

# Thinking About a Career in Caring?

*This Information Can Help You Decide*



## HOW CAN THIS WEBPAGE AND VIDEO BENEFIT YOU?

Often referred to as the “Toughest Job You’ll Ever Love,” the direct care profession (DCP) is not for everyone but for those who enter the field out of a genuine desire to help others, it is one of the most gratifying jobs to be found.

The career is physically and mentally demanding and often requires lifting and bending. As one who works in direct care puts it...“you need to have a strong heart, strong stomach, and strong back!”

The purpose of this webpage, video, brochure, and other resources is to provide you with a glimpse of what becoming a Direct Care Professional (DCP) involves.

## WHAT IS THE JOB OF A DIRECT CARE PROFESSIONAL?

### **Direct Care Professionals (DCPs) Go By Many Titles**

Direct Care Professional (DCP) is a new term used to describe those who work in direct care. They are known by many titles, for example, certified nursing assistant; home care and home health aide; personal care attendant; rehabilitation, medication aide, and hospice aide; universal worker; behavioral support specialist; caregiver; and direct support professional.

### **Direct Care Professionals Are in High Demand**

Iowa has approximately 75,000 Direct Care Professionals (DCPs) and needs at least 95,000 direct care professionals by 2020.

### **Who are Direct Care Professionals (DCPs)?**

Direct Care Professionals (DCPs) provide about 80% of the hands-on care and support for Iowans of all ages in many different locations. They serve children and adults with disabilities; those with mental illness, Alzheimer’s disease, or brain injury; those with long term illness such as multiple sclerosis; those recovering from acute illness, surgery, or injury; frail older Iowans; and those at the end of life.

## What is the Daily Work of Direct Care Professionals (DCPs)?

Direct Care Professionals (DCPs) are often the professional who is closest to the individual and their family. Depending upon where they work, they may assist with some of the most important and personal daily tasks, such as bathing; dressing; preparing meals; eating; grooming; using the toilet; providing transportation to appointments and events; running errands and shopping; monitoring medications and vital signs; assisting with physical and psychological rehabilitation; managing behaviors; and offering care and comfort through end-of-life.

DCPs who serve people with disabilities may help them develop life skills such as personal care, job coaching, nutritional planning, employment skills, and financial management.

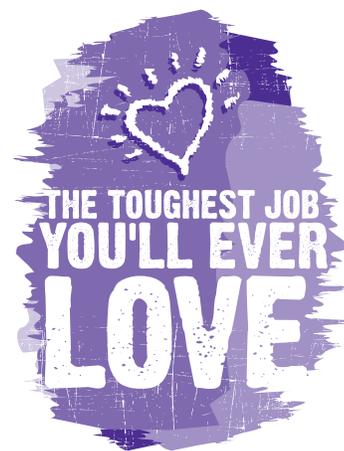
## Where Do Direct Care Professionals (DCPs) Work?

Direct Care Professionals (DCPs) provide services in peoples' homes, assisted living and nursing facilities, adult day centers, hospitals, group homes, residential facilities for people with disabilities, hospices, and non-medical senior services. Some find opportunities to work privately for a family or individual needing support.

## DIRECT CARE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

The educational opportunities for those entering the field of direct care vary. Below are some options that may be available to you. There have efforts on the part of the State, those who work in the field of direct care, employers, and others to create more standardized and portable education. There are also efforts underway to create opportunities to specialize in Alzheimer's disease, oral care, autism, and other areas.

- *Prepare to Care* is a new State-approved comprehensive training package taught by specifically trained instructors. The training prepares individuals to work in a variety of locations. The curriculum includes introductory and advanced training modules, and testing is done at a community college. Go to <http://iowadirectcare.wikispaces.com> for more information on the career pathways, training module descriptions, trained instructors, and advanced certificate exams.
- Some public health and other home care agencies provide training for Home Care/Health Aide. They may also accept completion of the State-approved *Prepare to Care* training modules for eligibility to work in their agency.
- If you're still in high school, ask your guidance counselor if your school offers Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training.
- All Iowa Community Colleges offer Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training. To find the contact information for the community college nearest you, click on <http://www.iacct.com/Pages/colleges.aspx>. This will take you to the Iowa Association of Community College Trustees (IACCT) website and a map of Iowa's community colleges and contact information.
- Some hospitals have health colleges that offer Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training. Contact your local hospital or health care facility.
- Some nursing homes offer Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training for people they are going to hire. Contact your local nursing home to find out if they offer CNA training.
- Some Hospice employers provide hospice aide training that, in some instances, is also a recognized national credential.
- Agencies providing services to individuals with intellectual disabilities often provide general and specialized training to Direct Care Professionals after hire.
- Job Corps Centers are a federally funded job training program, age 16 to 24. Home Health and Certified Nursing Assistant training may be provided for those who financially qualify. There are two sites in Iowa (Ottumwa and Denison) Visit their websites to learn more: <http://ottumwa.jobcorps.gov> or <http://denison.jobcorps.gov>



### **Will I be Certified or Licensed as a Direct Care Professional?**

Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) are certified after passing the written and skills exams required by the State of Iowa.

The State-approved *Prepare to Care* curriculum offers advanced training certificates of completion after taking an advanced training exam at a participating community college.



## **DIRECT CARE PROFESSIONAL'S WAGES**

### **What is the Average Wage for Direct Care Professionals?**

In 2010, the average Iowa Direct Care Professional's hourly wage was \$11.68.

Non-profit employers paid a higher average hourly wage (\$12.14) than for-profit employers (\$11.19).

(Source: 2010 Iowa Direct Care Worker Wage and Benefit Report, conducted by the Iowa Child and Family Policy Center.

Visit the links below for the full report or the key findings: <http://www.iowacaregivers.org/uploads/pdf/Wage.Benefit.Survey.FINAL.1.2011.pdf> <http://www.iowacaregivers.org/uploads/pdf/Wage.Benefit.KeyFindings.2.6.11.FINAL.pdf>

### **Help Paying for Your Training**

Contact your local Iowa Workforce Development Office or community college to find out if you might be eligible for financial assistance for Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training. Also ask about Pell grants or any scholarship opportunities. Click on this link to locate the nearest Iowa Workforce Development Office [www.iowaworkforce.org](http://www.iowaworkforce.org) or this link to find a community college in your area <http://www.iacct.com/Pages/colleges.aspx>.

## **FINDING THE EMPLOYER WHO'S RIGHT FOR YOU**

### **Types of Employers: Not-for-Profit - For-Profit - Governmental**

For-profit employers are owned by a for-profit company or individual. As the name suggests, for-profit employers strive to make a profit by providing services. Not-for-profit employers are organizations that were often started by churches, faith based organizations, or other groups. They do not have owners or stockholders. Instead, they are usually governed by a volunteer board of directors comprised of community members.

There are also a number of governmental agencies or facilities that employ Direct Care Professionals (DCPs). Examples are Veterans' Hospitals, Homes, and state mental health institutions. There are public health agencies in most counties in Iowa that employ home health or home care aides.

### **Check Out the Employer's Reputation**

Before you apply, ask others in your community whose opinion you respect for their impression of the organization. Also, ask current and former employees what it is like to work there. The State regulates most health and long term care providers and there are websites that you can visit to check on the standing or reputation of a potential employer.



## Questions to Ask Potential Employers

Based on the Iowa CareGivers survey of Direct Care Professionals, these are some of the questions that can help you decide if an employer is right for you.

- Do you include Direct Care Professionals in care planning meetings?
- It's important to me to give good care and services to the individuals assigned to me. On average, how many individuals will I be assigned? Will I be able to provide them the care and services they want and need?
- It's important to me to get my assignments done in the time allotted. How often will I be expected to cover the work of others in addition to my own work due to short staffing?
- Will I be expected to work on my scheduled days off?
- Please tell me what you have in place to help protect your employees' health and safety, for example, back safety when lifting.
- What kind of educational or advancement opportunities do you offer (mentoring or attendance at outside educational conferences such as Iowa CareGivers, community college updates, Alzheimer's Association, Brain Injury and other conferences.)



## OTHER THINGS YOU MIGHT WANT TO KNOW

### Background Check

Because Direct Care Professional is a position of trust, most employers or the state requires those who are employed in the field to have a criminal background check. This means you may have to wait until the background check is completed to start your new job.

## IS A CAREER IN CARING RIGHT FOR YOU?

### Here's What Those Already in the Direct Care Profession Want You to Know

"It's physically and mentally hard and requires stamina..."	"BUT helping people accomplish a goal or stay independent is very satisfying."
"It can be challenging to get assigned work done in the allotted time due to short staffing and the number of people you serve."	"BUT it is NEVER dull for those who like a challenge and you are there at key moments in the lives of those you serve."
"The pay isn't yet equal to the demands of the work ..."	"BUT appreciation from the persons served is rewarding."
"You may have to clean body wastes and fluids, and perform other unpleasant tasks..."	"BUT having the capacity and willingness to handle those tasks in a way that preserves the dignity of those served, you'll know that the rewards come from within you."
"Depending on where you work, there can be a lack of appreciation for how demanding the work is from persons served, supervisors, families of the persons served, and society in general..."	"BUT if you are motivated and gratified by making a difference in the lives of those you serve...this could be the right career choice for you."
"Some people have difficult behavior problems that cause them to be combative..."	"BUT they need you and depend on you."
"It is difficult grieving the loss of someone you've provided care and support..."	BUT having known them and forming that bond enriches your life."

A "career in caring" comes with many challenges, but also many rewards. It's not a career for the faint of heart. It's "heart work" and hard work. It's mentally, physically, and emotionally demanding work. But, for those who are up to the challenge, it can be, "the toughest job you'll ever love!" It can also be one of the most rewarding.

