



**Direct Care and
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ADVISORY COUNCIL



**Uplifting the Voices of Maine's
Direct Care and Support Professionals**

Annual Conference Report

December 2024





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Acknowledgements

We are pleased to present this report of the Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council first annual conference. Since the Council was established in 2022, we have been continually inspired and impressed by the dedication and expertise of the Council members. We believe that *Uplifting the Voices of Maine's Direct Care and Support Professionals* was a great success because of the participation of so many direct care and support professionals from across the state.

The Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program staff express their appreciation for the work of the former and current Advisory Council members and their dedication to giving voice to care workers around the state. Thank you to all the conference presenters and the provider organizations that paid for their staff to travel and attend the conference. And thank you to Maine Health Access Foundation for supporting the creation of the Advisory Council and its continued efforts.

Brenda Gallant, Executive Director, The Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

Nicole Marchesi, Public Policy Advocate, The Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

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Executive Summary

The Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman's Program (LTCOP) created the Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council (AC) in February 2022 to elevate the professionalism, skills, and voices of home care and long-term care (LTC) workers around the state. Early on in the AC's implementation, LTCOP and AC members envisioned an annual conference and began conference planning in earnest in early 2024. On September 17, 2024, over 120 direct care and support professionals, policymakers, and other experts convened in Hallowell, Maine for the inaugural direct care and support professionals conference. By all measures, the conference was successful: attendees exhibited high engagement and enthusiasm and the evaluations confirmed that overwhelmingly, attendees would return for a future conference and recommend the conference to peers.

Conference program

The conference structure included an opening keynote presentation, a panel presentation on topics related to care work state and federal policy issues, presentations from AC members, and facilitated roundtable discussions on the critical issues of worker recruitment and retention. Attendees had an opportunity to provide feedback on the conference and offer ideas for future conferences in a conference evaluation form.

Conference outcomes

The roundtable discussion facilitators took notes of key points and suggestions based on three recruitment and retention-related questions. These roundtable notes and the comments on all evaluation forms were compiled and organized into themes for future AC discussion and strategic planning to inform public and private care worker policy action. Noteworthy observations and recurring themes include the following:

- Workers appreciate being included in the policy conversations and are curious to learn more about existing and possible policy action
- Issues of pay and benefits are widely seen as the primary avenue for improved worker recruitment and retention



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- Workers repeatedly mentioned the importance of managers, policymakers, and advocates directly experiencing the challenges of their work by spending time working alongside them
- There is awareness of the need for improved staffing, from a quality of care perspective and avoiding staff burnout and exhaustion
- Workers identify their relationships with residents and families as a primary motivation for staying in their jobs and providing reliable quality care
- There is genuine interest in exploring options for innovative benefits such as childcare vouchers and housing subsidies
- Staff training should be improved so that new staff are better aware of the job expectations and existing staff can provide meaningful person-centered care

Primary themes

Conference attendees raised a wide variety of topics in the roundtable discussion and in the conference evaluation submissions. Organizing the topics by frequency mentioned and using the Motivation-Hygiene Model¹ to sort the themes according to whether they will increase worker satisfaction or decrease dissatisfaction, offers a framework for strategizing policy and practice interventions to improve worker retention.

AC Conference Themes	Times Mentioned	Increase Satisfaction	Decrease Dissatisfaction
Pay and benefits	21		X
Recruit at high schools and colleges and community job fairs	10		
Relationship with residents and families	10	X	
Discounted childcare or offer childcare	9	X	
Spend time doing the job (managers & policymakers)	9		X
Teamwork co-workers	9		X
Raise visibility in community	8		
Management support	7		X
Training*	7	X	X
TOTALS		3	5

¹ See the full report for a brief discussion of Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Model of worker satisfaction.



Next steps

The Advisory Council will use the priority topics generated at the conference to identify opportunities for policy awareness and action in the year ahead. The Council will assess the feasibility of the many conference attendee suggestions discuss and will initiate conversations with key policymakers, advocates, and care worker experts to explore policy interventions that will best address worker and provider challenges. Council leaders and LTCOP staff will identify care work champions to help create an advocacy, legislative, regulatory, and research agenda for the upcoming year.



Background

The Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman’s Program (LTCOP) created the Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council (AC) in February 2022 to elevate the professionalism, skills, and voices of home care and long-term care (LTC) workers around the state. The goal of the AC is to create an effective, respectful, bi-directional pathway between workers and policymakers that supports beneficial policy action. The AC meets quarterly for shared learning, peer exchange and support, and sector strategy planning. In addition, during 2024 the AC leads from Maine’s Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) planned the inaugural *Direct Care and Support Professional Annual Conference*. The overall theme of the conference was *Uplifting Voices*.

On Tuesday, September 17, 2024, members of the AC and other direct care and support professionals from across the state met at Maple Hill Farm in Hallowell to bond with fellow caregivers, share their voices with policymakers, and learn about exciting new ideas happening around Maine and in the nation. The conference brought 87 direct care and support professionals and 35 policymakers to the table.

Conference Support

Many LTC sector leaders supported the conference planning and delivery. Maine’s Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) and Maine’s Department of Labor agreed to be included in a conference panel. Maine’s Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP) representative, Dr. Susan Wehry, provided the keynote address. Several LTC employers supported conference attendance by paying employee wages for participants, including John F. Murphy Homes, Maine Veterans Homes, St Joseph’s, Creative Works, Maine General Rehabilitation and Long-Term Care, and DLTC Bella Point. In addition, Andwell donated \$1,000.00 for 20, \$50.00 Hannaford gift certificates.



Conference Attendance

The conference audience included 87 home care and long-term care workers; 35 policymakers (e.g., DHHS leaders, legislators), and other sector interested parties including LTCOP staff and volunteers, Maine Health Access Foundation, representatives from the University of New England and the University of Maine Center on Aging, members of the Maine Council on Aging, and representatives from PHI, a national direct care worker advocacy organization. **Note:** Maine’s long-term care provider organizations were intentionally not invited so that workers would be encouraged to speak candidly about issues of concern and propose recommended solutions.

Conference Program

Keynote Address

Physician, educator, and advocate Dr. Susan Wehry provided the keynote presentation, *The Essence of Being Essential*. Dr. Wehry offered background information on Maine’s GWEP program and its recent creation and promotion of a LTC resident centered video entitled *See Me*. The video is a poignant reminder of the adult person that inhabits every LTC resident, despite the physical or cognitive changes that are visible to others. She enlisted the audience’s input on the forthcoming geriatric specialty micro-credential that will be developed in the coming years with renewed GWEP grant funding from the federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

Panel Presentations

During the conference’s morning session, a five-member panel of experts presented federal and state perspectives on the direction of LTC quality improvement efforts, including staff support; direct care worker (DCW) workforce initiatives to support recruitment; national efforts to support DCWs; Maine’s economic outlook relative to direct care staff; and the views of an experienced worker and AC member. Presenters included: **Paul Saucier**,



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Director, DHHS, Office of Aging and Disability Services; **Angelina Klouthis Jean**, Director of Strategy and Innovation, Bureau of Employment Services, Maine Department of Labor; **Stephanie Hatcher**, Mental Health Support Specialist (MHSS), Instructor, Certified Residential Medication Aide (CRMA), Direct Support Professional (DSP), Council member; **Arthur Phillips**, Economic Policy Analyst, Maine Center for Economic Policy; and **Amy Robins**, Senior Director of Policy, PHI National

Advisory Council Member Presentations: *Perspectives from the Field*

Two current Direct Care and Support Professionals Advisory Council members, **Patience Success Juwah** and **Gail True**, spoke candidly about what motivated them to choose a career in care work and the rewards and challenges of their work. Like many care workers, the Council members are committed to quality care for the individuals they serve. They also identified areas where system improvements can reduce the physical and emotional demands of care work.

Roundtable Discussions

The conference's afternoon session included round table discussions among a mix of workers, policymakers, and other sector leaders at each conference table. The goal of the discussions was to gain input and insights on staff recruitment and retention strategies in light of current sector shortages. Each table included a discussion facilitator to support the discussion and take notes reflecting the topics discussed. A total of 22 tables submitted responses.

Each table discussed the following questions:

1. Retention is so important for both quality and access to care. What and/or who supports you staying in your job?
2. What can be done to attract new direct care and support professionals to this role?
3. What can policymakers do to better support direct care and support professionals as they undertake their challenges?

The residents and their families keep me in my job. I have a strong connection with them. The people's lives I have touched motivates me to keep going

Primary Discussion Themes

Retention is so important for both quality and access to care. What and/or who supports you staying in your job?

Nearly half of the tables (n=10) identified the relationships with residents and family members as the factor that keeps them in their jobs. Similarly, nine of the tables noted the importance of teamwork among coworkers as a key factor. Seven tables mentioned leadership support and seven stated that proper training “to do the job well” is important. Six mentioned the importance of pay. Other comments about key factors included worker benefits (e.g., health insurance), feeling valued, meaningful work, and opportunities for advancement.

Theme	# of tables mentioning
Advancement	3
Feeling of being valued / appreciated	2
Good staffing	2
Listening to DCW	2
Lower stress	1
Management support	7
Meaningful work	4
No other jobs available	1
Opportunities to provide input	1
Other support	5
Passion and/or dedication for the work	1
Pay	6
Relationship with residents and families	10
Teamwork co-workers	9
Training	7

What can be done to attract new direct care and support professionals to this role?

Most of the responses discussed on this topic were mentioned at several tables but only two responses were mentioned at more than a third of the tables: encouraging sector leaders to raise the visibility of DCW jobs and use word of mouth to promote the work and the job opportunities and having a presence at high school or college career fairs and at community



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job fairs. Other topics mentioned in at least four or five table discussions include increasing pay and benefits, demonstrating that DCWs are valued, offering mentoring and job shadowing, preparing workers better for the job challenges (including emotional support), offering tuition reimbursement, and offering free or discounted childcare.

Theme	# of tables mentioning
Better prep, including emotional prep	4
Discounted childcare or offer childcare	4
Flexible schedules	1
Grief counseling	1
Increased wages and benefits	4
Mentoring and job shadowing	4
Offer training and standardize training	3
Positive environment	2
Recruit at high schools and colleges and community job fairs	10
Referrals and/or referral bonus	2
Streamline hiring (e.g., background checks)	1
Tuition reimbursement and/or loan forgiveness and/or college credit	4
Value caregiving in society	4
Word of mouth	3
Raise visibility in community	8

What can policymakers do to better support direct care and support professionals as they undertake their challenges?

Half of the tables (n=11) stated that policymakers can support better pay and benefits for DCWs. Nine tables noted that policymakers should visit the residences and see directly the challenges of the work. The remaining suggestions included themes from the first two questions, such as improved training, childcare benefits, housing benefits, ensure adequate staffing, and ensure workers have the right equipment to perform job duties.

Theme	# of tables mentioning
Anonymous reporting of abuse	1
Better training	4



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Childcare	5
Don't tax OT pay	2
Ensure staffing	4
Equipment for the job	3
Housing benefit	3
Involve DCWs in training curricula	1
Meet with residents	4
Mental health services	1
More oversight	1
Pay and benefits	11
Reciprocity of credentials in other states	4
Spend time doing the job	9
Streamline certifications	3

Conference Evaluation Responses

The conference planners provided attendees with a conference evaluation form inquiring about the following:

Evaluation question	Avg. rating on a scale 1-5 (n=33)
Rate each presentation	4.69
Overall, did you feel the presenters treated the Direct Care & Support Professional sector as professional?	4.97
How likely are you to attend this conference again next year?	Will attend n= 20 (60%) Very likely n= 11 (33%) Likely n= 1 (.03%)
How likely are you to recommend this conference for your Direct Care & Support Professional peers?	Will recommend n= 23 (70%)* Very likely n= 6 (18%) Likely n= 1 (.03%)

*Does not add up to 100% because not every evaluation form question was answered

Over half of the worker attendees completed the evaluation form and all feedback was positive. As seen in the table above, **respondents overwhelmingly indicated they will or are very likely to attend the conference next year and they would recommend the conference to a peer.** Not a single respondent said they would not attend next year or would not recommend the conference to peers. These positive responses confirm the desire of

workers to be included in - and contribute to - policy conversations that impact their daily professional lives.

Identify three things you learned today

Workers identified many areas of learning that, unsurprisingly, reflected the range of

Come spend a day - a week - with us. You need to understand the nature of the work

presenter topics. Workers mentioned learning how much was going on “behind the scenes” and how complex the workforce issues are. They appreciated hearing about the legislative efforts, particularly the federal bills that have been introduced recently. They learned about the GWEP and micro credentialing, and that “DSPs in all sectors are facing issues”.

Overall, attendees gleaned valuable information about how hard many people are already working to improve working conditions, though there is more to be done.

Were there any topics you feel were missing?

Out of 27 responses, nearly half (n=13) indicated that no topics were missing. Many of the remaining evaluation responses offered a variety of topics as indicated below:

Topics
History of sexism + racism inherent in wage gap etc. example of systemic racism and sexism
More opportunities for introduction of people in room
More inclusion of PSS/CNA
Importance of introspection of the direct care worker
The extreme differences between group homes, nursing homes, or hospice/home care
Opportunity to learn more about how to support the council
Establishing some facility level councils to aid in communication w/advisory council
Staffing ratios
Mental health treatment for workers
Managers/owners should be present for this presentation / discussion
Opportunity to learn more about how to support the council

What topics would you like addressed in the future?

Twenty four individuals responded to this question and of those, six stated there were no topics they would suggest adding. Of the remaining 18, attendees offered several ideas for topics to cover in the future.

Topics
Managers roles
More detailed discussion of policy solutions, more time for questions during sessions
Results of initiatives
Wages, childcare benefits
Tracking progress and reporting it to workers, residents/families and policymakers
How to advocate for policy change and funding to the states
Detailed updates made
I would like the ones we addressed to be addressed again with results
Pay increase
Neutrality in one's face and action when dealing with clients
Current policy being considered and how DCWs can support legislation
Pay rates and state funding
Homelessness, drug use / Narcan
Staffing
Changes to direct care worker licensing / credentials
To many titles how do we get back to basics
Staffing ratios
Management of workers wellbeing, have to help DSP workers with stress

Other comments

Several evaluation respondents offered additional comments as listed below. Most had additional favorable comments about the presenters or about the knowledge gained from the conference.

Topics
First presentation in session direct care and support professional perspectives from the field was really good and personal
Report recommendations from roundtable discussion; I would encourage employees to send workers and their admin / managers to attend
I think it would be beneficial to consider separating the DPS from CNA + PSS presentations. CNA's



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Topics

typically work in profit settings where DPS are working in state funded nonprofit settings where the list of support tasks are endless, but the funding is lacking. In addition, there are separate regulations that are different for each title. Direct care and support professional perspective session from the field very important and impactful. Round table discussion - great to hear other people's ideas

I felt the importance of what I do

The opening speaker was amazing; more Q&A panel

It was very interesting to have the state workers on the panel

Keynote presentation: truly an honor <3

Panel presentation: each one built on each other. very professional and informative

Direct care and support professional: very good perspectives on what a DSP does

Round table discussion: loved the questions, everyone's feedback, stories, being on the same page

Round table best part -- could a different report-out work better? maybe each table could have a flip chart and then folks could walk around

I have enjoyed being here today. I have learned a lot. I feel like I will look at my work differently. It's amazing to hear and see how people are working towards making our system better and supporting the staff. Including the direct care staff. Hearing our input and taking it all into consideration. Again, I think this conference was very helpful. Thank you.

Comment on how felt presenters treated direct care and support professional sector:

Yes, love the recognition that someone might just want to be the best at what they do

Direct care workers need a union

Conference Top Themes

The themes from the roundtable discussions and the conference evaluations are listed below according to the themes listed most frequently, along with any specific suggestions offered by the conference attendees. We also included a column indicating whether the theme is one that could be addressed by public or organizational policy(ies) or both.

Conference Themes	Theme Category*	Public policy action	Org policy action	Suggestions from conference attendees	Times Mentioned
Pay and benefits	Traditional Benefits	Y	Y	Increase pay and create structure for equity among new and long term workers	21
Recruit at high schools and colleges and community job fairs	Increased Visibility	N	Y	Work w/ schools and communities to offer these events, attend existing events,	10
Relationship with residents and families	Sector Marketing	N	Y	Allow opportunities for staff to build relationships with residents and families	10
Discounted childcare or offer childcare	Innovative Benefits	Y	Y	Advocate for childcare subsidies so it is affordable for LTC providers to offer	9
Spend time doing the job	Sector Marketing	Y	Y	Senior leadership and external policy makers should spend at least one shift (preferably more) working w/ an experienced aide and talk about issues	9
Teamwork co-workers	Workforce Development	N	Y	Encourage and support teamwork	9
Raise visibility in community	Sector Marketing	Y	N	Make community leaders aware of staffing needs in LTC	8
Management support	Management Behavior	N	Y	offer appreciation, express concern for quality care, offer promotions, offer staff activities outside of work, staff appreciation week, listen well, help on the floor when needed, provide equip needed to do the job well, provide ongoing training	7
Training	Workforce Development	Y	Y	Improve training experience re content, access, topics	7

***Theme Category Definitions**

- *Traditional benefits* – Worker pay and benefits that employers currently typically offer
- *Increased visibility* – Ideas to increase awareness of the LTC and direct care sector labor needs
- *Sector marketing* – Ways to highlight the advantages of care work
- *Innovative benefits* – Worker benefits not currently offered but that might attract and retain workers
- *Workforce development* – Ideas for deepening worker knowledge and skills
- *Management behavior* – Ideas for improving management’s awareness of worker experiences

Two-Factor Analysis: The Motivation-Hygiene Model

The work-satisfaction literature has long referred to the *Two-Factor* or *Motivation Hygiene Model* (Hertzberg, 1959, 1966, 1982) to describe the two independent continuums that influence worker satisfaction: increasing satisfaction through motivations and decreasing dissatisfaction by removing demotivators. The Motivation-Hygiene Model informs us that taking steps to increase worker motivation is as important as taking steps to reduce the unpleasant aspects of the work, and the diversity in the conference attendee comments suggests this as well.

Organizing the most noted conference themes according to these domains offers insight into the complexity and the challenge of creating strategic priorities to improve retention. The AC members, together with input from other workers and from providers and policymakers, can take suggestions from the conference and further brainstorm ways to both increase motivation and decrease dissatisfaction.

AC Conference Themes (from comments)	Times Mentioned	Increase Satisfaction	Decrease Dissatisfaction
Pay and benefits	21		X
Recruit at high schools and colleges and community job fairs	10		
Relationship with residents and families	10	X	
Discounted childcare or offer childcare	9	X	



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Spend time doing the job (managers & policymakers)	9		X
Teamwork co-workers	9		X
Raise visibility in community	8		
Management support	7		X
Training*	7	X	X
TOTALS		3	5

*Training is counted in both categories because it can be training for advancement (e.g., professional development) or training to be able to perform one's tasks more ably or efficiently (e.g., competency training).

Key Takeaways

While the roundtable discussions and the evaluation comments reveal an array of worker concerns and ideas, an overarching takeaway is **the high level of interest, engagement, and investment that workers have in improving the sector**. Attendees appreciated the opportunity to be present and they very much wish to continue the conversation in future years.

Other key takeaways include the following:

- Wages and benefits, how they are calculated, and the policy action necessary to influence them were consistently mentioned. Innovations such as childcare, housing, and other benefits should be considered for improved recruitment and retention.
- Workers remain highly concerned about staffing and recognize the importance of adequate staffing to meet client and resident needs. They are also aware of hiring challenges and offered recruitment suggestions.
- Workers want to learn more about policy action that has or can influence their work experiences, both at the state and federal level.
- The DCW jobs are challenging and sharing their professional lived experience with policymakers is important to workers. The comments and roundtable conversation reflect worker views that the people who are making decisions about the sector do not fully understand the challenges of the day-to-day work - and they should.
- Sector and organizational leaders and managers must find ways to work together with staff to solve workforce, workplace, and quality of care issues.
- Workers are sustained in their professional roles by the relationships they develop with residents and clients, family members, and with each other.
- Improve staff training for accessibility, quality, and relevance

We need to get the public to understand how important direct care workers are

Next Steps

The AC formation and implementation is currently being evaluated to better understand the best practices for worker councils and whether workers and sector leaders have concerns or ideas for AC improvements. The results of the AC conference confirm workforce interest in having a “voice” at the policy table and in sharing their experiences with policymakers and advocates.



Immediate next steps include:

- **Share conference results** with the AC and solicit feedback and input to refine attendee suggestions and to assess the feasibility, effectiveness, and the policy implications of the most popular ideas.
- **Organize and catalog the recommendations** from the conference and engage the AC in strategic planning to address the most pressing concerns in the short and longer term, focusing on strategies and tactics to both increase satisfaction and decrease dissatisfaction.
- **Secure reliable funding** to sustain the work of the AC and grow its visibility and engagement with DCWs around the state.
- **Identify legislative champions** for the AC and for the long-term care sector and create communication pathways to keep these champions and other interested parties informed of AC activities and policy opportunities.

Your voice matters.

Get informed, be empowered.

Get Involved

