Experiences of Direct Care Workers of Color and Strategies to Improve Recruitment and Retention

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CLPC
Community Living Policy Center

The Community Living Policy Center

The Community Living Policy Center, or CLPC, at the Lurie Institute for Disability Policy at Brandeis University, conducts research and advances policy on the provision and quality of Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services for people with disabilities in the United States. Research includes:

- Quantitative studies on HCBS access and Family Caregiving
- Qualitative studies on Self-Direction and the DCW Crisis
- Policy work on leading HCBS topics

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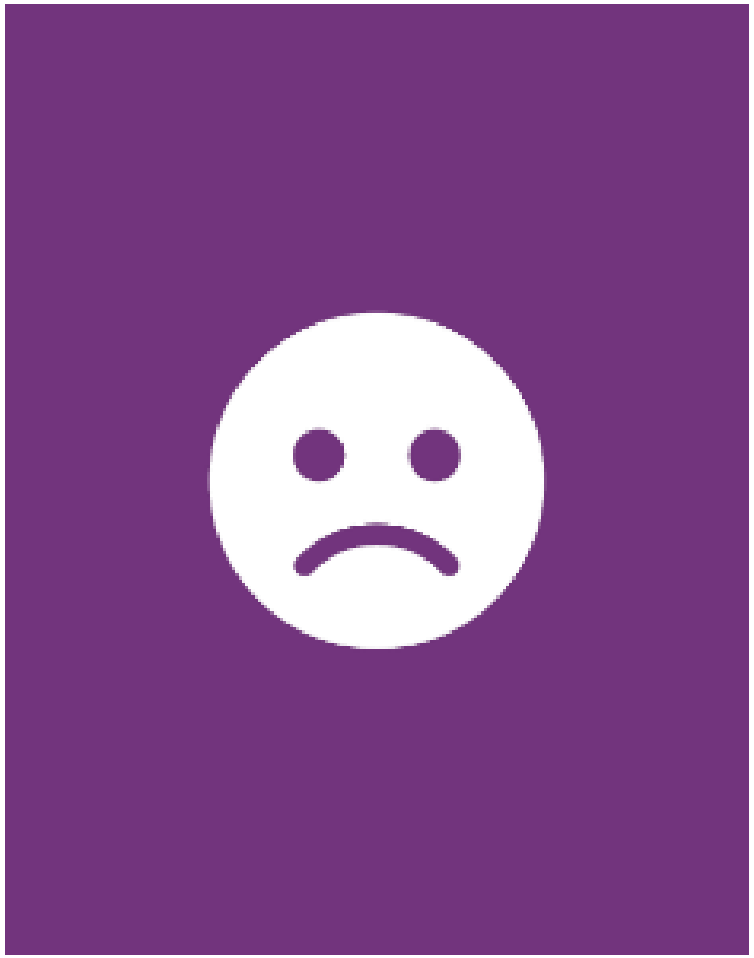
Introduction

The Importance of Direct Care Workers



- Direct care workers, personal care attendants, direct support professionals, and home health aides make HCBS and community living possible.
- Direct care worker shortage identified by CLPC stakeholders as highest priority barrier to independence.
- Provide hands-on personal care, daily living assistance, and person-centered planning support to older adults and people with disabilities live in their communities.
- Majority of direct care workers are women of color.

Other literature



- Prior research has linked high staff turnover rates with worse outcomes for HCBS recipients, including hospital admissions, reduced community participation, and other quality of life indicators.
- Only one previous study has linked higher wages and better outcomes for HCBS recipients.
- Few studies give voice to direct care workers' experiences on and perspectives of these recruitment and retention efforts.

Research Questions



- What are the experiences of direct care workers? What rewards and challenges do they face?
- What recommendations do direct care workers have for improving recruitment and retention of their fellow workers?

Methods

Participatory Research Study



- Direct involvement from people with lived experience (direct care workers) as true collaborators, rather than just as research participants
- 5 paid DCW Workgroup members with diverse experiences
- Helped develop study materials including interview guide
- Also participated in the study

Data Collection



- We conducted hour-long zoom interviews with DCWs, DSPs, and home health aids in community-based settings across the United States
- Recruited sources: Direct Care Workforce Strategies Center, Caring Across, ADvancing States and at national HCBS conferences

Worker Classification and Setting



- DCWs and PCAs assisting disabled people and older adults in state self-directed programs
- A number of DSPs assisting folks w I/DD in residential settings
- Some were employed by consumers through self-direction, some worked for agencies
- Some were private pay

Demographics



- 30 participants
- Race- 53% people of color including Native American people
- Ethnicity- 17% Hispanic/Latino
- Gender
  - Predominantly cis-women (73%)
  - 17% LGBTQ and nonbinary people

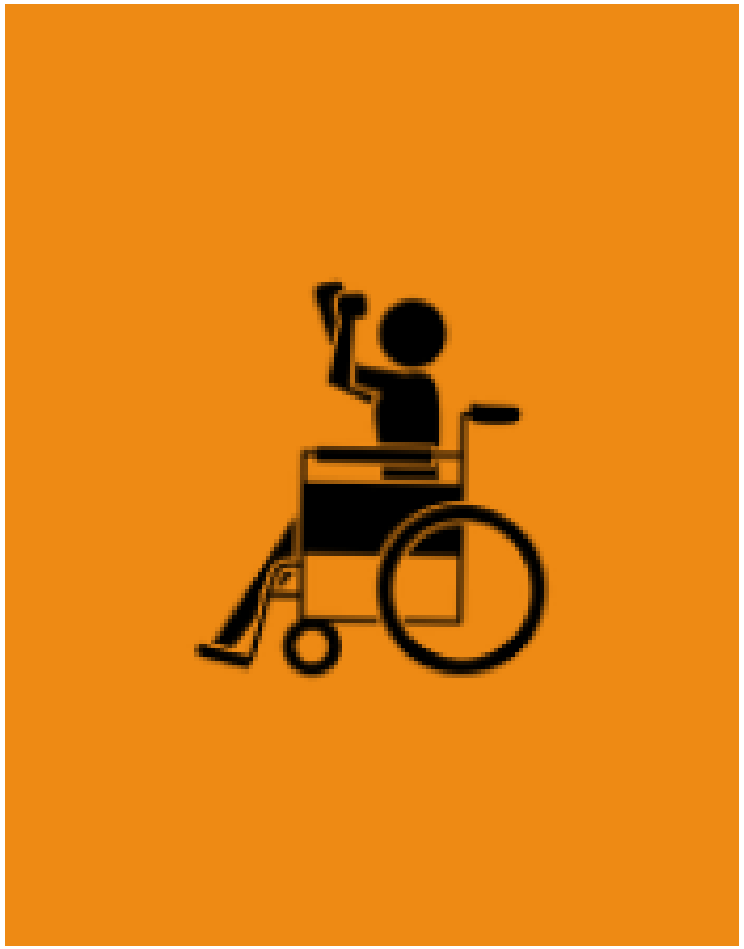
Demographics (cont.)



- Age- majority 50-65 years (40%)
- Regional breakdown -
  - West coast: 57%
  - Midwest: 17%
  - South: 13%
  - East coast: 13%
- Majority worked 50+ hours per/wk

Results: Rewards

Working with People with Disabilities



- The Why of the Profession
- Purpose and Impact
- Personal Growth
- Person-centeredness
- Advancing Independent Living Goals
- Building Interdependent Relationships

Constantly Learning New Skills



- Each consumer has different needs
- This is a skilled profession
  - Caring for people is not the same as other “service industry jobs”
- A lot of “on the job” training
- Some workers we spoke with have been doing this for 30+ years

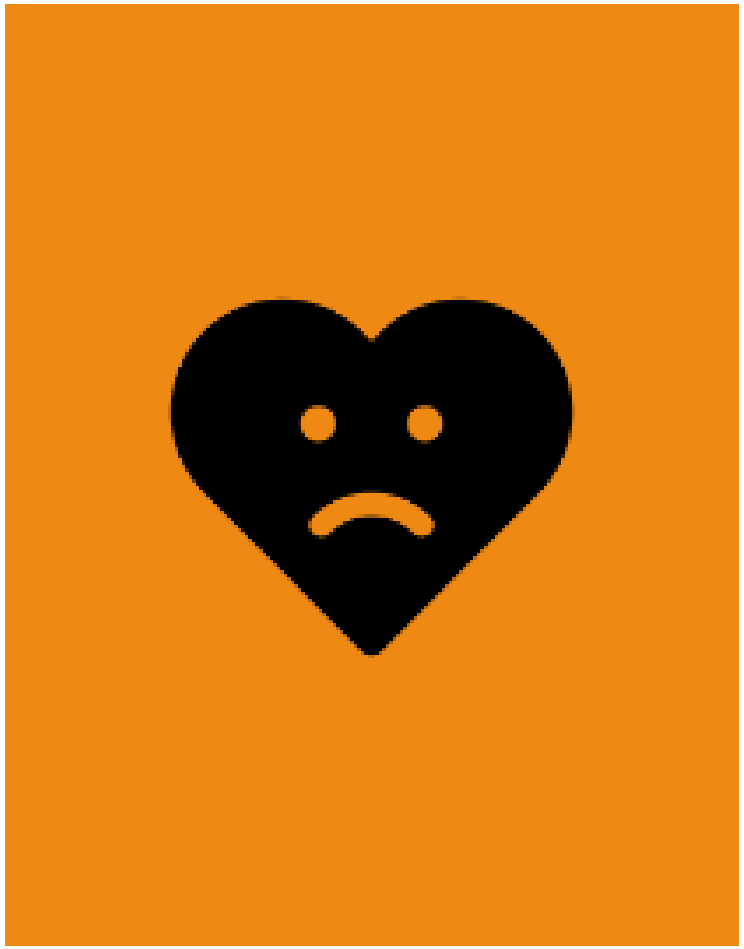
The Flexibility of the Profession



- Many participants appreciated the flexible scheduling of direct care
- Workers could create non-traditional schedules
- More time with school-aged children
- Time to take care of other family members

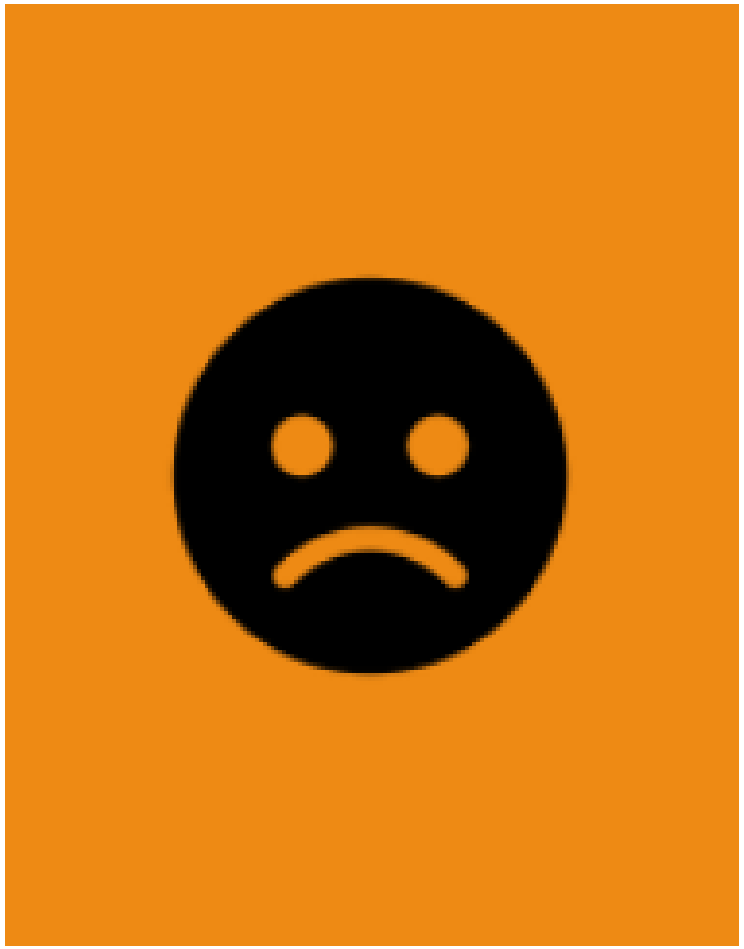
Results: Challenges

Low Wages, Inadequate Raises, Limited Benefits



- Wages don’t match value of work performed
- De Minimis raises
- Workers often utilize Medicaid
- Often no sick/vacation pay
  - People are working long hours
  - Turnover is high

Limited Opportunities for Robust Paid Training



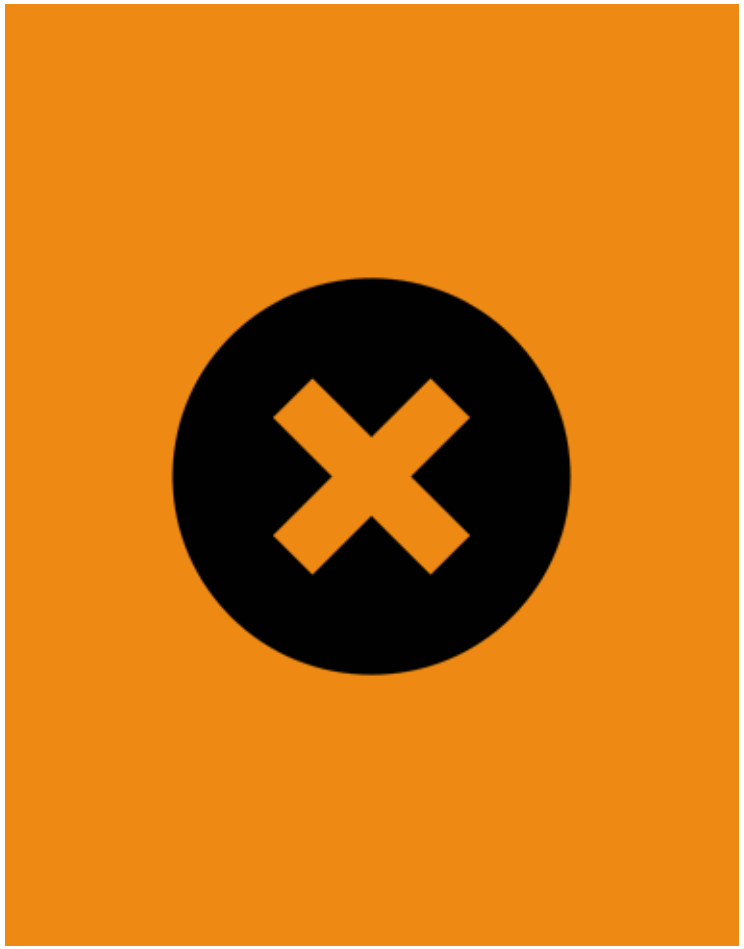
- In some states, workers have very limited access to training (helps to fill vacancies quicker)
- Even when trainings are offered, many workers considered them too basic
- Unpaid training by longer-term direct care workers of new hires

Limited Opportunities for Career Advancement



- Limited opportunities for paid credentialing and/or educational credits or stipends
- Many participants spoke about enjoying doing hands on work and were reluctant to shift to more sedentary jobs
- Many participants spoke about reluctance to take on more responsibilities with limited pay increases

Workplace Safety



- Burnout/physical exhaustion can lead to unsafe working conditions
- Back Injuries are common, often from lifting and bending (hoyer lifts not widely available)
- Emotional exhaustion/Mental Health
- Physical Safety

Race and Gender Concerns



- Participants of color, especially in southern/southeast regions reported racism from clients and family members
- Participants with diverse Gender Identities expressed concerns over personal safety

Recruitment/Retention Strategies

Living Wages, Benefits, and Retirement

- Livable Wages
- Affordable Health Care
- Mental Health Care
- Sick/Vacation Pay
- Bereavement Pay
- Child Care
- Retirement Plans



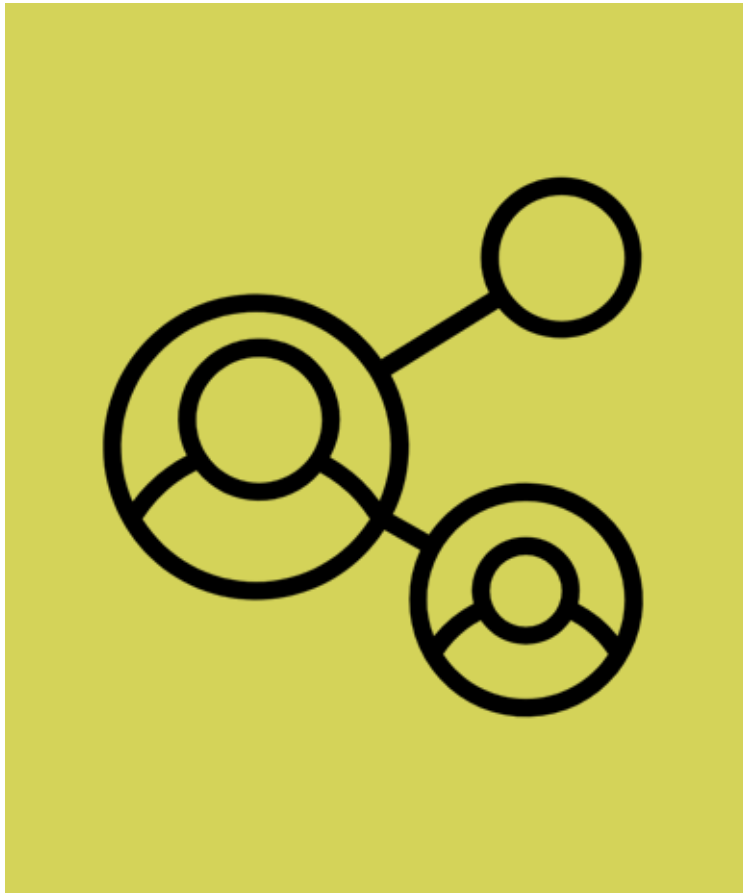
Newer Workers

- How do you target caring people?
  - Promotional videos - Some states use storytelling from long term workers to highlight impact of work
  - Shadowing - Legislator Visits
  - High school to college pipelines
  - Older worker pipelines
  - Family caregivers
  - Matching workers and care recipients
  - Technology (a draw for younger workers but may be a barrier for older workers)



Training, Credentialing, and Educational Opportunities

- Paid, non-redundant and useful trainings
- Free, stackable and portable micro-credentialing based on evaluated competencies
- Opportunities for college credit and/or stipends
- Assistance paying student loans



Robust Training Opportunities

- Hands on Training Opportunities by Long Term Workers
- Recommended Training Topics include:
  - Person-Centered Care
  - Cultural Competency
  - Managing Budgets
  - Alzheimers/Dementia
  - Lifting Safety
  - De-escalation
  - Emergency Planning



Learn more/contact us



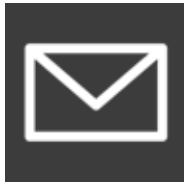
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