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Story Ideas on the Direct-Care Workforce

Is America Prepared to Care? What do we need to assure that an aging country will be able to meet the needs of frail elders for long-term care? We can't rely on a contingent, underpaid, undervalued workforce because when the economy improves there simply won't be enough available workers. How can direct-care workers—a workforce nearing 4 million— play a more significant role in supporting care coordination and chronic disease management?

Fair Labor Standards Act: Home care aides are exempt from the federal Fair Labor Standards Act that provides labor protections -- like minimum wage and overtime pay -- to practically every other worker in the nation. Yet some states provide more protections than the federal government. Do home care workers, one of the fastest-growing occupations in the country, have more protections in your state than they do under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act? Is lack of FLSA protection affecting the ability of home care providers to meet consumer demand?

New Initiatives/Legislation/Regulations: Some states are developing and pilot testing new curriculum for personal care aides, and some states are working on projects to increase direct-care worker retention. What are the long-term care initiatives, and pending or recently passed long-term care legislation and regulations, in your state?

Jobs and the Economy: Health care employment is one of the few expanding sectors—and much of this growth is in eldercare and disability services. But the fastest-growing jobs—home health aides and personal assistants—are so poorly paid that many workers rely on public assistance benefits. How can your state allocate public dollars to achieve better jobs for workers, while sustaining economic growth and achieving better outcomes for consumers?

CLASS Plan: States are required under the health reform law to build an infrastructure to ensure that consumers will be able to access the long-term services and supports that they need. What steps, if any, has your state taken to ensure both an adequate supply of home care aides and the infrastructure required by March 2012?

Matching Service Registries: Does your state have one? If not, how are consumers finding home care aides, and how are aides finding employment with consumers who need long-term services and supports?

Training: The federal training requirements for certified nurse assistants and home health aides have not changed since 1987. Personal and home care aides – which are among the fastest-growing occupation in the nation – require no training under federal law. Some states mandate that certified nurse assistants and home health aides get more training than the federal government requires and some states also require training for personal care aides. What does your state require? Does the direct-care workforce in your state have adequate training to care for elders and people with disabilities with complex medical conditions who reside in home-based settings?

Retention: Nursing homes, home care organizations, and other long-term care settings' ability to retain their frontline direct-care workers is notoriously difficult. Yet, everyone knows that experienced workers are needed to provide optimal care. What is the retention rate in your community? Are the long-term care settings finding innovative ways to retain their direct-care workers? What occupations are the aides pursuing when they leave? Are they seeking higher pay and insurance coverage and more work hours, since historically, these benefits and work conditions are lacking for this workforce?

Culture Change: More nursing homes are on a journey to achieve culture change for their organizations which benefits consumers, families, and staff. Culture change means turning institutional nursing homes into real homes, where residents have the intellectual, emotional and spiritual sustenance they need to thrive. Yet it is not limited to residential facilities alone. Nor does culture change in residential settings require building a brand new structure. Culture change is taking place within the walls of facilities and through practice changes in home care. Culturally changed communities strive to offer **relationship-centered care**, acknowledging the preference of individuals and providing care accordingly. Since direct-care workers provide 80 percent of the hands-on care, and are the staff that best knows the preferences of consumers, culturally changed organizations recognize that these workers are a critical component of the long-term care team. What long-term organizations in your community are on the culture change journey and what are they doing to achieve this philosophical shift?