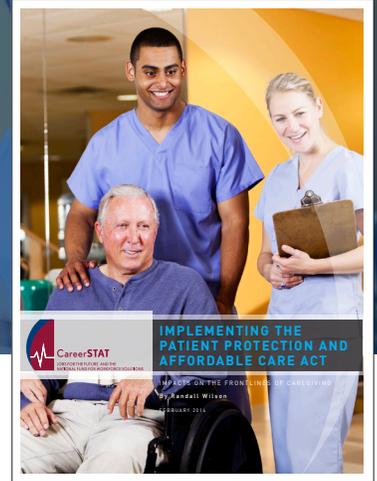


IMPLEMENTING THE PATIENT PROTECTION AND AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

IMPACTS ON THE FRONTLINES OF CAREGIVING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The National Fund for Workforce Solutions and its implementation partner, Jobs for the Future, have conducted research examining the impact of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) on the frontline health care workforce as part of CareerSTAT, an initiative to document and endorse the business case for investments in frontline hospital workers based on health care leader recommendations. This report includes reviews of current literature and data sources, as well as interviews with executives and practitioners in hospitals, primary care clinics, and long-term care institutions.

This report is intended to assist health care leaders, policymakers, and practitioners in gaining a greater understanding of the workforce implications of the ACA in general and, in particular, for frontline workers: the number; the skills needed; and changes in job duties and career paths that result from the ACA.

With the introduction of the ACA, the role of frontline workers will need to be reevaluated and refined, which calls for resources to be invested in this work to ensure ACA goals are met. Frontline workers include medical assistants, patient intake coordinators, medical coders, dietary staff, and many more.

The ACA is designed to transform health care by extending coverage to the uninsured, while measuring the patient experience, lowering health care costs, and creating better health outcomes. To hold down costs and improve the quality of care, the ACA changes the way hospitals and other health care providers are paid for services, while holding them to new performance standards. It supports models such as Accountable Care Organizations and Patient-Centered Medical Homes, to aid in coordinating care for an individual patient across multiple settings.

The ACA is impacting the delivery of health care in other ways, including an emphasis on primary care over hospital-based care. This means greater emphasis on the use of primary care providers and community health centers and a concerted focus on avoiding readmissions, and promoting prevention and wellness. Most organizations have focused on the organizational,

strategic, and patient implications of the ACA, but to date, many of them have yet to fully plan for the impact of the ACA on frontline and other workers.

Recently, due to the downturn in the economy, reduced turnover, and delayed retirements, the need for workforce development to fill vacancies and retain staff has lessened.

Yet organizations have still focused resources on developing workers who require a college degree, including doctors, nurses, physician assistants, and allied health professionals, with too few focusing attention on the need to prepare frontline workers for higher performance and skill levels.

The volume of workers needed to meet new patient demand, at the frontlines and higher levels, is not yet fully clear, nor is the specific composition of the workforce needed to implement the ACA. While estimates vary as to supply and demand for physicians and support and technical staff, hospitals contributing to this report did not expect to add staff. However, others say that they are actively hiring for new and replacement positions in underserved communities and high-growth areas in the South and Mountain West regions, where older Americans tend to migrate. More and better data are needed to plan for the skills and workforce needed under the ACA.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the fastest growing health care occupations represent a mix of health care support jobs. These include personal care and home health aides—required for a rapidly aging population—and other roles, including physical therapy assistants, diagnostic medical sonographers, and dental hygienists. Job growth will concentrate in primary care settings, including physicians’ offices and outpatient care centers.

The aims of the ACA—higher-quality health care at a lower cost—will require higher skill and performance levels for all staff. Essential skills include teamwork, effective communication, problem solving, critical thinking, and technology skills.

Skill needs will shift based on the patient care setting. The ACA is accelerating the need for new or enhanced frontline roles in order to implement new models of delivering care. For example, direct care providers need a deeper understanding of patients with complex physical and behavioral needs; observational skills to ensure patient safety and inform care teams of patient changes; and strong interpersonal skills. Other roles that are evolving include health coaches, educators, care coordinators, patient navigators, care transition managers, and case managers. These roles are not yet well defined or standardized, and in some cases are assumed by existing staff as a part of their regular duties.

Implementing the ACA offers a strategic opportunity to improve patient care and health while improving the jobs and career opportunities of frontline workers. The opportunities extend to new employment options and skill enhancement; expanded job responsibilities in direct care, administration, and technical support; increased support for investment in talent development and career mobility; and enhanced respect and engagement of this workforce. Serious challenges exist, including: cost constraints, which could limit talent development programs and new hires; insufficient resources to finance new care models and responsibilities; limited educational capacity of smaller providers in outpatient and clinical settings; erosion of career paths, such as from nurse assistant to licensed practical nurse to registered nurse; and a lack of clear standards and credentials for roles, such as care coordinators and patient navigators.

For the full report visit <http://www.jff.org/acareport>

CareerSTAT is an initiative to document and endorse the business case for investments in frontline hospital workers and to establish an employer-led advocacy council to promote investments that yield strong skill development and career outcomes for low-wage, frontline hospital workers.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

HEALTH CARE EMPLOYERS

- > Implement workforce planning and analysis functions
- > Invest in worker skills and career advancement to ensure success under the ACA
- > Create or augment career ladders to ensure success under the ACA
- > Measure the impact of investments in frontline workforce development on critical outcomes, including patient satisfaction and preventable readmissions
- > Promote greater transparency with employees on core measure results
- > Develop shared standards and definitions for emerging health care occupations

POLICYMAKERS

- > Refocus data collection and projections to better understand present and future needs for health care labor and skills with an eye on frontline workers
- > Examine potential strategies for reforming Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement for paraprofessional services and training
- > Advocate for investment in upgrading of low-quality, but essential, frontline jobs, in particular home health aides, personal care aides, and similar roles

PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND NONPROFIT EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE ORGANIZATIONS

- > Create incentives for skill development needed to meet ACA goals
- > Help build the capacity of smaller health care employers, especially primary care clinics, to offer training and educational opportunities to frontline staff
- > Enlist public and private workforce entities in piloting, documenting, and scaling promising practices in communities and in health care employers

PHILANTHROPY

- > Support efforts to analyze the impact of the ACA on frontline workers
- > Promote new training investments for frontline workers impacted by the ACA