

Active and Inactive Workers on the Nurse Aide I Registry: A Wage and Employment Profile

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Executive Summary

This report results from a study commissioned by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and conducted and compiled by the North Carolina Institute on Aging (NCIOA). Using two employment-related databases maintained by the state, the NC wage and employment histories and the NC Nurse Aide I Registry, information was compiled about individuals who are registered as nursing assistants (NAs) with the state of North Carolina.

The Problem

In more than three-quarters of U.S. states, state officials deem the recruitment and retention of the direct care workforce (a group of assistive healthcare workers which includes NAs, personal care workers and home health aides) to be a serious problem.¹ North Carolina is no exception.

Tracking the Workforce

Tracking the Nurse Aide I registrants by industry provides information about size, job stability and wages of this workforce over time as well as information about which industries they go to after becoming inactive (i.e., individuals who do not re-register). This information is valuable to policymakers and other stakeholders in their efforts to develop strategies to ameliorate the problem of high turnover.

Major Findings

- The number of newly registered, or newly ‘active,’ NAs still appears to be outpacing the number of NAs becoming inactive.
- Median wages continued to decrease over the last three years for both active and inactive registrants.
- Number of employers per individual continued to decrease over the last three years.
- While both groups experience a decline in median wages, inactive registrants continue to do better, on average, with higher median wages and fewer jobs per individual than active registrants.

¹ Harmuth S & Dyson, S. “Results of the 2003 National Survey of State Initiatives on the Long-Term Care Direct-Care Workforce” Paraprofessional Institute and the NC Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Long-Term Care, March, 2004, Available at: www.directcareclearinghouse.org/download/2003_Nat_Survey_State_Initiatives.pdf

- There is remarkable stability in the proportions of registrants working in LTC and non-LTC settings over the last three years.
- The proportion of inactive registrants holding jobs outside of healthcare is striking – over three quarters of these workers over the last three years.
- Continuously registered individuals (1993-2003) working in non-LTC settings fare better, on average, than those in LTC settings.
- Within LTC settings, continuously registered individuals (1993-2003) working in residential care homes and nursing homes appear to do significantly better than those in home care/home health settings.
- For continuously registered (1993-2003) individuals working in residential care homes and skilled nursing facilities, the general wage trend is positive, though modest, over the last decade.

North Carolina's Response

In order to make any substantial changes in the wage and employment situation of these workers, workforce initiatives at the national, state and local levels aimed at improving career ladders and wages are required. Efforts that may impact the North Carolina direct care workforce directly are a) the Real Choice Systems Change Grant Initiatives, b) the Better Jobs, Better Care Demonstration Grant Initiatives and c) the WIN A STEP UP program (Workforce Improvement for Nursing Assistants: Supporting Training, Education, and Payment for Upgrading Performance). These efforts are directed at both the individual LTC organization level and more broadly, at the level of the state infrastructure. Through the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services' Real Choice Systems Change Grant, North Carolina is developing two new job categories for direct care workers and has established a statewide association for direct care workers. Through a Better Jobs, Better Care demonstration grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Atlantic Philanthropies, a special licensure program is being developed for voluntary participation by home care agencies, nursing facilities and adult care homes. This special licensure program focuses on creating and sustaining a supportive workplace environment. Finally, through a collaborative effort between the NC Department of Health and Human Services and the UNC Institute on Aging, the WIN A STEP UP program is available to nursing facilities. This workforce improvement program aims to reduce turnover of nursing assistants by providing training, education and rewards.