

CALIFORNIA

Care Voter

Guide



THE STATE OF CARE

Care connects us all. Each of us will need to give or receive care at some point in our lifetime. Whether it's as disabled people or older adults seeking to live independently; parents or other family caregivers providing care for their children, grandchildren, neighbors, and loved ones; or care workers, offering the essential services that make all other work possible.



However, instead of recognizing care as essential, our current policies leave care workers underpaid, families struggling to afford child care, caregivers forced to choose between providing care and keeping their jobs, and hundreds of thousands of disabled people and older adults without the care that they need to live and age with dignity.

Giving and receiving care shouldn't be this hard – and it doesn't have to be. **As care advocates, we can rally our communities to push for truly equitable, affordable, and accessible care that meets everyone's needs.**

We need:

- **A comprehensive system for aging and disability care** that ensures access to care for every person who needs it in home and community-based settings that enable maximum autonomy, support family caregivers, and provide good jobs for all direct care workers.
- **A child care system that works for every family** and long term investments that reflect the true cost of care to support universal access for children and families when and where they need it, affordable, culturally-affirming programs, small business owners to keep their doors open, and family-sustaining wages and benefits for early childhood educators.
- **A robust, equitable, and inclusive paid family and medical leave program** that provides every worker with job-protected paid leave for bonding with a new child, dealing with a personal illness or care for immediate, extended, and chosen family, and care needs due to military deployment.
- **Good union jobs for all care workers** that protect and strengthen workers' rights to organize, legal protections against discrimination and harassment, and provide pay and benefits that allow workers and their families to thrive.

Our policymakers have the tools and power to change the care system, but it will only happen if we come together. Together, we can demand a system that is truly caring and works for every caregiver, care worker, and each of us who needs care, making it possible for people to be there for loved ones, age with dignity, and afford care when we need it.

ASK YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS & CANDIDATES ABOUT CARE

Your representatives, represent — you guessed it! — YOU! They make decisions every day that impact care. It is their duty to be responsive to their constituents' concerns! In this guide, you'll find sample questions to ask your representatives and candidates, whether they are running for U.S. Congress, your state legislature, a local office, or for President. Additionally, there is guidance on locating town halls

and other events with elected officials and how to share your story with them. **Ask these questions to find out how your elected officials plan to act on care.** As you ask your questions, you can also weave in your own story and connection to care, so your representatives understand your experiences and offer real solutions.

Aging & Disability Care:

- Direct care workers provide life-sustaining, dignifying care to disabled people and older adults. Yet, these workers aren't paid enough to make ends meet or are often burnt out and frustrated by the lack of family-sustaining wages and benefits to support them. Many are leaving these jobs for other positions, leading to high turnover rates and worker [shortages](#) that impact access to and the quality of care. **What proposals do you support to increase pay and improve job quality for direct care workers?**
- The majority of people want to live and age in their own homes and communities. Still, disabled people and older adults who need care often rely on their friends or family and need more support. **What can you do to help older adults, people with disabilities, and family caregivers get the support they need?**
- [4.4 million people](#) in California are unpaid caregivers. Many care for both their children and a disabled or older adult, often with no outside help at all and at the expense of their own well-being. **What would you do to help family caregivers?**
- [Over 4,000](#) of California's older adults and people with disabilities are stuck on waiting lists for aging and disability care in their own homes and communities through Medicaid. [Nearly 2 in 5](#) of those reporting such homecare needs said they could use more help, or that they get no help at all, with the highest levels of unmet need reported by Black Californians. **What is your plan to increase access to aging and disability care in homes and communities and support family caregivers?**
- Far too many caregivers, disabled people, and older adults face astronomical costs while trying to pay for care and are often forced to either leave their jobs because of a lack of paid leave, or impoverish themselves to get the care they need. **How would you make aging and disability care affordable in California?**

Child Care:

- The average cost of child care in California is more than [\\$16,432](#) per year for infants and toddlers in family-based child care and \$19,547 per year for center-based care. **Do you support a universal child care system where all families have access to affordable care and that prioritizes good union jobs for child care workers?**
- Early childhood educators are [among the lowest paid workers](#) in the country. In California, child care workers make an [average hourly wage of \\$19.26](#) and preschool teachers make an [average hourly wage of \\$24.11](#), which results in high rates of turnover and workers leaving the profession. **What are you doing to support early child care educators so they are paid family-sustaining wages and benefits?**
- Like clean water, highways, and good public schools, affordable and accessible child care is a public good that our economy and communities need to thrive. Public investments are needed to fill the gap between what families can afford to pay and what educators need to make to provide high-quality care and sustain their own families. As of 2022, [only 42%](#) of three-year-olds eligible for subsidized preschool programs are able to attend. **How will you prioritize funding for child care so families and providers no longer have to navigate these challenges on their own?**

- Demand for publicly-funded programs, such as California's universal Transitional Kindergarten and subsidized child care programs, [far exceed the supply](#), particularly for programs that serve infants and toddlers. In a time when millions of families are struggling to make ends meet, **what would you do to help make it easier for families, particularly those with infants and toddlers, to access care that meets their needs?**

Paid Family & Medical Leave:

- California is home to the first Paid Family Leave program and has one of the oldest Disability Insurance programs in the country. Along with job protection laws in California, these programs mean that millions of California workers can take job-protected, paid leave, also known as paid family and medical leave, to care for their own or a family member's serious health condition, or to bond with a new child. Research [shows](#) that paid leave works for working Californian families and businesses. **In your role, how would you support strengthening the paid family and medical leave program in California that guarantees all working people access to job-protected paid leave to care for a new child, a seriously ill or disabled loved one, or their own serious health issue?**
- California's paid family leave program reflects an outdated definition of family, allowing workers to receive benefits to care for only certain types of family members. This definition leaves out both chosen family and extended family members such as aunts, uncles, and cousins. **What will you do to ensure that families of all kinds and loved ones can be there for one another without the risk of losing their jobs or their paycheck?**
- California workers also rely on paid sick and safe days when they or a loved one are sick, need to seek preventative care, or need services related to domestic violence or violent crimes. Current California law requires employers to provide workers with up to a minimum of 5 paid sick and safe days per year. **What would you do to ensure that every worker has enough paid sick and safe days so no worker has to choose between their job and their own or their loved one's health?**

Ask About Their Experience With Care:

- What's your connection to care?
- What supports do you wish you had for care in your own life?
- Millions of family caregivers and people who receive care feel isolated, alone, and like their struggles aren't seen by our representatives. What can you tell the people who feel like there's little help for them?

HOW TO VOTE IN CALIFORNIA

Voting is one of the most powerful tools we have to push for equitable, affordable, and accessible care in our communities, but it can be difficult to know what to do ahead of and on election day. [These resources from Disability Rights California](#) outline how to register to vote.

HOW TO FIND TOWN HALLS, SET MEETINGS, AND OTHER WAYS TO INTERACT WITH YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

Especially during an election year, representatives and candidates will be more frequently publicly available. They'll hold town halls, come to parades, engage in debates, press conferences, and more. You can also always ask to meet with your elected officials or their staff – they have that job to serve their constituents! And town halls are explicitly for them to hear from and respond to their constituents.

How to find town halls or other events:

- First, check who your federal representatives are at [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) and your state representatives at [CalMatters' Legislator Tracker](#).
- Most elected officials have a newsletter that you can sign up for, which often includes information about town halls or other public meetings. They also post on their website and social media about upcoming events. Follow these communications to find an upcoming event you'd like to attend.

Request a Meeting:

- Almost all elected officials have websites where you can find information to request meetings or find the numbers for their offices. You can call to ask about scheduling a meeting or ask for the contact information of the staff member who handles scheduling for constituent meetings.

SHARING YOUR CARE STORY

Sharing your story with your elected officials is a powerful way to move policy forward. Elected officials are moved by people's stories, more than by statistics or facts. You can use these tips to help think about sharing your story!

Make it personal:

- Tell us about how you're connected to care. Have you given care — to a parent, child, family member, loved one? Received it?
- The more personal and specific your story, the more effective it'll be. Don't skip the details, but share as little or as much as you're comfortable sharing.
- Don't be afraid to be honest about how hard it is to give or receive care because of our patchwork system.

Some topics may include:

- The high cost you are paying out of pocket for care and difficulty finding care providers.
- If you've had to decrease your work to provide care for yourself or a loved one, or remove money from your retirement savings or increase your work to be able to pay for care.
- Experiences with lack of care — like not having child care or experiencing firsthand the difficulty of managing disability needs day to day without access to the help of a care worker
- What it means to not be able to afford child care or aging or disability care.
- What it means to not have paid leave to care for your loved ones and/or yourself — including the money you may lose.
- The emotional experiences related to care – do you feel like you're being pulled in every direction? Do you feel like you can't ever seem to get everything done?
- Any positive emotions related to care – like the feeling of security when you do have a care worker who you trust, the relief that comes from having paid leave to care for a parent who is struggling, the freedom that comes from receiving care that supports your needs, or the joys of caregiving.

You can end your story with a positive vision of what you'd like to see from our care systems. What are the improvements or changes that you'd like your legislator to make?

Want to share your care story online?

You can here: https://stories.caringacross.org/question/share_your_care_story

Here are some **best practices when sharing your story via video**:

- Try and take a video that is well-lit and make sure your audio is captured clearly.
- Act naturally! Read through the prompts above and decide what you'd like to say ahead of time. If it helps, jot down some notes. No need to be scripted, do what feels natural.

Encourage your friends and family to share their care stories, too.

- Your post on Facebook, Instagram, or any other platform could include the video you've created, or the graphics or sample language below.
 - We all have care in common. Sharing our stories helps show how powerful our care movement really is.
 - Our stories are powerful. That's why I've just shared my care story to help fight for a better care system for all of us. Join me: https://stories.caringacross.org/question/share_your_care_story.
 - You can download the graphics below [at this link](#).

QUICK FACTS ABOUT CARE IN CALIFORNIA

Millions of families across the state are sitting at their kitchen tables, struggling to pay for care for their children, grandchildren, parents, siblings, chosen family, other loved ones, and themselves. Here's more information about aging and disability care, early childhood education, paid leave, and good jobs for care workers in California and around the country.

Aging and Disability Care

- While the vast majority of American adults would prefer to receive care at home instead of an institutional care or skilled nursing facility, one in five adults report that they or a family member need new or additional paid support, demonstrating the need for investments in care. Within California, [more than 4,000](#) people are on waiting lists for Medicaid programs in their homes and communities, and even more don't qualify for any financial support that would make care more affordable. The median annual out-of-pocket cost for an in-home health aide is nearly [\\$62,000](#).

Family Caregivers

- 4.4 million Californians are unpaid family caregivers who provide more than [\\$81 billion in unpaid care](#). This labor disproportionately falls on women and people of color. Family caregivers experience significant workforce and earning losses, and often provide care without training or other support.
- [Nearly 60% of unpaid caregivers in California are women](#). Among the 16% of caregivers who provide over 40 hours of care per week, 55% are not employed, highlighting the economic barriers faced by those providing unpaid care to family members and loved ones.
- [34% of caregivers have a disability](#) themselves, adding to the challenges they face in providing care while managing their own health needs.

- There are [11 million sandwich-generation caregivers](#) in the United States, providing care to both their children and to an aging or disabled loved one.
- California is one of many states in the U.S. without a state-level civil rights law protecting caregivers against workplace discrimination and harassment. Safe and respectful workplaces help workers, especially women, stay on the job with the protection and dignity all workers deserve

Early Childhood Education

- In California, [the annual cost](#) of center-based child care for an infant and four-year-old (\$33,943) exceeds the cost of both housing (\$33,108) and in-state public college tuition (\$10,249).
- California loses [\\$17 billion each year](#) in economic productivity and revenue due to the lack of child care. We must create a child care system that meets the needs of children, families, communities, and child care providers.
- The lack of a comprehensive, robust care system in the United States particularly impacts women of color, who make up the majority of direct care workers, a [disproportionately high percentage of child care workers](#), and a [large percentage of family caregivers](#), who experience particularly high levels of stress related to caregiving without adequate support.

Paid Family and Medical Leave & Paid Sick Days

- Californians can't use paid family and medical leave to care for chosen or extended family. [Approximately 10% \(3.5 million\) of Californians](#) live with someone who isn't currently included in California's definition of family, such as an unmarried partner or other relative. This is critical for immigrant communities, who make up 28% of the state population and are more likely to live in multigenerational households.
- There are about [2.7 million LGBTQ+ people](#) in California – the most of any state in the country. Members of the LGBTQ+ community tend to rely on chosen family, or people outside of the traditional family definition, who are not currently covered by California's paid family leave program to care for them when they are sick.
- Access to paid sick days in California is [inequitably distributed](#). Overall, 8.9% of workers in California (1.6 million workers) lack access to paid sick days. And higher-earning workers have greater access to paid sick days: 84.1% of the lowest-paid workers have access to paid sick days, compared to 94.3% of the highest-paid workers.

Good Jobs for Care Workers

- [17% of Californian early educators](#) live in poverty – twice the poverty rate for California workers in general (8.7%) and 6.7 times as high as for other teachers (2.5%).
- Californian direct care workers providing essential aging and disability care are paid an average median income of [less than \\$26,000](#). [Almost half](#) live in or near poverty.
- If direct care workers were paid higher wages in California, the state would see a [boost of \\$3.6 billion](#) in economic output. This would save the state \$165 million in public assistance.

COMMUNITY-BASED CARE ORGANIZATIONS

If you'd like to learn more and find ways to get connected with organizations working to create a care infrastructure that meets the needs of everyone in California, check out:



[Black Californians United for Early Childhood Education](#): Black Californians United for Early Care and Education (BlackECE) is a powerful coalition of advocates, policy-influencers, civil rights organizations, researchers, university faculty, non-profit leaders, early educators, caregivers, providers, families, and community-based organizations.

[California Alliance for Retired Americans](#): The California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA) is a statewide nonprofit organization that unites retired workers and community groups to win social and economic justice, full civil rights, and a better, more secure future for ourselves, our families, and future generations.



[Family Caregiver Alliance](#): For over 40 years, FCA has provided services to family caregivers of adults with physical and cognitive impairments, such as Parkinson's, stroke, Alzheimer's, and other types of dementia. FCA is also a longtime advocate for caregivers in policy, health, and social system development, research, and public awareness, on the state, national, and international levels.

[California Pan-Ethnic Health Network](#): The California Pan-Ethnic Health Network brings together and mobilizes communities of color to advocate for public policies that advance health equity and improve health outcomes in their communities.



California Pan-Ethnic
HEALTH NETWORK



[California Work & Family Coalition](#): The California Work & Family Coalition is a statewide alliance of community organizations, unions, non-profits, and individuals dedicated to helping parents, caregivers, and families thrive. We envision a world where all people, whether currently working or not, have the power, time, resources, and support systems to care for themselves and their families, whether biological or chosen, to build collective community, and to rest and pursue fulfilling and healthy lives.

[Hand in Hand: The Domestic Employers Network](#): Hand in Hand is a national network of employers of nannies, house cleaners, and home attendants working for dignified and respectful working conditions that benefit the employer and worker alike. We organize people to demand dignity and fairness for domestic workers, and to win public investment in care for families, people with disabilities and older adults.



HAND IN HAND
THE DOMESTIC
EMPLOYERS NETWORK



[Justice in Aging](#): Justice in Aging is a national organization that uses the power of law to fight senior poverty by securing access to affordable health care, economic security, and the courts for older adults with limited resources. Since 1972, we've focused our efforts primarily on those who have been marginalized and excluded from justice such as women, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, and people with limited English proficiency.

[Parent Voices](#): Through grassroots organizing and leadership development, Parent Voices activate and center the wisdom of parents to transform child care and ensure all systems that impact our families are just, fair, and inclusive.



[Pilipino Workers Center](#): Pilipino Workers Center (PWC) is a grassroots non-profit that organizes, mobilizes and educates low-wage and immigrant Pilipinx communities in the United States with a strong focus on private homecare workers. Founded in 1997, PWC works in solidarity with other organizations and communities to build a world where everyone can access the care they need and have a just and dignified workplace.

[Senior & Disability Action](#): Senior and Disability Action mobilizes and educates seniors and people with disabilities to fight for individual rights and social justice. Through individual support and collective action, we work together to create a city and world in which seniors and people with disabilities can live well and safely.



[SEIU 2015](#): SEIU Local 2015 is the largest union in California, representing nearly 490,000 long-term care workers (home care, skilled nursing facility, and assisted living center workers) throughout the state. Its members are as diverse as the state's population but united in their commitment to caring for California's older adults and those with disabilities.

[UDW/AFSCME Local 3930](#): UDW/AFSCME Local 3930 is a union made up of more than 180,000 home care and child care providers throughout California. UDW home caregivers provide critical services through the state's In-Home Supportive Services program (IHSS), which allows over half a million California seniors and people with disabilities to remain in their homes with dignity and independence. Our child care members provide quality, affordable, home-based child care for thousands of California's working families.



Care Can't Wait California is a coalition of aging, disability, family caregiver, and worker advocates uniting to create a California in which all Californians have access to quality, affordable, and accessible care at every stage of life including aging and disability care, paid leave, and child care. We advocate to build a care infrastructure for California to ensure that disabled people and older adults have the resources to access care in the way they choose, family caregivers have the support they need, and care workers are paid family-sustaining wages and benefits.