

Iowa CareGivers Association Impact Statement

Enhancing the quality of care by providing education, recognition, advocacy and research in support of direct care workers (DCW).

The Need

The people of Iowa are facing a serious issue: a severe shortage of direct care workers who provide hands-on care in nursing homes, in-home care, hospitals, adult day centers, hospices, and other healthcare settings. The causes of this shortage are low wages, lack of benefits, and few training opportunities, all of which make it difficult to recruit and retain direct care workers.

Fortunately for the State of Iowa, the Iowa CareGivers Association (ICA) has been a leader in addressing the direct care worker shortage through its mission of providing education, recognition, advocacy, and research in support of direct care workers.

History

Since 1992, the ICA has improved the quality of care received by thousands of Iowans by:

- 1) Empowering individual direct care workers to improve their skills.
- 2) Evaluating the needs of consumers and the direct care workforce through nationally-recognized research.
- 3) Transforming public policy both nationally and in Iowa to acknowledge the vital role of the direct care worker in larger discussions on quality of care issues.

The ICA is a trusted voice for direct care workers and the services they provide. The ICA is also credited with being a catalyst for the formation of similar direct care worker associations in other states and improved quality of care as baby boomers age and demands on the health and long term care workforce increase.

Since 1992, ICA has been empowering the individual direct care worker by engaging them in:

- Shaping policy discussions
- Improving their work environment
- Mentoring and supporting others in the direct care profession
- Participating in professional development and training
- Becoming advocates and ambassadors for the profession
- Improving the quality of care they provide through training and education

The real measure of the ICA's success and impact comes from the individual stories of direct care workers who have continued in the profession and inspired others to do the same, to become leaders in their communities, and find new pride in their work by participating in policy discussions at state and national levels. The ICA has successfully positioned direct care worker issues at the center of workforce and health

care policy discussions, and has made significant strides in forwarding complex policy recommendations, many of which require sustained long-term efforts, broad collaboration, and direct care worker involvement.

The ICA was the lead organization in an effort to change policy and practice to increase recruitment and retention of direct care workers through the Better Jobs Better Care (BJBC) program. The ICA has championed and maintains the momentum for a multi-year effort to establish a standardized education and training system for direct care workers, and was the driving force behind the expansion of the Iowa Directory of Certified Direct Care Workers. The ICA has profiled the lack of health care coverage for direct care workers: While 9% of Iowa's population is uninsured, an ICA survey found that 25% of Iowa's CNAs working in nursing homes lack health care coverage. ICA's work to draw attention to this issue has put the Association at the center of health care reform debates.

True to its mission of engaging direct care workers, the ICA has gone straight to the source — direct care workers — to learn more about their needs in and outside the workplace, for education and training, and wages and benefits. ICA research has been used in Iowa and nationally to inform policy development, educate policymakers, identify gaps, and improve programs and systems.

How would the environment for direct care workers be without the Iowa CareGivers Association?

The Iowa CareGivers Association is an organization that has already accomplished so much — more training and leadership opportunities for direct care workers, policy development and advocacy at the state and federal levels, research that has highlighted the needs of direct care workers, and recognition of the value that direct care workers bring to the health and long term care workforce and consumers in Iowa. Without the independent voice and leadership of the ICA, direct care workers

will not receive the crucial opportunities they need for training, leadership, and ground-breaking policy development and research. Without these opportunities, the state of Iowa will likely suffer higher turnover rates, fewer opportunities for training, and decreased quality of care. The solution is obvious: The ICA must continue to provide crucial keys to success to fully utilize and enable direct care workers to work toward a brighter future.

The Future of the Iowa CareGivers Association (ICA)

The ICA has an eighteen (18) year track record of leadership in the direct care arena, which has earned the organization national attention and respect.

Simply put, the vision of the ICA is to build on the successes of the past, and to do and be more. That vision translates into expanding highly successful programs to reach more direct care workers and providers throughout Iowa, and to positively impact the quality of care received by residents and clients.

This vision also means that the ICA will expand its collaboration with other individuals and organizations that have interests in health and long term care issues. ICA will continue its role as a catalyst for needed change on issues related to the recruitment and retention of direct care workers; issues such as pay and benefits, education and training standards, respect in both the workplace and community, and the direct care worker voice in public policy and practice decisions.

With the establishment of the Direct Care Worker Resource and Outreach Center (the ROC), made possible through federal funding secured by Senator Tom Harkin, the ICA will expand its programs and services to more direct care workers. ICA will continue to impact important state and federal policy, practice, and system changes to ensure Iowa has a stable direct care workforce to serve the needs of older Iowans and children and adults with disabilities.

Iowa CareGivers Association

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