

Who Are New Jersey Direct Care Workers?

The direct care workforce comprises about 108K workers in New Jersey, including nearly 73K home health and personal care aides and about 35K nursing assistants employed in nursing homes.¹ This workforce figure includes an estimated 30K direct support professionals. Not included here are workers employed in the “gray” or private pay market. The workforce is overwhelmingly female (89%), people of color (82%) and more than half are immigrants.² Direct care workers assist older adults and people with disabilities with daily tasks, such as dressing, bathing, and eating and are a critical workforce to both help people aging or disabled stay in their homes, or receive the appropriate level of care within an institution, like a hospital or nursing home. By 2030, New Jersey will add approximately 20K new direct care jobs, making direct care one of the fastest growing occupations in the state. The number of positions needed to be filled is much higher given the rate of workers leaving the labor force or moving into other occupations.³

Policies impacting direct care job quality should be looked at holistically, and when strategies that impact compensation, training, advancement and benefits are being considered by state leadership, it is important to address these needs as a group wherever possible. This will help reduce the reality of competition for resources and benefit the entire class of critical workers.

Home Health Aides / Homemaker-Home Health Aides (HHAs) / Personal Care Aides

HHAs work in a client’s home, perform some clinical tasks, and are employed by home service organizations and provide service in assisted living settings. They provide a range of personal care and homemaking services that help patients stay comfortable and healthy at home. The role includes various tasks that involve physically touching and moving clients; examples are personal hygiene and positioning. It does not include administration of medication. *Median (avg.) hourly wage is \$15.04 and median (avg.) salary is \$31,291.*⁴

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) are an integral part of life in the community for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). DSPs provide hands-on support to individuals with IDD in their own homes, family homes, provider-managed residences and programs, in the community, and workplaces. Examples of support can include everything from activities related to daily living and personal care, to community integration and independent living skills. People with IDD depend on DSPs to provide critical care and to help them achieve their personal goals. *Average starting wage is \$18, depending on geography and experience, based on polling of current New Jersey direct care service providers.*

Certified Nursing Aides (CNAs)/Nursing Assistants

CNAs are licensed aides who work in hospitals, nursing homes and home care and perform clinical and non-clinical tasks. As a vital part of a larger care team, CNAs help patients with a wide range of basic needs, including eating, bathing, grooming, mobility and more. CNAs often provide the most intimate of care services and in the long-term care setting are often those closest to the patient and their needs. Certification is mandatory for Medicaid and Medicare certified facilities. *Median (avg.) hourly wage is \$17.23 and median (avg.) salary is \$35,835.*⁵

An important program that funds direct care in New Jersey is the [Personal Preference Program \(PPP\)](#), which allows beneficiaries to hire caregivers to work in their home. PPP provides an alternative to agency provided services and caregivers provide non-clinical tasks. PPP allows beneficiaries to hire friends and relatives to be paid as a caregiver for long-term care. Most caregivers under PPP are personal care aids (PCAs), but the program can also cover caregivers who are HHAs, CNAs and DSPs.

“Direct care wages are the same as what big box retail and fast food are offering. In addition to direct care requiring emotional and physically demanding skillsets, often our direct care professionals can’t clock in a full 8 hours in one location. They have to drive or find public transportation to get from one home to another to provide the absolutely critical direct care services.” – NJ Service Provider

¹ PHI. “Workforce Data Center.” Last modified September 22, 2022. <https://phinational.org/policy-research/workforce-data-center/>.

² Ibid. ³ Ibid.

⁴ New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development <https://www.nj.gov/labor/labormarketinformation/employment-wages/occupational-statistics/index.shtml>

⁵ Ibid.