

## Iowa Direct Care Workforce Initiative

Iowa's direct care workforce has emerged as a component of the state's overall efforts to implement 2008 health care reform legislation and improve access to health, long-term care, and support services. Issues facing direct care workers and individuals seeking care and support services exist within the broader context of workforce needs in Iowa and nationally, considering overall health and human services workforce shortages statewide, changing demographics that will place greater demand on the delivery system, and a growing desire to receive services and supports in the home and community.

Iowa is taking a proactive approach to address these workforce needs and changes in how individuals receive direct care services by developing and implementing the Iowa Direct Care Workforce Initiative. This Initiative, a product of years of work by direct care workers, health care, disability, long-term care, and many other stakeholders, will result in career pathways and will create new professional opportunities for the direct care workforce.

[A direct care worker is an individual who provides supportive services and care to people experiencing illnesses or disabilities.]

### Improve Direct Care Worker Recruitment and Retention

Direct care workers are the front-line, providing hands-on care and support to individuals of all ages and abilities in settings that range from hospitals to services in home and community-based settings. These workers have a direct impact on the quality of care and quality of life for Iowans statewide, yet the profession ranks in the top 15 for highest job vacancy rates<sup>1</sup> and reports startling turnover rates, estimated from 40 to 100 percent<sup>2</sup>. Iowa Workforce Development projects direct care occupations among those with the fastest growth through 2016<sup>3</sup>, and nationally projections indicate a significant shift in employment setting from facilities to home and community settings<sup>4</sup>.

### Create Statewide Standards for Portability of Education and Training

Iowa's direct care workforce is estimated to be as large as 100,000 workers, including individuals who provide services in hospitals, facilities, homes, and community settings. Training and education requirements for direct care workers vary greatly by setting and there are more than forty job titles for workers performing similar job functions. A majority of the workforce does not have uniform training standards, which results in a system that does not allow for portability of training and education despite common needs for care and support by consumers. This fragmented system is difficult for consumers to navigate, and according to an AARP survey conducted in 2006, nearly nine out of ten people surveyed believe that it is important for the state to certify all people who provide hands-on care.<sup>5</sup>

### Invest in the Direct Care Workforce for the Future

Iowa is developing a comprehensive approach to address direct care workforce recruitment, retention, job quality, and service quality. Iowa's Direct Care Workforce Initiative will provide educational and professional opportunities for the individual direct care worker and overall direct care workforce. This Initiative is unique in its approach as it truly seeks to create a workforce of trained professionals with

<sup>1</sup> *Iowa's Workforce and the Economy*. 2008. Iowa Workforce Development.

<sup>2</sup> National Clearinghouse on the Direct Care Workforce. Retrieved November, 20 2008, from [http://www.directcareclearinghouse.org/s\\_state\\_pfv.jsp?res\\_id=15](http://www.directcareclearinghouse.org/s_state_pfv.jsp?res_id=15)

<sup>3</sup> *Iowa's Workforce and the Economy*. 2008. Iowa Workforce Development.

<sup>4</sup> *Occupational Projections for Direct Care Workers 2006-2016*. Paraprofessional Health Institute.

<sup>5</sup> Silberman, S. L. (2006). *Bringing it home: AARP Iowa member opinion on direct care worker quality and long-term care access*. Washington, DC: AARP.

skills and credentials that are portable across work settings. Portability of skills and credentials is essential in providing opportunities for mobility and advancement in the direct care profession, and will create efficiencies by eliminating duplication of education and training.

## About the Iowa Direct Care Workforce Initiative

### What will the Initiative do?

- **Implement Standards for Education and Training**

The Direct Care Workforce Initiative will establish statewide standards for training and education of direct care workers, providing new professional opportunities for direct care workers by creating career pathways that lead to a state recognized credential. Credentialed workers will also have opportunities to develop advanced or specialty skills through professional development and continuing education in areas of interest or associated with setting of practice or population/individual served. Because there will be uniform standards, training and education will be portable across settings.

- **Establish a Governing Board**

This system will be governed by direct care professionals themselves through the establishment of a professional board, much like other credentialed professions. The board would have authority to certify workers and will provide public protection.

- **Coordinate Instruction and Increase Capacity**

As part of the development of standards for education and training, an accompanying training course for direct care worker instructors will be developed. The recommended structure will capitalize on the need by employers to provide on-site training, but under the new approach instructors are certified and linked together so all training and education is recognized by the state.

- **Certify Direct Care Workers**

The existing direct care workforce will be transitioned as simply and seamlessly as possible into the new system, recognizing their skills and experience while also preparing them for new educational and professional opportunities. The process for certifying existing direct care workers would be a long-term phased approach to accommodate the size and diversity of the workforce and to allow for planning and evaluation. New direct care workers will simply receive the new training and education and will be certified.

### When will this be implemented?

The Iowa Direct Care Workforce Initiative is a product of a multi-year effort by direct care workers, employers, educators, and consumers through the legislatively established Direct Care Worker Task Force and the Direct Care Worker Advisory Council. Implementation of the Initiative is in early development phases, with work being led by the Direct Care Worker Advisory Council to the Iowa Department of Public Health. Implementation will proceed slowly, based on a ten-year timeline.

### Where do I go for more information?

Contact the Iowa Department of Public Health or State Public Policy Group:

Erin Drinnin  
[edrinnin@idph.state.ia.us](mailto:edrinnin@idph.state.ia.us)  
515-281-3166  
[www.idph.state.ia.us](http://www.idph.state.ia.us) (Then search for Direct Care Worker)

Jennifer Furler  
State Public Policy Group  
[jfurler@sppg.com](mailto:jfurler@sppg.com)  
515-243-2000