

Meeting long-term care needs for an aging United States

A direct care worker visa policy to support the aging US population

Tara Watson



Direct care workers—including home health aides, personal care aides, and nursing assistants—provide support in activities of daily living and long-term care for older people and those living with disabilities. With the rising number of older Americans, an estimated 1.28 million additional workers in the sector will be needed by 2036, an increase of about 35 percent over today's 3.69 million direct care workers. This proposal details a temporary direct care worker visa, the H-1D, that offers a targeted and flexible way to address the looming workforce challenge and to improve the quality of care available to people who need support.

Rethinking Medicare home health

Liran Einav, Amy Finkelstein, Yunan Ji, and Neale Mahoney



Home health care is an important component of the Medicare system, yet Medicare home health lacks a clear, agreed-upon objective. The program appears to try to serve multiple purposes—substituting for institutional post-acute care, covering the costs of treatment and recovery from acute health events for home-bound patients, and providing in-kind, long-term services and supports (LTSS) to frail older adults. Current program design reflects an unresolved compromise among these objectives. In this essay, Liran Einav (Stanford University), Amy Finkelstein (MIT), Yunan Ji (Georgetown University), and Neale Mahoney (Stanford

University) clarify the objectives that Medicare home health might potentially serve, assess how well current program design aligns with those objectives, and discuss reforms that might help the program better meet each of these objectives.

Who enters and who exits direct care jobs in long-term care settings?

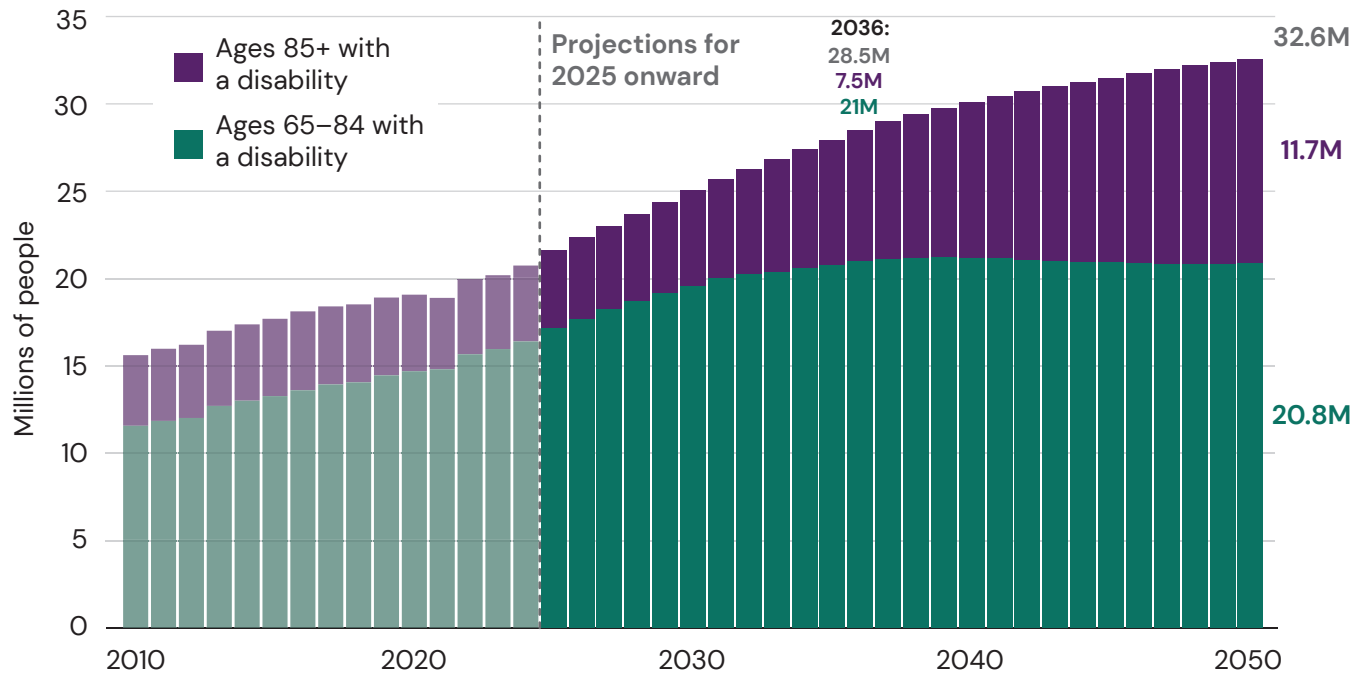
Krista Ruffini, Karen Shen, and Yulya Truskinovsky



Millions of older adults and people with disabilities require long-term services and supports (LTSS) to assist with activities of daily living (such as eating, bathing, dressing, and mobility) and instrumental activities of daily living (such as meals and managing medication). Direct care workers, i.e., nursing assistants, home health aides, and personal care aides, represent the majority of the LTSS workforce, numbering 4.9 million workers. However, both residential care and home care settings routinely face challenges attracting and retaining direct care workers, leading to widespread worker shortages and high turnover that threatens the industry's ability

to provide high-quality care. In order to design effective policies to attract and retain direct care workers, it is essential to understand which industries and occupations these direct care workers come from, and the characteristics of workers and jobs that are associated with direct care worker retention. In this blog, Krista Ruffini (Georgetown University), Karen Shen (Johns Hopkins University), and Yulya Truskinovsky (Syracuse University) analyze worker flows into and out of the direct care workforce between 2010–25. The authors leverage nationally representative longitudinal data to describe characteristics of workers who leave and those who stay in these roles, and characterize earnings trajectories for those who stay and those who move to different jobs.

Number of people 65 and older and 85 and older with a disability



Source: ACS 2010–24; CBO 2026.

Note: Sum of bars (gray) represents the number of people 65 and older with a disability. Disability projections are made under the assumption that disability rates by one-year age bucket from the 2024 ACS remain constant. These shares are applied to CBO's projected population of each respective age group through 2050.

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