

# A WORKFORCE IN CRISIS

A CENTRAL DIRECT CARE WORKER DATABASE SYSTEM BY EXPANDING THE IOWA DIRECT CARE WORKER REGISTRY

**A Foundation Upon Which to Build a Strong Direct Care Workforce—**



**A central direct care worker database system will benefit direct care workers, health and long-term services and supports (LTSS) employers, older lowans and persons with disabilities, family caregivers, and the State.**

Iowans and Iowa's economy can't thrive without the essential direct care workforce. This segment of the workforce includes nurse aides, home care and hospice aides, universal workers, patient care technicians in hospitals, direct support professionals and some 20 other titles. There are an estimated 60K direct care workers (DCWs) in Iowa who unselfishly serve Iowans of all ages and abilities and in a variety of locations, and sometimes under the risk of great personal harm.

COVID-19 sheds a light on how essential the entirety of the health and long-term services and supports (LTSS) workforce is. Without it the state's response to protect and provide care and support for Iowans in the face of COVID-19 is impossible. The growing demand for services is occurring at a time when the numbers of workers is dwindling. The need for an organized and coordinated health and LTSS workforce system is long overdue. While most systems begin with a foundation...the direct care workforce and those who rely on it have been functioning for years in a fragmented system that has no foundation. Now is the time to construct that infrastructure.

## BENEFITS DIRECT CARE WORKFORCE

Direct care workers (DCWs) are often burdened by the lack of consistency and portability of their training and currently have no continuing education standards that enable them to retain their credentials making it difficult to recruit and retain the workforce.

There is no statewide central database system to maintain permanent training records for the entirety of the direct care workforce which increases costs, delays employment, and forces DCWs to undergo repetitive training.

*"I see so much in-house training going on at facilities and when you leave you don't take those new credentials with you. You have to start all over and be retrained somewhere else. That would be awesome if you could put your in-house training on a database and be able to track it and carry it with you everywhere you go.*

-Michael Owens, Direct Support Professional

*"I've worked as a CNA in a nursing home in the past and have worked as a home care aide for years. But because I switched to home care I am no longer listed on the direct care worker registry and I don't think that is fair."*

-Lavada Messerschmitt, Home Care Aide, Keokuk County

## BENEFITS INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, OLDER IOWANS, AND FAMILY CAREGIVERS

Individuals with disabilities and older Iowans can't find individuals to assist them so they can remain living in their own homes and remain active in their communities.

Family members sometimes leave gainful employment to provide care or assistance for a child with special needs, aging parents, or spouse with dementia. That has an impact on the business community when they lose experienced employees when they can't find outside assistance.

*"Caregivers are an essential component of my ability to remain independent. Since my accident I have been able to go back to college, graduate school, become gainfully employed, and even hold public office. However, without caregivers, I am at risk of losing my job and my ability to remain in my own home. My home health agency has struggled to recruit and retain this workforce so much so that my mother has had to step in and become my full-time caregiver. The current system is simply not sustainable or practical for people with disabilities or aging Iowans."*

-Alex Watters



**"In the last month ending 12/20/20 in Iowa, 48.5% of nursing homes had a shortage of direct care workers."**

-AARP Nursing Home COVID-19 Dashboard

*"Iowans who already struggle with health and disability related issues should not have to struggle to find caregivers. Having an up-to-date registry with information about each caregiver would benefit everyone."*

-Jenn Wolff, Iowa Disability League/#UpgradeMedicaid

*"When seniors attempt to stay in their own home, the skills required of the workforce become increasingly important as the in home situation is dynamic and constantly changing. Today, an employer depends upon the workforce to state their training and experiences. Iowa must have this information captured and maintained with training and experience updates. This will help insure we have the correct workforce available to employers to meet demand and changing environments."*

-Tony Vola, Older Iowans Legislature

## **BENEFITS HEALTH AND LONG TERM SERVICES AND SUPPORTS (LTSS) EMPLOYERS**

Health and LTSS employers across all settings experience challenges in recruiting and retaining staff. The more streamlined health and LTSS workforce database system would provide employers across settings and regardless the population served access to a well-prepared and skilled workforce.

*"Where care is delivered has changed so much and so we need a system that is as flexible as the type of care and places care is being delivered. And from an employer perspective, if there was a singular location to find the information that this would capture, it just makes vetting and hiring that much quicker. And, in the face of this pandemic where caregivers have been desperately needed, it certainly would have been an avenue, a conduit to find people that have the training and the capability that maybe aren't currently in that role."*

-Jim Knoepfler, Vice President of Administration, EveryStep

*"It encourages quicker onboarding time."*

-Elanna Fultz, Director of Clinical Quality, WesleyLife Community Services

*"As a 14-year former owner of an In Home Care company based in Des Moines our number one issue was finding the correct employees to participate in our company and assist seniors to stay in their own home. When applicants would arrive, there was no process to fully determine their qualifications, experiences, training, and overall experience for this demanding job. By providing this service, the State of Iowa will take a large step forward in insuring the best workforce to help this vulnerable population."*

-Tony Vola, Older Iowans Legislature

## **BENEFITS THE STATE OF IOWA**

The recognition, coordination, development, compensation, and support needed by all levels of health and LTSS workers is in the best interest of Iowa's workforce, consumers, business community, economy, and the State overall.

Existing State data systems housed in various State departments (Inspections and Appeals, Human Services, Public Health, and Education) specific to the health and LTSS workforce do not connect or align in ways to track and retain valuable data on the current workforce in order to better prepare and support a strong health and LTSS workforce of the future.

### **Iowa CareGivers**

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## **Stakeholders Express Support for Central Direct Care Worker Database**

- Nearly 200 employers, community colleges, DCWs, and advocates who attended eleven regional listening sessions **"Direct Care Workforce 2020"** in 2015 and 2016. <https://bit.ly/3m9AWpF>
- 70 stakeholders who participated in a 2019 **"Building a Strong Direct Care Workforce"** forum.
- Iowa Workforce Development labor market analysts who conducted Iowa CareGivers **2019 Direct Care Workers of Iowa Wage and Benefit Survey.**

*"Connecting with the direct care workforce was the largest challenge to the 2019 Wage & Benefit Survey. Currently there is not an up-to-date centralized registry for direct care workers. A maintained comprehensive direct care worker central database system would allow for improved data collection and information."*

<https://bit.ly/2LxrmPM>  
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