

Improving Jobs To Improve Care

The SEIU Healthcare NW Training Partnership

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The first decade of this century was a time of great change for Washington’s home care sector. The sector experienced substantial growth as the state continued to shift long-term care for older adults and people with disabilities from institutions to home and residential settings. Home care workers won the right to organize. Voters approved higher standards and certification requirements for home care workers. The foundation was laid for the Training Partnership, the nation’s largest training institution devoted to developing professional long-term care workers to deliver quality care and support to older adults and people with disabilities. This case study chronicles the origins of the Training Partnership. It describes the organization’s statewide system for training workers, working with employers and improving the quality of care for consumers. It also identifies strengths and challenges to the model. The goal of this case study is to document the Training Partnership so readers in other states can use this example to improve home care jobs and quality of care in their own states.

INCREASING DEMAND FOR HOME CARE AND BETTER TRAINED WORKERS

By 2050, the number of Americans needing long-term care services and supports will double. They will have more acute and complex care needs than previous generations, and they will be more likely to receive care at home or in a residential setting than in an institution. These factors are driving the increased demand for workers providing home care services (called “personal care aides” nationally and

“home care aides” in Washington state). There were 1.2 million personal care aides in the United States in 2012, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects this occupation to grow much faster than the average for all occupations during the next decade – 49 percent growth or nearly 600,000 new aides by 2022. Washington projects similar state-level growth rates in demand.

It is unclear how the home care industry will develop an adequate workforce. It is difficult to attract and keep personal care aides, because, across the nation, the wages are low, benefits are scarce, and the hours are inconsistent and often insufficient. It is also a physically and emotionally difficult job. In addition, workers typically receive little training to prepare them for the demands of the job, a particularly difficult situation when faced with more complex care needs.

Limited training and difficult working conditions also lead to concerns about quality and cost of care. There are no federal training standards, and state standards vary widely, are inconsistent within and across states, and are very confusing for the workers, consumers and their families. Unprepared and unmotivated workers may not provide the best care, leading to potentially higher costs, both in terms of consumer health issues, such as avoidable hospitalizations, and in worker turnover and reliability.

Home care work, however, can be very meaningful. Many personal care aides derive much satisfaction from helping older adults and people with disabilities with activities of daily living, so they can live independent and comfortable lives. Several aides in

Washington whom we interviewed described how rewarding it is to help consumers live with dignity in their own homes by assisting them with day-to-day tasks such as cooking, bathing, shopping and going to medical appointments. They take their role as lifelines for consumers very seriously, identifying critical health care problems before they become crises.

TWO KEY STATE POLICY DEVELOPMENTS DRIVE REFORM: DEMAND FOR HOME CARE AND FOR A PROFESSIONALIZED HOME CARE WORKFORCE

State policy is a powerful tool for addressing the challenges of home care. Washington has been working for two decades to build a professional home care workforce with adequate numbers to meet demand and quality training and certification to deliver high-quality care. Since the 1990s, the state has worked to “rebalance” the long-term care system from institutional care, such as nursing homes, to home- and residential-based care. This has been driven by the increasing demand for consumer choice and the higher cost of institutional care.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 775 was instrumental in raising awareness of the inadequacies of the state’s existing training requirements and efforts to ramp up the home care workforce to meet the growing need in the state. It organized workers and formed a labor-management partnership with home care employers – including the state of Washington – which created the Training Partnership. Washington voters also strongly voiced their support for higher training and certification standards as well as background checks for home care aides by twice passing state ballot initiatives supporting them (voters had to re-pass the training standards initiative after implementation of the standards voted for in the first ballot initiative was stalled). Both ballot initiatives passed with historically high margins, indicating very strong public support for improving the home care aide job and improving the quality of home care for consumers.

THE TRAINING PARTNERSHIP

The Training Partnership is the nation’s largest training provider for workers in home care. A nonprofit school founded in 2007, it develops and provides training programs and services for long-term care workers and is the primary training provider for home care aides in the state of Washington. With more than 45,000 total trainees on any given day (both new and incumbent workers), it is the second-largest educational institution in the state by enrollment – behind only the University of Washington.

The Training Partnership has created a statewide training system with comprehensive resources and tools to support home care aides, consumers and employers. Its focus is much broader than traditional training programs or institutions. It aims to train and empower long-term care workers, bring respect and dignity to the profession, and, in turn, improve the quality of care for consumers. With its multifaceted focus on improving training and opportunities for workers and transforming the industry and quality of care, the Training Partnership also is one of the country’s most ambitious sector strategy initiatives. With its understanding of how improved economic stability can enhance worker performance and its dual focus on improving jobs and providing advancement opportunities, the Training Partnership also exemplifies the emerging *Raise the Floor and Build Ladders* strategy.

The Training Partnership is governed by a labor-management partnership, with 50 percent employer-designated representation (including the state of Washington as a major employer of home care aides under the Medicaid program) and 50 percent union-designated representation on the board of trustees. Trustees have expertise in home care delivery, policy, worker needs and education. As reflected in the vision for its services, the Training Partnership considers the home care workers, employers and consumers all as primary customers. Adult-learning principles guide the Training Partnership’s development and implementation of its varied training programs. Training offerings include basic training and certification prep for new home care aides, continuing education, advanced

training through the nation's first Registered Apprenticeship program for home care aides, and nurse delegation training. These trainings are delivered in multiple modalities (in-person, online), at multiple locations around the state, and at various times to accommodate workers' schedules (evenings, weekends). They are available in many different languages, and interpreters for unique languages are available upon request.

The Training Partnership wants home care aides to envision futures in the industry and so is developing new career pathway options designed to improve the job and retain good workers. It also offers numerous other supports for workers and employers including peer mentors, a navigator pilot program, a call center, a quarterly magazine and other communications, a customer service team for workers and employers, and a centralized data repository providing secured access to training records and certification status.

OUTCOMES, STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

In a short period of time, the Training Partnership designed and launched a system that could implement new and more rigorous training standards in the state of Washington and that could meet the scale of demand in the state's home care sector. The Partnership now trains more than 45,000 workers and is the largest provider of certified home care workers in Washington. Students who start training have high completion rates of 90 percent or better across the board. More than 80 percent of the Training Partnership's native English-speaking students pass the state certification exam (the state and the Training Partnership are working to improve lower rates for non-English speakers). The Training Partnership accounted for 70 percent of the state's certification earners in 2013.

According to state officials, the Training Partnership has added "horsepower" to Washington's efforts to train home care aides. It also has brought to the system much innovation and reform, from the development of a well-organized instructor network delivering thousands of courses

The Training Partnership provides a crucial role as we are a statewide intermediary for the home care industry. We create an effective training delivery system by utilizing information and feedback from both workers and employers.

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annually and developing dozens of new ones each year, to the creation of the cutting-edge Registered Apprenticeship program, to exploring additional career advancement opportunities in a relatively flat occupation. It has helped educate and empower home care aides to do their jobs better and has provided mechanisms for them to connect with peers and overcome the inherent isolation of the job. Employers show high levels of satisfaction with the Training Partnership's offerings. The partnership has highlighted home care aides as an integral part of the care team.

The Training Partnership also has taken data-driven management and results-driven decisions to a new level. It has developed a robust data system to track worker training and certification and proactively help workers stay in good standing. It collects and uses data to continuously improve its offerings and customer service. It also has plans for a rigorous evaluation of its soon-to-be-revamped Registered Apprenticeship program to measure the value of the training in terms of improved quality of care.

While still a relatively new initiative, the early experiences, challenges and success of the Training Partnership in Washington state offer lessons and guidance for state and federal policy makers, workforce development investors and philanthropists, and job training providers about how to train and support one of our nation's most



important workforces. We identified several strengths and a few challenges to the model.

Strengths

1. Clear goals, commitment to continuous improvement and vigorous drive to improve the field
2. All aspects of the Training Partnership are embedded in the industry
3. Significant employer engagement, including sustained funding
4. A solid understanding of workers and commitment to their success
5. Planned for scale from the beginning

Challenges

1. Integrating training and certification processes and continuing to improve the model
2. Serving immigrant and rural workers
3. Developing career pathways and economic advancement opportunities for home care aides
4. Evaluating impact and outcomes, including improvements in quality care

THE FUTURE

The Training Partnership's focus for the immediate future includes designing and testing roles for home care aides that add value for the consumer and in the health care system. It envisions a home care aide workforce equipped with the knowledge and resources workers need to collaborate and communicate with their consumers' doctors and care teams, potentially allowing for outcomes such as earlier identification of patient needs leading to

more timely care from other care team members. Such early interventions have the potential to reduce emergency room visits and hospitalization, reducing health care costs for both consumers and the public and improving the consumer experience. In this vision, home care aides are a key component in bringing down total health care costs for consumers in home and community-based care settings.

LESSONS FOR OTHER STATES

The Training Partnership experience offers many lessons for other states. Other states likely need to professionalize their home care workforce and develop a system that can respond to growing demand. The Training Partnership's close working relationship with the state of Washington to implement the policy for higher training and certification standards has facilitated development and improvement of the training and support offerings. The experience of the Training Partnership and the state policies that supported the organization's development provide an approach that other states can adapt to their own context. These lessons, in combination with the detailed description of the Training Partnership's offerings and structure in this case study, can guide readers toward development of better home care jobs, a well-trained home care workforce and higher quality of care. One home care aide interviewed for this case study provided the perfect summary: "I hope this case study helps improve home care work in other states. It is very hard on [consumers] to move to another state but not have the same well-trained home care aide. There should be more consistency throughout the country."

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This executive summary is excerpted from *Improving Jobs to Improve Care: The SEIU Healthcare NW Training Partnership*, by Vickie Choitz and Matt Helmer with Maureen Conway. The full document can be found at this link:

