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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**New Report Shows Direct Care Occupations Earn Median Hourly Wage of \$13.80 –  
A Major Reason Why Employers, Consumers, and Family Caregivers Struggle to Find Help!**

(DES MOINES, IOWA, January 14, 2020) — The number of those who provide direct care or support to individuals with disabilities and aging Iowans is dwindling at a time when the need is growing. According to the State Data Center, there were over 500,000 Iowans age 65 and older in 2017 and that number is expected to grow by another 146,000 by 2050. People are living longer and with increasing age the likelihood that some form of assistance will be needed also increases. Add to those numbers 175,000 Iowans age 18-64 living with a disability and another 30,000 children under the age of 18 with a disability. Along with the increasing demand is the paradigm shift in that the majority of Iowans want to “age in place” and remain in their own homes and communities while receiving assistance in meeting their needs for care and support.

While many older Iowans and people with a disability never need any outside assistance, for many others it is the difference between living independently and being institutionalized and for some, the difference between life and death. When the level of care or support exceeds a family caregiver’s capacity or for those who have no family nearby or at all, outside help is needed. That may include assistance in the home, community, or institutional setting. In most instances it is certified nurse aides; home care, hospice, psychiatric, and rehabilitation aides; direct support professionals; or other direct care workers who provide the majority of the hands-on care or support. They manage medications, help with bathing, dressing, meal preparation, oral care, cleaning, transportation, job coaching, grocery shopping, and other important tasks. In some instances their keen observations, actions, and reporting have saved lives.

Health and long-term services and supports (LTSS) employers in 2016 responding to a survey by Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) and Iowa CareGivers, conveyed daunting circumstances for many employers who are unable to fill current job vacancies and face multiple staff retirements in the near future compounding already dire workforce shortages. There was consensus that the current system does not have an adequate workforce to provide support for many who find themselves in need of assistance not to mention future rising demands.

Both home care aides and personal care aides are among the top ten fastest growing occupations. And home health aide is one of the top ten highest demand occupations in Iowa, and nursing assistants rank number eleven, according to IWD. While there is no mechanism to accurately report the total number of those who work in direct care/support occupations, it is estimated to be between 40,000 and 65,000 depending on the resource. Continued.....



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According to the *Direct Care Workers (DCW) of Iowa 2019 Wage and Benefit Survey*, low wages are a key factor in a DCW's decision to leave a caregiving job. Key findings include (percentages rounded): <http://www.iowacaregivers.org/research-resources/reports.php>

- ✓ DCWs in Iowa earn a median hourly rate of \$13.80 – that's \$28,704 annually.
- ✓ 47% have annual household incomes below \$30,000 and an average household of 3
- ✓ 28% are working more than one job
- ✓ 22% are seeking employment outside the field of direct care (78% for better wages)
- ✓ 9.5% plan to retire in next 5 years
- ✓ 10% have no health care coverage - the percentage of uninsured DCWs is more than double the percentage of Iowa's total uninsured population of 4%.
- ✓ 23% receive health care coverage through Medicaid or Iowa Wellness Plan
- ✓ 54% dependent children receive health care coverage through Hawk-I/Children's Health Insurance Program
- ✓ 17% rely on Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program (SNAP)
- ✓ 38% of respondents who were no longer working in the field left due to low pay but 58% would return to direct care for better pay

To put these wages in context, the United Way of Iowa's Asset Limited Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) report poverty threshold specifies an average annual household survival budget for a family of four living in Iowa is \$46,680, nearly double the U.S. family poverty level of \$23,850 per year. <https://www.uwiowa.org/united-way-alice-report-iowa>

"We can't build a strong direct care workforce and assure Iowans have access to the care and supports they need by continuing to ignore them, said Di Findley, Executive Director of Iowa CareGivers. "We and our partners appeal to our elected officials, and the public, and private sectors to place a high priority on direct care workforce issues. One step is to make certain that no direct care or support worker earns poverty wages by ensuring adequate provider reimbursements and other wage enhancement strategies. Another is to strengthen the worker supports such as child care subsidies, supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP) benefits, and access to affordable health care until the day they finally earn what they are worth and no longer need to rely on public supports."

Iowa CareGivers is an independent, nonprofit and nonpartisan statewide organization. Mission: To enhance the care and support of Iowans by providing education, research, recognition, and advocacy for those who provide direct care.

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