

RESOURCE

To: Governors' Offices, primarily education and/or workforce policy advisors

Re: State Direct Care Workforce Development Strategies

From: National Governors Association

Date: April 2022

Purpose

The third consideration in the Issue Brief [*State Strategies for Sector Growth and Retention of the Direct Care Workforce*](#) is "Identify and support training opportunities that enhance accessibility of direct care jobs and create opportunities for career growth."

Direct care jobs typically require limited training and education and therefore can serve as an accessible entry point for work in the health sector. Although demand for these roles is high and their services are critical, many states may not prioritize these roles in workforce development initiatives because the wages typically fall below thresholds set by states for inclusion in such initiatives. To address this issue, state education and workforce initiatives can be focused on ensuring these roles are only the first step on a clear career pathway that leads to higher wage opportunities. There are several solutions states may implement to address training needs, support recruitment, and build pathways for career progression. These strategies include: apprenticeships, work-based learning opportunities, and career pathways.

As states explore the progression of direct care workforce development strategies, a first step may be to assess current direct care workforce development programming. Below is a toolkit that states may use to understand the current state of direct care workforce development initiatives and explore opportunities to enhance these strategies.

Registered Apprenticeships

Registered apprenticeships are “earn-and-learn” models that have been validated by the U.S. Department of Labor or a State Apprenticeship Agency. There may be federal workforce funding available to support employers and individuals seeking to undergo training to earn a nationally-recognized credential. In the direct care workforce space, registered apprenticeship programming has already been developed for [Nursing Assistants](#) and [Social and Human Service Assistants](#), but there may be an opportunity to build programming for other direct care roles.

Benefits of Registered Apprenticeships to Incumbent Workers and Employers:

- Assistance with training and tuition costs (On-the-Job-Training contracts can reimburse employers up to 75 percent of wage rates paid to participants for up to six months)
- Coverage for supervision and extraordinary training costs (equivalent to 75 percent of the apprentice’s wage rate)
- Provision of additional recruiting, placement, and support services (including transportation, books, supplies, and childcare)

Opportunities for state action:

- To explore whether a registered apprenticeship for direct care roles exists in your state, visit <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/apprenticeship-job-finder>
- To develop or expand apprenticeship opportunities in the direct care space, consider sharing information about registered apprenticeships and the support provided by state workforce agencies with direct care employers through informational sessions and customized marketing materials.

Work-based Learning

In contrast to registered apprenticeships, work-based learning programming is generally developed at the state level using Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding. These programs may include career and technical education opportunities, and are targeted to a number of audiences, including high school students and adult learners. States or local workforce development boards develop strategies to prioritize the use of work-based learning funding. State approaches vary significantly, but many focus on high-wage, high-skill, and high-demand careers. Although direct care roles are certainly in high demand, they are not generally classified as high-wage or high-skill and therefore may not be prioritized for funding or emphasis by workforce development agencies.

Opportunities for state action:

- Review state strategies for prioritizing occupations for workforce development funding and determine whether direct care roles are included
 - [This resource](#) by the Education Commission of the States may serve as a helpful guide to identify state strategies for the designation of high-demand occupations which are prioritized for workforce development funding.

- If direct care roles are not currently included and there is interest in prioritizing these roles for workforce development funding, consider alternative strategies or exploring sector or sub-sector specific strategies (such as grant programs for training, tax credits for instructors, or partnering with state Medicaid offices to provide reimbursement increases if direct care workforce development indicators are met).

Career Pathways

Many direct care jobs require skills that may be easily translated through training into higher skills and higher wage health sector opportunities. However, the time and costs associated with additional training make the pursuit of these opportunities challenging. By establishing career pathways that facilitate transitions to higher skills and higher wage jobs in the health sector, it is easier to retain qualified workers in the health sector. Career pathways for direct care roles can be developed alongside apprenticeship and work-based learning opportunities. States can also focus on clearly articulating career pathways for direct care workers, both within direct care roles and into other jobs in the health sector.

Opportunities for state action:

- Leverage state longitudinal data systems or licensing/regulatory data to assess and articulate common career pathways for direct care workers.
- Identify opportunities for the development of stackable and portable credentials for direct care roles, and align steps along the career pathway with paid training opportunities.
 - Consider partnering with community colleges for the development of these pathways.
- Create reference documents and resources which clearly articulate direct care career pathways. Share these resources with local American Job Centers and high schools to promote advancement opportunities for direct care workers.