



Oregon

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ORS 410.604 Legislative Report to the Legislative Assembly

Identifying and Reducing Barriers for Homecare and Personal Support Worker Enrollment and Certification for Persons Who Are Immigrants or Refugees

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Background

Senate Bill 855, passed during the 2019 legislative session, directs the Oregon Home Care Commission (OHCC) as a professional licensing board to study how persons who are immigrants or refugees are enrolled as homecare or personal support workers. OHCC is charged with developing and implementing methods to reduce barriers to enrollment for applicants who may be immigrants or refugees.

Before addressing specific barriers and strategies to reduce barriers, it is important to understand the Commission's role in supporting homecare and personal support workers of all language abilities, the role of the homecare workforce, and the current enrollment process.

Oregon Home Care Commission

In November 2000, the citizens of Oregon voted to pass Ballot Measure 99 to amend the Oregon Constitution and create the Oregon Home Care Commission. The Commission consists of nine members appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. OHCC is responsible to:

- Ensure the high quality of homecare services provided to older adults and people with disabilities across the lifespan by homecare and personal support workers paid with public funds;
- Provide routine, emergency, and respite referrals of qualified homecare and personal support workers to older adults and people with disabilities across the lifespan who receive services in-home and in the community paid with public funds;
- Provide training opportunities for homecare and personal support workers;

- Provide training opportunities for older adults and people with disabilities across the lifespan who hire homecare and personal support workers;
- Establish homecare and personal support worker qualifications; and
- Establish and maintain a registry of qualified homecare and personal support workers.

The role of homecare and personal support workers

Homecare workers provide services and supports to older adults and adults with disabilities who receive services in-home and in the community paid with public funds. Personal support workers provide services and supports to individuals across the lifespan who experience intellectual/developmental disabilities and receive public funded services in their homes and communities. Personal support workers also provide services and supports to adults experiencing a mental illness who receive public funded in-home services.

Services and supports range from assistance with personal care and household tasks to skill building and community inclusion.

Current enrollment process

Homecare and personal support worker enrollment standards are similar—one must complete an application and enrollment agreement, pass background and abuse record checks, and prove they can legally work in the United States, and attend a mandatory orientation.

Individuals who are interested in providing services and supports to older adults and adults with physical disabilities begin the homecare worker enrollment process at the local Aging and People with Disabilities or Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities office.

Individuals who are interested in providing services and supports to children and adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities begin the personal support worker enrollment process at the local Support Services Brokerage, Community Developmental Disabilities Program (CDDP), or Children's Intensive In-Home Services Program office.

Individuals who are interested in providing services and supports to adults experiencing a mental illness begin the personal support worker enrollment process at a Community Mental Health Program office and are approved through the Health Systems Division with the Oregon Health Authority.

Individuals may choose to enroll to provide services and supports to all populations mentioned above, but each program has its own enrollment process and individuals must apply and pass a background check for each program.

Homecare and personal support worker certifications offered by the Oregon Home Care Commission

Once an individual enrolls as a homecare or personal support worker, they can earn various certifications through the Commission:

- Professional Development Certification
- Enhanced Homecare Worker Certification
- Enhanced Personal Support Worker Certification
- Exceptional Personal Support Worker Certification
- Community Health Worker Certification
- Ventilator Dependent Quadriplegia Certification
- CPR and First Aid Certification

Each certification requires the completion of required trainings, passing knowledge assessments, and completing continuing education requirements on an on-going basis. These certifications provide opportunities for professional development and may lead to an increased hourly wage rate.

Identifying barriers

In partnership with stakeholders, OHCC identified and categorized barriers to enrollment into the homecare workforce and earning certifications offered by the Commission for people who are immigrants or refugees. Identified barriers include:

1. Access to information—individuals may not know where and how to apply to join the workforce. Websites tend to be primarily in English and information can be challenging to find. In addition, some individuals may not be literate in their preferred language. Individuals who join the homecare workforce may not know the professional career options and certifications available to them through the Commission, especially if there is a lack of outreach or information available in their preferred language.
2. Access to resources— Individuals may not have access to the internet, which is often where individuals find information about joining the workforce. Individuals may not have access to professional interpreter services and must find their own solutions to receive information in their preferred language. This includes relying

on family, friends, and children to interpret complex information. In addition, they may not know how to access and use the Commission's Registry to find work since the tool is displayed in English and is web-based. Although not exclusive to those who are immigrants or refugees, there may be a lack of reliable transportation or childcare that prevents individuals from accessing information or applying to join the workforce during office hours or attending scheduled trainings.

3. Cultural considerations—Communities representing immigrants and refugees may be resistant to assistance because of cultural or family norms. Homecare services may be viewed a familial responsibility, not necessarily a profession, discouraging individuals from enrolling as workers. Cultural values may affect training and worker practices (e.g. age, gender role of the trainer or person needing assistance, physical touch, religious holidays, prayer times, etc.). Immigrants and refugees may also be fearful of the current political climate, government involvement, immigration issues, or being negatively treated based on their ethnic or religious background.

Strategies currently used by the Commission to reduce barriers to enrollment and certification for individuals who are immigrants or refugees

Workforce recruitment events

The Oregon Home Care Commission, in partnership with stakeholders around the state, developed a workforce development strategic plan in June of 2017 with the goal of attracting and retaining a committed and diverse workforce to serve older adults and people of all ages with disabilities. One strategy the Commission has used to accomplish this by offering recruitment events in partnership with community organizations that support individuals who are immigrants or refugees.

The purpose of workforce recruitment events is to reduce barriers for individuals interested in joining the homecare workforce by providing an onsite orientation and assistance with the enrollment process. This provides an opportunity for individuals to apply to be homecare and personal support workers, attend mandatory orientation, and complete all enrollment documents in one location.

In partnership with the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), targeted workforce recruitment events have been held in Portland and Ontario specifically for immigrants or refugee communities. Outreach, enrollment, and training materials were available in a variety of languages to meet the specific language needs of those in attendance. Interpreters were also provided. Participants

appreciated receiving help in their preferred language and found the onsite help and orientation useful for finding information, understanding the enrollment process, and learning and connecting from peers.

Translated materials and interpreter services

The Commission offers a free, robust training program for homecare and personal support workers across the state. In addition to English, many of the courses and training materials are offered in Spanish, Russian, Arabic, and Somali, and will soon be offered in Vietnamese. The Commission accommodates requests for interpreters in an individual's preferred language for all courses and actively recruits multilingual trainers. Multilingual trainers provide outreach to homecare and personal support workers whose primary language is not English to encourage attendance.

The Commission has created a training cohort model to assist immigrants and refugees earn various certifications offered by the Commission. This provides individuals the opportunity to attend all the required courses together. Trainers are often from the same communities as attendees and have a similar background. Somali, Mai-Mai, Arabic, and Russian speakers in the Portland area have participated in the cohort model to earn their Professional Development Certification. Plans are currently underway to offer a cohort for Somali speakers to earn their Enhanced Worker Certification. Both certifications provide workers with higher wages. Professional Development Certification is .50 cents increase for every hour worked and Enhanced Certification is one dollar more for every hour when working for a consumer with enhanced service needs.

The Commission arranges and pays for interpreter services for homecare and personal support worker orientations. Homecare worker orientations are provided by Aging and People with Disabilities or Area Agency on Aging offices across the state. Personal support worker orientations are provided by trainers contracted by the Commission.

Adoption of Oregon Administrative Rules

The Oregon Home Care Commission has adopted chapter 418, division 020 Oregon Administrative Rules that require orientation and trainings to be culturally-appropriate for workers of all language abilities, accessible to workers in their preferred language, and utilize interpreter services when requested.

Strategies to reduce barriers to enrollment and certification for individuals who are immigrants or refugees

1. Collect data to inform outreach, marketing, and training development strategies.
2. Conduct focused outreach and culturally appropriate marketing with easily identifiable branding.
3. Continue to strengthen relationships with existing community partners.
4. Cultivate new community partnerships.
5. Build relationships with key community leaders and influencers in the immigrant and refugee communities.
6. Actively engage with the immigrant and refugee communities and have a presence at community events.
7. Continue to offer workforce recruitment events.
8. Develop alternate ways to share information about the workforce that do not rely on written materials, such as video presentations in different languages.
9. Utilize regionally-based media, such as radio programming and community newspapers available in other languages.
10. Continue to offer the training cohort model for individuals whose primary language is not English and expand the cohort model statewide based on interest from refugee and immigrant communities.
11. Provide translated information on the Commission's websites with hyperlinks to translated information.
12. Publish the training newsletter with translated information on the front-page directing individuals where to find information in their preferred language.
13. Research the feasibility of expanding Commission trainings to include English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and citizenship classes to draw people to the workforce and assist those already in the workforce to further develop their skills and knowledge base.
14. Be mindful when scheduling trainings and recruitment events as to not conflict with individuals' religious practices or holiday observances.
15. Partner with Aging and People with Disabilities, the Office of Developmental Disabilities Services, and the Health Systems Division with the Oregon Health Authority to ensure enrollment materials and communications are available in multiple languages.
16. Expand access to interpreter services at Support Services Brokerages, Community Developmental Disabilities offices, and Community Mental Health Program offices that enroll personal support workers.
17. Encourage trainers contracted with the Commission who speak languages other than English to recruit other trainers and potential workers from immigrant and refugee communities.

18. Engage immigrant and refugee communities to assist in educating new immigrants and refugees about homecare opportunities and resources available through the Commission.
19. Simplify information about joining the workforce online and in print.
20. Research the feasibility of the Commission's registry being displayed in multiple languages.

Plan of action

The Commission will engage its existing Workforce Development Committee to inventory resources, prioritize strategies and create a project plan for implementation. The committee is a regularly occurring meeting. Membership includes a wide variety of stakeholders invested in workforce development, including consumers of in-home services, homecare and personal support workers, the union representing the homecare workforce (SEIU, Local 503), community organizations, and governmental agencies.