

Center for Studying Disability Policy

# Strengthening the Direct Care Workforce Post-COVID

**Scaling Up and Sustaining Effective Strategies**

June 3, 2021

# Welcome



**Debra Lipson**  
Mathematica

# Agenda



**Background on direct care workforce**



**Panel discussion**



**Q&A**

# Panelists



**Robyn Stone**

LeadingAge, LTSS Center  
University of  
Massachusetts Boston



**Bea Rector**

Home and  
Community Services  
Aging and Long-Term  
Support Administration,  
Washington State  
Department of Social  
and Health Services



**Zulma Torres**

Cooperative Home Care  
Associates



**Robert Espinoza**

PHI

# Long-standing challenges facing the direct care workforce



**Supply shortages**



**Insufficient training**



**High turnover rates**



**Lack of career ladders**

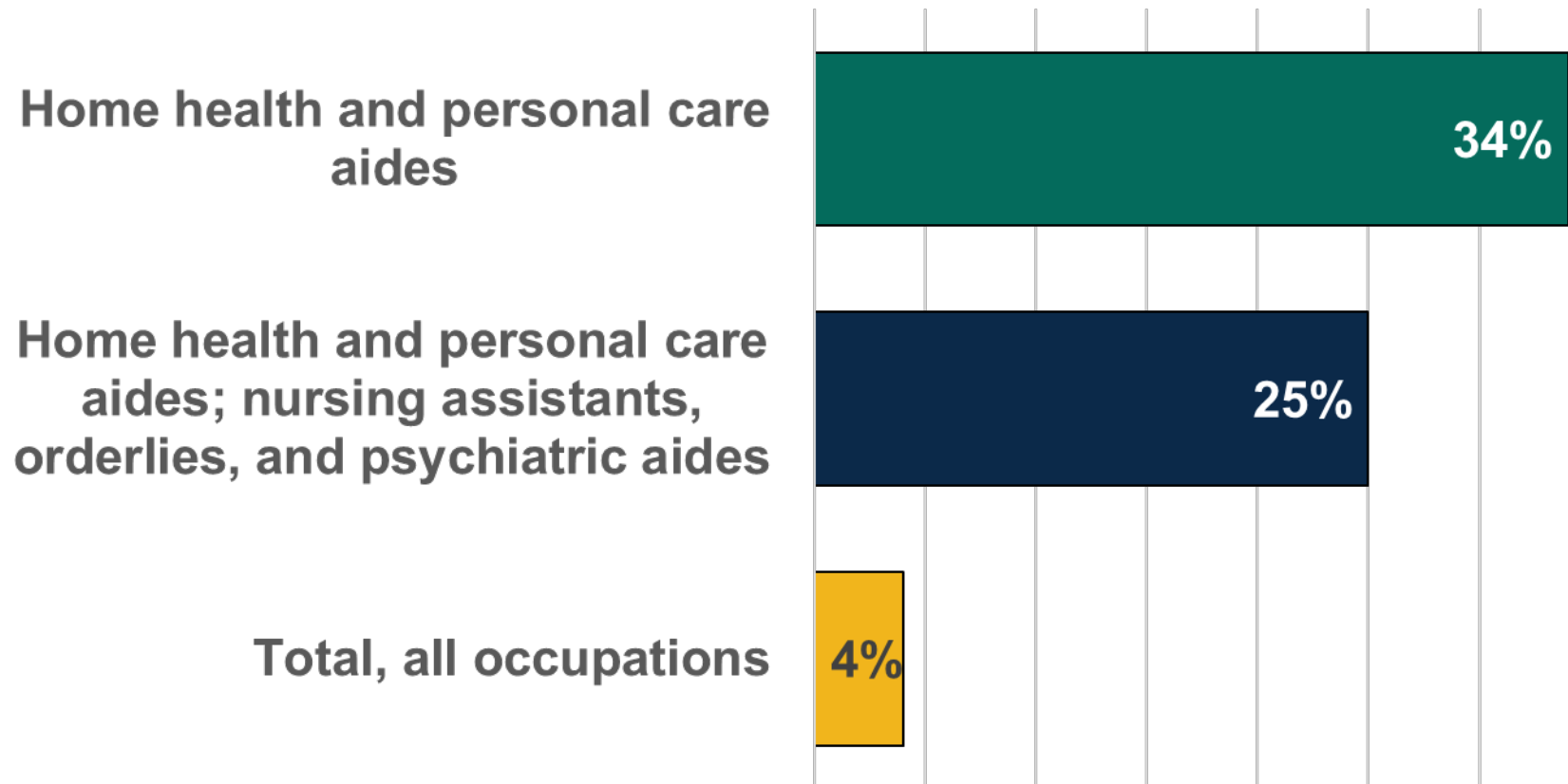


**Low wages and benefits**



**Demanding schedules**

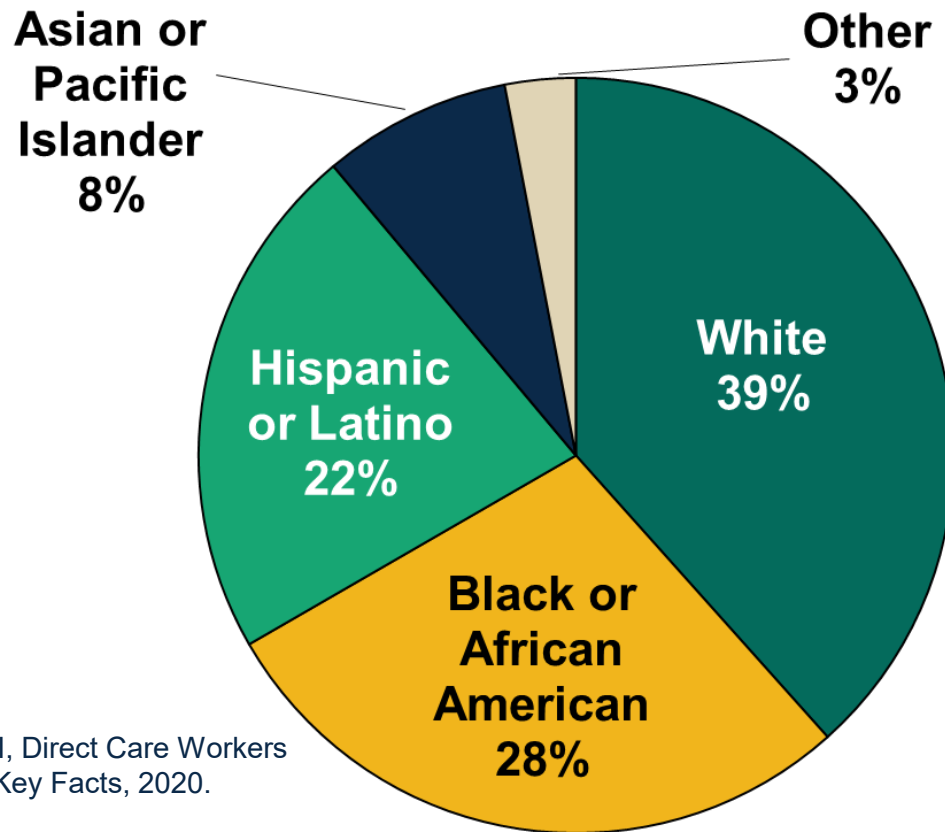
# Projected demand for home care workers 2019–2029 *(before COVID-19 pandemic)*



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections Program.  
Note: All occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. economy.

# Characteristics of home care workers

Home care workers by race/ethnicity, 2018

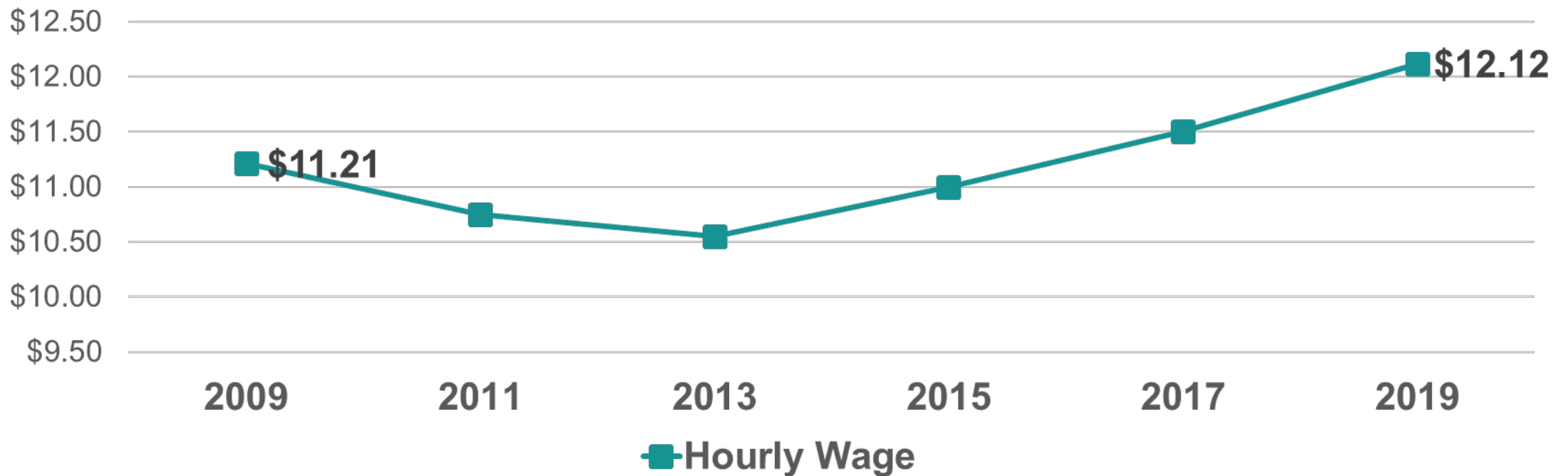


Source: PHI, Direct Care Workers in the U.S. Key Facts, 2020.

- / **While people of color make up 38 percent of the total U.S. labor force, they comprise 62 percent of all home care workers.**
- / **87 percent are women**
- / **32 percent are ages 55 and older**

# Home care worker wages and benefits

Median hourly wages, adjusted for inflation, 2009–2019

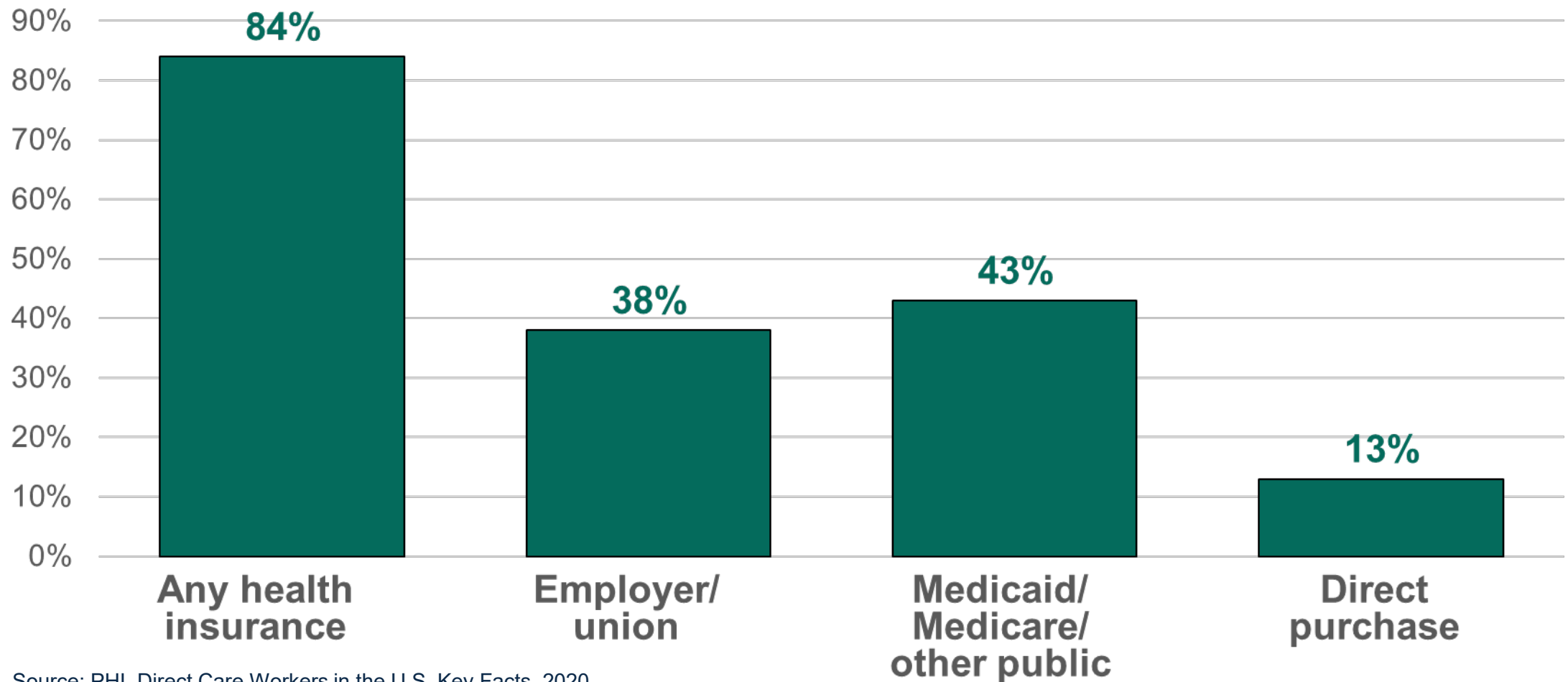


Source: PHI, Direct Care Workers in the U.S. Key Facts, 2020.



# Home care worker wages and benefits

## Health insurance status, 2018



Source: PHI, Direct Care Workers in the U.S. Key Facts, 2020.

# COVID-19 created new challenges

- / Health and safety risks of contracting or spreading the virus due to insufficient personal protective equipment**
- / Staff burnout as workers had to compensate for those who could not work due to illness, childcare obligations, etc.**
- / Training programs stopped or moved online using different, and potentially less effective, approaches and creating technology barriers for many low-wage workers**

# For most challenges, there are evidence-based solutions

- / **Supply shortages**
- / **High turnover rates**
- / **Low wages and benefits**
- / **Insufficient training**
- / **Lack of career ladders**
- / **Demanding schedules**



- / **Stronger recruitment pipelines**
- / **Higher wages and benefits**
- / **More training and career ladders**
- / **Improved job quality**

# Panel discussion

# Consequences of COVID-19

- / What challenges did COVID-19 create for home care workers?**
- / How did the COVID-19 pandemic worsen the problems facing direct care workers, such as workforce shortages, high turnover rates, and insufficient training?**

# Response to COVID-19 challenges

**/ What was done to support, and assure the safety of direct care workers, to allow them to continue providing services to people with disabilities living in homes or community residences?**

# Silver linings

- / What policies or practices were introduced or done differently that worked well and should be continued or expanded?**
- / Are there any policies or practices that were suspended or stopped that should not be restored?**

# Short- and long-term solutions

- / How can states make best use of new federal funds—in the short term and long-term—to build and strengthen the direct care workforce?**
- / What are effective, evidence-based solutions? Are there gaps in data or evidence that new research should fill?**



# Questions

# Resources

## / Relevant research from Mathematica

- <https://www.mathematica.org/our-publications-and-findings/publications/covid-19-intensifies-nursing-home-workforce-challenges>
- <https://www.mathematica.org/commentary/covid-19-and-long-term-care-challenges-and-lessons-learned>

## / LeadingAge

- <https://leadingage.org>

## / PHI

- <http://phinational.org>

## / Washington State Department of Social and Health Services

- <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/>

# Contacts

/ **Debra Lipson, Mathematica**

- [DLipson@mathematica-mpr.com](mailto:DLipson@mathematica-mpr.com)

/ **Robyn Stone, LeadingAge**

- [RStone@leadingage.org](mailto:RStone@leadingage.org)

/ **Robert Espinoza, PHI**

- [respinoza@PHInational.org](mailto:respinoza@PHInational.org)

/ **Bea Rector, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services**

- [bea-alise.rector@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:bea-alise.rector@dshs.wa.gov)