

“Raise the Floor, Build the Ladder: Good Jobs for New Mexico’s Workforce”

Progress Report December 2015

New Mexico Direct Caregivers Coalition

Background

In 2014, the New Mexico Direct Caregivers Coalition (NMDCC) embarked on a three-year effort to raise awareness of the value of frontline healthcare workers. These workers include a Personal Care Assistants, Home Health Aides, Nursing Attendants and Orderlies, Community Health Workers, and related occupations. This effort was undertaken to further NMDCC’s mission to enhance and promote family and professional direct care workers, supporting their professional development and advancing issues of importance to the field of long-term and direct care.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City was an early partner in this effort. The Federal Reserve fosters the stability, integrity and efficiency of the nation's monetary, financial and payments systems to promote a stable, healthy economy. Through this initiative, the Community Development Department is working to support economic development in New Mexico by drawing on the significant growth in the healthcare sector. Support of this work has grown to include the Con Alma Health Foundation and McCune Charitable Foundation and other local funders, advocates and educators.

Stakeholders Task Force and Working Groups

The initial activity was convening a Stakeholder Task Force of community-based organizations, educators, state officials and business leaders to develop a common understanding of the direct-care sector and opportunities for improving employment outcomes. The framework of “Raise the Floor, Build the Ladder” developed by the Aspen Institute and PHI was adopted to guide this work. This approach seeks to balance the focus on career mobility with efforts to establish financial stability among lower-wage workers. The approach emphasizes multi-sector, multi-stakeholder approaches for bringing systemic change to frontline, low-wage workers that also provide positive returns to employers.

In June, the Stakeholder Task Force hosted a day-long process to:

- Develop common understanding of direct caregivers (Personal Care Assistants; Home Health Aides; Orderlies and Nursing Attendants working for agencies or independently),
- Develop common understanding of the employer perspectives on demand for caregivers,
- Identify realistic career pathways for caregivers based on employer need and job opportunities,
- Identify and deliver strategies for targeted, foundational training to prepare individuals for entry-level positions in direct care,
- Contribute to care recipient safety in community-based and in-home care settings.

The meeting was attended by 50 participants representing diverse perspectives from the industry, education and government sectors. Participants underscored the importance of the direct-care sector and the need for improving education and employment services to support it. A result of this Task Force Meeting was the establishment of two Working Groups to meet between June and September 2014 to further define:

- **Career Pathways for New Mexico Caregivers:** This Group diagrammed and documented realistic career pathways for entry-level caregivers seeking to continue their education, training and skills development within the field based on employer need and job opportunities in New Mexico. This Group identified and recommended additional educational opportunities and supports so caregivers can progress within those career pathways, gaining higher wages and benefits.
- **Foundational Instruction for New Mexico Caregivers:** This Group identified strategies for building targeted, foundational training to prepare individuals for entry-level positions in direct care. The strategies included cross-walking current curricula of community colleges and universities. It also included identification of skills and competencies common to caregivers working in any setting (in-home, nursing home, group home), i.e., competencies that are similar to the variety of care recipient populations (elderly, disabled, etc).

Members of the Working Groups and Stakeholder Task Force convened again in September 2014 to present their work and to recommend next steps. The full reports are included as Appendix A (see Appendix A). Key recommendations included:

- Build out foundational training program for frontline healthcare workers with support from employers and educators;
- Develop communications tools and strategies that advances a foundational program with credentialing for frontline healthcare workforce that includes employers, advocates, educators and care recipients;
- Develop a public awareness campaign for NM’s frontline healthcare workforce and that would include employers, advocates, educators and care recipients;
- Host a statewide convening around issues affecting frontline workers, noting the various kinds of supports that employers could provide.

Statewide Summit

Based on the outcomes of the September convening, NMDCC and the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City planned a statewide summit to raise awareness of the needs and potential solutions for the direct-care sector and make connections with other sectors with lower wage employment. Maureen Conway of the Aspen Institute was enlisted to help plan the Summit. Maureen’s work with PHI and other workforce leaders across the country in a diverse range of sectors has fostered initiatives in states and cities throughout the U.S. that bring multiple stakeholders together to improve conditions for frontline, typically low-wage workers.

The Summit planning group grew quickly to include Dolores Roybal of Con Alma Health Foundation and Henry Rael of McCune Charitable Foundation. These individuals and others of the planning group chose April 28, 2015 as the date for a convening to answer the following two questions:

1. “Is there will in New Mexico to form a statewide funders’ collaborative that supports frontline, low-wage workers?”
2. “If there is will to form a statewide funders’ collaborative, what actions or programs would best support New Mexico’s frontline, low-wage workers?”

Speakers of local, state and national stature who could pose these questions and also give examples from other locales were invited to participate in the “Build the Floor, Raise the Ladder” summit. The speakers included Cabinet Secretary Celina Bussey, Senator Michael Padilla, and Steve Maestas, chair for the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, as well as representatives from the Hitachi Foundation, the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, the Aspen Institute, Restaurant Opportunities Center, New Mexico Workforce Connection and the Associated General Contractors of New Mexico.

The Summit was well-received as indicated by overall and individual evaluations (see complete analysis, photos and summary of next steps here <http://nmdcc.org/raise-the-floor-build-the-ladder>. Approximately 135 people attended from New Mexico, Dallas, Kansas City, Denver, Washington, D.C., Chicago and New York.

Recommendations from the Summit reinforced findings from the initial Working Groups and centered on: training and skills development, changing public awareness through organizing, and increasing/expanding workplace benefits for frontline workers. NMDCC posted results of the Summit discussion group conversations on its website.

Ongoing Activities and Next Steps

As a result of these activities, NMDCC has expanded connections with a broader group of stakeholders in a focused effort to strengthen opportunities for direct-care workers. This has resulted in the following:

- **Direct-Care Career Pathways Map:** NMDCC developed the first career pathways map that shows possible career progression among various jobs that a direct-care worker could pursue in New Mexico.
 - **Next Steps:** Engage other education providers, especially the Community College System, in clarifying the linkages between the training options and addressing any gaps in certifications to provide a seamless path for direct-care workers.
- **Customized Training for Caregivers:** This process informed the development of a full-color Trainer’s Guide, Participant Guide and instructional slides to accompany the 8-hour “Customized Training for Caregivers,” a program that prepares frontline entry-level direct workers with the skills they need to be a caregiver and to advance to postsecondary education and/or higher-wage jobs. The curriculum has been very well-received by employers for use with their frontline healthcare staff, as well as by pueblos, the Jicarilla

Apache and Navajo Nation tribes for use with their Community Health Representatives (CHRs), the occupation within Indian country that most closely fits caregivers.

- **Next Steps:** Continue development of training delivery and ensure its connection to other education providers within the context of the career pathways map.
- **Employer Roundtables:** NMDCC has begun hosting meetings with employers of all sizes and including trade association representatives to learn of their workforce needs and determine how NMDCC can be helpful in meeting those needs.
 - **Next Steps:** Focus engagement with employers around three themes:
 - Expand to include managed care organizations and larger employers.
 - Identify a sub-set of employers, such as the assisted living centers, for an in-depth engagement to identify policies and practices to improve employment outcomes within the ‘Raise the Floor, Build the Ladder’ framework.
 - Identify employer interest and specific needs that can be addressed by a funding collaborative.
- **Funder Engagement:** NMDCC has expanded and strengthened its relationships with regional funders through demonstrating the need and importance of addressing the needs of lower-wage workers. In addition to including funders in the development of the programs described above, NMDCC has also hosted presentations, roundtables and conference calls for funders to inform them of the role of workforce development.
 - **Next Steps:** Cultivate relationships with local and regional funders to promote collaborative approaches for addressing the employment outcomes of lower-wage workers.
- **Policy Engagement:** State agencies are clearly primed for next steps too. We believe that NMDCC can assist state agencies involved in supporting direct-care services by connecting employers’ needs with agency and policy direction, and promoting policy change to better support the frontline healthcare workforce.
 - **Next Steps:** Convene employer trade groups to develop policy recommendations for state agency executives, particularly the Department of Health (DOH) and the Human Services Department (HSD). These agencies oversee regulations for Certified Nursing Assistants, Community Health Workers and Medicaid-funded agencies.

Appendix A

Career Pathways for New Mexico Caregivers Working Group Report

Objective: Identify realistic career pathways for caregivers based on employer need and job opportunities, including:

- The sequence of education and training;
- Multiple entry points to accommodate participants entering at differing skill levels (including adults and out-of-school youth with very low basic skills);
- Multiple exit points at successively higher levels of education and employment aligned with marketable, stackable, “creditable” credentials;
- Supportive services and navigation assistance for participants in the pathways

Discussion:

1. As a Human Resource professional, most important determinant of success on the job is *longevity at last job*.
2. Within our agency of care for those with developmental disabilities, a career pathway is follows. We encourage staff to develop expertise within a strand (e.g., Service Coordinator to Program Specialist) and across strands (e.g., House Manager: Job Developer):

Independent Living

Direct Support Staff
Lead Direct Support Staff
House Manager
Service Coordinator
Program Specialist
Director, Residential Living

Supported Employment

Job Coach
Job Developer
Director of Supported Empl

3. Employee Assistance Program support that could be offered include:
 - Individual and group counseling
 - Team-building and celebration within the workplace
 - Paid personal time off
 - Reimbursement for mileage, holiday and vacation, disability, health and dental insurance
 - Work-related training
 - Continuing education
 - Public benefits assistance (screening for food stamps, Medicaid eligibility)
 - Employee education programs that inform of public benefits and community resources/referrals

Recommendation to Full Task Force: Develop public awareness campaign for NM’s frontline healthcare workforce and includes employers, advocates, educators and care recipients.

Foundational Instruction for Caregivers Working Group Report

Objective: Identify strategies for targeted, foundational training to prepare individuals for entry-level positions in direct care:

- Start from what is known and required by State of New Mexico and in use by NM organizations
- Outline standards of quality assurance to the public and other stakeholders
- Outline incentives for employers
- Outline metrics for assuring completion and articulation

Discussion:

1. Foundational skills should emphasize:
 - Listening skills
 - Recognition of one's boundaries
 - Fraud, abuse, neglect and exploitation and that caregivers need to have a greater sense of responsibility and ethic than the average person
 - Dealing with one's stress
 - Communications skills and dealing with challenging behaviors
 - Foundational training should give participants an overall sense of what caregivers are likely to see more of so they can determine if they want to stay in the field
2. Caregivers in rural areas will need access to training so methods of delivery may be variable.
3. Training for caregivers of those who are elderly vs. those who care for elderly need not be distinguished/separated. In other words, caregivers of each population have more in common than they have differences. Caregivers need to understand they have transferable skills and are able to serve both populations, depending on client needs and/or work opportunities.
4. One HR professional of this Working Group notes that an individual's *character* is the most important determinant of success on the job. He said their employees can be trained once properly screened and hired.

Recommendation to Full Task Force: Build out foundational training program for frontline healthcare workers with support from employers and educators. Develop communications tools and strategies that advances a foundational program with credentialing for frontline healthcare workforce that includes employers, advocates, educators and care recipients.

At the September convening, NMDCC sought input as to whether there would be support and the will to host a national/state conference that would bring attention to issues of frontline healthcare workers the following spring. Task Force members were enthusiastically supportive.

Need for Multi-Sector Stakeholders' Summit

As momentum grew, it became clear that involving and highlighting other industry sectors at a Spring national/state convening around frontline workers would be very beneficial in a number of ways:

- Community-based organization advocates supporting frontline workers from all sectors could share in conversations;

- Corporations and foundations would be more interested in supporting a convening to support frontline workers from all sectors more than one dedicated solely to the fastest-growing set occupations in New Mexico.
- There was greater possibility of cross-sectors learnings for government officials, community-based advocates, educators, business leaders and funders.

For more Information, go directly to <http://nmdcc.org/raise-the-floor-build-the-ladder>

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NMDCC advocates for direct care workers' education, training, benefits, wages and professional development so they may better serve people who are elderly and those with disabilities.