

Exploring the indispensable role of home health aides in the era of COVID-19 and beyond

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Home health aides are indispensable for older adults wishing to remain in their homes who are unable to care for themselves and lack family or

friends who can help them. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, home health aides have been serving as older adults' lifelines to the outside world and as "boots on the ground," providing essential medical assistance.

Despite their vital role, [home](#) health aides are vastly undervalued by the U.S. healthcare system, write Regenstrief Institute and Indiana University School of Medicine faculty member Jennifer Carnahan, M.D., MPH, M.A., and Lynn D'Cruz, P.T., MPA, of the School of Health and Human Sciences at IUPUI and Kathryn M. Denson, M.D., of the Medical College of Wisconsin and the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center, in an editorial calling for changes in the U.S. healthcare system.

"During the pandemic, home health aides, at significant health risks to themselves and their families, have often been the only one visiting a homebound older adult," said Dr. Carnahan, corresponding and senior author. "We must recognize the importance of the role these typically underpaid and untrained individuals play in enabling older adults to remain in the familiarity of home and we must make changes in the healthcare system to support and invest in these essential workers."

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median salary of a home health aide in the U.S. is \$13.02 per hour, often without benefits. The editorial notes that most home health aides identify as female and the majority are Black, Latina or Asian.

Integrating home health aides into an older adult's healthcare team could yield significant benefits, according to Dr. Carnahan, a researcher specializing in aging and a geriatrician who often sees patients requiring home health aide assistance. She and her colleagues write that without a strong support system "...we can expect inadequately supported older adults to continue to cycle through illness, repeated unnecessary

hospitalizations, and potentially unwanted nursing home admissions."

The editorial, "Home Health Aides in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond," concludes, "Recognizing, supporting, and appropriately compensating the individuals working as home health aides will have a positive ripple effect through [older adults](#) and their families, the [health care system](#), and communities as a whole. Let's move forward in support."

The article was published in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*.

More information: Lynn D'Cruz et al, Home Health Aides in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond, *Journal of General Internal Medicine* (2022). [DOI: 10.1007/s11606-022-07430-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-022-07430-7)

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