conviction that workers are true experts in their own experience, and their insights should guide policy decisions that directly impact them. This is especially important in the home care and nursing facility industries, intensely [occupationally segregated fields](#) in which most essential long-term services and supports (LTSS) are provided by women, disproportionately by Black women, women of color, and immigrants.

This report features findings from the [historic qualitative caregiver research study](#) we commissioned in partnership with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in February 2023. Through a multi-day, moderated online discussion board, we collected insights from 40+ caregivers from around the country in an interactive discussion designed to capture caregivers' experiences in their own words about their jobs, work and home experiences, and community lives. 30 participants completed the discussion in full. In alignment with the [Black Women Best framework](#), we designed the study to center the insights of Black women, who face some of the most extreme challenges and occupational segregation as care workers. Of the many workforce development policies we tested, caregivers named increasing recruitment and retention the most impactful way to improve job quality by enhancing safety, support and satisfaction in the workplace. Each workforce solution presented in this report centers workers in their own words.

SOLUTION ONE:

Implement Quality Training Programs that Include Career Ladders within Direct Care

- Intentionally center equity and confront exclusions and access issues in healthcare education opportunities for Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) learners and women.
- Offer accessible, diverse training that includes career ladders (not only options to advance “out” of direct care roles but also to advance within the direct care field into advanced roles).
- Employ an “earn-and-learn” training approach, ensuring program costs are covered and compensating workers for attendance and completion of training; workers should receive a wage increase consistent with their newly increased skillset upon training completion.
- Promote labor-management training partnership (LMTP) approaches. LMTP organizations convene employers and union members to design worker-centered, industry-responsive training, programming, and employee benefits. Featured LMTP interventions include peer mentorship, advanced roles, career ladder programs, complex care and other advanced skills certifications.

SOLUTION TWO:

Equip Direct Care Workers with Wraparound Supports and Services that Help Increase Job Satisfaction and Improve Quality of Life

- Wraparound supports promote access, engagement, and success in employment and skills training programs, particularly among workers with multiple marginalized identities and BIPOC women.²
- Workers in both home care and nursing facilities had many insights about supports and services that would help them stay on the job in the direct care field and enjoy a better quality of life with their families, most often, access to affordable, reliable transportation and child/dependent care.
- Many ideas emerged about designing practical wraparound transportation assistance, including mileage reimbursement, parking passes, car allowances, affordable vehicle buying programs and grants, free or reduced-rate public transportation passes for buses and trains, and more.
- Key priorities include childcare subsidies and on-site childcare/aftercare at or near the worksite.

SOLUTION THREE:

Provide Traditional and Non-Traditional Benefits and Workplace Protections that Strengthen Recruitment and Retention

- Family-sustaining wages and comprehensive employment-based benefits packages are overwhelmingly lacking in the direct care industry but have long been common in whiter, more male professions.³
- The women and BIPOC workers in our study stressed the severe, wide-reaching negative impacts of poor compensation and benefits and the importance of living wages and benefits.
- The report highlights recent federal and state investments in direct care worker wages and benefits since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly using economic stimulus dollars.
- LMTP innovations include a healthcare trust in Oregon providing affordable, quality health insurance benefits to nursing facility employees and dependents, and a union-bargained benefit in Washington for caregivers to receive a free pair of slip-resistant safety work shoes annually.

SOLUTION FOUR:

Improve Recognition for Caregivers On and Off the Job

- Workers in our study frequently spoke of the rewards of caring for people in need—many refer to their vocation as direct care workers as their “calling”—but hesitated to recommend caregiving as a job to others due to the lack of respect caregivers often experience.
- Study participants discussed the importance of interpersonal efforts to respect caregivers, such as employers rewarding and praising caregivers for a job well done, but the primary policy solution workers stated would help is recognizing direct care workers as part of the healthcare team alongside doctors, nurses, social workers, care coordinators, and provider organizations.
- This reform is particularly impactful for consumer-directed independent providers working in private homes. Growing evidence supports the

benefits of person-centered care and home care workers’ vital role in the healthcare team when consumers support their caregiver(s) joining.

- Highlights include a California LMTP project providing training on enhanced care skills and communication designed to set home care workers up for success interacting with their consumer(s)’ healthcare team.

SOLUTION FIVE:

Assist Caregivers with Finding Quality Jobs

- Study participants shared many struggles, including the difficulty of finding quality jobs in caregiving when the norm is often a poor quality, “dead-end” job.
- Home care workers lamented the instability of caregiving work, irregular paid hours, and difficulty finding backup providers. Nursing facility workers reported feeling overworked and undervalued in the aftermath of the pandemic and the ongoing staffing crisis, experiencing violence and discrimination, and feeling like there was not enough time to provide high-quality care.
- The report highlights Carina, a technology nonprofit addressing home care workforce shortages through app-based matching services for consumer-directed caregivers and clients.
- Efforts to address nursing facility staffing shortages have included state regulation efforts to implement staff-to-resident ratios and standards for minimum hours of care per resident day. Establishing a federal staffing standard, increased transparency, and better staffing and care quality data would help workers and residents make informed decisions about facilities.

Addressing job quality and confronting structural racism, sexism, and other systemic disparities to create family-sustaining careers in the direct care industry is more critical than ever. Our research highlights the crucial link between worker power and quality care—fairly compensated, well-trained, supported caregivers are best equipped to provide the quality care that millions of consumers depend on daily to live with dignity. Workers’ right to raise their voices in a union is central to system reform efforts to improve services, benefitting both consumers and working families. This report uplifts solutions not always heard about in the mainstream workforce development system narrative—solutions driven by workers, for workers, and carried out by labor-management partnerships with the interests of the workforce, care consumers, and the industry at heart. By documenting workers’ experiences, sharing their insights and ideas, and uplifting examples of interventions, we hope this report will provide a blueprint for worker-centered workforce development solutions to address the direct care recruitment and retention crisis.



