



Older Direct-Care Workers: Key Facts and Trends

April 2010

SUMMARY *The direct-care workforce in the United States is graying along with the overall population. But direct-care workers—90 percent of whom are female—tend to be somewhat older than women in the workforce overall. This is attributable in large part to the fact that home care workers tend to be older, and make up a growing proportion of the direct-care workforce.*

Who are direct-care workers?

Direct-care workers provide an estimated 70 to 80 percent of the paid hands-on long-term supports and services received by Americans who are elderly or living with disabilities or other chronic conditions. These workers help their clients bathe, dress, eat, and negotiate a host of other daily tasks. They are a lifeline for those they serve, as well as for families struggling to provide quality care.

Currently numbering over 3 million, direct-care workers constitute one of the largest and fastest-growing workforces in the country, playing a vital role in job creation and economic growth, particularly in low-income communities.

Direct-care workers are employed in a range of settings, including the consumer's or family's home; facility-based settings such as nursing homes, hospitals, and large facilities for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities; and community-based residential settings such as group homes, assisted living facilities, and a variety of day programs.

Many direct-care workers are employed by agencies or organizations. But many work directly for private households either through publicly-funded programs or private arrangements.



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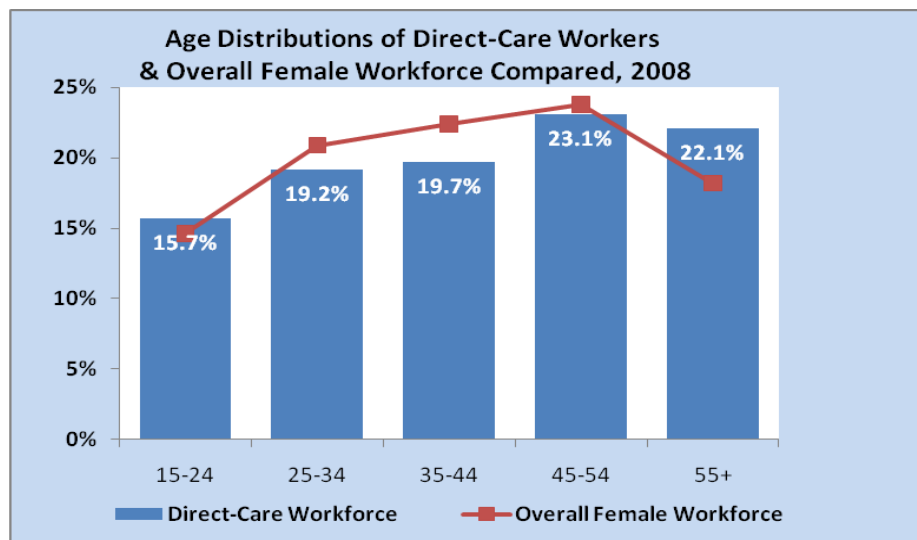
Age comparisons with the overall female workforce

Information about the age distribution of the direct-care workforce can be derived from the March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS) (see Data Notes on p. 6).

Direct-care workers—90 percent of whom are female—tend to be somewhat older than women in the overall workforce.

In 2008, 22 percent of direct-care workers were age 55 and older compared to 18 percent of female workers in the civilian workforce (see Chart 1). Roughly a fifth of direct-care workers were aged 35-44 compared to 22.4 percent of women in the workforce overall.

Chart 1



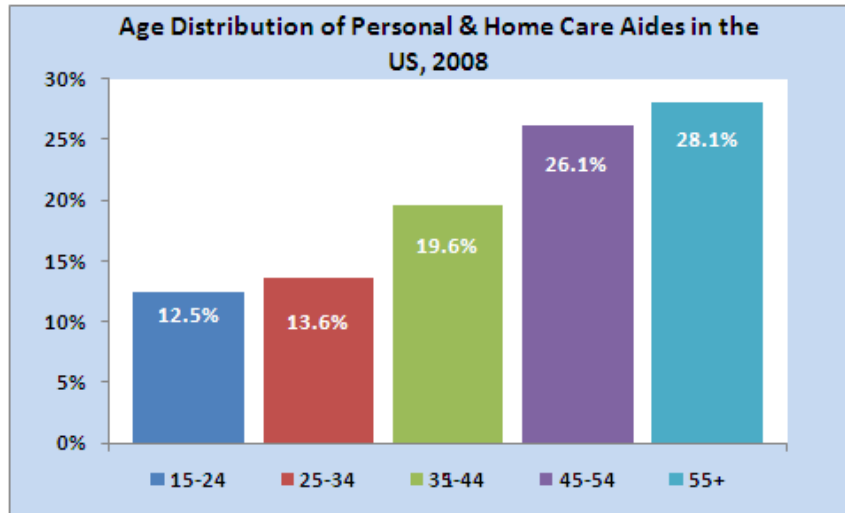
Older workers and the direct-care workforce

The CPS presents information on two broad occupational groupings that make up the direct-care workforce. The first is “Personal and Home Care Aides” and the second is “Nursing Aides, Psychiatric Aides, and Home Health Aides.”

PERSONAL AND HOME CARE AIDES. Older workers are relatively *more* prevalent among Personal and Home Care Aides, compared to the rest of the direct-care workforce (see Chart 2). Approximately **28 percent** of Personal and Home Care Aides, or **229,577 workers**,

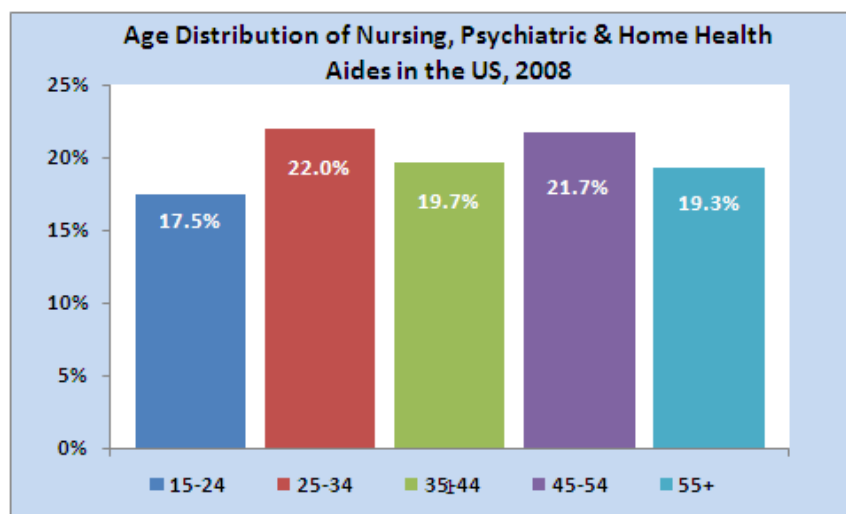
are age 55 years and older (the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates total employment for Personal and Home Care Aides at 817,000 in 2008).

Chart 2



NURSING AIDES, PSYCHIATRIC AIDES, AND HOME HEALTH AIDES. In contrast, older workers are relatively *less* prevalent among Nursing Aides, Psychiatric Aides, and Home Health Aides. Just under a fifth of these aides (**19 percent**) are in the older age cohort. This translates into **353,000 aides**, given that the BLS reports employment of 2,454,500 aides in 2008.

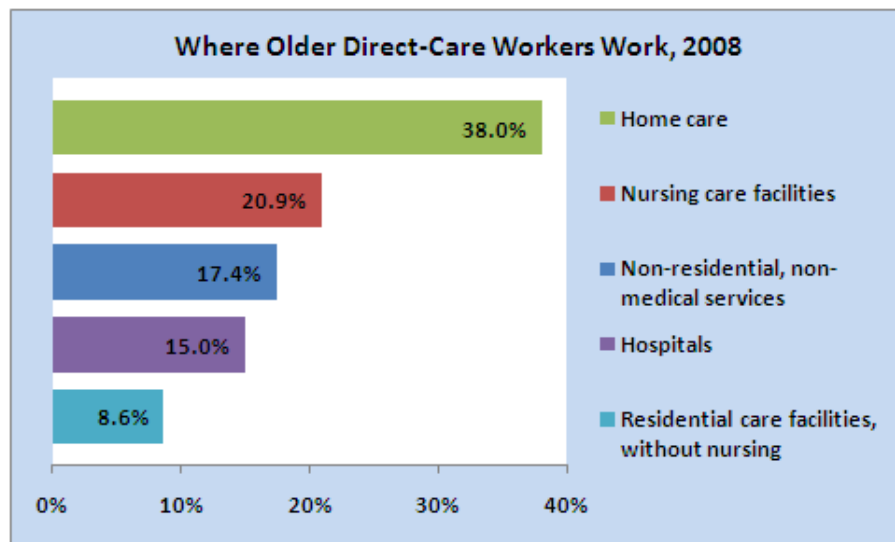
Chart 3



Where older direct-care workers work

Older direct-care workers are more likely to be employed in home care than in any other setting. Nearly 40 percent of older direct-care workers report employment in home care settings, compared to a fifth who report working in nursing care facilities and 15 percent who work in hospitals.

Chart 4



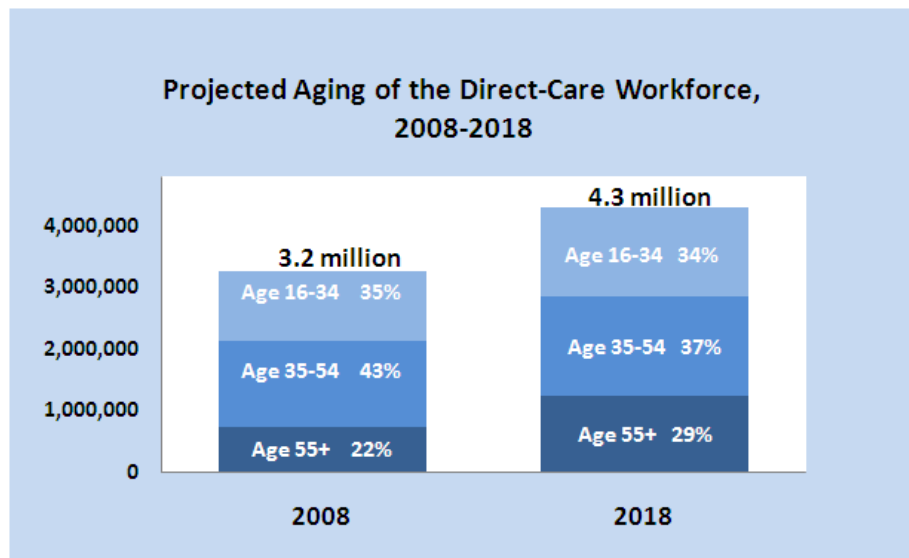
In contrast, younger direct-care workers are more likely to work in nursing care and hospital facilities, and less likely to work in home care and non-residential community-based agencies, such as day programs for persons with Alzheimer's or intellectual and developmental disabilities. Over a third of younger direct-care workers (aged 15-24) are employed in nursing care facilities, and nearly a quarter are employed in hospital-based facilities.

Employment trends for older direct-care workers

The number of older direct-care workers is likely to increase significantly for two reasons. The first is the dramatic growth projected for this workforce as a whole: employment of direct-care workers is projected to increase from 3.2 million to 4.3 million over the decade 2008 to 2018. Second, due to the continued aging of the nation's overall workforce, we can expect the age distribution of the direct-care workforce to shift toward the older age groups.

The latest workforce projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics call for a 49 percent increase in the number of women in the workforce who are 55 and older over the period 2008 to 2018. In sharp contrast, the number of women aged 25 to 54 is basically expected to remain unchanged. Growing numbers of older women workers are projected to raise the percentage of older women in the female workforce from 18 percent in 2008 to nearly 25 percent in 2018.

Chart 5



Applying the same percentage point increase to the oldest cohort of direct-care workers suggests that **direct-care workers age 55 and over will increase from 22 percent of this frontline workforce to nearly 30 percent** (see Chart 5). This means that by 2018 we can conservatively expect employment of **at least 1.2 million older female direct-care workers**,¹ up from approximately **723,002** today.

¹ Given that the direct-care workforce is already older than the general workforce, this projection is likely to be an underestimate.

Data Notes

Direct-care occupational categories are defined by the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system developed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) at the U. S. Department of Labor (DOL). Definitions of the three standard direct-care occupations—Nursing Aides, Orderlies & Attendants; Home Health Aides; and Personal & Home Care Aides—can be found at: <http://www.bls.gov/SOC>.

Occupational employment statistics are from DOL/BLS, Employment Projections Program, 2008-18 National Employment Matrix, available at: <http://www.bls.gov/emp/emiols.htm>. Workforce projections by age group are from: M. Toossi (Nov. 2009) “Labor force projections to 2018: older workers staying more active,” *Monthly Labor Review* (Washington, DC: DOL/BLS).

Statistics relating to direct-care worker demographic characteristics are based on PHI analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), 2009 Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement, with statistical programming and data analysis provided by Carlos Figueiredo.

For more information on the direct-care workforce, visit PHI PolicyWorks website at www.PHInational.org/policy.



PHI (www.PHInational.org) works to improve the lives of people who need home and residential care—and the lives of the workers who provide that care. Using our workplace and policy expertise, we help consumers, workers, employers, and policymakers improve eldercare/disability services by creating quality direct-care jobs. Our goal is to ensure caring, stable relationships between consumers and workers, so that both may live with dignity, respect, and independence.