



## 2021 State Policy Priorities

Direct care workers and family caregivers are essential to the delivery of health and long-term services and support in Iowa. This critical role has never been demonstrated more fully than in the COVID-19 pandemic. Serving on the front lines, these individuals care for Iowans of all ages and abilities and work in people's homes, public health agencies, assisted living, nursing homes, hospices, group homes, hospitals, and throughout our communities.

The pandemic has exposed many of the long-known issues related to this high demand essential workforce. While vaccines promise to bring the virus under control, Iowa's lawmakers must take action to rebuild Iowa's exhausted workforce and invest in the infrastructure needed to protect direct care workers in future emergencies.

### PROTECT

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Essential workers  
risk their own safety  
to care for others.  
They deserve to  
know if they are  
infected and at risk  
of infecting their  
loved ones.

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Iowa's Direct Care Workers (DCWs) and Child Care Workers (CCWs) need access to resources that protect the people they serve, themselves, their families and their communities, including access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), testing, vaccines, and specialized training.

- ♥ Give DCWs and CCWs priority in PPE distribution, COVID-19 testing, and vaccinations, using the National Guard to assist as necessary.
- ♥ Require early intervention and mitigation efforts in care settings after first positive COVID-19 test.
- ♥ Meet the needs of current caregivers through:
  - Support services and training to address emotional wellbeing/burnout.
  - Childcare and financial support for additional costs associated with school closures and expanded workload.
  - Health care coverage and paid leave when in isolation/quarantine.
- ♥ Include representatives of direct care and childcare workforce in state post-pandemic analysis and after-action reporting and planning to better prepare for future emergencies and disasters and invest federal relief funds in the necessary infrastructure to support caregiver resiliency.

## BUILD

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Pay and benefits are not reflective of the importance of caregivers in delivering health and long term supports and services (LTSS). The work is often undervalued and seen as “just a job,” “low skill,” or “entry-level” rather than a chosen career.

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State lawmakers should support long-overdue initiatives that build a strong, resilient and diverse direct care and childcare workforce.

- ♥ Require wages that provide for an annual household Survival Budget ([2018 ALICE Report for Iowa](#), uweci.org) and benefits that include (but are not limited to) affordable health care, paid leave and retirement.
- ♥ Provide opportunities for quality training and continuing education with portable credentials as a path to salary growth, rewarding and lasting careers, improved retention, smooth transitions between care settings, and clear pathways to expanded career options.
- ♥ Achieve greater equity in the delivery of health and long term supports and services by recognizing the increased diversity in Iowa’s direct care workforce and in the consumers and families receiving services and provide incentives for expanded cultural awareness and competencies.
- ♥ Protect DCWs who “speak up” about workplace issues that impact the treatment of people served, the ways services are being delivered, or their personal safety without fear of retaliation.

A comprehensive state-based centralized direct care worker database is the foundation of a strong, diverse and professional direct care workforce. As a resource, the database would be a tool for employee recruitment, provide access to caregiving resources, highlight the skills of Iowa’s direct care workers and help focus the state’s direct care workforce initiatives.

- ♥ Dedicate infrastructure or federal COVID relief funds to expand and build upon the state’s existing Nurse Aide Registry. Doing so would:
  - Allow for the collection and continuous assessment of the composition and needs of the state’s direct care workforce.
  - Inform state strategies and facilitate data-driven decisions on recruitment and retention of Iowa’s direct care workforce.
  - Assure all Iowans have access to an educated and qualified health and long term supports and services workforce.
  - Give direct care workers a permanent and portable record of their training, certifications, cultural competencies and credentials.
  - Provide employers with easy access to an up-to-date pool of skilled DCWs to address staff shortages and meet specific needs.
  - Enhance the state’s capacity to deploy qualified DCWs to respond to emergencies and future pandemics.
  - Streamline and maintain security while eliminating duplication and addressing inconsistency of currently available data.

## PREPARE

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Direct care workers, employers, family caregivers, state policy makers, and Iowans of all ages and abilities would benefit from a centralized database of direct care workers.

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