

The Critical Need for Enhanced Rate for PCA Services House File 481 and Senate File 393

People with disabilities requiring more support unable to find qualified staff:

As the Personal Care Assistant (PCA) shortage has grown, people with the most significant needs have had the hardest time finding qualified and capable staff. PCAs receive the same level of pay for assisting those who need a few hours of service per day as they do for those with more specialized and intensive needs.

Consequences of PCA shortage:

Those lacking appropriate care can develop severe pressure ulcers, breathing problems, urinary and other infections, as well as a host of complications requiring costly hospitalization and nursing home placement. People have had to stay in bed over holidays, or slept in their wheelchairs overnight because they could not find PCAs to fill needed shifts. **Some people have died due to the lack of qualified staff.**

Solutions:

We support establishing an enhanced reimbursement rate for individuals accessing 10 or more hours of PCA services per day. The enhanced rate would result in a wage increase for all PCAs who typically earn only \$10 to \$12 per hour and receive few benefits.

- PCAs assisting people with disabilities who require 10 or more hours of PCA services per day should be paid a **wage at least 10% higher** than the typical rate.
- PCAs providing service for individuals with “High Needs” should have knowledge similar to Nursing Assistants or Home Health Aides, and have an equivalent amount of **training, competency and experience.**
- A hybrid version of training should be developed to **include best practices for supporting independent living.**

To receive the higher wage, a PCA would have to have proper training and be working for a person with high needs. If the PCA has training, but is working for someone who does not require complex services, they would be paid at the regular PCA rate.

Background:

The PCA program was created 40 years ago, so that people with severe, physical disabilities who could direct their own care could move out of institutions and live in the community. Over the years, the program has been expanded to include individuals with other types of disabling conditions.

PCAs aid people with disabilities to live at home by assisting with dressing, eating, toileting, bathing, grooming and transferring out of bed into a wheelchair. Some individuals require more assistance with respiratory issues, feeding tubes and other medical needs.

The PCA program is the most cost effective means to enable children, adults, and seniors with disabilities to remain in the community and avoid expensive alternatives. With needed services, these individuals contribute to their families and communities. A significant number of people who receive PCA services work and pay taxes.

As our economy has improved following the great recession, fewer people have been willing to work as PCAs because the pay and benefits are lower than in almost every other occupation. Although the work can be rewarding, it is not easy. Jobs such as fast food work and other entry level positions often pay a more livable wage and offer better benefits.

The time to make these changes is now because we are in crisis. For more information, please contact:

Jeff Bangsberg

763-438-5805 (cell); jeffanitabb@gmail.com