

## Pay gap

IHSS workers' pay rates vary by as much as \$3 an hour statewide. Some counties of note:

Glenn .....	\$15.00
Lassen .....	\$15.00
Siskiyou .....	\$15.00
Tehama .....	\$15.00
<b>Butte</b> .....	<b>\$15.50</b>
Colusa .....	\$15.50
Orange .....	\$15.50
San Diego .....	\$15.50
Trinity .....	\$15.50
Modoc .....	\$15.85
Los Angeles .....	\$16.00
Sacramento .....	\$16.00
Shasta .....	\$16.10
San Luis Obispo .....	\$17.64
San Francisco .....	\$18.00



Source: California Department of Social Services (June)

highlights the gender and ethnicity of home care workers as one reason why, others note that family members are often the ones providing the necessary care, leading to a devaluing of the service.

"Some county boards of supervisors have expressed in the past that IHSS providers are lucky to get paid at all, as though caring for an elderly person or a person with disabilities full time isn't work if you are related to them," said Cherie Parker, public information officer for United Domestic Workers of America (UDW). "The low pay is leading to a long-term care crisis of alarming proportions."

## Relative care

Although firm figures in California are hard to come by because people constantly move into and out of IHSS, officials estimate that 50 percent or more of such care is delivered by family members. (In another twist to the system, IHSS recipients select their own caregivers, while the county sets the rate and assigns the hours.) For many, choosing a family member is a matter of comfort and trust, caregivers say.

Tracy Mills Jones has extended such care to several members of her family, going back to the 1990s when her mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Jones provided in-home care for her mother and later for her cancer-stricken husband, and now cares for a brother who suffered a stroke and also requires transportation to a dialysis clinic.

"It was when the pandemic hit that I really noticed the pay issue more clearly," said Jones, who lives in Palmdale in northern L.A. County. "I always knew I was underpaid, but I'd made up the difference with a bunch of odd jobs, cleaning places at night, things like that. During the pandemic, those

jobs all went away and I could see that I simply could not make it on IHSS pay. That is a terrible feeling."

What should her pay be? In a just released report, the EPI researched what home care wages would look like once factors like "wage penalties" associated with the nature of care work and the demographics of the workers themselves were removed.

While the estimates are for all kinds of home care, including medical, the results are startling: California's suggested hourly rate becomes more than \$25, or roughly \$10 above the current average.

Increasingly, home care providers in California have turned to labor organizations in an effort to move the wage question forward. The roughly 570,000 IHSS providers in the state are represented in contract negotiations either by SEIU 2015 or the UDW regardless of whether they choose to join the union. (Disclosure: Both organizations are financial supporters of Capital & Main.)

SEIU 2015 has launched an effort to set a wage floor of \$20 per hour for home care workers.

"That's a great starting point," Wafer said, "because then this can become a more competitive job field and we might have more caregivers open to doing IHSS work."

But that effort is ultimately local, since the unions must negotiate separately with each county. Absent a state mandate to raise home care workers' wages, this 58-piece puzzle will continue to exist.

"It's a necessary program that should be developed further," O'Connor said.

But with pay this low and work this undervalued, the massive gap in IHSS coverage in the state is certain to grow. It's a care crisis waiting to happen. □

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