

Raising the Floor and Building the Ladder for New Mexico Caregivers

Tanisha Marquez of Los Lunas, New Mexico recently graduated from the Personal Care Assistant program at University of New Mexico (UNM)-Valencia County. This young mother of two capped her graduation by earning the national Direct Care Alliance Personal Care and Support Credential, an examination that measures competencies in eight core competency areas like ethics and judgment, nutrition, mobility and transfer and in-home care.

The New Mexico Direct Caregivers Coalition (NMDCC), formed in 2009 in direct response to caregiver workforce shortages and the lack of recognition for the work they perform, administers the national Credential in partnership with National Domestic Workers Alliance. NMDCC employs administration of the Credential as one of several strategies for raising the floor and increasing low-wage workers' ability to move up the economic ladder.



Michael Stewart with Molly Abeyta at Mary Esther Gonzales Senior Center, Santa Fe, NM

The Credential examination is accessible and highly affordable: it takes less than three hours to complete the test, costs less than \$100 and can be administered one person at a time.

The average hourly wage of a New Mexico home health care aide today is \$8.54, making it necessary for many to work at least two jobs. At that rate, many caregivers still don't earn enough to pay for health insurance, child care, retirement or other workplace benefits.

NMDCC seeks to reach all 60,728 caregivers expected to be working in New Mexico's workforce in 2016, offering them education, training and opportunities to be active in advocating for better wages, benefits and workplace supports. UNM-Valencia Campus, a rural university campus, is moving to incorporate the Credential to its Personal Care Assistant program.

While a credential is not required to work as a caregiver, NMDCC promotes it as a tool caregivers can use to demonstrate to potential employers national recognition of their skills. Further, NMDCC promotes the Credential as a confidence-builder for caregivers, encouraging them to negotiate for better wages and benefits. In NM, the average caregiver earns between \$9 and \$12 per hour. Those who work as independent contractors, however, can often earn upwards of \$15 per hours.

Besides the current caregiver workforce, the state's Aging and Long-Term Services Department estimates another 210,000 men and women serve as an unpaid caregiver to a family member. Armed with the Credential, family caregivers too—many of whom experience lost wages due to caring for a loved one—can use the Credential to enter or *re-enter* the workplace. Michael Stewart of Santa Fe completed NMDCC's "Customized Workplace Training for Caregivers" training that prepares caregivers to take the Credential. According to Michael, a

retired machinist, “the training and Credential are ‘proof’ of real-life skills I learned in caring for my father,” he said. “I can now use these skills in a new career, as a direct caregiver,” he said.

Tanisha and Michael are well-prepared to enter a field experiencing a 27 percent increase between now and 2016. The New Mexico Workforce Connection recognizes NMDCC’s Credential administration and will pay the cost of the exam for those who qualify for Workforce Investment Act services.

Tanisha plans to one day earn her Masters of Nursing. For now, Tanisha and Michael can go directly to work as caregivers. And, NMDCC will help connect them directly to agencies and care recipients using a soon-to-be-released job-matching service.

Tanisha has greatly improved job stability and has new career advancement options too. She can apply to UNM-VC’s Associates in Nursing degree, Phlebotomy, Emergency Medical Science, First Responder or Paramedic (four-year) program to further her education.

Michael has found a way to use the skills he’s learned as a caregiver to continue in a field he loves, beginning a second career.

And all parties to the collaboration can take credit for their success!

For more information, contact

New Mexico Direct Caregivers Coalition

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