



## Protecting and Investing in our Direct Care System

We all want to ensure the health and resilience of Maine people and our economy. But shortages in the direct care workforce are making it difficult to maintain and secure vital services for thousands of older adults, individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities or those with behavioral health needs, across our state.

Lawmakers can address this challenge by funding cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs), improving MaineCare rate-setting procedures, and investing in competitive wages for direct care workers.

### FUND ANNUAL COLAs FOR DIRECT CARE SERVICE RATES

- State statute requires COLAs for MaineCare services each year there is not a rate review so providers can continue to meet Mainers' health care and direct care needs.
- The administration chose not to deliver the mandated 3.5% COLA on January 1, 2025; the Part 1 budget instead included a partial, one-time 1.95% COLA over the biennium.
- The full COLAs for FY 26 and FY 27 were NOT included in the Part 1, aka "continuing services budget" - the largest item left out of the baseline measure.
- Fully funding COLAs over the biennium would deliver an estimated \$215 million in federal matching funds to communities throughout Maine.

### FIX PART UU LANGUAGE – MaineCare Rate Setting System

The administration's proposed Part UU language in LD 210 would compromise the current rate-review and setting process and impose uncertainty and costs on our direct care system. Specifically, we urge you to:

- Reject language making COLAs and rate-setting subject to available appropriations.
- Implement new rates within six months of being established and COLAs within six months of Maine's annual minimum wage increase.
- Recommit to a rate review and funding for adjusted rates every five years.
- Create additional definitions, timelines, and transparency measures to ensure timely rate determination and stakeholder access to information about the funding needed to ensure rate adjustments are made.

### SECURE A COMPETITIVE WAGE FOR DIRECT CARE PROFESSIONALS

- Our state needs thousands more direct care professionals to meet Maine people's needs; however, low wages and benefits are a primary obstacle to hiring and retaining them in a competitive labor market.
- Speaker Fecteau has introduced a bill that would raise the state's reimbursement rate for direct care labor, allowing agencies to offer more competitive wages and benefits.
- This bill would also improve data collection, training, and technology adoption in the direct care sector.

## **ABOUT MAINE’S ESSENTIAL CARE & SUPPORT WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP**

Maine’s Essential Care & Support Workforce Partnership, a broad coalition of employers, workers, and concerned individuals working to increase access to quality direct care and support in Maine by changing the way we value workers and the work they do.

The partnership, led by the Maine Council on Aging, the Maine Center for Economic Policy, PHI, and Davey Strategies, believes every person who needs care and support services in Maine should be able to receive consistent and predictable care and support from an empowered and valued worker who is trained to deliver quality services, regardless of the setting in which services are delivered. A well-trained and appropriately compensated direct care and support workforce is essential to the health and well-being of Maine’s people and economy.

Over 100 organizations and individuals are engaged with the work of the partnership. A subset of this group serves on our Advisory Council and meets regularly to strategize and organize in order to increase the number and kinds of people who are advocating for sufficient investments in Maine’s “care economy” – both the workforce and the care infrastructure, collaborating on innovative solutions and initiatives to grow and more efficiently deploy a quality workforce, and promoting care as a valuable and honorable profession.

## **WHO ARE THE ESSENTIAL CARE & SUPPORT WORKERS?**

Direct care and support is provided by workers and family members in a variety of settings, supporting or caring for people with a wide range of needed assistance with activities of daily living (ADL) and instrumental activities of daily living (IADL.)

An individual who, by virtue of employment, generally provides the above defined services, is an “Essential Care and/or Support Worker” also known as a direct care worker.

These workers include: Certified nursing assistants (CNAs), direct support professionals (DSPs), personal support specialists (PSSs), independent support specialists (ISSs), behavioral health professionals (BHPs), and home health aides. There are a large number of job titles, certifications, and training requirements associated with the above categories of worker. Some require certification and some do not. None of these classifications requires a degree from higher education. Other labels: Employment Specialist, CIPSS, CHW, CRMA, CNA-M, MHRT 1, MHRT C, CIPSS, Recovery Coach. This is not an exhaustive list.