

In-Home Care Providers Must ‘Keep Pedal Down on Recruitment’ Amid COVID-19 Crisis

By Andrew Donlan | April 2, 2020

Recruiting and retaining caregivers was an industry-wide problem for home-based care providers long before the novel coronavirus began circulating throughout the United States, completely reshaping how health care is perceived.

Nearly 100% of in-home care providers had recruiting concerns before the global pandemic struck, according to a trends report released in early 2020 by myCNAjobs. The report was based on a survey of over 400 agencies.

But what do those concerns look like now? Not much time has past since the report came out, but in-home care providers are navigating all sorts of new workforce obstacles.

To complicate matters further, nearly 10 million Americans have filed for unemployment since March 15, according to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL).

Home care and home health agencies have both old and new worries on their minds due to the shifting landscape. But now is not the time to pull back on recruitment and retention, Brandi Kurtyka, the CEO of myCNAjobs, told Home Health Care News.

“This is what home care and health care are built for — to take care of people that need care,” Kurtyka said. “In my humble opinion, it is time ... to figure out a way to serve people. This is the time to keep the pedal down on recruitment. This is the time to come up with clever and creative strategies to serve seniors. I think there’s a lot of different ways to do that.”

Headquartered in Tampa, myCNAjobs is a professional caregiver network that offers recruitment tools for hiring caregivers, certified nurse assistants and home health aides.

The trends report, which also polled more than 2.5 million caregivers, was relatively grim from a provider perspective when first released. For example, it showed the most significant bump in a long time in regard to what caregivers were willing to work for — \$12.68 per hour, up from \$11.72 in 2019.

But that data was compiled pre-coronavirus. And, in some ways, it's based on a job economy that washed away when the virus landed on American shores.

A brave new workforce world

Fair compensation, job flexibility and respecting employees have always been key to recruiting and retaining employees. While that remains true, there are now additional areas that demand attention during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Above all, agencies need to reassure current and future employees that they can keep workers safe.

But providers are fighting an uphill battle to acquire the resources necessary to promise that safety. Personal protective equipment (PPE) is low enough in hospitals that private businesses have started manufacturing masks and gowns to help out.

For in-home care agencies, PPE is much harder to come by than it once was.

“Finding PPE has been a challenge,” Jennifer Tucker, the COO of Homewatch CareGivers (HWCG), told HHCN. “We have been resourceful and creative and are finding new avenues to obtain PPE daily to ensure our caregivers are protected.”

HWCG is one of the biggest franchise brands in home care. It has over 200 locations across the U.S.

Another way for agencies to keep workers safe — in turn, supporting recruitment and retention — is by harnessing technology for COVID-19 screening.

New York-based People Care, for example, has set up an app that asks caregivers seven questions before they make a visit. If any of the answers are worrisome, they are contacted by a clinician before delivering care.

Moving forward, remote technologies will similarly become important from a workforce perspective.

“Recruiters are fearful of interviewing caregivers, and home care agency offices are going remote,” Kurtyka said in March.

On its end, myCNAjobs has launched free video conferencing and booking services to facilitate hiring interviews.

While in-home care providers have been hampered by tight labor markets in recent years, rising unemployment rates may change that.

“Franchisees are also working to connect and recruit qualified individuals within industries or populations that might be out of work due to COVID-19,” Tucker said. “[That includes] individuals within the restaurant [or] hospitality sectors, or college students who have returned home due to canceled or virtual classes.”

As part of its workforce strategy amid COVID-19, HWCG is supporting workers with non-work-related issues as a way to reassert the company’s dedication to them. That, along with taking steps to ensure their safety, will make it easier for providers to both recruit and retain employees while coronavirus fears are present.

“Our franchisees’ retention efforts have been impressive,” Tucker said. “These include daily encouraging texts and messages to their teams. They provide resources for their caregivers, such as helping find child care or helping out with essential groceries and household staples for caregivers who might not be able to make it to the store as demands soar. Above all, workers are briefed with up-to-date facts on COVID-19.”