

Education Pathways for Caregivers:

An Untapped Opportunity
for Employers



In this first-of-its-kind research report examining caregivers' educational and career aspirations, CareAcademy reveals critical insights on how employers can best recruit, retain, and develop the direct care workforce. Based on a survey of 1,500 caregivers from across the country, this report offers a path forward for employers to facilitate upskilling opportunities for their staff with far-reaching benefits.

Foreward

It is clear that quality education is fast becoming a true health intervention. And the delivery of high-quality care is now more important than ever as the entire care continuum moves into home and community-based care settings. In fact, our core mission at CareAcademy centers on exactly this challenge. How do we empower the direct care worker with opportunities to continue their education and increase their skills? Getting this right has a far-reaching impact, benefiting the caregiver themselves, their agency employer, and ultimately the clients in their care.

We are pleased to bring you this first-of-its-kind research to truly examine what motivates the direct care worker to pursue ongoing education and what kind of continuing education they are looking for. Additionally, we specifically look at the role the agency has to play in enabling and empowering its workforce.

The results are clear: Caregivers want to work for agencies that will open up pathways to ongoing education and upskilling. They are more likely to choose agencies who provide those pathways, they are likely to stay at those agencies longer, and they will be more satisfied in their careers.

Amid a nationwide shortage of direct care workers, this groundbreaking study shows that offering educational benefits is an untapped opportunity for agencies to materially impact their recruiting and retention efforts, maximize caregivers' value, and improve their career satisfaction.

I would like to ask each and every one of you to ask yourself as you read through this report: What is the one thing I can do tomorrow to better support my care team? There are quite a few ideas here, and you probably have more of your own. But with the answer to that central question, we can together advance the caregiving profession, bring more workers into the industry, and meet the skyrocketing demand.

We think this is an important step for the industry, and we look forward to creating a dialogue with you. Please share your feedback and your plans with me directly at helen.adeosun@careacademy.com.

I look forward to partnering with you on this journey.

Helen Adeosun,

CEO and Founder, CareAcademy



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At CareAcademy, we recognize that education is now a true health intervention. We believe passionately that supporting the direct care worker on the front lines is critical to delivering high-quality healthcare in home and community-based settings. Our innovative approach to delivering training is designed to enable care professionals to upskill and expand their knowledge beyond core compliance curricula to include advanced disease training, condition-based certifications, HHA certification, and nurse CEUs, among others.

We are proud to lead the industry by launching the CAREer Path Initiative, the first direct pathway to higher education in partnership with Southern New Hampshire University. Direct care workers are now able to earn college credit for their regular training conducted within the CareAcademy platform. This first-of-its-kind higher-education partnership opens up new doors for direct care workers to advance their career development by offering new educational pathways based on experience and learning.

Learn more about CareAcademy’s mission to support caregivers and the CAREer Path Initiative at www.careacademy.com/CAREerpath.

Executive Summary

The delivery of high-quality care at home is under incredible pressure. The “triple tsunami” of a rapidly aging population, the global pandemic that fueled unprecedented demand for care in the home, and a hiring crisis like none the industry has ever seen before have all hit at the same time. In the middle of it all sits the professional direct care worker.

As part of CareAcademy’s mission to support the caregiving profession, we sought to understand more about how this immense pressure has impacted the professional caregiver themselves. We asked:

- What is the demographic makeup of this community?
- What motivates them to enter and stay in the profession?
- How do they choose an employer, and what makes them stay?
- What are their educational and career ambitions?

And much more.

This first-of-its-kind research uncovers several key insights that provide a critical roadmap to unlocking the recruiting and retention challenges home care and home health operators face every day.

In fact, the signals in the data are clear: Agencies that offer support for the pursuit of ongoing education will have a competitive advantage in the industry. Eighty-five percent of the 1,500 caregivers surveyed indicated they would be more likely to stay with an agency that offered this support. And further, 94% of caregivers say access to further education is an important consideration in accepting a job offer.

In short: Offering support for ongoing education is an untapped opportunity for agencies to materially impact their recruiting and retention efforts—and it’s completely within their control. And yet, despite caregivers’ overwhelming interest, 75% said their employer has never talked with them about ongoing education or training. This must change now.

“Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers” offers both a glimpse into the minds of caregivers and a path for agencies to facilitate upskilling opportunities with far-reaching benefits. This study finds that direct care workers, agency employers, and the clients in their care benefit from increased access to training and specialization—ultimately, improving client health outcomes through education.



Key Findings

“Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers” is a first-of-its-kind research study designed to learn more about caregiver motivations and aspirations to uncover how best to support existing caregivers in delivering high-quality care in the home. Conducted in August and September 2021, the survey engaged 1,500 caregivers from a broad range of demographics across the country.

With education fast becoming a true healthcare intervention, the key findings in this report provide a clear roadmap for agencies to better engage their direct care staff and create upskilling pathways. It provides agency operators with deep insight into what motivates their care team. Armed with this detail, home care and home health agencies will be well-positioned to deliver quality healthcare as the full care continuum moves into home and community-based settings.



Key data points from the survey include:

69%

of respondents said they are interested in ongoing education

94%

of caregivers said access to further education is an important consideration in accepting a job offer

85%

of caregivers said they're more likely to stay with their current employer if offered resources to further their education

75%

of caregivers said their employer has never talked with them about ongoing education or training

88%

of respondents said they would feel more satisfied at their job if given opportunities to improve their skills through further education and training

The kind of supports that caregivers would find valuable include monetary support (27%) and flexible work schedules (26%) as well as general support from their employer (6%).

The most common upskilling pathways were to become a nurse (24%), obtain their CNA license (17%), or move into healthcare administration (16%). A full 20% didn't specify a role type but indicated an interest in staying in a healthcare setting.



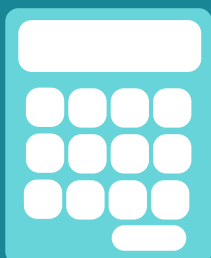
Five Simple Steps: An Agency Action Plan

Based on the data contained in this report, agencies have a number of levers fully within their control to better recruit, engage, and retain their direct care staff. Here are five steps home care and home health agencies should explore deploying today:

01 Offer tuition assistance

Caregivers were clear that cost is a key barrier to pursuing ongoing education. While an agency's ability to increase wages is constrained by numerous factors well outside that agency's control, a tuition reimbursement program that is within its control will generate long-term ROI. The most common objection to offering this type of program is, "What happens if we offer reimbursement but the caregiver leaves?" In fact, caregivers said the opposite: Offering tuition reimbursement makes them more likely to stay.

Tuition Breakeven Calculator



To better understand the breakeven point and ROI opportunity on tuition reimbursement, CareAcademy has created a simple calculator. Input key details about agency costs and the amount of potential reimbursement—and the

calculator will pinpoint how many months until breakeven point, and the monthly ROI from there forward. This decision tool will enable agency administrators to set an appropriate reimbursement amount, as well as set employee agreements to ensure employees will stay long enough to at least break even.

[Download Free Calculator](#)

02 Create flexible work schedules

Caregivers were clear that while cost is a key factor in their ability to pursue ongoing education opportunities, their schedules are also important. Create flexibility in your scheduling to allow room for care staff to take classes.

03 Create a dialogue with the team

Not everyone on the care team will want to pursue ongoing education. For those who are interested, it is important to understand what kind of education they are interested in. Doing so will ensure that the program you develop will meet the needs of your care team.

04 Think holistically about the types of opportunities offered

There are numerous types of training and education opportunities that you can consider adding to your program. Consider access to higher education, nursing classes, CNA programs, specialized certifications for specific disease conditions, and on-the-job training for higher levels of acuity, among others.

05 Showcase educational opportunities as part of your recruiting strategy

The data is clear: Caregivers are considering educational benefits when deciding where to work. Be sure to highlight your programs in your recruiting process, starting at the very top of your recruiting funnel and at each step of the way. Reimbursement makes them more likely to stay.

Taking these five simple actions now will pay enormous dividends. In an incredibly tight labor market, it is time to get started!

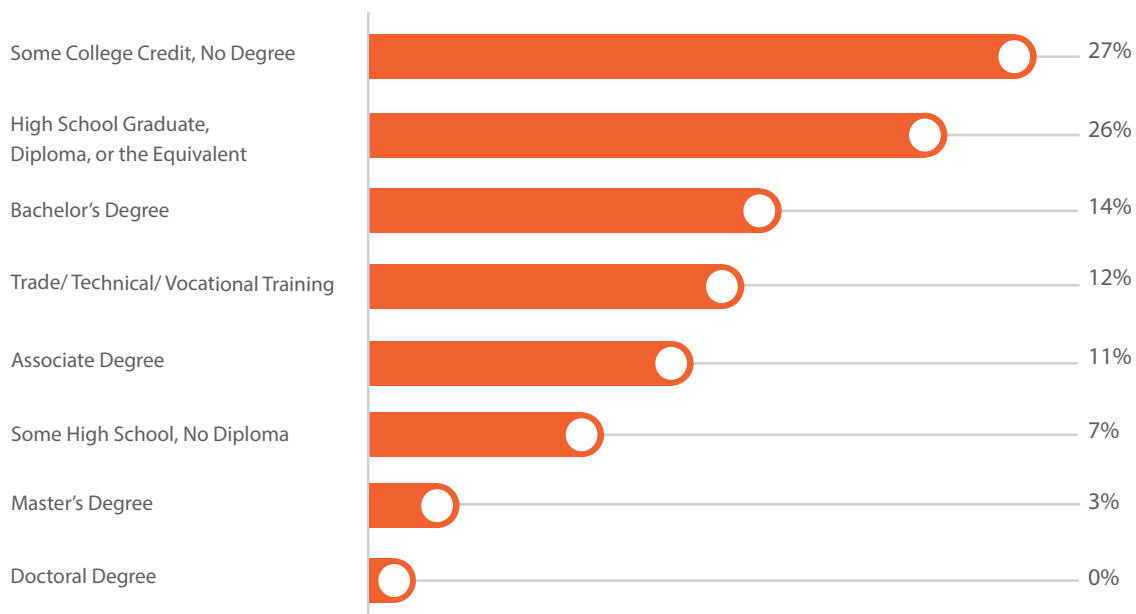


Section 1

Respondent Demographics

Who are the direct care workers? In this section, we examine the breakdown of educational attainment, employment status, household income, age, race, and gender among caregivers in our sample. The goal is to better understand the demographic makeup of the direct care workforce in order to identify ways to best support workers in all groups.

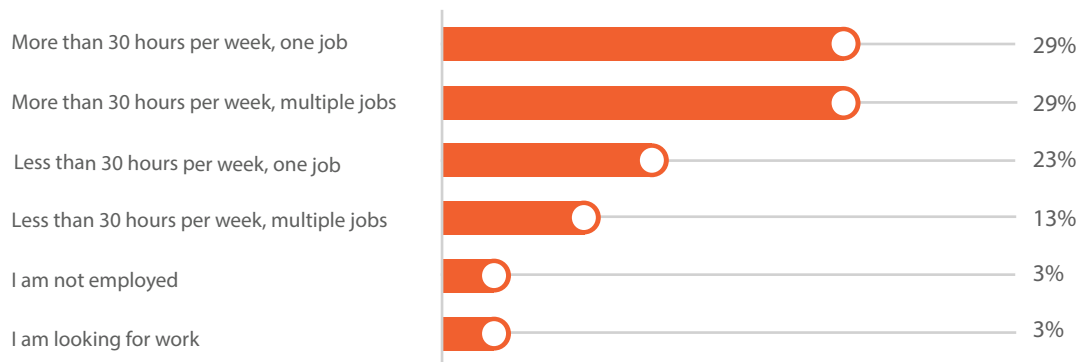
Highest Level of Education



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

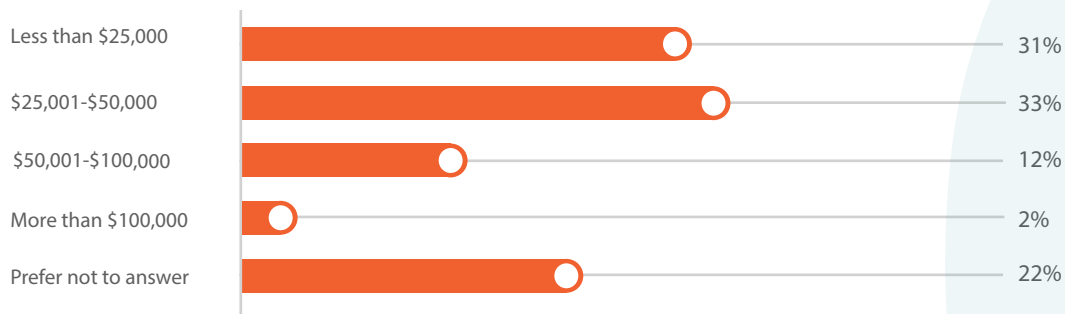


Employment Status



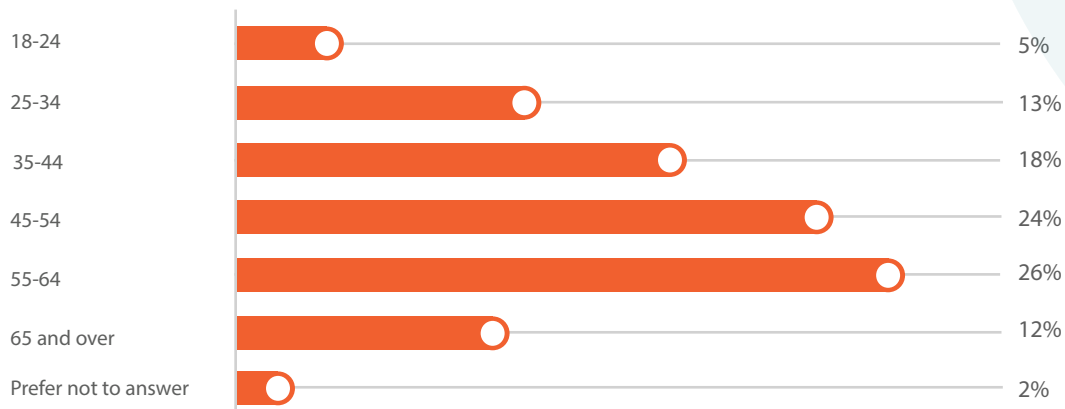
Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

Household Income



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

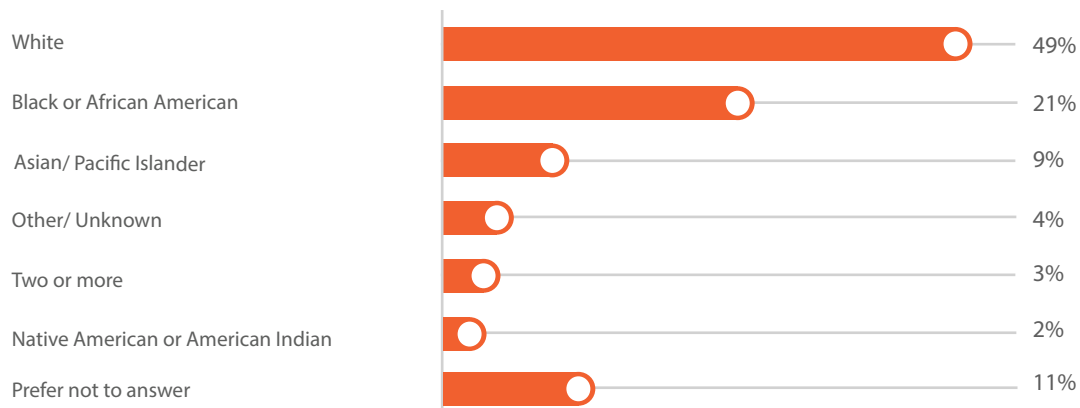
Age of Respondents



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

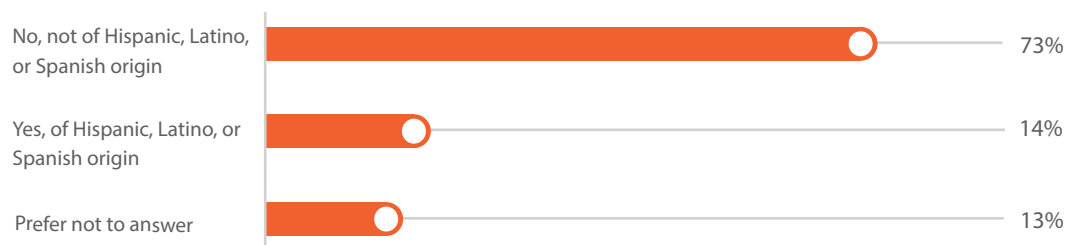


Race/Ethnicity



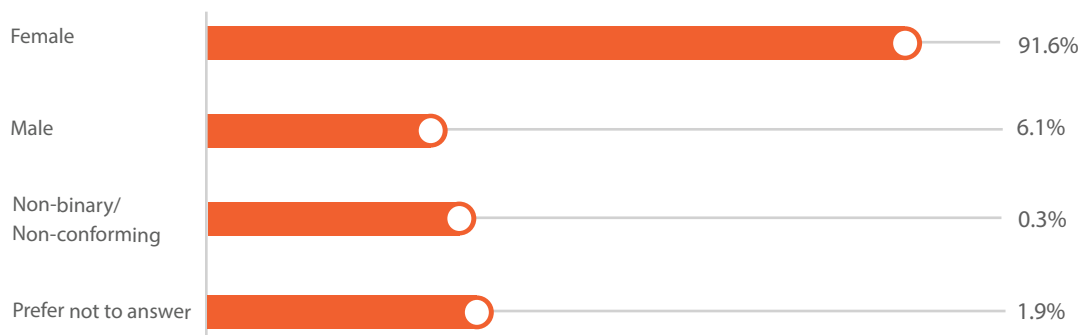
Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

Hispanic Origin



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

Gender



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501



Section 2

Caregivers' Motivation and Support for Continuing Education and Program of Interest

This section examines caregivers' interest in continuing education and upskilling. The goal is to assess the degree of motivation for further education, the menu of programs that they would prefer to pursue, and factors that may deter enrollment into these programs.

Are you interested in further education?

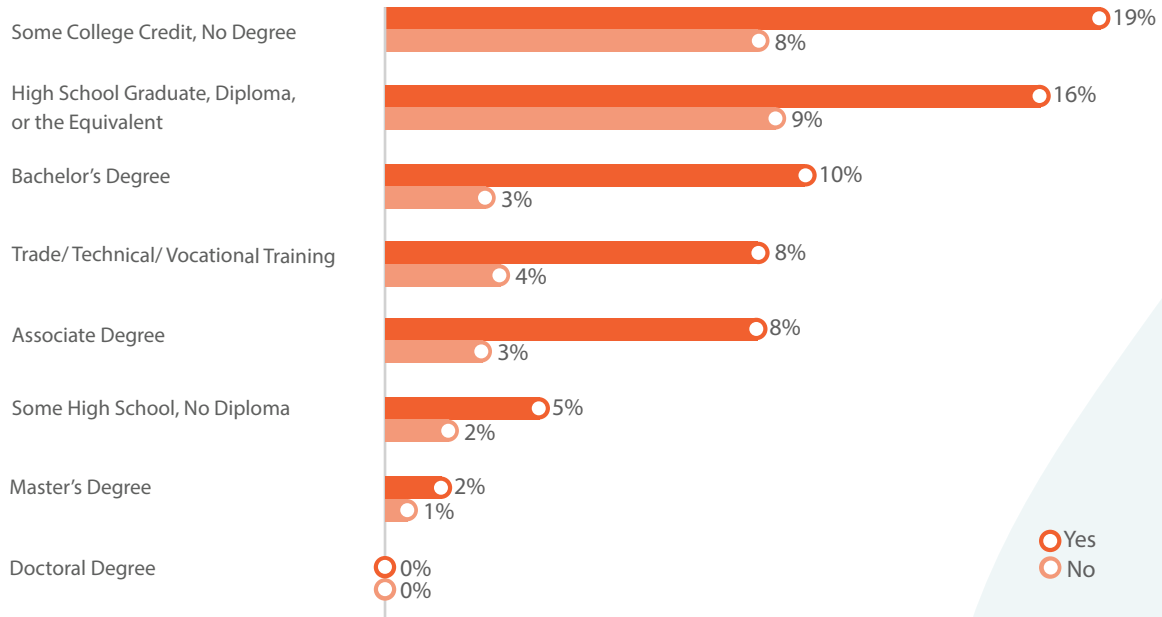
Overall, caregivers expressed high interest in upgrading their skills through education. Nearly 7 out of 10 respondents indicated an interest in pursuing higher education beyond their current highest levels of education.



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501



Interest by Highest Education

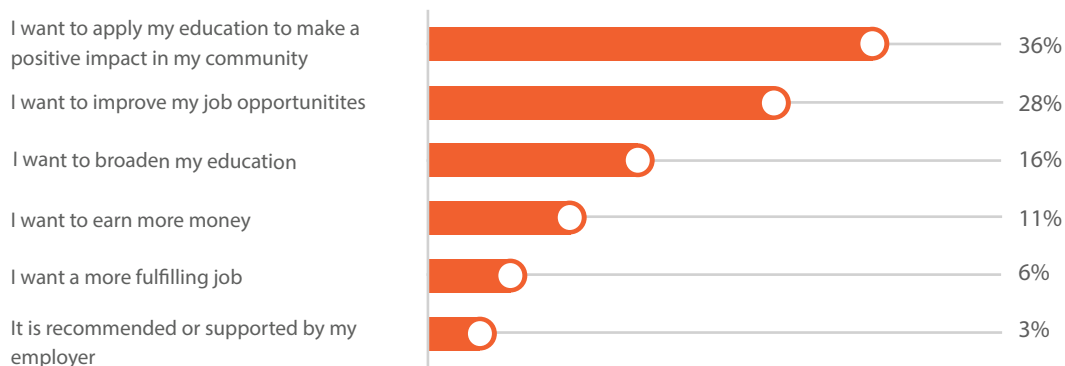


Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

Caregivers' strong interest in furthering their education was consistent across all levels of educational attainment. In each education grouping, two to four times as many respondents expressed interest compared to those who did not.

Why do direct care workers want to pursue higher education? Thirty-six percent said they want to use their education to make a positive impact on the community, 28% to improve their job opportunities, and 16% to expand their educational horizons. Only 11% of respondents said they wish to pursue further education to make more money.

Reasons for Interest in Further Education



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N = 1,035





"When I was 13, I said I was going to be a nurse, as I live to help people and my community. I have been a home health aide for 10+ years and feel that I must move forward and achieve my LPN so I can help others in more ways than I can now! Loving caring for our community and others in a time of need."

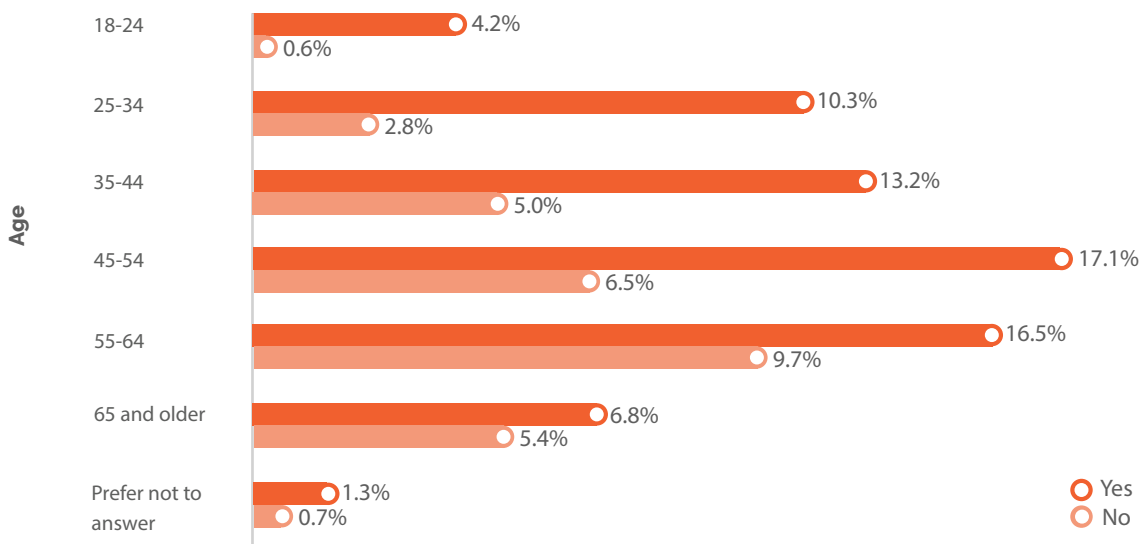
- Nichole S.

Does interest in further education vary by demographics?

Those who showed greater interest in continuing education were mainly females of age 25 to 54 years who work more than 30 hours per week with at least one year of experience and earn an annual income of less than \$50,000. This outsized interest from female caregivers could be because an overwhelming 91% of respondents were female caregivers. In total, there did not appear to be a significant difference between those who were interested versus those who were not interested in pursuing further education across any one demographic or ethnographic grouping.

Interest Breakdown by Age of Caregiver

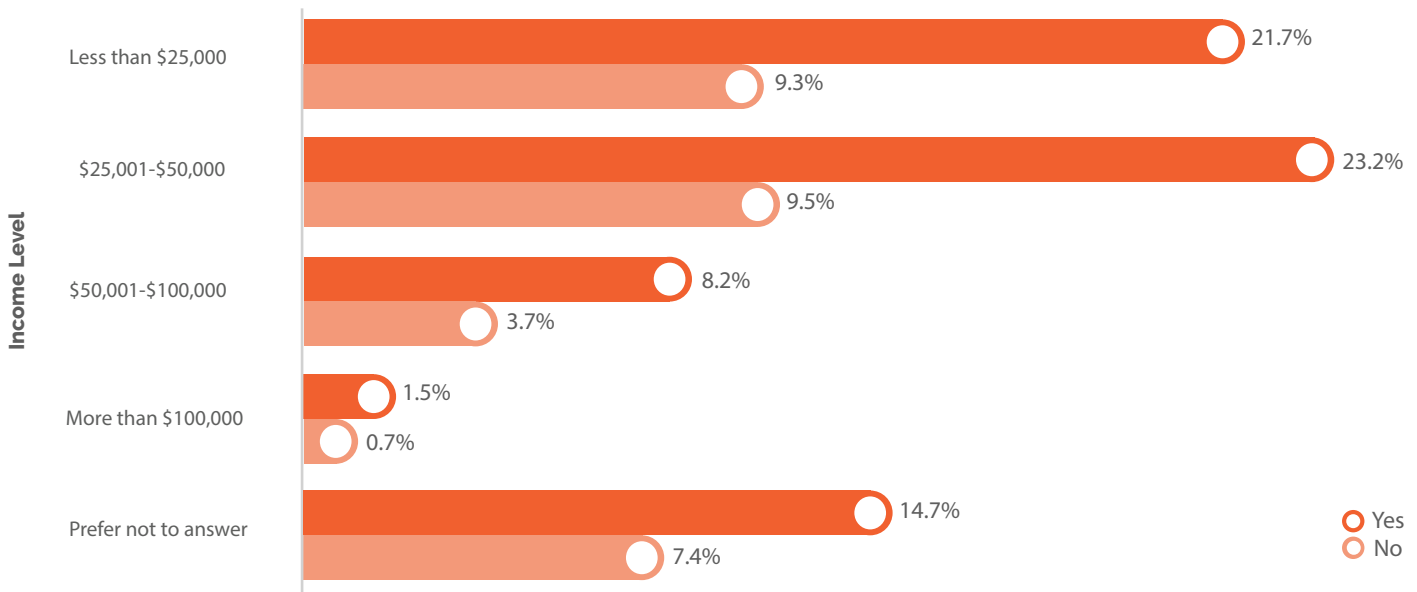
Interest in continuing education far outweighed lack of interest across all age groups. Among those between the ages of 35 and 64, who constituted roughly 60% of the sample, interest is high. However, interest only declined slightly in older caregivers indicating a desire for lifelong learning.



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

Interest By Income Levels

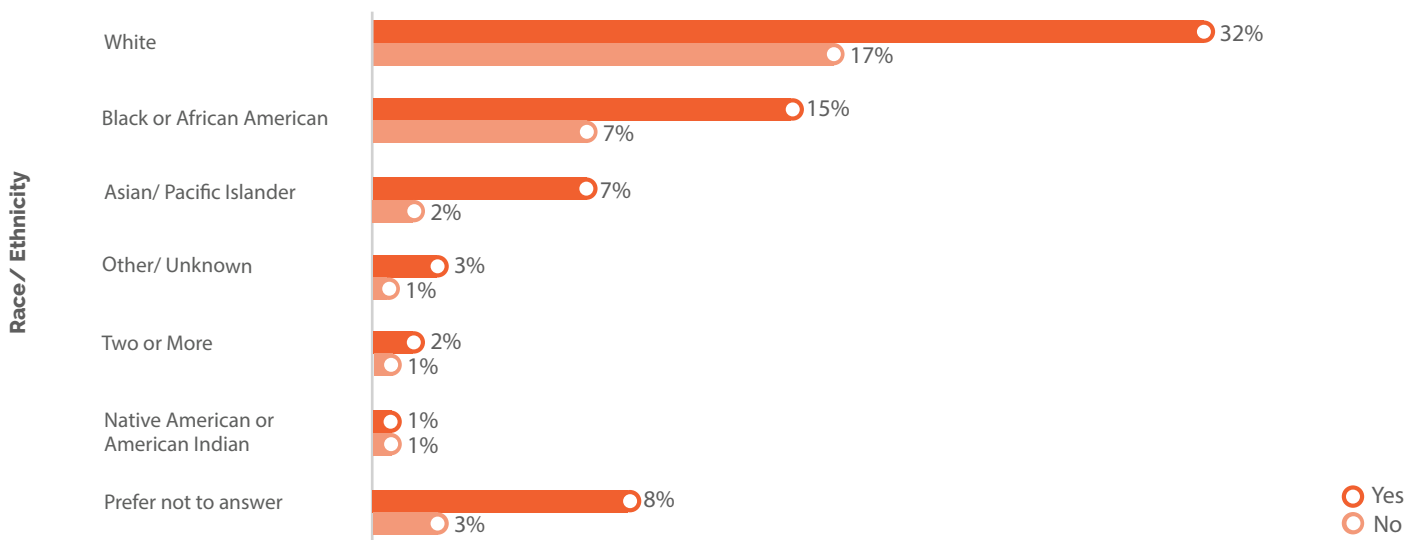
Similar to the other demographics, interest is high among direct care workers of all income levels.



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

Interest By Race/Ethnicity

Irrespective of ethnic or racial composition, at least twice as many direct care workers expressed interest in further education compared to those who did not.



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

The observed high interest in additional education across all demographic and ethnographic groups presents opportunities for agencies and educational institutions of all types to step in and make it possible for caregivers to continue education in their desired program. Section 3 explores insights into these educational programs.

Section 3

Understanding Caregivers' Educational Priorities and Obstacles to Further Education

With nearly 70% of all caregivers interested in pursuing continuing education, it is important to understand what programs direct care workers want to explore, as well as the key roadblocks to pursuing that education.

What educational opportunities are caregivers interested in?

Among those who showed motivation to upskill and/or continue their education, more than one-third (35%) indicated they wished to earn an aide or assistant certification (e.g., HHA, CHHA, CNA, etc.)

Table 1. Interest by Education Opportunity

Category	Percent
Aide or Assistant Certification (e.g., HHA, CHHA, CNA, etc.)	35%
Community College	20%
Other Credentials	14%
Four-Year College or University	9%
Master's Degree	9%
Professional Degree	6%
Doctoral Degree	3%

Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,041

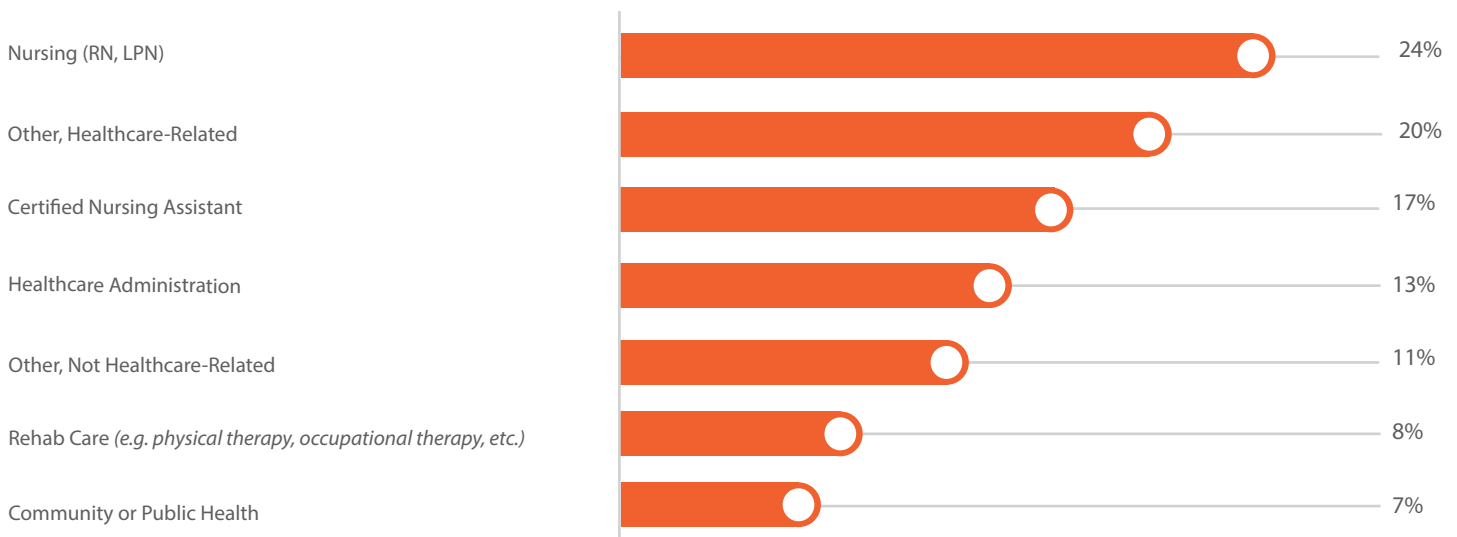




"I would like more medical training to better serve the patients or clients I have now. Also, advancing in medical knowledge can only be helpful in the role I have now or if I want to move to a job that requires more patient training."

- Charlie M.

Educational Program of Interest If Opportunity Arises



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

If they were given access to further education, most caregivers (61%) would be interested in becoming a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), a nurse (e.g., Licensed Practical Nurse, Registered Nurse, etc.) or a career in another healthcare-related field. Based on the information above, they would be most interested in earning these certifications or degrees from a community college or CNA school.

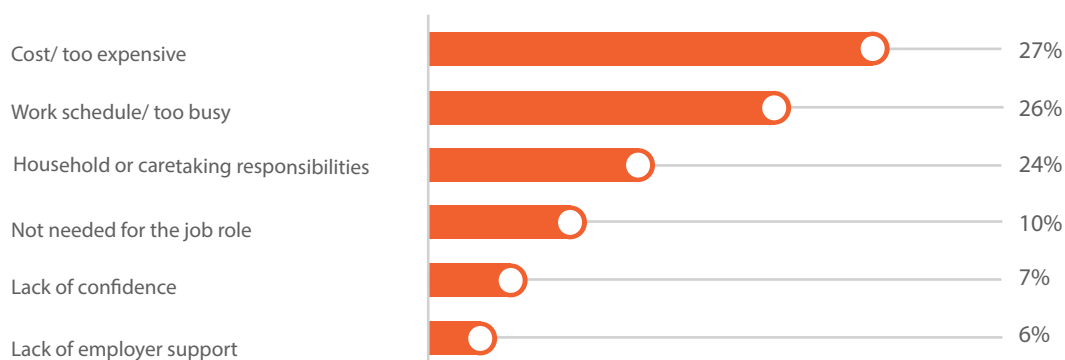
Nearly 4 out of every 5 caregivers (77%) would prefer to pursue these programs on a part-time schedule. In addition, close to 8 in 10 caregivers prefer courses offered through a mix of in-person and online (41%) or remote-only (36%), two options that would make it possible to pursue upskilling opportunities while remaining employed.



What factors deter caregivers from pursuing further education or training?

Despite the sizable interest in continuing education and/or upskilling, certain factors hinder the caregivers' effective enrollment into a program of interest. The barriers that caregivers face often mean that they are not able to explore those options. The survey found costs (27%), work schedules (26%), and household caretaking responsibilities (24%) as the top limitations holding them back.

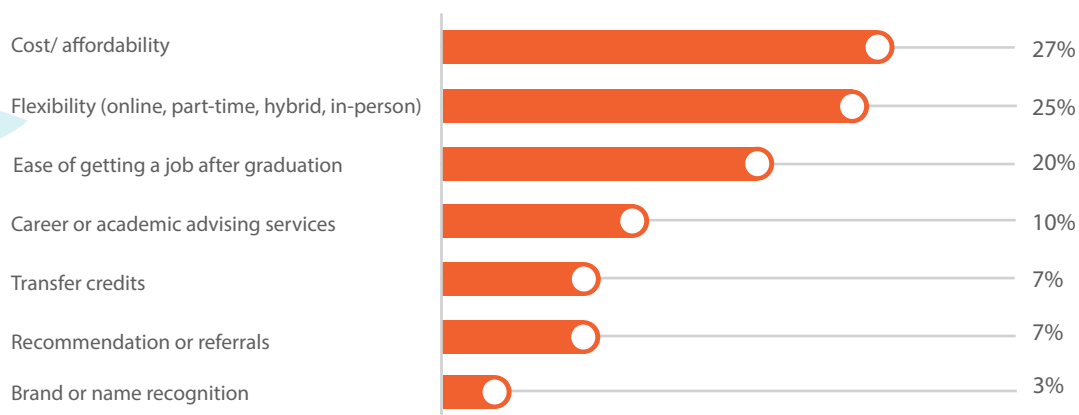
Obstacles to Further Education



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

When choosing a degree program for further education, caregivers identified cost or affordability (27%), program flexibility (25%), and ease of getting a job after graduation (20%) as the top three most important factors.

Important Factors When Choosing a Degree Program



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

What types of support resources would likely encourage caregivers to pursue further education opportunities?

Most caregivers indicated that they would likely pursue further education if they received tuition assistance or financial aid (28%), had the ability to earn credits for job training or experience (25%), or were given more access to academic or career advising services (20%). Another 18% indicated that more assistance with caretaking or household responsibilities would motivate them to continue their education.

Table 2. Classification of resources that would encourage caregivers to pursue further education

Desired Resources to Encourage Further Education	Percent
Tuition assistance or financial aid	28%
The ability to earn credits for job training or experience	25%
More access to academic or career advising services	20%
More assistance with caretaking or household responsibilities	18%
More support from my employer	9%

Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

Interest is high across support services. However, for those who selected tuition assistance or financial aid, interest in pursuing further education was twice as high. This would indicate that financial aid or tuition assistance is the most likely lever to open up pathways to ongoing education for this highly motivated cohort.

Similarly, the ability to earn credits through job training and access to academic and career orientation services could reduce the cost of education by helping caregivers enroll in more targeted courses.

Agencies have a major role to play in supporting these ambitions. And the data signals two important opportunities: Recruiting and retention.

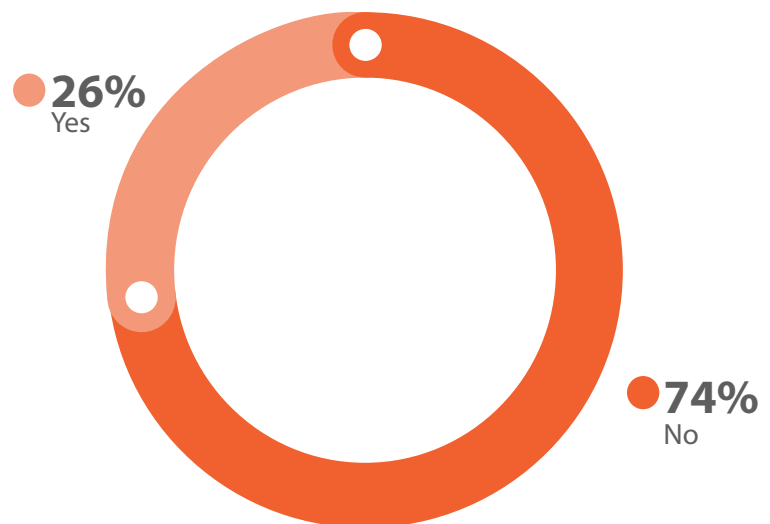
Section 4

A Role for Employers to Improve Caregiver Recruitment, Retention, and Overall Caregiver Satisfaction

In this section we examine the role of caregivers' current employers and the potential impact of continuing education (and upskilling) on recruitment, retention, and job satisfaction.

Has your employer ever talked to you about improving or learning skills through further education or training?

Although 69% of caregivers expressed high motivation or interest in continuing education, three-fourths of them indicated that their current employers have never talked about improving skills through further education or training.



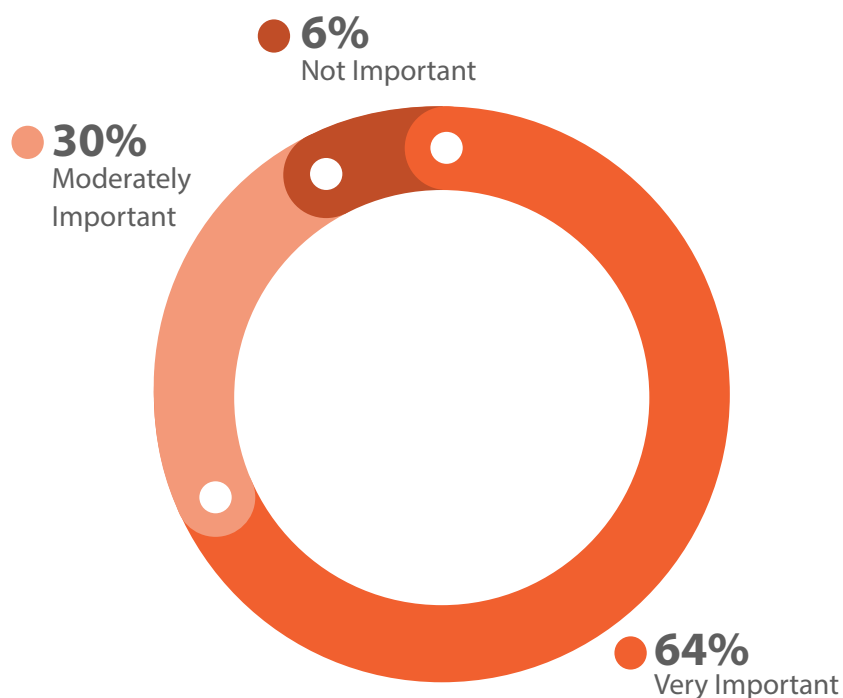
Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

When considering a job offer, how important is access to additional education?

Nearly all caregivers sampled signaled that access to additional education is at least a moderately important consideration when deciding whether to accept a job offer. A full 64% of respondents indicated that it was very important.

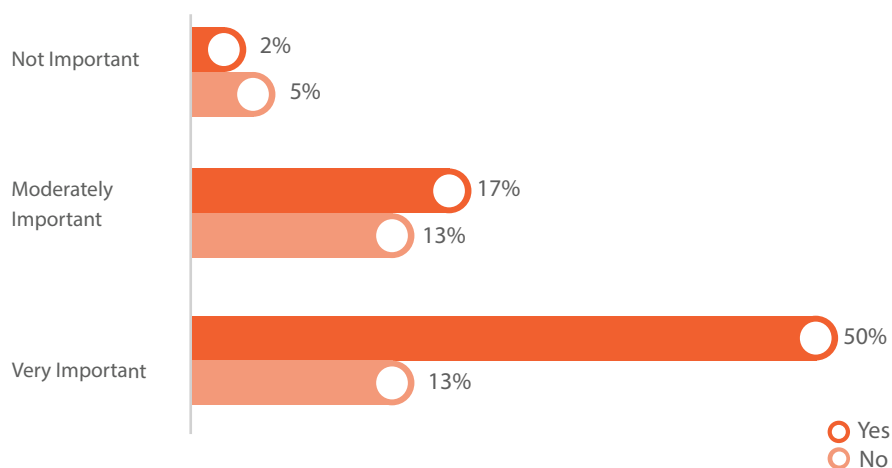
As expected, those who expressed interest in continuing education were about three times more likely to say access to education is either very or moderately important (67%) than those who were not interested (26%).

Importance of Access to Additional Education to Consideration of Job Offer



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

Interest by Importance of Access to Education in Considering a Job Offer



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

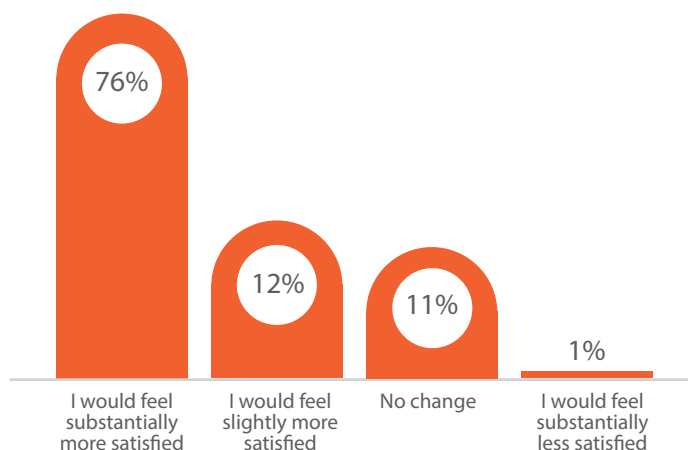
How does improving skills through further education and training impact caregivers' job satisfaction?

Nearly 9 in 10 caregivers indicated that they would feel greater satisfaction in their job if they improved their skills through further education and training.

Additionally, caregivers who expressed interest in continuing education were almost four times more likely to say they would feel significantly more satisfied at their current job if they were offered access to further education.

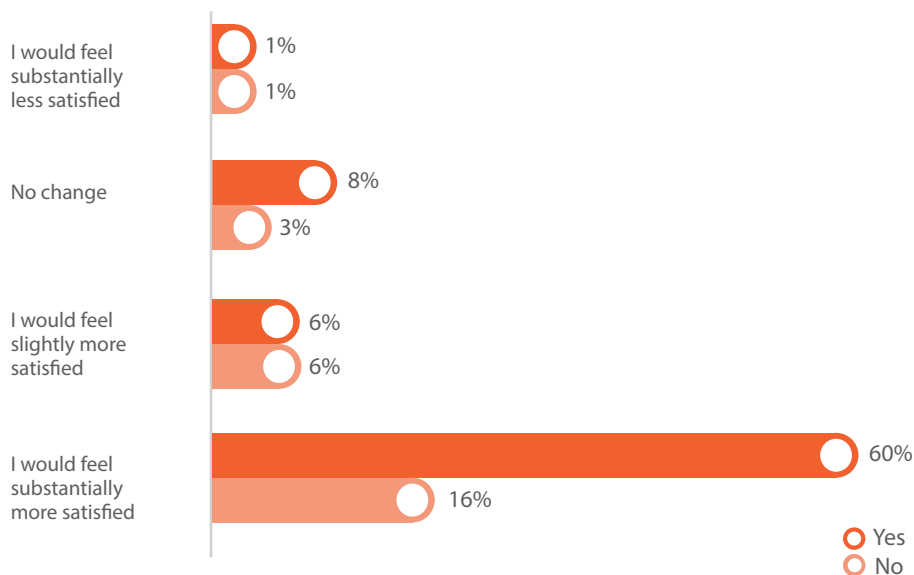
This data suggests that avenues to improve skills through further education and training have a positive impact on job satisfaction, especially among those who are motivated to continue education.

Impact of Improving Skills Through Education and Training on Job Satisfaction



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

Impact of Improving Skills on Job Satisfaction by Interest in Continued Education



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501





"I have been with my company for over 15 years and I am considering leaving for a company that will pay 80% of my education."

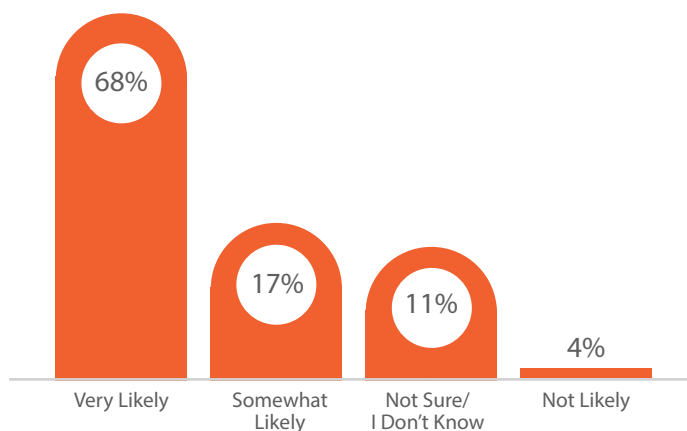
- Evelyn A.

How likely are caregivers to continue working for their current employers if offered access to further education?

Nearly 9 out of every 10 caregivers indicated that they are either very likely (68%) or somewhat likely (17%) to continue working for their current employers if the employer offered resources to pursue further education.

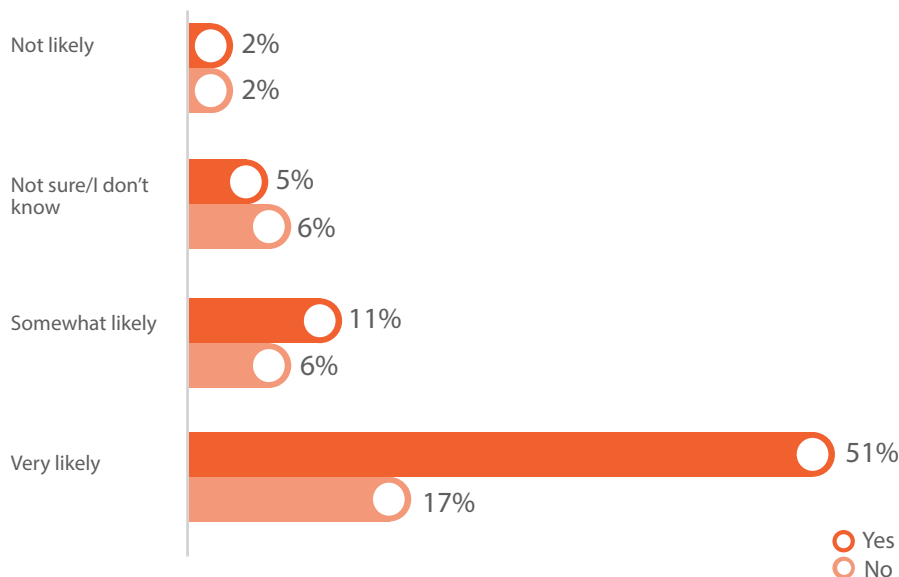
Caregivers who expressed interest in further education were three times more likely to say they are very likely going to stay with their current employers if offered access to further education, relative to those who did not express interest.

Likelihood of Job Retention If Granted Access to Further Education



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

Impact of Improving Skills on Job Satisfaction by Interest in Continued Education



Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501



What types of support resources would encourage caregivers to stay with their current employers?

Previous findings suggest that providing access to further education or training increases the likelihood of retention. In addition, we asked direct care workers what other benefits would influence their decision to stay. Not surprisingly, higher wages and/or bonuses (27%) and offering better benefits (18%) ranked highest on the list. Other notable benefits include job promotions or leadership opportunities and flexible scheduling, each at 14%.

Table 3. Classification of resources that would encourage caregivers to stay with current employers

Likelihood to Stay With Current Employer If Offered	Percent
Higher wages and/or bonuses	27%
Better benefits	18%
Job promotions or leadership opportunities	14%
Flexible scheduling	14%
Better or more specialized job training	10%
Support to earn a degree	9%
At least 35 to 40 hours of work per week	8%

Source: Education Pathways for Caregivers: An Untapped Opportunity for Employers Survey, N=1,501

Initially, caregivers identified the high cost of education as a primary obstacle to continuing education. As such, it makes sense that higher wages and/or bonuses and better job benefits ranked as the top two options to encourage caregivers to pursue further education. Potentially, higher wages and/or better benefits could reduce the cost of education and training. And, when direct care workers gain access to further education, job satisfaction goes up and job retention increases.



Conclusion

To deliver quality healthcare, education is rapidly becoming a new health intervention as healthcare moves into home and community-based organizations. At the same time, the direct care workforce is facing a massive hiring crisis to reach the levels needed—potentially as many as 7.4M new workers by 2029, according to PHI research.

It is clear from this research that caregivers are highly interested in continuing their education and pursuing upskilling opportunities, even in the face of significant barriers. Furthermore, the data suggests that employers who offer these opportunities are more attractive to job candidates and more likely to retain workers.

The good news is that the majority of caregivers who aspire to continue their education plan to remain in the healthcare field. This means employers have an opportunity to make an incredible impact by enabling access to educational opportunities for caregivers. Providing these opportunities will both attract more new entrants to the caregiving industry now, and build a pipeline of future CNAs, nurses, and other critical healthcare professionals for the future.

The data provides a clear roadmap for agencies to better engage their workforce. Agencies must begin a discussion with their caregivers on the types of ongoing education they would like and how to break through the collective roadblocks they face. Agencies who take these steps will be seen as employers of choice and will have the advantage of a highly satisfied, highly motivated workforce working to deliver high-quality care in the home.

The time to act is now.

Survey Methodology

The survey was administered to 1,500 self-identified direct care professionals during August and September 2021. The focus of the survey was to engage caregivers who are actively working in a care setting, and currently employed through an agency. Direct care professionals were invited to participate in a survey via an email, which contained a link to the survey. Participants were enrolled in a raffle for five \$100 gift cards as an incentive for completing the survey. The analysis was conducted by the CareAcademy research team in collaboration with a senior statistical consultant.



Special Thanks

Thank you to the CareAcademy Advisory Board for their support in the design and execution of the survey. Thank you to SNHU for their ongoing partnership in the CAREer Path Initiative. Thank you to Edwin Ndum, senior statistical consultant, for his collaboration on the development of this report. Finally, a big thank you to all of the caregivers who participated in the survey—this has been an incredibly challenging 18 months, and we appreciate all that you do to support your clients.

About the Author

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CareAcademy

Jessica oversees the design and implementation of CareAcademy's processes for measuring caregiver and care recipient outcomes. As an experienced long-term care researcher, she is passionate about linking better quality care and care experiences for older adults to the social supports that lend them and their families the support needed to allow them to better age-in-place.

Prior to CareAcademy, Jessica worked for RTI International, an independent, nonprofit institute that provides research, development, and technical services to government and commercial clients worldwide. Notably, she was an assistant project manager and analyst for the evaluation of a CMS nursing facility initiative focused on capacity-building interventions to reduce avoidable hospitalizations—a model that impacted residents and staff in over 250 facilities across eight states.

Jessica has co-authored publications with senior researchers who have more than 20 years of experience in long-term care and health-services research concerning older populations.

She holds an undergraduate degree in math and political science from Emory University and is experienced in qualitative and quantitative research methods.



CAREer Path Initiative

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About the CAREer Path Initiative

A recent PHI study has indicated that as many as 7.4 million new care workers will be needed by 2029 to meet the growing demand for care workers in home care. The CAREer Path Initiative seeks to bring together key industry participants to create an accelerated pathway to recruit new entrants to the direct care profession, provide ongoing career opportunities, and create meaningful growth. To support this effort, CareAcademy is committed to developing a credentialing ecosystem to enable direct care workers to earn college-level credits for their training and providing upskilling pathways for them to achieve their learning objectives. The company has partnered with Southern New Hampshire University as its first education partner enabling direct care workers to earn credits toward a degree from SNHU for their regular training conducted within the CareAcademy platform. This first-of-its-kind higher-education partnership opens up new doors for direct care workers to advance their career development by offering new educational pathways based on experience and learning.

To learn more, visit www.careacademy.com/CAREerpath.



About CareAcademy



CareAcademy provides high-quality, state-approved caregiver training for home care agencies that increases caregiver knowledge. Caregivers love to complete all of their needed training from an easy-to-use, mobile-friendly platform designed around their style of learning. Home care agencies know their caregivers are current with their training requirements and are able to manage their state specific compliance needs.

Learn more at www.careacademy.com

