

# Panel #1

**Anne Pannone**  
**Bayada Home Health Care**

Anne is a home health aide with BAYADA Home Health Care caring for individuals on the Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL) waivers. She was selected as Pennsylvania's Direct Care Worker of the Year by the Pennsylvania Homecare Association and Pennsylvania Department of Aging for 2017. Anne was also selected from all of BAYADA's home health aides as BAYADA's National Aide of the Year in 2017.

**What led you to become a direct care worker? Why did you choose this line of work?**

- I have always considered myself to be a helper and have always had a desire to help others.
- I have years of medical experience (lab work 24 years) and I realized I could do this profession and help people without needing an advanced degree.
- Took care of my mother when she was at home.

**What are the most rewarding aspects of your job?**

- The connection I have with my clients and the ability to meet new people.
- The appreciation the clients have for the services I provide.
- The ability to be an effective listener and being able to report changes and help prevent larger problems.

**What are the most challenging aspects?**

- My ability to provide for myself and my family.
- My profession is not well-respected in society.
- The services I provide are not considered essential and are not a priority to other health care professionals.
- There isn't support "down the hall" if there are questions.
- Interacting effectively with individuals with mental illness (depression, anxiety, etc.).
- Clients not receiving the services they need (optical, auditory, mental health, drug treatment programs).
- Clients having access to reliable medical transportation for appointments.
- My ability to get to the client's home using reliable transportation.
- Handling multiple clients in one day.
- Family support/education on the HHA role and family's responsibility.

**What do you see as the barriers to recruiting direct care workers?**

- Pay and benefits are insufficient.
- A lack of innovative education to equip me to deal with what happens in the home (handling mental illness, family dynamics, physical conditions, cultural sensitivity).
- It is perceived a feminine profession.
- It's a lonely profession (there is no support with other aides).

**What do you see as the barriers to retaining direct care workers?**

- Having pay and benefits that keep up with inflation.
- A lack of communication and coordination between families and other services going on within the home.
- Ability to connect with my colleagues.
- The profession is not seen as a stepping stone and a place for growth.

**How can these barriers best be addressed?**

- Better pay and benefits.
- A recognition and support that this is a profession (greater respect for the profession in society).
- Better education for both the aide and the families.
- Having a shadowing program to introduce people to the direct care profession.
- Create a ladder for growth.
- Better communication and support between HHAs and between HHAs, families, and office.

**Kialenah Stewart, Philadelphia**  
**Participant Directed Home Care Worker**

My name is Kialinah Stewart and I am a homecare worker from Philadelphia. Thank you for taking the time to hear from me today.

I started working in home care because of my mom. My mother was a CNA all of my life. In fact, my mom, her sister, her sister in law and my niece all work in healthcare. It's in our blood. When I was a little girl, I would go with my mom to work and watch how deeply she cared for the seniors in her nursing home. When she retired, her name was on a gold plaque.

In 2006, my mom got sick. I had to quit my job in the ER to take care of her. I always vowed to her that I never would never put her in a nursing home. I didn't trust anyone else to give her the care that I could. I gave up my life to make hers better.

It was hard seeing my mother vulnerable like that. I was used to seeing her cooking, walking around and taking care of me when I was sick. Then the tables turned. It was like she was now the baby and I was the mother.

My mom recently passed away at age 87. I don't regret the decision I made to take care of my mom and I would do it again. Because of my decision, she was able to live a longer, more comfortable life.

When my mom passed, I decided to stay working in home care. I decided to stay despite the challenges, because I love this work. I now take care of a consumer who suffers from brain trauma and liver damage. I help him get dressed each day, go up and down the steps, and exercise his arms and legs. I cook, clean, do his laundry, and take him to the doctor. Without my care, he would be in a nursing home. I love that I can make sure seniors and people with disabilities can live at home, in their community, and age with dignity and independence.

But I understand why so many home care workers leave. And a lot of home care workers leave – almost half of all home care workers leave in their first year!

The bottom line is, the only way we will recruit and retain the workforce we need is if we invest in higher wages, real benefits, training, and support.

When I left my job in the ER, my wages dropped by \$4 an hour! Right now, home care workers are paid an average of \$10.26/ hr, and nearly half of us rely on public assistance for food or healthcare. That's crazy. Think about it. People who work full time in home care cannot afford to put food on their table. If we want to recruit and retain home care workers, we have to be willing to invest; we have to raise wages.

Home care workers also need benefits. When I started as a home care worker, I wasn't eligible for healthcare coverage. For years I went without the surgery I needed until finally I was able to turn to Obamacare and was able to get a united healthcare silver plan. And today, too many of us still don't have coverage. How can we provide the best care to our consumers when we are sick?

And it is more than just health benefits. When I left the ER, I also lost the ability to ever take a paid sick day or a vacation day. This work can be stressful and tiring and we need time to take care of ourselves, so we can keep providing the best care possible.

We also need opportunities for more training and career advancement – in all my time as a home care worker, I've never had a formal training or orientation. Everything I've learned has been on my own. The thing is, home care workers are often the first person to identify issues that could lead to serious, and expensive, health issues. Other states are investing resources in training and technology to empower home care workers as members of the care team – in part because it is the right thing to do and in part because it helps drive down costs. Pennsylvania should be investing in trainings should designed and run by the workers that that really deepen our skills and allow us to provide the best care possible for our consumers -- not just some training program with videos developed by employers who need to "check a box" to say they did training.

Lastly, workers need a voice within the home care system. Over the past year, I've started advocating for myself and other home care workers with the United Home Care Workers of PA. I've visited lots of policy makers. I've been surprised to find out how many don't know much about the important work we do, what the challenges are, and what we need to do to improve home care for all. I know that the only way to make changes is to make sure that workers have a voice.

Thank you again for taking the time to hear from me. I am hopeful we can work together to make home care a job that pays. No one should have to take a vow of poverty to do this important work.

Statements from Terry Green, CNA and Program Assistant at Inglis Day Program in Philadelphia.  
These statements were prepared for The December 7, 2017 PA Long Term Care Council Meeting.

**What led you to become a direct care worker? Why did you choose this line of work?**

Becoming a CNA easily achievable without doing a lot of schooling. At the time, I did not have the time to dedicate to long term schooling or education. I was able to get a certification and be employed in a full-time position within a relatively short amount of time. I needed to support myself and my son.

I originally was hired as an "NA" – nursing assistance, without a certification. After 3 months of on the job experience, I had the chance to go to Delaware County Community College for about a month to get my certification. This allowed me to be immediately employed, with the promise of increasing my pay after I was certified.

Also, working as a CNA/Direct Care Worker also afforded me flexibility with my work schedule. I was able to be more available for my family. The flexibility allowed me to work overtime and work double shifts when I could, but then work less hours when I needed. So, initially, it was not about the "work", but about the income and flexibility.

**What are the most rewarding aspects of your job? What are the most challenging aspects?**

The most rewarding aspect of my job is knowing that I make a difference in somebody's else life. It is bigger than just me. The job turned out to more than just an income. I have a sense of compassion knowing I am able to help someone in need and really make a difference in someone's life. The rewards are much greater than the paycheck that I get every two weeks.

Some challenges I face include the consumers today have more mental health issues and behaviors. Direct Care Workers do more than just check off a list of things to do, we play a bigger role in people's lives and this includes a lot of mental health and behavioral health management.

Another challenge I face is when I do not have the time to give people. We have so much to do, and so many people to care for, that sometimes I feel like I cut people off, or rush through care so I can get to the next "task". I hate to see a person as a "task". This is frustrating when I want to be able to give someone the time they are seeking.

Another challenge is when I come across who do not have the same drive or dedication to the work that I have.

**What do you see as the barriers to recruiting direct care workers?**

The pay.

Direct Care work is not seen as a "career". Society labels Direct Care Work as "entry level", and when you tell people you're a "CNA" they always ask "are you going back to school"? Or the attitude is "You can do more then that"...

**What do you see as the barriers to retaining direct care workers?**

The pay.

The demand is great, and sometimes people realize it is just not for them. It requires more than just showing up – it is a very physical and mental job. You need to be totally present when providing care – not just physically present.

Expectations of management – sometimes the way we are told to do things is contradictory.

And, along with what I said above about not having the time to give people, the frustration of being rushed through a “task” can be very stressful. For example, if I want to take a few minutes to chat with a consumer or tidy up their room a little more than usual, I risk getting penalized for not being available for the call bell ringing in the hallway.

The physical aspect of it – it is HARD work. Physically, you have to be able to do the work. This only gets harder as you get older.

**How can these barriers best be addressed?**

Culture change – how do you change the culture of our society to see Direct Care as meaningful work. It is easy to get into, anyone with a high school diploma can become a Direct Care Worker, and our society puts so much emphasis on education and college, which unfortunately creates the stigma of “you can do better”.

**Susan Huggans**

**1111 S Main St Apt 1**

**Old Forge, PA 18518**

**Education**

**Montrose Area School District**

**Broome Community College 1971 – 1973**

**University of Phoenix 2007 – 2010**

**University of Phoenix 2010 – 2014**

**Degrees**

**Associate Degree – Health Care Administration**

**Bachelor Degree – Health Care Administration with a concentration in management  
(currently on hold)**

**I have worked in the health care field for over 20 years. I have worked 14 years in pediatric offices, seven years in a family medicine office, and nine months working as a shadower for the Epic program.**

**In August 2017 I was hired as a Personal Care Assistant with Life Geisinger. As a Personal Care Assistant I help participants of Life Geisinger with every day activities such as bathing, ensuring the participant eats by preparing meals, and reminding them to take their medication. I do light housekeeping such as vacuuming, washing dishes, floors and laundry.**

**After working in medical offices for over 20 years, I have finally found a position where I love to get up every morning and look forward to each day helping the elderly participants of the LIFE Adult Day Care program.**

Thank you for the opportunity to give input to service our people better. Below are the questions you requested.

1. What led you to become a direct care worker? Why did you choose this line of work?
  - A. I did not feel like I was helping enough as a patient care specialist, even with my Healthcare Administration Degree. Giving care to the elderly, leads to job satisfaction for me as I am personally involved in their daily care.
  - B. I chose this line of work because it also fits in with my lifestyle. Flexible schedules are great.
  
2. What are the most rewarding aspects of your job? What are the most challenging aspects?
  - A. The most rewarding aspects of my job are helping people and providing needed assistance. Being a person they can count on in their lives for assistance is very rewarding.
  - B. This type of work is a constant daily challenge. It takes an emotional as well as a physical toll on all direct care workers daily.

3. What do you see as the barriers to recruiting direct care workers?

Barriers to direct care workers include: burnout, physically and emotionally taxing, and challenging cases as well as other family member issues.

4. What do you see as the barriers to retaining direct care workers?

Some barriers to retaining direct care workers are: support system from leadership, physical nature of the job, and pay scale. Having a good leader who understands the direct care worker role is extremely important. Physical injuries are common, and the pay rate doesn't really compensate for the physical nature of the position.

5. How can these barriers best be addressed?

These barriers can be helped with open communication in the leadership role, and further through staff education and a better pay scale.

Sincerely,

Susan Huggans