

RECOMMENDATION 9

Ensure an Adequate Aging Network Workforce for the Future

In the 2022 National Poll on Healthy Aging, 88% of respondents (Americans aged 50-80) reported that they felt it is “important to remain in their homes for as long as possible.”¹⁰ This requires a robust, trained workforce in the community and, if needed, in older adults’ homes. As North Carolinians age in place, it is imperative to have a robust aging network workforce that is prepared to address the needs of older adults. Government support, strategic partnerships, and ongoing collaboration and education can support the current and future workforce in this endeavor.

As North Carolina seeks to ensure an adequate aging services workforce for the future, it is important that aging and adult services organizations understand the characteristics and needs of the current workforce. A comprehensive evaluation may include state and geographical variations of

roles housed in aging network organizations, the types of positions needed in these organizations, typical salaries offered, salaries needed to attract workers, and general workforce capacity. Additionally, it should seek to describe the demographic makeup of the workforce, with particular attention to gender, age, race, and ethnicity. The evaluation should also consider the workforce’s training needs, including use of and access to technologies.

This evaluation can provide guidance for aging service organization succession plans and collaborative capacity-building opportunities with universities, community colleges, and other partners to train and support future members of the workforce. Retired health care, social services, and aging service professionals may also provide valuable insight on these issues.

STRATEGY 26

Understand Current Aging Network Workforce Characteristics and Future Workforce Needs

The Department of Labor should partner with the North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services and North Carolina Workforce Development Boards, as well as other health care and aging network partners, to evaluate the characteristics of the aging network workforce in North Carolina and projected workforce needs in the coming years. This evaluation should examine variations in workforce capacity and salaries across the state, demographics of the workforce (e.g., age, race, and ethnicity), and use of and access to technology.

Desired Result – There will be an understanding of the diversity of the current aging services workforce and geographic gaps in capacity and salary. This will help inform efforts to increase workforce capacity to meet the needs of the growing older adult population.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy? – North Carolina’s older adult population continues to increase. In the next two decades, the state’s older adult population is projected to increase by an estimated 1 million individuals, or 61%.¹¹ As this demographic shift occurs, there will be an increased need in the community for a workforce to serve this population. The current workforce that cares for older adults – both through direct care services and through program provision and administration – is also aging and retiring, leaving fewer workers to serve this older population.¹² North Carolina needs current information about the aging network workforce, including demographics and salaries, to plan for the future workforce. A workforce with a diversity of backgrounds and skills such as competency with technology and accessibility-related skills like language interpretation and sign language will best serve older adults in our state.

The direct care workforce, which includes personal care aides, home health aides, and nursing assistants, should also be an area of focus to identify current gaps and future needs. This workforce is addressed in **Strategy 27 – Respond to Current and Future Needs for Aging Services Workforce.**

Context – The aging services network is made up of those organizations that carry out the work of the Older Americans Act – including local senior centers, Area Agencies on Aging, and state and local departments and councils on aging. These organizations plan and provide programs and services, or administer funds

to support programs and services, that help to meet the social, transportation, housing, nutrition, and other needs of many older adults.

Partners

The North Carolina Workforce Development Boards are groups of community leaders appointed by local elected officials that oversee workforce programs in their area. In North Carolina, there are 22 local boards, each with representation from members of the local business community, economic development agencies, community-based organizations, education, and more. They also oversee local NCWorks Career Centers to deliver workforce solutions and assist those in search of a job in finding one. The North Carolina Coalition on Aging (NCCOA) launched a similar initiative in 2020 related to the state’s direct care workforce – the Essential Jobs, Essential Care project. Together with a national advocacy organization, the NCCOA focused on three policy areas; improving pay, enacting workforce innovations, and strengthening data collection.¹³ The Essential Jobs, Essential Care initiative paved the way for recognizing the importance of building and transforming North Carolina’s direct care workforce, including a wage increase for director care workers in home and community-based services for fiscal years 2021 through 2023.¹⁴

How would this impact the health of older adults?



An adequate and diverse aging network workforce will help older adults have timely and accessible links to programs and services that help reduce falls, improve mobility, promote proper nutrition, and provide social connections.