

Unsung Heroes: The Crucial Role – and Tenuous Circumstances – of Home Care Workers During the Pandemic

March 30, 2021



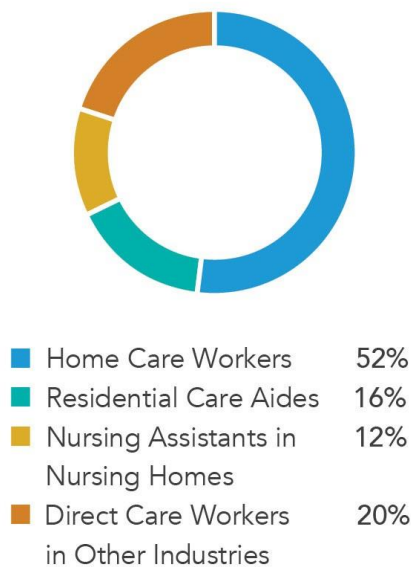
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About the Direct Care Workforce

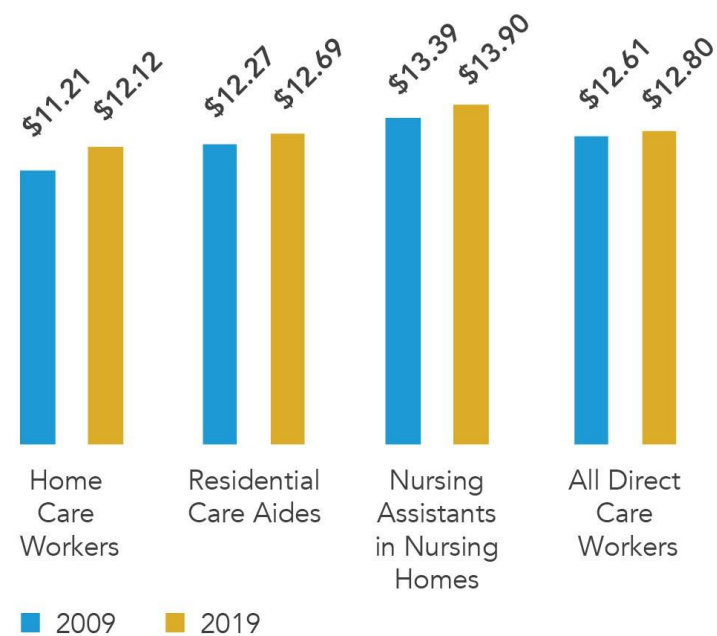
- Support older people and people with disabilities across settings
- Titles vary by occupation, state, and institutional provider
- 4.6 million home care workers and nursing assistants
- 8.2 million job openings in direct care by 2028
- Larger than any other occupation in the U.S.

DIRECT CARE WORKER

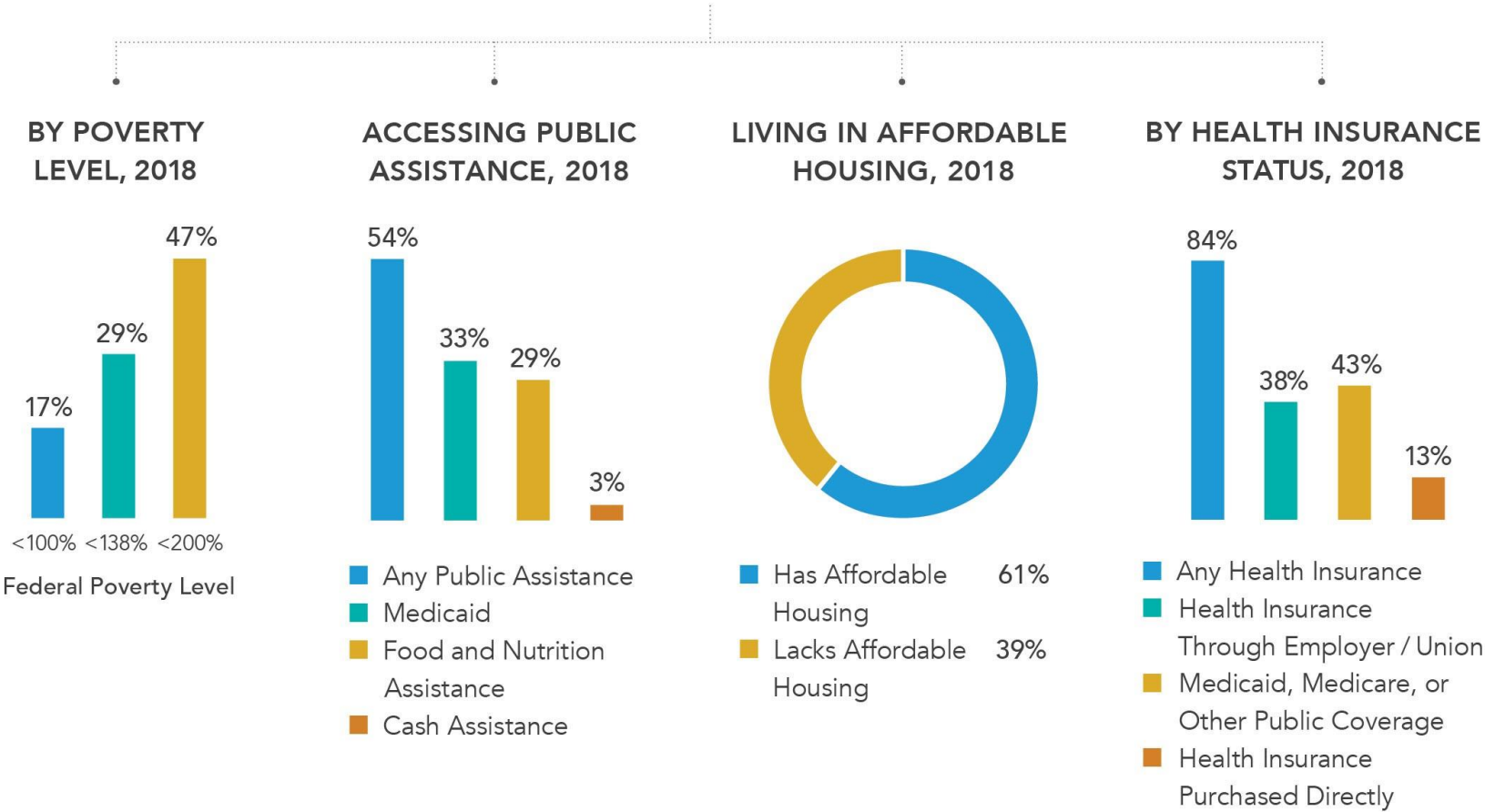
EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY, 2019



WAGES BY INDUSTRY, 2009 TO 2019



HOME CARE WORKERS



Reported Experience of Home Health Care Workers

- On the Front Lines of COVID-19 Medical Management, but Invisible
- Heightened Risk for COVID-19 Transmission to Patients and Themselves
- Varying Levels of Support From Agencies, Including Information and Personal Protective Equipment
- Forced to Make Tough Trade-offs Between Their Own Health and Finances

SOURCE: Madeline R. Sterling, MD, et al. "Experiences of Home Health Care Workers in New York City During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic: A Qualitative Analysis."
<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2769096>



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Presentations

- **Joanne Taylor**, Owner, Senior Helpers Westchester (NY). Taylor began her career in home care after juggling the roles of caregiver, advocate and loved one for her own family members
- **Robert Espinoza**, Vice President of Policy at PHI, a New York-based nonprofit group that studies and implements ways to improve eldercare and disability services both for those who receive care and those who provide it
- **Clare McHugh**, a Novelist and home health care client in Baltimore whose mother suffers from advanced dementia
- **Karen Gilmore**, a Home Care Worker for Ms. McHugh's mother



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We believe that caring, committed relationships between direct care workers and their clients are at the heart of quality care. Those relationships work best when direct care workers receive high-quality training, living wages, and respect for the central role they play.



An Increasingly **Diverse** Direct Care Workforce (2019)

The typical home care worker is a woman in her 40s—many are immigrants and/or women of color. **The demographics are changing.**



87%

WOMEN

27%

IMMIGRANT

59%

PEOPLE OF
COLOR

43

MEDIAN AGE

Low Wages, High Poverty: Direct Care Workers

Low wages and irregular schedules make it difficult to retain and recruit workers in this sector. **As a result, turnover remains high.**



U.S. Direct Care Workers (2019)

\$12.80

MEDIAN
HOURLY
WAGE

\$20,300

MEDIAN
PERSONAL
EARNINGS

31%

PART TIME

45%

IN OR NEAR
POVERTY

Limited Training or Career Advancement

The training infrastructure for direct care workers doesn't equip them with the skills, knowledge, confidence, or career paths they need.



Insufficient training standards—

especially for personal care aides and DSPs

Lack of specialty training—

variety of topics and special populations

Didactic training methods

that don't account for adult learners & learning styles

Few advanced roles

where workers could be better optimized in the care team

Inadequate Public Funding & Reimbursement

The LTSS system needs more funding to ensure everyone can access the supports they need—labor costs are especially underfunded.



Long-Term Services & Supports

Expensive,
difficult to predict,
exhausts savings

Medicaid only for poor & low-income people—

and restrictions
are growing

State Medicaid budgets are strapped—

little funding for
labor costs

Inadequate reimbursement rates in Medicaid



What Does This Mean for Us?

Whether the field is aging, medicine, health, or another related industry that interfaces with people accessing LTSS, **here's what you should know.**



Growing &
changing
demographics

The future of
healthcare is
team-based &
interdisciplinary

People have
non-medical
needs and
broader
aspirations

People are part
of complex
systems and
larger
communities

THE 5 PILLARS OF DIRECT CARE JOB QUALITY



QUALITY
TRAINING



FAIR
COMPENSATION



QUALITY
SUPERVISION
& SUPPORT



RESPECT &
RECOGNITION



REAL
OPPORTUNITY

‘Caring for the Future’ report



Policy & Practice Recommendations

1. Reform long-term care financing
2. Increase compensation
3. Strengthen training standards and infrastructure
4. Fund direct care workforce interventions
5. Improve data collection
6. Center direct care workers in policy and practice
7. Rectify structural gender and racial inequities
8. Shift the public narrative



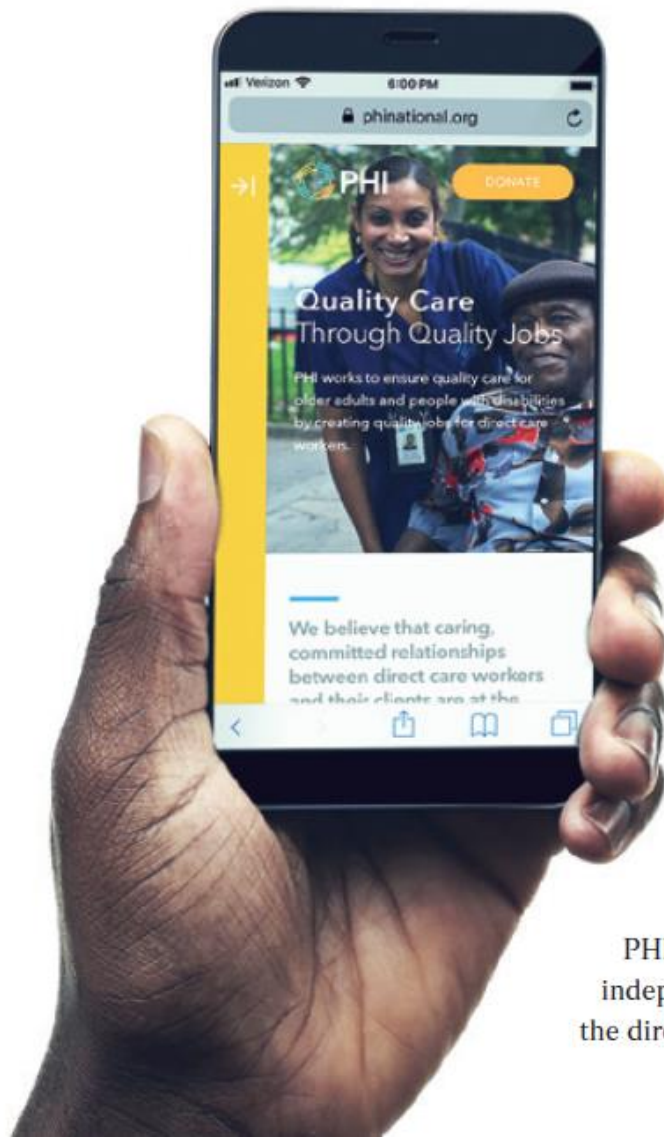
"I think the role of the home health aide should be considered just as important as any other health care role."

Marisol Riviera

CARE COORDINATOR AT COOPERATIVE HOME
CARE ASSOCIATES (CHCA), BRONX, NY

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PHI works to transform eldercare and disability services. We foster dignity, respect, and independence for all who receive care, and all who provide it. As the nation's leading authority on the direct care workforce, PHI promotes quality direct care jobs as the foundation for quality care.

Contact Information and Additional Resources

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An archived version of the webinar will be posted online later today. We will notify attendees by email when it is available.

For more coverage of issues affecting home care workers, visit www.khn.org.