

Racial/Ethnic Diversity in the Long-term Care Workforce

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I. Introduction/Background

As many as 19 million older Americans are expected to need long-term care (LTC) services by the year 2050, more than double the number who required LTC in the year 2000. Over time, this population (as well as the general population) will become increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. Consumers of healthcare services report a preference for providers who share their own race/ethnicity and cultural background. These findings raise questions about how racial and ethnic diversity is reflected in the current LTC workforce, and how the demographic make-up of the workforce will be matched to consumer needs in the future.

II. Methods

Data describing characteristics of the current long-term care (LTC) workforce were sourced from the 2015 American Community Survey (ACS), 1-year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). Data describing graduates of LTC-related education programs were sourced from the 2015 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and a customized file prepared by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN).

III. Findings

At the national level, the overall LTC workforce is relatively racially and ethnically diverse. African American and Filipino healthcare workers are substantially overrepresented.

The data also demonstrate an inverse relationship between racial/ethnic diversity and educational attainment: the share of employed non-White healthcare workers in LTC decreases as the level of educational attainment increases. Finally, there were important differences in the racial and ethnic composition of the LTC workforce depending on the care delivery setting.

IV. Conclusion

These findings suggest that a highly diverse LTC workforce will care for an increasingly racially/ethnically diverse client population. While there will be some opportunities for clients to receive care from racially/ethnically concordant LTC workers, many LTC workers will be called upon to care for clients from multiple racial/ethnic groups.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

- 1) A highly diverse LTC workforce will care for increasingly racially/ethnically diverse clients.
- 2) The findings of an inverse relationship between racial/ethnic diversity and educational attainment suggests a need to provide opportunities for aides to pursue further education so that they can enter better paying LTC occupations.
- 3) Employers should provide financial assistance to aides who wish to pursue nursing education and offer them part-time employment while completing their education in exchange for agreement to work for the LTC employer following graduation.

V. Policy Implications

The finding of an inverse relationship between racial/ethnic diversity and educational attainment suggests a need to provide opportunities for personal care aides and nursing/psychiatric/home health aides to pursue further education so that they can enter other, better paying LTC occupations, such as LVN and RN positions. Diversifying the RN workforce in LTC is especially important because RNs often work in leadership positions, such as Director of Nursing. Employers should provide financial assistance to aides who wish to pursue nursing education and offer them part-time employment while completing their education in exchange for an agreement to work for the LTC employer following graduation.