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Home-care industry in peril

Report says low wages, high turnover threaten care

Home-care aides are among the fastest growing occupations, but the industry is riddled with high turnover rates, workforce vacancies and related quality-of-care issues, Policy Matters Ohio says in a new report

Home-care jobs are growing at five times the rate of jobs overall in Ohio, as more people seek home-based services rather than institutional care. Ohio now has approximately 86,000 home-care aides, including 66,000 home-health aides, and 20,000 personal-care aides, serving older adults and people with disabilities.

But problems in the industry stem from low job satisfaction due to low wages; part-time and unpredictable hours, and a lack of benefits that come with the job. In order to serve the growing public demand for these services, while ensuring continuity and quality of care, policymakers must address the need for better wages and benefits in the industry, the Policy Matters report says.

“These workers are critical to the community and to the economy,” said Jennifer Toles of the Ohio Organizing Collaborative, which advocates for social, racial and economic equality. “The people who take care of our loved ones should be able to take of their own.”

Nearly half of all personal-care aides leave their job over the period of a year, while roughly 25 percent of home-health aides do so. This high rate of turnover in the industry has a significant negative effect on the continuity and quality of care.

Home-care and personal-assistance jobs are among Ohio’s lowest-paying. Half of Ohio’s personal-care aides earn less than \$9.46 an hour, an amount that is roughly 40 percent less than the median wage for all occupations (\$16.47). Fewer than half of these workers have employer-sponsored health insurance.

Almost half of Ohio’s home-care aides live in households that receive some form of public assistance due to their near-poverty status (44 percent). More than one-third of Ohio’s home-care aides receive food assistance (34 percent), and nearly one-third are enrolled in Medicaid (32 percent).

The Policy Matters report says a \$15 wage floor for publicly funded home-care workers would stabilize the workforce, help avoid consumer use of more costly institutional care, and reduce home-care worker reliance on public benefits.