

Home care advocates look to ease staffing shortages

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06/22/2020 05:00 AM EDT



A woman with her home care worker in New York Getty Images

When New York's coronavirus outbreak began in March, Terry Karydes relied on long-time personal attendants through the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance program to provide her daily care for Parkinson's disease.

Weeks later, Karydes turned to home care agencies after two of her CDPA aides were quarantined for Covid-19 exposure and another was diagnosed with the flu. She

struggled to find a stable set of aides after she also was diagnosed with coronavirus and disclosed her status when the aides arrived in her home. “At a certain point, people would just turn around and leave,” she said in an interview.

Many home care recipients say they have been unable to access care because their aides — who are predominantly immigrant women of color — were sick or fearful of taking public transportation, said Belkys Garcia, an attorney with the Legal Aid Society. When aides did provide treatment, they wore makeshift personal protective equipment or none at all because of shortages.

Recruiting home health care workers was a difficult task before the pandemic, but the virus has created an even-worse shortage, according to Bryan O'Malley, executive director of the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Association of New York State. O'Malley said the association will push for new legislation to ensure access to home care services, PPE and better wages.

The Legal Aid Society and other organizations making up the Coalition of Labor And Disability Advocates are calling on the state to require insurance plans and agencies to provide testing and PPE to home care workers and consumers. They also are seeking to ensure that workers are not only paid for all hours worked but also compensated with “premium pay during the emergency,” among other demands, according to a letter obtained by POLITICO.

A survey conducted by personal assistance association found that many who receive care through CDPA are highly concerned that their attendants could become infected with Covid-19, including nearly two-thirds of those living in the Capital Region, 54 percent in Long Island and Westchester County and 33 percent in New York City.

The association, which previously highlighted issues facing [the home care workforce](#) in a late-April report, further found that about half of consumers surveyed in regions hit hardest by the pandemic reported having fewer personal attendants scheduled or working for them — 50 percent in the Hudson Valley; 46 percent in Long Island and Westchester County and 43 percent in New York City.

Anecdotal evidence suggests the home care workforce has rebounded slightly from the levels seen at the peak of the coronavirus outbreak in New York, said Home Care Association of New York State spokesperson Roger Noyes. But, he said, recruitment remains a challenge.

“Before the pandemic, agencies in New York state reported between 21 percent and 23 percent of their home health aide or nursing positions were unfilled due to staffing shortages. Now to overlay, on top of that, a public health emergency that results in workforce capacity decreases of 10 percent, 15 percent or 20 percent or higher, you’re trying to rebound to a position that was already understaffed,” he said in an interview.

The Coalition of Labor and Disability Advocates has urged the state to publish data on home care consumer and worker illness and death, broken down by race, primary

language, disability status and zip code. It also asked the state to publish data on the number of home care consumers going without care or with fewer hours than those authorized, broken down by race, primary language of the consumer and worker, and zip code of consumers and workers.

“People were being ordered to stay at home but not given any of the supports they needed to stay at home,” Garcia said. “That puts them at risk.”

Department of Health spokesperson Jonah Bruno said in a statement that the state has "provided more than a half-million pieces of PPE to home care agencies, [is] in regular communication with the state's Licensed Home Care Services Agencies, and will continue to provide guidance and assistance as we work together to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic."