

WORKING AT A GOOD JOB: CAREGIVERS' EXPERIENCES AND IDEAS IN THEIR OWN WORDS



Our nation is in a care crisis, driven by the lack of good jobs. In February 2023 we conducted a historic qualitative research study into what changes and reforms are needed to create the kind of quality jobs that can strengthen our nation's caregiving workforce.

Few recent national research studies have captured caregivers' experiences and insights on job quality and equity-advancing policies in their own words. That is what this study sought to do, prioritizing detailed information-gathering from BIPOC women caregiver participants with open-ended questions and equity-informed, worker-centered research analysis.

Our discussions explored participants' experiences and ideas about a) envisioning good jobs, b) evaluating working as a caregiver today, and c) making caregiving a better job in the future.

The research identifies a clear set of challenges that are shared by long-term caregivers throughout the profession. At the same time, our research shows that some experiences and opinions vary depending on whether caregivers 1) work in homes or a facility, b) deliver home care services through an agency or as an independent provider, and c) care for a consumer who is a family member. This memo will focus on the commonalities that bind caregivers together.

1. What affects caregivers' overall wellbeing?

Family, economic, and health concerns are an interconnected trio of challenges

- Caregivers' primary focus is having a secure and thriving family, which includes their own and others' children, their partners, and their elders.

- Workers worry about who will care for their family's various needs and they struggle to find quality time with family.
- Their families are impacted by economic challenges, such as low wages, weak employment benefits, debt, and the rising cost of necessities (particularly housing).
- Economic challenges are directly related to workers' health concerns, which focus on both their families and their consumers.
- They also express concerns about their own physical and mental health, which are directly affected by their family and economic considerations.

2. What criteria need to be met for a "good job"?

*Caregivers' initial thoughts on job quality are those that meet the **economic, health, and social needs of their families.***

- To create these types of good jobs there must be an interconnected web of on-the-job opportunities and supports.
- "Good jobs" must meet core economic and health needs.
- A "good job" is one that is personally fulfilling, receives appreciation and respect, and complements a worker's holistic life.
- "Good jobs" provide opportunities for growth via strong training programs and career ladders.
- "Good jobs" are staffed with collaborative, reliable coworkers and supportive managers who listen to caregivers' voices.

3. While caregiving is immensely fulfilling, workers cite poor evaluations on other dimensions of a “good job,” especially benefits and pay.

- Caregivers’ passion for their work cannot be overstated.
- However, low pay, few employment benefits, and little respect deeply affect job quality.
- Caregivers are overworked, receive insufficient training, and face unstable employment.
- Caregiving work takes a significant physical and emotional toll on workers.

4. Caregivers believe a variety of wrap-around life supports would improve their job and life quality.

Caregivers highly rated a variety of policy solutions, including:

- Assistance for tuition, housing, and transportation, salary-based compensation, universal child/elder care, and peer mentors.

5. Increasing retention is one of the most powerful ways to make caregiving a better job.

- Lack of staffing and absenteeism result in consumers receiving lower quality care and workers experiencing stress and burnout on and off the job.
- Lack of staffing, stress and burnout profoundly undermine workplace safety.
- Increasing the amount of respect and admiration that caregivers receive would greatly improve retention.

6. Essential tools for retention are providing workers with accessible and diverse training, and a clear variety of career ladders.

- Workers report that training is often rushed, which reduces workplace safety.
- In contrast, high quality training increases consumers’ health outcomes and enhances caregivers’ pride in their work and job satisfaction.

- Workers are interested in a range of opportunities, including providing basic care, emergency care, specific condition care, safety, and leadership skills.
- Barriers to training include lack of awareness of opportunities and the number of trainings available.
- Trainings can feel inaccessible, due to factors such as a lack of paid compensation, inconvenient time of day, transportation issues, and workplace understaffing prohibiting time off.

These research findings were taken from two multi-day online discussion forums with long-term caregivers, designed to give voice to the nature and meaning of caregivers’ experiences, feelings, and opinions.

Forty participants from across the country began the discussion and 30 completed it in full. One group was exclusively made up of Black women and the other was comprised of caregivers from a variety of racial and gender backgrounds. Most of our participants were home care workers, with a roughly even split between agency and independent providers. Our groups also included a number of caregivers who care for a consumer who is a family member, who currently work with multiple consumers, or who currently work one or more non-caregiving jobs.





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ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM**

Healthcare Career Advancement Program (H-CAP) builds the workforce for quality care through workforce development, training resources, and working with unions, employers, and workers.



The Center for Advancing Racial Equity and Job Quality in Long-Term Care (Center for Equity) is a H-CAP initiative to advance an equitable caregiver infrastructure by confronting the links between systemic racism, sexism, and poor job quality in long-term care and centering the majority Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) women and caregiving workforce.



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