

Immediate Solution to the Direct Care Worker Shortage: Build a Sustainable Training Infrastructure

Background: A critical shortage of direct care workers (DCWs) is threatening critical services that are provided through behavioral health, community mental health, and long-term care systems to support individuals with disabilities and older adults in a range of settings including their own homes. The shortage is due to multiple factors, primarily that DCW jobs are characterized by low wages/benefits and a lack of guaranteed hours, training, and respect. It affects all of us, the economy, workforce and economic development, health systems, housing, and non-healthcare businesses. Employers are now shuttering their doors, cutting back services, and turning clients away due to the DCW workforce shortage, which is putting peoples' lives at risk.

Solutions: Study after study makes it clear that addressing the shortage must include raising wages/benefits, and professionalizing this workforce by establishing quality standards, comprehensive training, credentials, and career pathways. It is also clear that success requires a strategic, coordinated, statewide plan that takes all these solutions into consideration. These measures are known to reduce turnover and lead to higher quality care with better outcomes. Michigan desperately needs an infrastructure to support a sustainable, stable, high-quality direct care workforce. Immediate action can be taken on one key component of this infrastructure: Training. We have an unprecedented, extraordinary opportunity because of strategic foundational work already in motion. There is now an active statewide MDHHS/AASA DCW Advisory Committee, a statewide DCW Coalition, and other organizations working together across boundaries. A key goal among many stakeholders is to establish a statewide DCW Training Infrastructure that improves care for Michiganders.

IMPART Alliance (www.impartalliance.org), with multiple partners, has jointly developed a proposal to establish such a training infrastructure with ARPA funding, and submitted it to the MDHHS leadership. IMPART, formed in 2016 with Michigan Health Endowment Fund support, is committed to helping Michigan build this workforce in a systematic, integrated, sustainable way. It has a strong history of funding for developing evidence-based DCW training and engaging in advocacy on behalf of DCWs, most of which has been in partnership with MDHHS/Aging and Adult Services Agency (AASA), providers, and multiple community organizations. Its institutional home is in the College of Osteopathic Medicine at Michigan State University.

While ARPA funding is comprised of one-time-only dollars, a modest 2.8M would provide the opportunity to establish a solid DCW training infrastructure that we believe is essential to professionalizing and stabilizing this workforce. Effective, competency-based training, that maps to competencies endorsed by the MDHHS DCW Advisory Committee and aligns with CMS competencies, will elevate the role of DCWs, reduce turnover rates, contribute to solid career pathways, and result in higher wages for DCWs. The goal is to make comprehensive training opportunities accessible, affordable and result in credentials that help DCWs advance in both their work and incomes. We are in discussion with Director Massey and MDHHS leadership about the proposal. The next step is to work with legislators to include the proposal in the supplemental appropriations budget.

Proposal Details and Deliverables: Initial funding would support the following:

1. Finalizing comprehensive, person-centered, model DCW and Trainer curricula that train DCWs to provide core supports and services with any population, in any setting, and through any program or payor.
2. Developing a structure, with two key components, that we recommend exist outside of state government.
 - a. A **training arm** through which curricula is delivered to as many potential DCWS as possible and advances DCW career pathways, especially for non-traditional students. We envision a centralized administrative unit with trainings being delivered at the local level through MI Works! Agencies, Area Agencies on Aging, community colleges and other training providers.
 - b. A **credentialing arm** with capacity to issue credentials based on specific criteria and proven competencies that lead to better client outcomes.

The success of the proposed Training Infrastructure requires that several actions be taken simultaneously, which would also be supported by the initial funding. These include 1) dramatically increasing the pool of qualified instructors who can teach the model curricula as soon as it is available, 2) developing a plan to assure that DCWs and providers will have access to affordable training, 3) establishing a program to connect trained DCWs with employers, and 4) mounting an aggressive marketing plan to recruit Trainer Candidates, rebrand this workforce as a profession, and implement recruiting strategies to scale.

Outcomes, Timeline, Cost and Sustainability: We anticipate that these outcomes can be completed for 2.8M, within 2 years of funding, and sustained financially thereafter by an affordable fee for service access model.

Join Multiple Initiatives in Michigan Supporting the Direct Care Workforce



- **IMPART Alliance**, is committed to helping Michigan build the Direct Care Worker (DCW) workforce in a systematic, integrated, sustainable way. It has a strong history of funding for developing evidence-based DCW training and engaging in advocacy on behalf of DCWs, most of which has been in partnership with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), providers, and multiple community organizations. Its institutional home is in the College of Osteopathic Medicine, Michigan State University. With multiple partners, IMPART submitted a proposal to MDHHS to establish a Michigan DCW training and credentialing infrastructure, which was included in the FY 23 MDHHS budget and is currently under development. www.impartalliance.org; impart@msu.edu. Executive Director, Clare Luz

- **The MDHHS/Bureau of Aging, Community Living, & Supports (ACLS Bureau)—Statewide DCW Advisory Committee** provides content expertise, advising and strategic direction to develop policies, programs, and procedures, and short and long-term recommendations for addressing the Michigan DCW shortage. It has wide and diverse representation across government, LTSS settings, DCWs, providers, advocates, and other stakeholders, and three active workgroups: Professionalization through Competency and Training Standards, Credentialing, and Career Pathways (Education); Communication and Mental Health, and DCW Strategies and Planning. Facilitators: Scott Wamsley, ACLS Bureau and Clare Luz, IMPART Alliance; Co-facilitator Lauren Swanson-Aprill, ACLS Bureau

- **The IMPART Alliance Statewide DCW Coalition (Essential Jobs, Essential Care or EJEC™ Project)** was established through a partnership between IMPART Alliance and PHI www.phinational.org to transform DCW jobs through policy reforms in three areas: improving wages/benefits, professionalization, and data systems. A key goal has been to develop an EJEC™ Coalition that can help members be informed, network, and mobilize quickly for advocacy actions with united, consistent messaging to policy makers. The EJEC™ Coalition currently has over 700 members. Chair: Clare Luz, MSU/IMPART Alliance.

- **The DCW Wage Coalition** provides strong advocacy for adequate compensation to all Michigan's DCWs, with an emphasis on those who provide Medicaid-funded supports to people served by the state's public Community Mental Health system. Increased wages are considered essential to stabilizing and advancing this workforce. The coalition also supports annually earmarked wage increases, tied to inflation, and funding to support training programs, career development, and credentialing. Co-chairs: Robert Stein, General Counsel/MALA, rstein@miassistedliving.org, and Karah Ley, Project Coordinator/The Arc Michigan, karah@michiganallianceforfamilies.org

- **Nursing Home Stabilization Workforce Council**, created by Governor Whitmer by Executive Order in 2021, acts as an advisory body within MDHHS to review, develop, and recommend policies, administrative actions, legislative changes, and other approaches to support nursing home quality care. The Council meets virtually or via a hybrid in-person/virtual meeting monthly. To learn more contact: Kenny Wirth, MDHHS, wirthk4@michigan.gov.

- **The Michigan Care Legislative Caucus** is the legislative organization in the Michigan House of Representatives and Senate serving the interests of Michiganders who provide and receive care. The Caucus envisions a world where care is not gender-focused and care jobs will provide living wages and professional standards. The focus is on home and community-based services, where every individual has the right to receive the care they need in the comfort of their own community. Goals include serving as a catalyst for legislative action related to caregiving and as a forum for information exchange and member networking; creating a bi-partisan workgroup for legislators and stakeholders interested in improving Michigan's care infrastructure and state policy through legislation; connecting legislators with stakeholders for input and expertise on care issues; and coordinating care-focused legislative packages supported by members for maximum impact. Founded by Rep. Helena Scott and Rep. Padma Kuppa.

- **Industry Collaborative to Expand Direct Care Across Michigan** funded through The MI Department of Labor and Economic Development -Workforce Development (LEO-WD) MICA 3.0 (Michigan Industry Cluster Approach) Project

- **The Statewide DCW Training and Credentialing Infrastructure project** funded through the 2023 state budget general fund.

- **Other Statewide Leaders and Strong Advocates** are leading the way in supporting DCWs including the Area Agencies on Aging Association, Black Women in Home Care, Commission on Services to the Aging, Community Mental Health Association, Disability Network of Mid-Michigan, Incompass Michigan, Michigan Assisted Living Association, MDHHS--Health Care and Human Services Workforce Capacity Steering Committee, Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council, Michigan Home Care & Hospice Association, and more.

Please join us. Email impart@msu.edu for more information on how to get involved.