

Caregiving

Our nation must recognize and justly reward the valuable work of providing quality care for children, people with illnesses, people with disabilities, and older adults.

The American economy has long depended on unpaid and undervalued caregiving work, including childcare and long-term care largely provided by immigrant women and women of color. As the world moved to a market economy, society rewarded the crafts and skills that men performed outside the home with monetary compensation, but relegated caregiving to women, often denying women that same remuneration or the ability to control their earnings. And as legalized slavery was abolished in the United States, Black women were pushed into domestic service that ultimately denied them the ability to be caregivers in their own homes. Care work within households and the marketplace remains gendered, undervalued or unpaid and largely provided by Black, Brown, Latinx, and immigrant women, and other people of color. Indeed, a vast majority of the care workforce today are women, largely Black and Brown women, earning poverty-level wages, typically without benefits. Even before the pandemic, low-wages left care workers concerned for their ability to pay for basic needs like housing and food.

Despite the increasing recognition that childcare and long-term care are essential to the larger economy and enable others to return to work, policy makers are failing. COVID-19 has devastated the already fragile child care sector, with half the state's child care programs unlikely to survive without public investment. Guidelines for operating care programs during the pandemic have been late, confusing, and unreliable. Further, government assistance commonly favors large and well-established nonprofit and private centers, leaving community and family-based care centers in limbo. And childcare providers and parents have largely been excluded from policymaking.

COVID-19 has similarly impacted the long-term care sector. Long-term care workers, including providers of home care and nursing home services, continue to work despite a lack of appropriate protective equipment, cleaning supplies or even health coverage, placing themselves and their families at great risk of illness and death. Meanwhile, funding and eligibility through Medicaid (the largest payer for long-term care) has been cut, leaving workers, providers, and the individuals they serve in increasingly perilous situations. In that 1 in 6 New Yorkers are over the age of 65, and our aging population is growing, the

RECOMMENDATIONS

- + **Acknowledge the Importance of Paid Caregivers During a Crisis and Beyond.** Hazard pay, universally accessible paid leave, and access to personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies and testing should be guaranteed for all care workers. Care workers are essential and should not be asked to place their bodies and their loved ones at risk, while others work safely within their homes and offices.
- + **Provide Universal Access to Affordable Caregiving Services.** Affordable caregiving services, including childcare and long-term services and supports, are essential to all aspects of society. They enable others to work, improve health, and improve the economy. Universal access to caregiving services will benefit all of society, including care workers who also have personal caregiving needs.
- + **Compensate Care Workers Fairly.** Care workers should be compensated as professionals. Compensation should include a living wage and benefits such as health insurance that is not tethered to an employer. Public funding streams must be leveraged to set fair compensation standards.
- + **Include Care Work in Economic Recovery.** While other sectors of the economy will contract, jobs in the care sector will continue to grow. Public investment to make care jobs quality jobs will put people, especially women and people of color, back to work while keeping communities safe and healthy.
- + **Guarantee Access to Universal Healthcare.** Pass strong legislation to provide universal healthcare, including long-term care, to all people regardless of employment.
- + **Include care workers of all modalities in decisions about how the care system operates.**

opportunities for employment of home and long-term care providers will increase. We must ensure these workers are protected and paid fairly.

Our nation must recognize, value and appropriately invest in the work of providing quality care for children, individuals with disabilities, people with illnesses, and older adults. The importance of doing so cannot be overstated. Studies demonstrate the critical impact of early education and care on children's brain development and long term health. Similarly, studies demonstrate that long-term caregivers are essential to improve quality of life, chances of recovery, condition management, and pain reduction. Refusing to value or invest in this work is not only short-sighted but reflects a deeply rooted patriarchal and racist conception of the world. Care workers of all modalities must receive professional wages and benefits. A successful recovery requires investing in and supporting our paid and unpaid caregivers.