

Many grantmakers in the Greater Washington region read your story, "Home Health Aides Are in Demand as Hospitals, Nursing Homes Try to Trim Rolls" (August 15), with great interest.

The Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers – in collaboration with the Greater Washington Workforce Development Collaborative, Washington Area Women's Foundation, DC Coalition on Long Term Care and DC Appleseed – has been convening public and private funders, employers, service providers, and advocates to explore issues at the intersection of our rapidly aging population, the demand for and supply of home health workers (and other health workers) who can take care of them, and the quality of jobs for these workers, all of which have critical implications for the economy of the Washington region.

We have learned that our region faces many challenges, including:

- Demand for home health workers (and other health workers) is expected to expand exponentially as the population ages. Total population in the region grew 2.4 percent between 2005 and 2009, while the population over 60 grew 6.4 percent – almost three times faster (American Community Survey).
- The population of home health workers is not growing as fast. Between May 2009 and May 2010, employment in the field in the region barely increased – from 11,020 to 11,030 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_47900.htm).
- Median pay is low. In the region in 2010 (Bureau of Labor Statistics – link: <http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes311011.htm#st>), median annual earnings for home health workers were \$20,560, yet annual earnings needed for a DC worker without dependents are \$31,565 (Wider Opportunities for Women, link: http://wowonline.org/ourprograms/dc/dc_fess/documents/DCBESTReport.pdf). The number is higher for surrounding jurisdictions, for workers who are supporting dependents and for workers without employer-paid benefits.
- Our borders are fluid, meaning that many residents work in one jurisdiction and live in another, but, unfortunately, our licensing and credentialing processes are not. A worker licensed in DC might not be able to practice in Maryland or Virginia – or vice versa.
- A rapidly growing immigrant population translates into deep need for culturally competent and sensitive services.
- A lack of career ladders in this occupation, which inhibits meaningful job retention, earnings gains and career advancement for workers who are committed to it – and makes turnover a bigger problem for employers than it might otherwise be.

Smarter, strategic investment, including in regional collaboration, is needed to strengthen training programs, improve job quality and compensation, and grow the workforce to meet the explosion in demand that is not just around the corner anymore – but that is already here. We invite others to join us in growing and supporting innovative and smart solutions that ensure that the Greater Washington region remains a good place to live, learn, work, and age.

Tamara Copeland, Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers

Sarah Oldmixon, Greater Washington Workforce Development Collaborative, The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region

Gwen Rubenstein, Washington Area Women's Foundation

Judith Berman, DC Appleseed

Judith Levy, DC Coalition on Long Term Care