

An SSAI-Sponsored Survey Research Study on SCSEP Participants and Direct Care Jobs

Summary

Assessing and Improving the Fit between Older Workers and Direct Care Work

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This research indicates that there is considerable potential for low-income older workers to help fill the growing demand for direct care and home care workers through stronger links with the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). Based on a literature review, a survey of 251 SCSEP participants, and semi-structured interviews with workforce experts and employers, the report found the following:

Demand for direct care jobs serving older adults is burgeoning, to the point where 33 states face “very serious or serious” shortages of direct care workers (DCWs).

- Home health aides and personal care aides are projected to be among the fastest growing occupations, adding 1.3 million new jobs between 2010 and 2020, totaling nearly 3.2 million.

A substantial proportion of SCSEP participants are interested in jobs as DCWs.

Surveyed participants were asked if they would perform specific tasks generally required for each of six types of direct care and home care jobs, with the following results:

- More than one-fourth (28%) would perform all five assistance tasks of a home health aide.
- Nearly one-fifth (17%) were willing to perform all 11 personal/medical assistance tasks of nursing aides or certified nursing assistants, who are primarily located in nursing or assisted living homes.
- All seven tasks of a home care or personal care aide were options for 22% of the SCSEP respondents.
- Just 13% would perform all eight of the various general tasks of a home chore aide.
- One-third (32%) were willing to do all five of the different tasks as a home safety aide.
- Just over 14% were willing and able to handle all four maintenance tasks of a handyman, some of which required special carpentry skills.

Almost all the surveyed SCSEP participants were willing to train for direct care jobs.

- Four out of five participants - regardless of age, gender or level of education - would engage in formal training for a direct care job, with 34% willing to complete more than 40 hours of training.

There is a moderate match between direct care jobs that SCSEP participants want and available jobs.

- Home care and nursing home jobs that do not require repeated heavy lifting offer the best fit and number of job openings for older workers.
- Employers preferred older workers because their life skills, sense of responsibility, work ethic, and personal characteristics (especially patience and compassion) are well suited for direct care jobs.

Employers will hire qualified older adults as DCWs or for “emerging roles” in community-based care.

- The employers’ responses, combined with participants’ preferences, also indicate four emerging home care roles ideally suited to older workers: 1) companionship, engagement and hospitality; 2) home safety and management; 3) coordination and leadership; and 4) health promotion.
- These emerging supportive care roles are similar to current DCW job types but may require some adjustments to attract significant numbers of older adults.

Conclusion: Up to 32% of the SCSEP respondents are interested in one or more types of direct and home care work and are willing to be trained. The growth in home care jobs offers great potential and a good fit for the skills and attributes of older workers. Employers have positive orientations toward older adults as DCWs, especially in emerging supportive care roles. Potential barriers may include transportation problems or limited computer skills, plus ageism of some employers, low wages, and limited training opportunities.

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