

WORKFORCE POLICY STATEMENT

ATTRACTING PEOPLE TO WORK IN AGING SERVICES

POLICY AIM: Federal policies and demonstration projects that build awareness of the diverse field of work in aging services and attract and support people entering this growing field.

CHALLENGE: The US has a significant shortage of, and a growing demand for, qualified workers who are capable of managing, supervising and providing high-quality services and supports for older adults. The population of adults age 65 and older will increase from nearly 50 million in 2015 to 88 million in 2050 – an 84% increase. The US Department of Health and Human Services estimates that nearly 7 out of 10 people who reach age 65 ultimately will need some form of long term services and support (LTSS). Thus, the nation will need 2.5 million workers of all different types by 2030 to keep up with the growth of America’s aging population. Unfortunately, current recruitment and retention of workers of all kinds is an ongoing challenge for a number of reasons. Medicaid is the primary public funder of LTSS services and low reimbursement rates limit salaries for all positions. This is particularly true for those who work in direct care. The reality is that jobs in aging services are highly skilled and complex, a fact not recognized in pay scales or reimbursement rates. In addition, work in these settings is physically and emotionally demanding. And, we continue to work towards improving workplace cultures. Finally, immigrants have a growing role in the LTSS workforce and there is potential value for the quality and sustainability of the LTSS field; in fact 24% of direct care workers are foreign-born.

LEGISLATIVE SOLUTIONS: Design and implement a foreign worker program in which workers come for a specified time to work in LTSS and then return to their native countries; expand the H (1)(b) visa program to include positions related to LTSS, create scholarships similar to the National Health Service Corps for students to work in aging services; educate lawmakers about the reliance of our communities on immigrants and migrants; amend current Medicare law to allow Graduate Medical Education (GME) funds to support training for staff in the LTSS field, and fund education and training programs with added focus on the LTSS field.

REGULATORY/AGENCY SOLUTIONS: Explore demonstration projects at the Department of Education to create programs that expose youths from grades K-12 to the diverse field of aging services, or alternatively require a demonstration project through legislative language; explore a demonstration project at the Department of Health and Human Services building on the experience in New York in which MLTSS plans are required to contract with regional workforce investment organizations to provide training and technical assistance around developing the workforce; explore apprenticeship programs in LTSS at the Department of Labor.