

New Mexico Direct Caregivers Coalition Legislative Principles

New Mexico faces serious challenges in meeting the long-term care needs of elderly and/or disabled residents who require an adequate and stable supply of caring and well-trained direct caregivers. Direct caregivers are paraprofessional workers who provide care to New Mexico's aging and disabled populations and work as personal care assistants, home care aides, home health aides and certified nursing assistants (CNAs). They work in diverse settings, including private homes, adult day centers, assisted living residences and other residential care settings, and nursing homes.

Average wages for caregivers in the state of New Mexico are much lower for those in these occupations than for other occupations. In New Mexico, a home health aid worker earns approximately \$8.00 per hour, \$7.53 per hour less than that of an average New Mexico worker.

Preliminary figures for 2006 from the U.S. Department of Labor indicate there are 21,520 New Mexicans whose primary occupation was nursing assistant, home health aide or personal care/home care aide. Personal and home care aides are the second fastest-growing occupations in New Mexico, with projected annual job openings for these occupations of 58 percent between 2006 and 2016! This figure translates to 6,190 additional job openings in New Mexico for personal and home care aides by 2016.

High job turnover occurs as a result of worker shortages, low wages, few to no benefits, little training and little recognition for the work performed.

Persons who are elderly and disabled suffer the effects of direct care worker shortages and high turnover. Quality of care is compromised since employers are unable to meet the need for high-quality services to those who are elderly and/or disabled.

Through funding from the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, the New Mexico Direct Care Coalition was formed in October 2008 as a source of solutions to the effects of worker shortages, few to no benefits, little training and little to no recognition for those working in the field. The Coalition provides the space and opportunity for family and professional caregivers to define and advocate on topics of importance to them – be it higher wages, better benefits and workplace supports, recognition, professional networking or training/education needed for advancing their own development and that of the field.

Legislative Principles

- Empower direct caregivers to deliver competent, compassionate, person-centered care;
- Adopt a humane, holistic, and consumer-centered approach to care;
- Ensure adequate and qualified staff at all levels;
- Support the right of direct care workers to advocate for consumers and themselves;
- Provide adequate reimbursement to support the provision of high-quality care and services, especially adequate compensation and benefits for staff; and
- Provide adequate initial training, advancement opportunities, and ongoing training for direct-care workers.

An emerging organization, the Coalition has already attracted over 4,500 agencies and individuals to its cause of enhancing and promoting the professionalism and image of direct caregivers, supporting their professional development and workplace issues through networking, advocacy, and educational and job advancement. We support legislation that recognizes and values the personal and professional contributions of caregivers, resulting in better-trained, more knowledgeable and more qualified workers.