UTILIZING TECHNOLOGY TO BRIDGE THE GAP IN THE ESSENTIAL CARE WORKFORCE

2024 Legislative Recommendation to Maine's Essential Care & Support Workforce Partnership's Advisory Council

Background:

The Utilizing Technology to Bridge the Gap in the Essential Care Workforce Working Group (Tech Working Group) focused on implementing recommendations that would increase the employment of technology to automate tasks, streamline workforce deployment, support people who are currently not being served, or enhance the efficiency of the workforce.

The Tech Working Group met three times in October and November of 2024 to review recommendations that were assigned to them from the [The Future of Maine's Care Workforce Planning Summit Culminating Report](#). The members of this group created a problem statement[1] to be sure they were deliberating on solutions to the same problem. Considering the assigned recommendations, they added their perspectives and the realities of the financial and political landscape to discussions.

Final Recommendation:

Require Maine's Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) to designate a technology implementation lead and to produce a plan by October 15, 2026 with strong stakeholder involvement to advance the use of technology to assist in reducing the care gap that exists in Maine. This process shall include:

- A Landscape Analysis: current available and effective technologies, results of Maine's innovation grant projects, promising initiatives across the country, and available federal and private resources and policies;

- A Set of Measurable and Realistic Goals for State Leadership in promoting and incentivizing the use of supporting technologies;

- An implementation Road Map: with milestones and a timeline that includes enabling legislation, rule-making, and funding

- Stakeholders shall include: provider agencies, members of the essential care and support workforce, family caregivers, clients, representatives from OADS and OMS, and subject matter experts in digital health, specifically enabling technologies, and implementation.

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[1] The direct care workforce of Maine is insufficient in numbers to meet the needs of vulnerable populations; therefore, there is a need to simplify our complex systems while also targeting care and support where it is most needed. Cost-effective technology solutions must be implemented to ensure people receive the consistent, high-quality care needed; ensure that the workforce is allocated based on real-time need to maximize efficiency; improve training and professional development options; and increase job satisfaction.

Case Statement for the Above Recommendation:

Maine faces a critical workforce shortage in essential care and support services. The demand for care already exceeds supply, with at least 23,000 hours per week of authorized care going unfilled due to insufficient staffing. This gap will only grow as Maine's population ages. Leveraging innovative technologies can close the care gap and make the system more sustainable; however, the state needs to take the lead and incentivize the expanded use of technology already happening within the provider community.

Proven technologies offer a cost-effective way to alleviate this care gap. These tools are not a replacement for workers but a vital support, enabling existing caregivers to work more efficiently and effectively. By integrating technology, we can: expand access to care without increasing labor costs; improve the quality of care for clients; enhance working conditions, and reduce burnout and costly turnover.

With the state facing uncertainty from the federal government and budget shortfalls, solutions requiring significant funding are unlikely to gain legislative support; therefore, we put forth a solution we believe will have minimal financial implications this year.

Benefits:
- Fewer workers are needed to meet the care needs of Mainers.
- Workers stay in their jobs and experience better working environments.
- Clients receive better and more consistent care targeted for when the care is specifically needed
- Cost savings from operational efficiencies could fund improvements in wages, benefits, and professional development for the workforce.

Anticipated Support and Opposition
The Tech Working Group has identified a long list of organizations that could form a broad coalition to advocate for this recommendation. The Group believes there will be opposition from the department.

Key Messages:
This is not just a solution to the current crisis—it's a path to a stronger, more equitable future for Maine's care system.
- **Support, Not Replacement:** Technology is framed as a tool to assist workers, allowing them to be deployed where support is most needed. It reduces administrative burden, empowers caregivers to focus on their clients, and is not a threat to worker jobs.
- **Improved Care Quality:** Workers and clients benefit from enhanced services made possible by appropriate, safe, and proven technological supports.
- **Cost-Effective:** Over time, our solution identifies savings that can be reinvested in workforce development, ensuring a sustainable system.