

# Why They Leave: Turnover Among Washington's Home Care Workers

## Caring Across Generations (CAG)

The CAG campaign recognizes the growing home care need and seeks to help baby boomers and their families meet care needs by realizing the “five fingers of the caring hand,” including:

1. The creation of new, quality jobs in home care;
2. Labor standards and improved job quality for existing jobs and new jobs;
3. Training and career ladders for home care workers;
4. A new visa category and path to citizenship for care workers;
5. Support for individuals and families in need of support and care, including the creation of a matching registry and maintenance and expansion of funding streams.

A recent report, *Why They Leave: Turnover Among Washington's Home Care Workers*, provides a broad overview of home care workforce issues in Washington State including findings from a 2011 survey project and interviews designed to further understanding of the needs of Washington's home care workers and what motivates them to both enter and leave this profession. *Why They Leave's* findings and recommendations highlight and support the importance of the CAG campaign in Washington State.

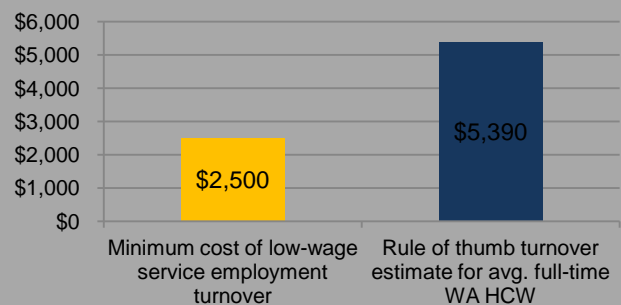


Turnover in the long-term care industry is at a crisis point and threatens quality of care and quality of life for vulnerable adults who rely on long-term care services. Even given the economic downturn and rising unemployment rates, the vast majority of states still experience significant difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified direct care workers. These shortages are likely to worsen over time as demand increases.

## A Crisis in Care: The Impending Shortage of Home Care Workers

In Washington State, annual home care worker turnover has been estimated at 19 to 37% for individual providers and 27 to 67% for agency workers.

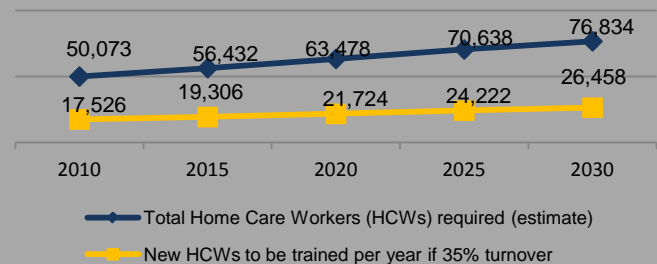
Estimates of Average Annual Per Home Care Worker Turnover Costs



High rates of home care worker turnover have negative effects on providers, the state, and consumers. The cost of replacing workers is high and quality of care declines for consumers experiencing significant worker turnover. Several studies have observed that inadequate care caused by high turnover and worker shortages can ultimately result in serious health consequences, such as hospitalization, poorer nutrition and relocation to a nursing home.

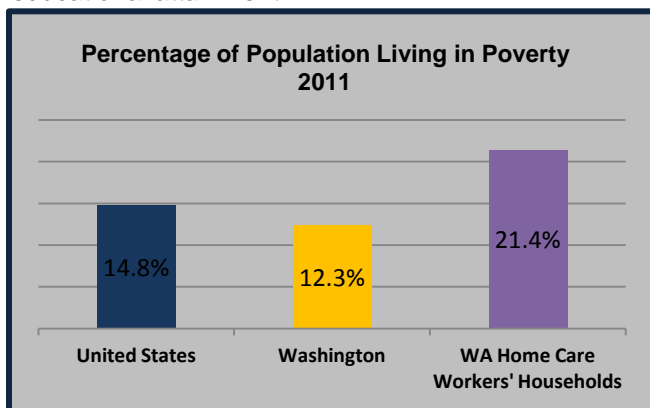
The future availability of a sufficient number of home care workers does not look promising. There will be an unprecedented increase in the size of the elderly population as the “baby boom” generation ages. By 2030, individuals aged 65 and older will represent one-fifth of the state's population. If the number of Medicaid consumers receiving home and community-based services from home care workers in Washington increases at the same rate as the general population, the Medicaid caseload will grow by 56% by 2030. To meet this demand, Washington is estimated to need about 35,000 more home care workers by 2030. Assuming a 35% annual turnover rate, nearly 440,000 total home care workers would need to be trained from 2010 to 2030 to meet this demand.

Future Increased Demand for Washington Home Care Workers is Exacerbated by High Turnover Rates, 2010-2030.



## Washington's Home Care Workforce

Washington's home care workforce is comprised of approximately 42,300 workers. The overwhelming majority of home care workers are women. About 72 percent of Washington home care workers are White, 14 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, 9 percent are Hispanic, 5 percent are Black, and less than 1 percent are American Indian/Native Alaskan. Most workers are disadvantaged economically and have low levels of educational attainment.



While these workers are engaged in physically and emotionally tolling work, they are among the lowest paid in the service industry, making little more than the minimum wage with few benefits. In 2011, over one in five Washington home care workers and their families lived in poverty.

### Turnover in the Home Care Workforce: Why Do They Leave?

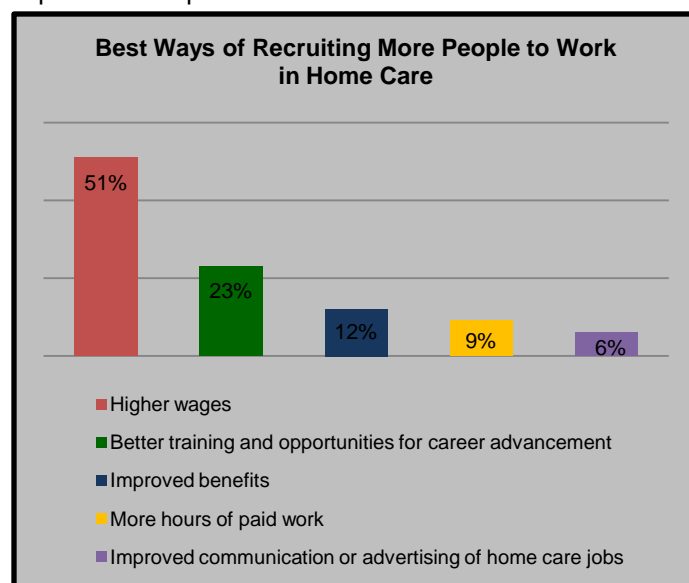
Efforts to recruit, retain and maintain a stable, quality home care workforce rely on a variety of interdependent factors. Our April 2011 survey of former Washington home care workers found those who leave tended to be wealthier and more educated, suggesting they had other options than continuing employment in home care. This conclusion is supported by findings that re-employed job leavers were substantially more likely to achieve better benefits, wages, hours and career mobility in positions outside home care.

Main Reasons For Leaving The Home Care Workforce Among Individuals Who Left Home Care	
Left to go back to school, get a better job, or a job that would advance their career and provide skills development opportunities	28%
Wanted a job with better hours	23%
Wanted better wages and/or benefits	16%
Wanted a less physically and emotionally stressful job	13%
Tired of home care work, bored, or burned out	11%
Issues with the patient or the patient's family	6%
Wanted a job that involved less travel or commute time	4%

Additionally, the survey found the primary reasons cited for leaving this profession were the pursuit of better career opportunities and/or a job that would provide better hours, wages, and/or benefits.

### Solutions to High Turnover: Improved Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Health and long-term care policies significantly affect workforce recruitment and retention. The April 2011 survey respondents indicated increasing hourly wages, providing better training and opportunities for career advancement, and improving benefits are the best ways to create incentives for individuals to enter home care. Additionally, a literature review of prior research on home care turnover confirms these factors are most important to improve turnover.



### Why They Leave Recommendations

State and private payers of home care should focus efforts on best practices to recruit, retain and maintain a quality home care workforce, including:

1. Raising the hourly wage to at least \$17.58/hr – the living wage for a single wage earner supporting one dependent in Washington;
2. Implementing strategies to help home care workers find reliable hours of work and a stable predictable income;
3. Improving health insurance benefits for workers;
4. Providing the workforce with some form of retirement security;
5. Increasing and improving training standards; and
6. Developing career advancement opportunities that allow workers to develop additional skills and move into a job specialty within home care or move into more advanced health care/social service jobs.

**“Now is the time to invest in home care. It will save money, help people to stay healthy longer, protect consumer choice, support working families, and ensure that a stable workforce of well trained.” – Caring Across Generations**