



Care at the Polls Guide

Dive into our guide on how care will show up at the polls this November.

Recap: Where We Stand Today

Over the last 12 months, Congress negotiated legislation using reconciliation, a process that enables a simple majority to pass legislation (effectively bypassing the Senate's filibuster). The hope was to pass as many parts of President Biden's agenda as possible, including policies on health care, climate change, tax reform, and importantly, policies to support caregiving and the care economy.

The House of Representatives did pass the Build Back Better Act in late 2021, reflecting many of these priorities, including investments in home and community-based services (HCBS) for older and/or disabled people and child care, as well as establishing four weeks of paid family and medical leave. However, as the Senate took up negotiations, the legislation was narrowed to focus on addressing Medicare drug pricing and a two-year extension of Affordable Care Act subsidies as well as investments to address climate change and tax reform.

The bill that became law in August, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), was not Build Back Better. While the IRA did include critical measures to help the American people, much was left undone, including all the proposed investments in care: funding for HCBS, paid family and medical leave, and child care.

The 2022 midterm elections will be pivotal to ensure we can enact meaningful legislation that supports those who receive care and those who provide it, and to create the care infrastructure that this country requires.

Legislators make decisions every day that impact care. You don't need to be an expert on these issues to ask those who represent you why and how they will act to support care.



The Issues

Caregiving: Due to our nation's lack of a care infrastructure, the majority of care that is provided in this country is given by family caregivers. These families often have little support, receive few services, and can lose jobs and income as they try to meet their family members' needs. Because of the lack of necessary supports for their family members to live the life they choose, individuals and families are left to fill the gaps in the system. The lack of care infrastructure shows that lifelong caregiving, from child care to care for older adults and disabled people, has long-term negative economic, health, and social impacts on families. More programs must be in place to support family caregivers, but we must also make care jobs good jobs and bolster the care workforce so they can provide more of the care that family caregivers currently perform.

Child Care: The pandemic has laid bare and exacerbated the deep inequities of our child care infrastructure. Our current system relies on families to desperately search for child care openings and pay higher and higher sums to access care, while at the same time, the early educators caring for our nation's children receive poverty-level wages. It is time to build a comprehensive child care and early education system that works for children, families, educators, and our economy as a whole. A sustainable system must ensure that every low- and middle-income family has access to affordable, high-quality child care options. We also must ensure that caregivers receive living wages, benefits, and pay parity with elementary school teachers. These essential jobs must also provide professional development and career ladders. Finally, the system must offer these educators fundamental work-related rights and protections.

Community-Based Long Term-Services and Supports: Our country lacks a comprehensive, national system for long term services and supports (LTSS), a critical need that has never been appropriately addressed at the federal level. The majority of these services are funded through Medicaid, a complex system that leaves many people waiting—often for years—to access services. This system also depends on direct care workers, who many families cannot find or afford, leading to overreliance on family caregivers, who must figure care out on their own. To meet this national challenge, the federal government must take the lead in developing a coordinated, comprehensive approach to LTSS to fix the inequities in the current Medicaid program and address the need for supports outside of Medicaid. It must examine the possibility of incorporating an LTSS benefit into Medicare or creating a standalone federal LTSS program.



Medicaid: Medicaid is an essential program for older adults and disabled people who need LTSS. Overwhelmingly, it is the largest funding source of LTSS, specifically home and community-based services (HCBS), and the primary source of other traditional health care services for many older and/or disabled adults, as well as for many direct care workers. Many states and territories continue to have inadequate Medicaid reimbursement rates. This means that the funding for services—which includes worker wages—does not account for the actual cost of the supports, leading to limited or reduced services and low wages for direct care workers, as their salaries are factored into the rate. These low rates contributed to the current extreme workforce shortage, as providers are struggling to attract and retain workers, and workers are struggling to survive on poverty wages. This has driven a crisis in access as hundreds of thousands of disabled people and older adults are now on waiting lists for services across the country, often for years on end.

Medicare: Medicare is a critical health care program for older adults and disabled people. Medicare however, does NOT cover LTSS outside of a short-term rehabilitation stay. While the new opportunity provided by the IRA for Medicare to negotiate drug prices will lower drug costs, it will not address the huge and growing need for coverage of the cost of LTSS.

Paid Family and Medical Leave: Nearly all of us will need paid leave at some point in our lives, to care for ourselves or a family member, or to welcome a new child. Without paid leave, people often face a cruel and unnecessary choice between the health and well-being of themselves and their families versus going to work so they can pay their bills. We must establish a robust Federal Paid Family and Medical Leave program that includes 12 weeks of paid leave for all workers to bond with a new child, deal with a personal or family illness (including serious mental health conditions and substance use disorders), or handle needs that arise from a military deployment. The program must cover all workers—public or private, employees or contractors, full time or part-time—as well as small business owners themselves.

Care Workforce: A well-trained, fairly compensated direct care workforce is essential to providing the necessary supports and services to older adults and disabled people. The current underfunded Medicaid reimbursement system, compounded by cost-cutting actions by state legislatures and Medicaid officials, as well as the stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic, have exacerbated the workforce crisis. The system of care in this country is on the brink of collapse. Demand for care workers from private industry and other human services sectors is also high, leading to competition among industries for workers. These problems have been compounded over three decades, leading to a crisis that presents a grave threat to the lives of disabled people and older adults, and care workers themselves. Major federal investments to support this workforce with family-sustaining wages and a career path must be a priority when rebuilding the economy.



How to Talk about Care

Whether at a town hall or coffee-with-your-congressperson, here are ways you can raise the importance of care with your elected officials:

- **It is unacceptable the care economy was completely overlooked by Congress.**
 - Leaving child care, paid leave, and home and community-based services out of the final reconciliation bill is **an absolute tragedy for tens of millions of families and undermines the health of our economy.**
- **Care is the foundation of our economy.** Care workers do the **essential work of caring for our families.**
 - The people who take care of our children, older adults, and disabled family members deserve the same dignity and respect they give to our loved ones.
 - **Those providing care are the backbone of the economy; they do the work that makes all other work possible.**
- **It's time this country invested in care infrastructure: long-term care for older adults and disabled people; quality, flexible childcare; paid family and medical leave; and a strong care workforce.**
 - Addressing family care needs lowers families' out-of-pocket costs, directly creates jobs in local communities, maintains income, and empowers family caregivers to maintain or secure jobs.
- **Paid care workers and family caregivers got us through the last two years.**
 - Family caregivers, disproportionately women of color, have had to leave the workforce and are burnt out due to lack of caregiving support.
 - For too long, the essential work of unpaid family caregivers and the underpaid direct care workers for older adults and disabled people, has gone unnoticed or has **been passed over for federal investments.**
 - This underinvestment stems directly from policies that explicitly served to marginalize people of color and women from securing workplace rights and wage advancement.
 - **It is time to undo this injustice.** Congress must act to expand access to care and improve the working conditions for caregivers.



- **As people live longer, we need to prepare our economy and support families so they can thrive.**
 - Demand for home and community-based services (HCBS) is growing quickly, especially as Baby Boomers age into retirement.
 - We'll need an estimated 4.7 million direct care jobs to fill the demand in the next decade alone, but there are not enough workers because the pay is so low.
- **Investing in HCBS is critical for our families and our economic recovery.**
 - The demand for direct care is greater than ever, but there simply aren't enough direct care workers, in large part due to harsh working conditions and poverty wages.
 - More direct care support will also enable family caregivers who have left their jobs to care for a loved one to rejoin the workforce.
- **We must raise wages and provide more training for the direct home care workforce.**
 - Investing in the direct care workforce will ensure that care workers can care for their own families while more disabled people and older adults on Medicaid waitlists for HCBS can get the care they need.
 - The majority (61%) of the country's 2.4 million home care workers are women of color who haven't seen pay increases in decades—they currently earn \$20,000 a year on average.
 - Worse, they have very few benefits, lacking essential supports such as paid leave and training opportunities.
- **It's time to clear Medicaid waitlists** so more older adults, veterans, and disabled people can access high-quality care to transition from nursing institutions back home, or to stay in their homes and communities longer.
 - Nearly 820,000 people who qualify for HCBS through Medicaid are on waitlists—and that number will likely increase as the population of adults aged 65 and older nearly doubles from 2016 to 2060.
 - Older adults and disabled people have suffered the most from our systemic failures to value them.



Sample Questions to Ask Your Representatives:

1. What is your plan to reduce waiting lists for disabled people and older adults for home and community-based services?
 2. What proposals do you support to raise wages for direct care workers?
 3. Given the fact that any funding for care infrastructure was left out of the budget reconciliation package, what do you see as the next steps to address the critical need of funding more care programs? How can we strengthen childcare, long term services and supports like home and community-based services, and paid leave?
 4. What is your understanding of the historic marginalization of care workers, and how can we address this injustice?
 5. How has care impacted your life? What supports do you wish you had had?
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About Caring Across

Caring Across Generations is a national campaign of family caregivers, care workers, people with disabilities, and aging adults working to transform care so it's accessible, affordable and equitable— and enables everyone to live and age with dignity.

To achieve our vision, we transform cultural norms and narratives about aging, disability and care; win federal and state-level policies; and build power amongst the people touched by care. For more information, please visit www.caringacross.org