

Essential Jobs, Essential Care: Why CNA Survey Data Matters

Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) provide essential, hands-on support to patients by assisting with daily care tasks and basic medical needs. In New Jersey, becoming a CNA requires completing a state-approved training program and passing a competency exam administered by the Department of Health (NJDOH) and a criminal background check. CNAs must also be re-certified every two years.

To better understand this critical workforce, the [New Jersey Collaborating Center for Nursing \(NJCCN\)](#) partnered with the [Essential Jobs Essential Care \(EJEC\)](#) data committee and PHI to conduct New Jersey's first-ever [statewide CNA survey](#) in 2024. Funded by the Department of Human Services (NJ DHS) Division of Aging Services (DOAS), this landmark survey was distributed primarily by mail, translated into Spanish, and promoted through health care associations, employers, and social media to maximize participation.



Read the full [Certified Nursing Assistant \(CNA\) Workforce Report](#).

The survey highlights the significant challenges facing Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs).

Low wages, inadequate training, and limited career advancement opportunities are driving many workers out of direct care and into retail, food service, and other industries that offer safer conditions and higher pay.

Key findings include:

Lack of Health Insurance

Nearly [one in three CNAs \(32%\) report not being offered health insurance by their employer](#). Among those who are offered coverage, many decline because the cost is unaffordable.



Medicaid Reliance

Among CNAs who did not enroll in employer-sponsored health insurance, more than [one in five \(21%\) reported being covered by Medicaid](#). This highlights how low wages force many CNAs—who provide essential care—to rely on the same safety-net programs as the patients they serve.

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Language Diversity

More than half (51%) of CNAs speak a language other than English at home, underscoring the urgent need for stronger language access initiatives.



Retention Crisis

About four in ten CNAs (39%) say they plan to retire or leave the profession within the next two years. This is particularly concerning given the widespread reports of understaffing that are already straining the workforce.

Streamline Oversight

Nearly one in four CNAs (23%) are certified as Certified Home Health Aides (CHHAs). EJEC and NJCCN emphasize centralizing credentialing and licensure for CNAs with CHHAs under the Board of Nursing, a change that would create consistency, reduce administrative burden, and strengthen workforce oversight.

Read the full [Certified Nursing Assistant \(CNA\) Workforce Report](#) and learn more about efforts to strengthen the direct care workforce and improve care for older adults and people with disabilities at www.EssentialJobsNJ.org.

Essential Jobs, Essential Care NJ (EJEC NJ) brings together a diverse coalition of health care providers, consumer advocates, workforce organizations, labor representatives, and policymakers. Together, we are collaborating to build a stronger direct care workforce and to ensure better care for New Jersey's older adults and people with disabilities.



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