

## OECD Health Policy Studies: Who Cares? Attracting and Retaining Care Workers for the Elderly

*Summary*

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The COVID-19 crisis is striking social services with full force. The long-term care (LTC) sector is especially affected because of the large numbers of deaths and sick people in long-term homes as well as the exposure of LTC workers to infections. However, this pandemic is also highlighting LTC's structural problems in terms of insufficient staffing, poor working conditions and career prospects, insufficient skills, and poor wages, all of which have an impact on quality of care and safety. OECD published a report named "[Who cares? Attracting and Retaining Care Workers for the Elderly](#)" to study these issues and try to push for some policy changes to attract and retain care workers for the elderly. The report is articulated around 5 objectives:

- Addressing the shortfall in workers
- Tasks, qualifications and training of long-term care workers: reducing the skills gap
- Addressing retention by creating better-quality jobs in long-term care
- Improving care pathway for elderly people
- Shortfall innovation: how technology, skill mix and self-care can change long-term care

This summary will focus on examples of good practices implemented in some OECD countries.

### **1. Addressing the shortfall in workers**

#### **A. Improve the image of LTC**

Some countries (e.g. Belgium, Portugal and the United Kingdom) have tried to improve the LTC image among young workers and students with Proud to Care and Care Ambassadors initiatives. Others (e.g. Cyprus, Israel and Romania) have provided financial support and perseverance grants for LTC education to train unemployed people or support people to come back into the sector (e.g. Japan).

#### **B. Find new sources of workers**

To find new sources of workers, countries have focused on four main policies:

- Targeted recruitment of workers from the traditional pool (students of health or social care or former LTC workers)
- Improve the image of the sector, especially to attract more students of nursing or social care
- Recruit outside the traditional pool by targeting men, unemployed people or those looking for a career change (e.g. Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom)
- Increasing the recruitment of foreign-born workers is another strategy

## 2. Tasks, qualifications and training of long-term care workers: reducing the skills gap

### A. Skills' (re)valorisation

- Austria, Israel, and Japan: Introduction of scholarship for nurses in geriatric care training
- Canada and Korea: Provide internship and mentorship opportunities
- Canada and Bulgaria: Development of “excellence curricula” in LTC
- Ireland, Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States: Development of new advanced professions for nurses

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### B. Introduction of advanced nurse practitioners

The United States, the Netherlands, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Sweden have introduced advanced nurse practitioners. They are responsible for case management measures including personal training accounts, which open an internet-based account presenting workers' rights for training; personal objectives; training searches results (France); degree study allowances (Estonia); and training vouchers available for specific vocational training programmes (United States).

## 3. Addressing retention by creating better-quality jobs in long-term care

Since 2011 OECD countries have been implementing three main policies to improve earnings in the LTC workforce:

- *Wage improvements or guarantees*: Retention is higher in countries where agreements differentiate pay scales to years of experience (e.g. Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden)
- *Overtime and travel time pay*: In Australia, a new management model in nursing homes has contributed to reducing turnover rates among LTC workers. These flexible management models provide LTC workers with more opportunities to control their work-life balance. Better organisation of daily work and planning shifts and teams are cited as important elements for job satisfaction by workers in Austria, the Netherlands and Portugal.
- *Tax benefits/financial incentives*: Scandinavian countries are strengthening highly educated nurses' roles by giving them more capacity to manage budgets and organise LTC. In Norway, nurses are becoming increasingly specialised and taking more leadership roles, especially in conducting assessment needs for services, based on a standardised assessment form that all municipalities are required to use. Nurses are being given more autonomy to decide on the type but also amount of care needed by each client. They are also taking decision-making roles when it comes to managing municipalities' budgets for LTC.

## 4. Improving care pathway for elderly people

Approximately one-third of OECD countries have policies in place to support better co-ordination of services provided by caregivers and to promote more integrated care. Most of these policies aim to strengthen integration between health and social care services. Another important set of policies refers to initiatives promoting co-ordination between formal and informal workers.

In Scotland, United Kingdom, work has been under way since 2016 to integrate services across health and social care. The Czech Republic has started to integrate health and social care services in the Pardubice region to support individuals with reduced self-sufficiency.

## **5. Shortfall innovation: how technology, skill mix and self-care can change long-term care**

### **A. The use of technology to improve productivity**

Technologies such as telecare can help to reduce hospital admissions and length in hospital stay for the elderly. For instance, the Advanced Telecare service in the Limousin Region in France achieved a reduced number of falls among the elderly at home and reduced hospitalisation

### **B. The use of technology to connect more easily between workers**

In Norway a social media messaging app like WhatsApp connects nurses who work in the same region but have different clients. This helps them share professional advice, which is particularly relevant in-home care services.

In France, in the Ille-et-Vilaine region, a new teleprocessing tool was implemented to allow nurses to communicate in real time, to co-ordinate working schedules more easily and to share medical data in a secure way.

### **C. The need of standards and regulations on technologies**

In Germany, a Concerted Action was implemented (with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs). Some concrete proposals for innovative care approaches involving digital solutions were part of it to improve the efficiency of nursing care. They were focusing on:

- Using digitisation to design innovative approaches, such as in district networking, telenursing, telecounselling, home assistance systems or eCounselling
- Using digitisation to relieve nurses, for example, by reducing the bureaucracy of nursing documentation
- Involving caregivers in the development of new digital products and applications and introducing them into day-to-day work, while observing ethical principles
- Increasing efficiency at the interfaces between nursing and health care (such as discharge from hospital)

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