

Strengthening Workforce for Accessible, Quality Care



Lutheran Services in America—one of the largest nonprofit networks in the country—is rooted in a century-long faith-based, mission-driven tradition of service. Through its nationwide network of nearly 300 independent health and human service providers, Lutheran Services in America works in 46 states, Washington, DC and Puerto Rico, and reaches over 7 million people annually: 1 in 50 people in America, in 1,400 communities, with more than 250,000 dedicated employees. We recognize the essential role of the healthcare and direct service professional workforce in supporting children and families, rural communities, older adults, people with disabilities, and others.

The Issue

Across our network, the healthcare and direct service professional workforce shortages are the number one barrier to ensuring access and quality care. The shortages, driven in part by inadequate reimbursement and unsustainable costs, have led to record job vacancies.

- **54% of nursing home providers** are limiting new admissions due to staffing shortages.
- Patients are spending **24% longer in hospitals** awaiting discharge compared to 2019.
- On average, **Medicaid reimburses only 82%** of the actual cost of care.

Providers are losing skilled workers to higher-paying jobs outside the sector while demand for care continues to rise. The U.S. population over 85 will **nearly triple by 2060**, while the working-age population remains flat. Without immediate action, millions of older adults, people with disabilities and children will lose access to essential care and services.

LUTHERAN SERVICES IN AMERICA NETWORK

Explore our interactive map at lutheranservices.org

Our Priorities

We urge Congress and the Administration to take **bipartisan action** that strengthens the healthcare and direct support professional workforce. Across populations including children and families, people with disabilities, and older adults, access to quality care for millions of Americans cannot keep pace with actual needs due to ongoing workforce shortages.

Lutheran Services in America supports policies that:

- **Strengthen & Improve Recruitment and Retention** by ensuring competitive compensation including increasing Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement rates to align with the actual cost of care provided; offering incentives and growth opportunities; establishing safe, rewarding, and supportive workplaces; and expanding pathways for hiring internationally-educated workers.
- **Build and Strengthen the Pipeline** by expanding access to school-based training and education as well as apprenticeships.
- **Ensure Readiness** by equipping workers with new skills to meet the growing demand for care through training, education, and career pathways, combined with increased investment in and access to technology and AI tools that reduce administrative burden and streamline compliance tasks.

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Lutheran Services in America asks lawmakers to support and enact these measures and policy priorities:

Recruitment & Retention

- **The Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act (S. 2759/H.R. 5283)** which allows unused green cards to be repurposed for internationally-educated healthcare professionals, addressing immediate workforce gaps.
- **The Dignity Act of 2025 (H.R. 4393)** which expands the pool of legally authorized workers through visa modernization and per-country cap reforms.
- **The Essential Workers for Economic Advancement Act (H.R. 5494)** which creates a new H-2C visa for non-degreed, non-agricultural industries, including healthcare, valid up to nine years with an adjustable annual cap.
- **Increase Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement rates** to align payment with the actual cost of care provided to strengthen access to care for frontline workers and an aging population.
- **Creation and expansion of tools to improve recruitment and retention**, including loan forgiveness, tax credits, increased reimbursement rates to enable competitive wages, and other incentives.

Pipeline

- **The Healthcare Workforce Innovation Act (H.R. 935)** which supports workforce training and education initiatives across health professions.

Readiness

- **Reintroduction of the Ensuring Seniors' Access to Quality Care Act**, which allows skilled nursing facilities (SNFs) to resume Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training programs after correcting non-patient-care-related infractions, resolving a burdensome regulation that created an unnecessary two-year penalty that hinders workforce development.
- **Increased investment in technology and AI tools** that reduce administrative burdens, streamline compliance tasks, and allow direct service professionals to spend more time delivering high-quality, person-centered care.
- **Increased flexibility for onsite training** for new hires and existing employees so that providers can expand their own workforce.