In February 2022, President Biden announced a major reform initiative to set a national minimum staffing standard for all nursing staff—a policy that improves care for the approximately 1 million people per year who use a nursing home because they can’t live on their own or they need rehabilitative care before returning home after a brief hospital stay.

**WHY STAFFING MATTERS**

- Nursing homes long have suffered from substandard care due to poor staffing. Today, more than seven in 10 nursing homes staff below the level experts have determined is necessary to avoid harm to residents.

- Increasing overall nurse staffing has been one of the most consistent recommendations for improving the quality of care in nursing homes. More than 150 studies over decades have documented the strong positive impact of additional nurse staffing on the care process and outcome measures.

- Higher staffing levels are associated with meaningfully better care: fewer pressure ulcers, infections and hospital visits, and reduced mortality. Nursing homes with higher staffing rates have had fewer COVID-19 cases and deaths than those with lower staffing levels.

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MAKING CARE JOBS BETTER JOBS

- Improving staffing in nursing homes also means improving job quality for nursing home workers. Adequate staffing would mean assistance in moving patients and time to sit with a resident in distress. It would mean fewer injuries on the job and less worker burnout.

- Every year, the average nursing home loses just more than half of its direct care staff—a much higher rate than hospitals, doctors’ offices and other provider settings. The problem at nursing homes isn’t hiring staff—it’s keeping staff.

- High staff turnover impacts health outcomes for residents. Government data show that nursing homes with higher staff turnover have lower ratings, more health and safety violations, and more complaints of abuse.

GENDER AND RACIAL INEQUITY

- Our health care system was shaped by discriminatory laws and a discriminatory culture that continue to have an impact today.
  - Staffing is lower at facilities with a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic residents, which contributes to health disparities.
  - At the same time, workers of color are disproportionately in jobs with the lowest wages.
  - More than 90% of nursing home workers are female, 58% are persons of color and 20% are women of color.
  - Low wages and insufficient shifts mean a median annual income of $24,200.
  - Approximately 12% of these workers live in poverty, and 41% live in what could be considered low-income households. Among Black and Hispanic female direct care workers, about 50% earn less than $15 per hour.

- A staffing standard will mean nursing homes will have to hire more nurses and nursing assistants. That will only be possible, however, if nursing homes offer a higher starting wage and better benefits. This may be the single most impactful policy initiative this administration can undertake to address gender and racial inequality in the health care sector.

- The impact of a staffing standard will be widespread and have an intergenerational effect. Nearly one in three nursing assistants has a child younger than age 18 living at home, and one in six has one or more children younger than age 5. Raising the wages of these workers and giving them more hours will improve the economic prospects of the whole family.
The administration is expected to propose a minimum staffing standard this summer. This rulemaking is a once-in-decades opportunity to set national staffing standards, but the rule will be finalized only if the administration hears from working families—people who work in nursing homes or those who used to, people who have loved ones who are getting older and may need nursing home care even for a short period of time, and people who are in nursing homes now.

We are asking people who care about improving the quality of care and the quality of jobs in nursing homes to spread the word about what we expect to be a landmark policy change—and to submit comments and stories to the Department of Health and Human Services in support of a strong national staffing standard. Visit BetterCareNow.us to have your voice heard!