



News Release

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Maine PASA Launches Health Care for Health Care Workers Campaign

Launch Coincides With "Cover the Uninsured Week"

NORWAY, ME – Maine PASA launched its *Health Care for Health Care Workers Campaign* today, bringing to light the fact that many workers providing health care services do not have access to health care themselves. In particular, this issue affects direct support professionals, direct care workers and even Certified Nurses' Assistants (CNAs).

The Paraprofessional's Healthcare Institute (PHI) released a *Health Insurance for the Home Care Sector* report stating that "Over 18,000 direct-care workers, primarily low-income women, deliver health and long-term care services to Maine residents, yet many are themselves uninsured. This lack of affordable health care contributes to a growing shortage of these workers, which, in turn, reduces the quality of care for Maine's elderly and disabled residents."

According to the report, one in four nurses' aides working in nursing homes and around 40 percent of home health aides nationally lack insurance. In Maine, the majority of homecare services are paid for through MaineCare, Maine's Medicaid program. As a result, the wages for home care workers are based on the reimbursement rates of MaineCare. These reimbursement rates are not enough for employers to provide health insurance benefits to their workers.

For those employers who are able to provide insurance, the copays and deductibles are frequently too high to be of any value to the workers. Without access to affordable health insurance, workers are less likely to seek health care putting them at greater risk of preventative illnesses ultimately disrupting services for clients.

"As the number of elderly citizens increase in Maine, we need to ensure we have enough, quality workers to provide the types of support services the allow them to stay in their own home longer," says Roy Gedat, Maine PASA Executive Director. "An industry-wide lack of the benefit of health insurance poses a significant barrier to recruiting talented, caring people to this profession."

The PHI report illustrates how pivotal this profession is becoming to Maine, largely because of Maine's demographic change. Elders in Maine over the age of 65 are expected increase by 77% between 2000 and 2005. At the same time, the demographic of people who have traditionally cared for them – women aged 24 – 54 – is not growing fast enough to fill the number of jobs that will be required to provide services to this aging population of people.

"At the end of the day, quality jobs for our workers equate to quality care for our disabled and elderly citizens," says Gedat. "Ensuring access to affordable health insurance is a major step in reducing service disruption and increasing the number of qualified people who go into and stay in this profession."

Maine PASA, a 650-member association, promotes professionalism and development for the direct care, direct support and personal assistance workforce to support the highest quality of life for elders and people with disabilities. For more information on the *Health Care for Health Care Workers Campaign*, please visit www.mainepasa.org or www.hchcw.org.

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