

Data Infrastructure for Measuring the Care Economy: A Focus on the Direct Care Workforce in Long-Term Care

July 16, 2025

Kezia Scales, PhD, Vice President of Research & Evaluation, PHI





An Essential and Rapidly Growing Workforce

- Nationally, 5 million direct care jobs focused on supporting older adults and people with disabilities across settings (2023)
- More than 861,100 *new* jobs and 8.9 million *total* job openings expected within the next decade (2022-2032)
- Predominantly women (85%) and people of color (64%); more than 1 in 4 immigrants (28%)



The Implications of Poor Job Quality

- **Economic instability:**
 - Median annual earnings ~\$25,000
 - 37% live in/near poverty; 49% rely on public assistance
- **Workforce instability:**
 - 75% median turnover among home care workers
 - 99% median turnover for nursing assistants in nursing homes
 - 40% average turnover rate for direct support professionals (DSPs)
- **Barriers to care:**
 - Most states (43) report HCBS closures due to workforce crisis
 - 90% of I/DD providers report moderate to severe staffing challenges; 69% turning away new referrals
 - 46% of nursing homes report limiting admissions due to staffing challenges; 66% concerned about closure



Key Data-Driven Resources

POLICY RESEARCH >

Workforce Data Center

From wages to employment statistics, across states and nationwide, find the latest data on the direct care workforce.

We provide customized, up-to-date snapshots on this quickly-growing workforce.

SHARE THIS   

MORE POLICY RESEARCH

Reports & Multimedia

We produce studies, policy reports, and multimedia resources on today's pressing long-term care topics.

VISIT LIBRARY →

STATE DATA

NATIONAL DATA

SELECT SEARCH CRITERIA You can select one or more states by using the map below, or by using the State drop-down menu.

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

STATE

ALABAMA

ALASKA

ARIZONA

ARKANSAS

CALIFORNIA

COLORADO



DIRECT CARE
WORKFORCE
STATE INDEX

Sources: <https://www.phinational.org/policy-research/workforce-data-center/>; <https://www.phinational.org/state-index-tool/>

Systemic Challenges to Data Collection

- **Fragmented LTSS landscape** characterized by a wide array of policies, payment streams, programs, and service delivery models
- **Dynamic workforce:** part-time and part-year employment, multiple job holding, employer-level and occupational churn
- **Inconsistent training, registration/certification, and regulation** of workforce
- **Uneven integration with other health and social care services** limits understanding of workforce impact and outcomes



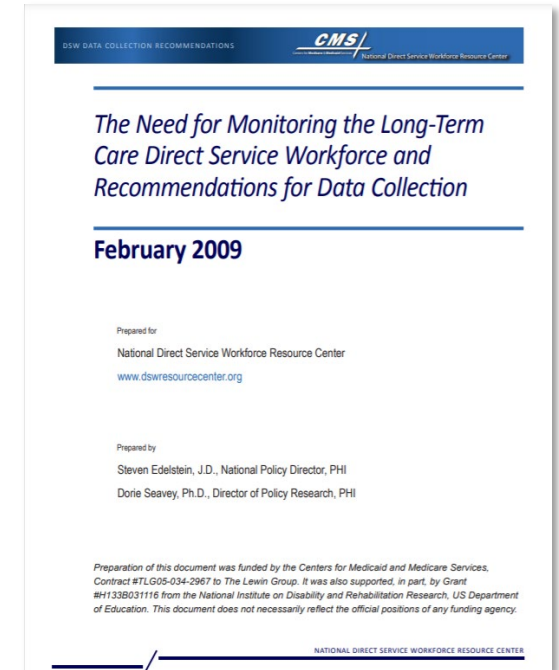
Specific Public Survey Data Limitations

- Data are not sufficiently **timely or comparable**
- There are barriers to **distinguishing direct care roles**, especially direct support professionals (DSPs)
- **Sample sizes** limit analysis by industry *and* occupation, state, rural versus urban setting, etc.
- **Independent providers** (majority family members) paid through consumer direction are largely excluded or hidden; also those employed in the **gray market**
- May not account for those who hold direct care jobs as **secondary jobs** (e.g. ACS based on primary occupation)
- **Gaps in relevant data**, e.g. ACS asks about Medicaid and SNAP enrollment but not many other public benefit programs



What Data Do We Need and Why?

- Minimum data set: **size, stability, compensation**
- What is the current demand for direct care workers relative to supply?
- What are the impacts of key state policy interventions and investments on the workforce, care recipients, and family caregivers?
- What is the return on investment in training, career development, higher wages, and other workforce development and job quality initiatives?
- How do workforce experiences and outcomes differ by demographic characteristics and other factors?



<https://www.phinational.org/resource/the-need-for-monitoring-the-long-term-care-direct-service-workforce-and-recommendations-for-data-collection-2/>



Kezia Scales, PhD

Vice President of Research & Evaluation, PHI

kscales@PHInational.org

PHInational.org