

Direct Creation, Advancement, and Retention of Employment (CARE) Opportunity Act of 2026

Direct care workers provide daily assistance to millions of older Americans, people with disabilities, and others with chronic care needs. Direct care workers include personal care aides, direct support professionals, home health aides, and nursing assistants. These workers are the backbone of the long-term care workforce and assist individuals with daily tasks such as preparing meals, managing medications, and assisting with transportation.

The direct care workforce makes it possible for many disabled people, including older individuals with disabilities, to live, work, and participate in their communities. They are essential to supporting family caregivers and ensuring that older Americans and people with disabilities can live with dignity and independence.

There is a growing demand for direct care, but not enough workers to meet the demand. The population age 65 and older increased from 40.5 million in 2010 to nearly 58 million today, with projections estimating that the population of older adults will grow to [88.8 million in 2060](#). Further, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [one in four adults](#) is currently living with a disability. With the growth in individuals needing services, the direct care workforce is projected to add [nearly a million new jobs](#) between 2024 and 2034.

Direct care workers care for and support some of our nation's most vulnerable people. However, the workforce itself is also vulnerable to low wages, difficult working conditions, and economic insecurity. Of the over [five million direct care workers](#) who support older adults and people with disabilities, the vast majority are women and people of color. Many direct care workers have no education beyond high school and lack access to career pathways or advanced training. For many direct care workers, helping others takes a heavy toll on their own health. For example, nursing assistants are [nearly five times more likely](#) to experience workplace injuries or illnesses than the typical U.S. worker. The [current median wage](#) for direct care workers is just \$17.36. [Thirty-six percent](#) of direct care workers live in low-income households, and [nearly half](#) rely on some form of public assistance to support themselves and their families.

Unfortunately, Congressional Republicans and the Trump Administration have made the situation even more dire by cutting Medicaid funding by nearly \$1 trillion and threatening the public assistance that helps many direct care workers make ends meet. To meet the growing demand for direct care workers, improve working conditions, and create greater economic opportunity, Congress must invest in the workforce that cares for millions of people every day.

The *Direct CARE Opportunity Act* addresses the need for a prepared, well-trained, and empowered direct care workforce—now and in the future. The *Direct CARE Opportunity Act*:

- Provides funding to states and entities to invest in strategies to recruit, retain, and advance the direct care workforce pipeline.
- Implements models and strategies to make the field of direct care more attractive, such as training, registered apprenticeships, and mentoring, enabling local and regional innovation to address workforce shortages and needs in a high-demand field.
- Encourages retention and career advancement in the field of direct care through the development and utilization of a career pathways model.
- Responds to the needs of a growing aging population and allows older Americans, people with disabilities, and others who require direct care services to remain in their communities, when possible.
- Supports the health and well-being of those who need and rely on direct care services, helping prevent more costly institutional care.