

Letter to the editor: Caregivers need care, too

Written by Gallupsun Staff
Friday, 10 September 2021 04:38



As the Navajo Nation recovers from COVID-19, we must ask ourselves a simple question: how do we make sure everyone benefits from the recovery?

Home care workers provide essential services to older adults and people with disabilities. Yet, they struggle to earn a living – a result of longstanding inequities of women and persons of color. Caregivers are not just an important part of Arizona's aging population. Without caregivers, much of the rest of the economy would not even function. Arizona is also an aging state as we all know – like other states, the 65+ population increased by 51 percent between 2008-2018.

And nationwide, in the decade from 2018 to 2028, all our states will have to fill an estimated 4.7 million home care jobs, including more than one million NEW caregiving jobs.

BUT, the home care industry is plagued with worker shortages and high turnover rates in Arizona and elsewhere. Median hourly wage for home care workers is \$11.80 or \$15,000 annually. Adjusted for inflation, the median wage for home care workers actually declined 8.7 percent between 2009-2018! Almost half of all home care workers live at 200 percent of the Federal poverty level.

It is no wonder that - at present - these are poor-quality jobs. Right now, we have a once-in-a-lifetime solution to the problem of recognizing Arizona's home care workers. The

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Better Jobs, Better Care Act, a \$400 billion investment proposed in Congress, would create nearly 14,000 new care jobs, just in Arizona. As many as 14,000 new care workers spending wages in the economy would create 53,000 new jobs overall!

People of the Navajo Nation greatly need a solution to care and the cost of care for elders and those with disabilities. This is the time our country might finally recognize that what works on the Navajo Nation could also work for the nation.

Valerie Tsosie

Navajo caregiver

Member; NM Caregivers in Action

The New Mexico Caregivers Coalition has been providing training and advocacy to caregivers in New Mexico since 2009. The organization opened itself to membership in the last year. It currently has 88 members. Approximately 25 percent of them live and/or provide direct health care services on the Navajo Nation including New Mexico and Arizona.

NM Caregivers in Action is a 501 (c)(6) organization created to serve New Mexico's frontline healthcare workers. These include Personal Care Assistants, Home Health Aides, Homemakers, Direct Support professionals, Community Health Workers and

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Representatives and related occupations. For more information, visit nmcareaction.org.