
GSA On Aging: GSA Policy Profile Podcast
Caring for Tomorrow Sustaining a Healthy Eldercare Workforce
Transcript



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Patricia D'Antonio:

Hello. Thank you for joining this Policy Profiles podcast installment, which will examine the current policy landscape in supporting those in the workforce, caring for older people. This is a timely topic because this month is Careers in Aging Month, which I'll discuss a little bit later. This is Trish de Antonio, the Vice President of Policy and Professional Affairs for the Gerontological Society of America. Joining us for our discussion today is Amy York, the Executive Director of the Elder Care Workforce Alliance.

Amy York:

Hi, Trish.

Patricia:

GSA is a convener of the Alliance, along with the American Geriatrics Society. We're delighted that GSA's past president, Dr. Michelle Saunders, serves as a co-chair for the Eldercare Workforce Alliance. And Amy, I'm so glad that you could be here with us today. You've been such a great colleague and supporter of GSA for many years.

Amy:

Thanks so much for having me.

Patricia:

Just a little bit about Amy. Amy serves as the Executive Director for the Eldercare Workforce Alliance. In her role, she collaborates with member organizations in volunteer leadership to direct the policy and communication efforts of the Alliance. She looks for the practical solutions to expand the elder care workforce. Amy joined the alliance from the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, where she advocated on a wide range of issues, including Medicaid, Medicare, caregiving, the Older Americans Act, and other issues surrounding aging. Prior to joining the Federation, Amy served in legislative and political capacities for two national labor unions. Throughout her professional career, she has demonstrated an ability to develop robust working relationships with federal policymakers, and a strong understanding of how to advance a policy agenda through the legislative and regulatory process. Amy serves on the boards of the Collaborative Action Team, training for Community Health, older Adult Network, or Catch On, and the UCSF Health Workforce Research Center on Long-Term Care. Amy I'm just so excited that we're going to be able to sit down and chat today. Thank you so much for being here.

Amy:

Sure. Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be here, too.

Patricia:

So, before we dive in, I just wanted to highlight Careers in Aging Month. Each March, GSA hosts Careers in Aging Month to raise awareness about the diverse careers available in the field of aging businesses, clinics, universities, and organizations worldwide unite to showcase the incredible career possibilities in aging. As populations age and life expectancy increases,

the demand for professionals in aging-related fields is growing rapidly. Organizations worldwide recognize the diverse career paths available in aging, from businesses to healthcare providers. Careers in Aging Month is all about raising awareness and highlighting the diverse opportunities in this dynamic field. Our careers in aging month partners and supporters include the American Healthcare Association, the National Center for Assisted Living, Argento, the Erickson School of Aging Studies at the University of Maryland's Baltimore County, HOSA Wisconsin, LeadingAge, LeadingAge Kansas, the National Center to Reframe Aging and Northwood Technical College.

Let's harness the power of promotion to eliminate the pathways to success in aging careers. With this annual event, together, we can inspire, educate, and empower the next generation of change-makers in this vital field. You can learn more about Careers in Aging Month at Geron.org. Click Careers and Learning on the top of the website, and we'll also include the link in our show notes.

So, Amy, let's jump in as we celebrate Careers in Aging Month to discuss the Eldercare Workforce Alliance. Can you tell us a little bit about the Alliance and its goals and objectives, and maybe talk a little bit about some of the recent policies the Alliance has supported, and what policies regarding the elder care workforce do you see Congress considering this session?

Amy:

Thanks, Trish. So the Eldercare Workforce Alliance was started now in 2009, following the 2008 Institute of Medicine Report, Retooling for an Aging America: Building the Healthcare Workforce. And unfortunately, that report said we were very under-prepared to address the needs of all of us as we age, especially the baby boomer population and the increased aging population. So in response, formed this national coalition that includes national organizations that represent consumers, family caregivers, the direct care workforce, and healthcare professionals. And our objective is really to impact policy and as you said look for practical solutions within that policy framework. We have always been an advocate for the geriatrics and gerontological training in whatever kind of legislation has been out there.

Specifically, the Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program and the Geriatric Academic Career Awards are two programs that we have been the lead in terms of policy advocating for these programs. And those programs provide training across the country. And there's currently 42 of the Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program or GWEP. I'll shorten it now. And then there are 26 Geriatric Academic Career Awards or GACAs. And those programs really have a huge bang for their buck. It's a \$48 million program. But they provide training to thousands of primary care workforce, frontline workforce, and a lot of different parts of the workforce in how to care for older adults. And it's such an important part of what the federal government does to help train the workforce.

The other specific bill that we have worked on over the years is called the Direct Care Opportunities Act. This is a bill that's been introduced in the last few Congresses and has

support more and more support every year. And we anticipate that that bill will be introduced again in this Congress. So that's another area where we have really pushed for additional support into that frontline workforce that provides the most hands-on care to all of us as we're aging. And we really are looking to improve wages, really professionalize that workforce with additional training as well. And then it this in this new political environment, protecting the programs that are already there that provide a lot of support for older adults like Medicaid and Medicare are really important. And so, going into this this Congress we're really working with a number of other partners to make sure that those programs remain in place.

Patricia:

And I know Amy, that from our perspective at the Gerontological Society, we've always appreciated how you are looking at a broader view of workforce and, and being able to bring that back to all of us when, you know, there's so many things that we're following being a multidisciplinary professional organization, that your focus there is always very helpful for us for how we consider and how we think about all of us in the workforce and how we reach older people. Right? Especially when you think about the GWEPs and the GACAs, right? The fact that many of us, even in primary care, might not think of ourselves working with older people. And yet when we really start to, you know, to think about that, many of us do work with more older people than we realize, in our interactions and in our work.

So, let me just ask you this. Beyond wages, what innovative strategies or policies could be implemented at the federal level to improve working conditions, professional development opportunities? We talked a little bit about the GWEPs and, and overall value placed on the elder care workforce.

Amy:

So, one of the things that is really important, which I did mention, is training. So, ensuring that that good training is in place is really important for this workforce. And a lot of it is providing just a little bit of money to do some advanced training programs, it is really important. For example, the direct care workforce, in particular, has a number of obstacles to getting increased training. To do a day of training means they have to take off a day of work. If we can provide additional funding so that they don't have to take off a day of work and they can be provided training and still get paid. It is just, you know, an incentive for them to go ahead and get that additional training in things like dementia care and, as well as, you know, other types of diseases and that need some more specialized training. But they can go ahead and get that specialized training and also getting more training in terms of how to, you know, help the people they're caring for to move correctly so that they're avoiding falls. So falls prevention programs, those kinds of things are really, really important to provide to this frontline workforce that is with the with, with older adults daily.

Patricia:

Right. And when we're thinking about that, we're thinking about a workforce, it's pretty broad, right? So yes, many of our members understand this, but for those who might be listening who aren't members, right, there's workforce that are providing services in the

home, workforces that are providing services in different types of settings, whether that be long-term care facilities or hospitals. Those special needs for or specific needs for older people becomes really important, right? And how we can make sure that we're recognizing those needs and providing them?

Tell me, I'm going to switch a little bit here, but as we live longer and healthier lives, right? As we look to gain meaning in our lives, you know, the demand for professionals and aging related fields has grown. What have you seen, and can you discuss some of the diverse career paths available in the aging workforce and some emerging career opportunities?

Amy:

Sure. As you mentioned, settings, I think that's one area where things have really expanded. I think there is a lot more opportunities for home and community-based care. I think, especially after COVID, a lot more people wanted to be in the home and there was a required demand for those services. And, while they're not being met, I would say there is certainly increased opportunities for jobs in that area. And they're really hurting for and, and need more and more people to be in those home and community-based jobs. And that's not just that frontline workforce. Definitely that's one piece of it. You know, I think there's also opportunities for in clinical social work in providing additional supports for those living at home and occupational therapy as well as physical therapy.

There's a lot more of that in the home now. I know personally my mom had all of those services provided in the home in a very rural area in North Carolina. And that was, you know, key to her being able to stay in the home as long as she did. And, and I know that's what, you know, a lot of people want is that home-based care. I think social work is another area where a lot of things are changing in all settings, not just the home setting. I think a lot of social workers are in hospitals and as well as long-term care facilities. There are a few in assisted living but there are certainly care coordinators as well which sometimes social workers serve in that role. And care coordination is another area where a lot of things are growing. I think that there's also opportunities for us as a coalition to shape those roles because they're sort of not really designed in a way that maybe provides the most and best coordinated care that we can. So I think there, that's an opportunity for us moving forward to really address those care coordination needs as we move forward.

Patricia:

Yeah. You raise a really good point related to care coordination needs. And I think sometimes when we find ourselves turn into a, a situation that may arise from an emergency or, you know, we get those phone calls from friends and colleagues who know that we work in aging. And so they're just trying to find that, that resource. It's when it highlights for me the fact that we need to continue to build a better understanding of the care coordination for older people and why those needs are so essential for us to be able to live, as we say, meaningful lives as we age. Right? And so there are ways that we can stay in a home, a home in our homes and being able to connect with the right services and supports helps that. And there's also the time when we need services of a long-term care facility.

And so being able to find that, and to be able to move in and to adjust there and to have the right people that we can contact and advise us on that is so important. And, and get care coordination, good care coordination is just so essential. Yet we still have challenges in getting our policies to support that. And so it's why I know that it's so important for the Eldercare Workforce Force Alliance to be a continuing voice for policymakers in that area. You know, we try to keep these short because we know that our colleagues, their time when they're listening to these we understand that there's other things that they could be doing. And, and I really have come to the end of the questions that I had, but I was wondering, is there any question I didn't ask you that you hoped I would, or anything that you want to add to our conversation today?

Amy:

Well, one of the issues I didn't mention that I think is going to be front and center in the next few years is immigration. And immigration has been a really important component to having a stable workforce that cares for older adults, that frontline workforce for sure, but also the rest of the workforce that cares for older adults many times are from other countries. And, you know, I think it's something that needs to be considered when we're talking about the care in general, but also the care of older adults. And, and I would be remiss if I didn't mention that, and that it should be something that's considered when we're thinking about immigration policy.

Patricia:

And is there anything at this point that we're looking at as the Eldercare Workforce Alliance that you want to highlight in that, in that light or in in other areas that we haven't touched on yet today?

Amy:

There isn't any specific legislation right now that we're looking at. But I think, stay tuned, I think there will be in the future. The other piece of this is, too, that it might not be legislation, it could just be an executive order or something like that, that would be of concern. And we definitely would raise that. Yeah, so one other piece though that I did mention, social work, is that we have supported providing additional provider funding for social work in care coordination, right? But also in mental health, mental and behavioral health. You know, we don't have enough providers in that space and we should be using all the expertise that we have. And right now Medicare doesn't pay for social work to do that in most cases.

Patricia:

And I know that through the work with the Eldercare Workforce Alliance, GSA has signed on and, supported in recent years, bills that were introduced in Congress to support that. I would say to those of you who are listening, we have information on our website about that, as does the Eldercare Workforce Alliance. And so, Amy, I don't know if you want to mention your web address, but we'll certainly have that linked in our show notes today.

Amy:

It's pretty easy. Eldercareworkforce.org.

Patricia:

There you go, Eldercareworkforce.org. That makes it easy to remember. You know, I want to thank you for joining us today. You know, we do seek to highlight the importance of not only the eldercare workforce, but the policies that help support caregivers as they allow more meaningful lives as we age. We appreciate your time. Thank you. And again, want to wish everyone a Happy Careers in Aging Month. Amy, any other closing thoughts or closing comments?

Amy:

Thank you for mentioning caregivers. That is definitely an area where we have been active and they're an important part of the care that's provided to older adults. And even though many are not paid, they're really essential to providing care in this country. So, whatever ways that we can support caregivers. And actually, there have been a number of pieces of legislation around that that have been introduced in this Congress already to support family caregivers and we have supported those bills. So, thank you for raising that. And that's definitely an area where EWA has been engaged.

Patricia:

Certainly, we can put links to those bills in the show notes. If you want to send us anything for our show notes, we can put links to those in our show notes for this podcast. Once again, I want to thank our listeners. I want to thank Amy York from the Eldercare Workforce Alliance for joining us today. And we appreciate all of you, our listeners again, happy Careers in Aging Month and follow GSA's latest advocacy activities at geron.org/advocacy and keep watching GSA Enrich for more podcasts. Thanks a lot and see you on our next podcast.

Show Notes

- [GSA's Careers in Aging Month](#)
- [Eldercare Workforce Alliance](#)
- [Lifespan Respite Care Reauthorization Act, S. 830 introduced on the Senate and House bill to be introduced soon](#)
- Alleviating Barriers for Caregivers (ABC) Act to be reintroduced soon (Bill from the last congress is available [here](#))
- Family Caregiver Awareness, Resources, and Education (CARE) Partnerships Act (language [here](#)) to be introduced soon