

No Aide in Sight: Workforce Shortage Cripples District's Long-Term Care System

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Makeda Vanderpuije
ladc@leadingage.org
(202) 508-9462

Washington, D.C. (February 7, 2024) –

The District of Columbia's shortage of qualified professional caregivers is worsening, new data show, leaving more older adults and people with disabilities without much-needed in-home care and services.

Results from a survey of facility-based and home and community -based long term care providers, conducted by the DC Coalition on Long Term Care, underscores a deepening crisis impacting both those seeking care and providers who serve them. Respondents representing 47 providers offering assisted living, home care, adult day services and skilled nursing, weighed in on challenges related to staff recruitment and retention, as well as potential solutions.

The statistics revealed paints a stark a picture of a system in crisis:

- 71% of providers report increased difficulty recruiting new direct care staff compared to just one year ago.
- 65% of providers struggle to retain staff, citing low wages, lack of qualified candidates, and licensure issues.
- DC Board of Nursing data confirms a 30% loss of direct care workers in just one year, leaving thousands of seniors and people with disabilities without access to crucial care.
- Staffing shortages are driven by the inability of providers to pay competitive wages due to inadequate reimbursement rates. Direct care workers are leaving for jobs that are less difficult, require less training and pay more money.

A recent report from AARP affirmed that DC ranked last in the nation on wage competitiveness for direct care workers, noting a \$5.00 an hour gap between the wages

of direct care workers and workers in other jobs with comparable or lower entry level requirements.

The consequences are real and heartbreaking. Providers are forced to close admissions and delay care, leaving many vulnerable residents without options. Family members, like the caregiver in a video shared at the Coalition's recent Senior Village Town Hall, are burdened with the added stress of managing their loved ones' care on top of their own lives.

In another video, 84-year-old Delores Wood is sweetly appreciative of the support that her aide provides to help her with tasks of daily living. But when the home health agency she relies on faces staff shortages, she's left alone, unable to cook, bathe, or even use the bathroom without assistance. These stories are not isolated incidents; it's reality for many in the District of Columbia grappling with an intensifying long-term care workforce crisis.

The findings follow on earlier provider surveys in 2020 and 2022 (see page 2 of this PDF: https://www.dclongtermcare.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Final-Jan-2024_Updated.pdf). For over 20 years, the DC Coalition on Long Term Care has been a voice for older adults and people with disabilities. Through advocacy, collaboration, and research, the Coalition has secured considerable progress on long-term care issues in the District. Now, we are sounding the alarm on the workforce crisis, urging immediate action.

“We see little evidence of a sense of urgency and continue to be concerned about lack of a coordinated response among the various agencies that have responsibility to ensure an adequate workforce,” says Claudia Schlosberg, Chair of the Coalition’s Workforce Development Subcommittee. “We recognize that many needed reforms will take time, but unfortunately, we no longer can afford to wait.”

The Coalition is calling upon the Mayor to use her emergency authority to reinstitute pandemic era waivers that allowed DC long-term care providers to hire Maryland and Virginia certified aides and allowed DC certified nursing assistants to work in home care settings. The Coalition also is calling upon the Council to pass and fund the [Direct Care Worker Amendment Act](#) to raise the wages of direct care workers and modernize DC’s regulations to help rebuild this vital sector of our healthcare workforce.

Together, we can raise awareness, drive solutions, and ensure that all residents of the District with chronic and/or disability needs can age in the community safely and with dignity.

###

RESOURCES:

- [2024 Survey Results](#)
- [Recording of the December 2023 Senior Village Town Hall](#)
- [DC Coalition on Long Term Care Workforce Webpage](#)
- [2023 Survey Results](#)
- [AARP: How Mid-Atlantic States are Expanding Home Care](#)

About the DC Coalition on Long Term Care:

The DC Coalition on Long Term Care is a non-profit organization that brings together consumers, advocates, providers and provider associations and organized labor to work with the District government on long-term care issues. For over 20 years, the Coalition has been a leading voice for older adults and people with disabilities, advocating for improved access to high quality care.