# Iowa Public Narrative

Direct Service Workforce (DSW) Coaching

Karin provides care for Arthur, who is 84 and shows signs of Alzheimer’s, but other than that he is very healthy for his age. He was married for 53 years before his wife passed away. He didn’t want to leave his home that he shared with his wife but needed help after he ended up in the emergency room because his blood sugar dropped too low. He had double-dosed his diabetes medication. Karin’s work allows Arthur to remain at home and direct his care. Besides helping with his medications, Karin makes sure that he has a full cupboard of food and helps prepare meals so he can follow his heart and diabetes meal plan. Caring for Arthur is a 24/7 job. She cannot afford to take a day off, even when she is sick, because she only receives a little over $12 an hour. Karin would like to advance in her career but does not feel she can in her current role because there are not many opportunities to move up.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately impacted Karin and other essential workers, has intensified the direct service workforce crisis. Many of us are worried about our health. Many people lost their jobs. Direct service workers have been driven out of their jobs because of illness, fear, family responsibilities, and other reasons.

If we do not raise wages for people like Karin, she will face immense economic instability. She will continue to need public assistance to provide food and health care for herself and her family. Raising wages will improve the health of Karin, along with her family, and the health of all people. Since Medicaid is the largest payer for long-term services and supports, raising wages through Medicaid will also set a higher wage standard for the whole industry—making direct services jobs more competitive with other sectors.

Other state legislatures have appropriated budgets to create initiatives to increase compensation for direct service workers in the form of wages, bonuses, and/or additional paid leave and to cover other compensation-related expenses.

If these jobs aren’t filled because there isn’t an opportunity to move up, Iowa’s older adults, people with disabilities, and their families will suffer the consequences. In Iowa, nursing assistants and home health aides must complete 75 hours of entry-level training, which is the federal minimum.[[1]](#endnote-2) Training requirements for personal care aides are even lower: they must only complete 13 hours of “orientation,” but these credentials are not portable, meaning personal care aides must retrain every time they change employers.

Iowa has already made substantial progress toward realizing this vision with the *Prepare to Care* curriculum and training model[[2]](#endnote-3) and has committed anew to building the state’s training infrastructure through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) home and community-based services (HCBS) spending plan.

Together, we are a community of Iowa residents and caregivers who are passionate about this work because we are fighting for the health and wellbeing of our families in a failing health and long-term care system, made even worse by the current pandemic. Each of us wants the best for our parents, ourselves, sons, daughters, and neighbors. We all want to be able to live with optimal health, independence, and dignity. We need direct care service workers like Karin to support us. We are all interconnected—our opportunities to be healthy are linked.

Please join us to 1) Raise wages for direct service workers across long-term care settings by increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates with a wage pass-through provision and 2) Establish a competency-based training and credentialing system that promotes consistency and career mobility across direct service job titles and settings.

1. Campbell, Stephen, Angelina Del Rio Drake, Robert Espinoza, and Kezia Scales. 2021. *Caring for the Future: The Power and Potential of America’s Direct Care Workforce*. Bronx, NY: PHI. <http://phinational.org/caringforthefuture/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. “Prepare to Care.” Accessed 8/30/21. <https://iowapreparetocare.training-source.org/>; Campbell (McCall), Stephen. 2017. Training Standards for Personal Care Aides: Spotlight on Iowa. Bronx, NY: PHI. <https://phinational.org/resource/training-standards-for-personal-care-aides-spotlight-on-iowa/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)