

THE STATE OF WORK: HOME CARE PROVIDERS IN THE INLAND EMPIRE

APPENDICES

DECEMBER 2024



APPENDIX: HOME CARE WORKER PROFILES

Carolina

Age: Below 20 years

County: Riverside

Race/Ethnicity: Mexican American

Carolina, a 19-year-old Mexican American, is an IHSS provider for her mother who has multiple health conditions including: renal failure, enlarged heart, high blood pressure, seizures, and vasculitis. Prior to becoming an IHSS worker in 2022, Carolina worked at an Amazon warehouse and at a Walmart Superstore. After noticing her mother was becoming more reliant on her father and siblings to address her basic needs, Carolina decided to quit both her jobs to assist her mother.

While helping her mother without an income, Carolina was convinced by her older sister to apply to become an IHSS worker. Carolina attributes her sister's support as being fundamental when going through the application process, she states, "honestly, if I didn't have my sister's help, I would have been very confused." Carolina was approved for 124 hours a month, which is approximately 4 hours a day. As a part-time position, her annual net earnings is \$17,385 a year. Unable to pay for her necessities on her IHSS income, she began learning how to apply acrylic nails to supplement her wages.

When Carolina was asked to describe how she learned to address her mother's health conditions, she stated following the doctor's suggestions. For instance, to manage her mother's high blood pressure, she stated "the doctors did give us food that she can and can't eat and like ideas of what to cook for her." Similarly, to protect her mother from experiencing head injuries during a seizure, Carolina was advised to place a pillow under her mother's head. While the IHSS program did not provide Carolina with training on how to properly lift her mom or assist her in emergencies, she highlights being happy to help her mom in any way she can.

Despite her responsibilities not feeling like work, Carolina expressed experiencing heightened stress as her client is also her mother, whom she shares a strong relationship with. On one occasion, Carolina's mother had notified her she was feeling nauseous and wanted to throw up. Unable to wait for Carolina's assistance to walk to the restroom, she fell on the floor and hit her head. Carolina immediately called 911 and could not help but cry and rely on her family to cope with the situation.

On nights when her mother is constantly throwing up, Carolina is required to stay by her side to ensure she does not choke. She states, “there’ll be times where we basically just don’t clock out. I’m working 24/7.” While Carolina acknowledges the best part of being an IHSS worker is helping her mother, she hopes they can continue to see an increase in both their wages and hours as this is a physically and emotionally demanding job.

Eduvilia

Age: Late 40s

County: Riverside

Race/Ethnicity: Mexican

Eduvilia, a 49-year-old Mexican woman, became her mother’s IHSS caregiver in 2018. Her mother was diagnosed with chronic type 2 diabetes and was required to undergo dialysis. She learned about the possibility of becoming an IHSS worker through the dialysis center in which her mother received treatment. When asked about her experience applying to become an IHSS worker, she stated it was “frustrante [frustrating],” since she would call IHSS and was required to wait long hours over the phone to receive assistance. Thankfully, she had an IHSS worker guide her through the process and was approved for 40 hours a month.

On a typical work day, ranging from 4 to 8 hours a day, Eduvilia would check her mother’s fistula to ensure it was properly functioning, take her blood pressure, provide her medications, drive her to dialysis or doctor appointments, and assist her in showering. Although Eduvilia worked full shifts on certain days, they were insufficient in addressing her mother’s medical needs, leading to working overtime hours. When she attempted to address the overtime hours she worked to IHSS, staff would respond by stating she had sufficient hours and to stick to the hours approved. Eduvilia further states that IHSS said “para darme horas extras, ella debería estar totalmente postrada en una cama sin moverse. Y literalmente si estaba, aunque se podía mover, pero si estaba. [to give me overtime, she would have to be completely bedridden without moving. And she literally was, even though she could move, but she was.” By 2023, Eduvilia’s mother was completely bedridden.

When Eduvilia noticed her mother’s health was declining and she needed more assistance, she called IHSS multiple times to advocate for an increase in her mother’s approved IHSS hours. She states the only reason she was approved for more hours was because, “yo les llamaba y les decía que no iba mejorando.

Y miraba que ella necesitaba más tiempo de las horas que me estaban dando. [I called them and told them that she wasn't getting better. And I noticed she needed more time than the hours they gave me]." Towards the end of her mother's life, Eduvilia was approved for 170 hours a month.

In addition to caring for her mother, Eduvilia was also the caregiver for her brother who suffered from heart problems. While Eduvilia only cared for her brother for a year, she was approved for 20 hours a month. Despite being an IHSS caregiver for two family members, she described learning how to care for them as time went by. She states, "*tú lo haces lo mejor que puedes* [you do it the best way you can]." Eduvilia ties the extreme amounts of stress she experienced to the feelings of impotence she underwent due to being unable to further assist her mother. Despite IHSS not providing training, she reflects the potential of IHSS training benefiting workers in hope of assisting their clients psychologically.

Dee

Age: Early 60s

County: San Bernardino

Race/Ethnicity: White

Dee, a White woman in her early 60s, works as an IHSS caregiver in San Bernardino County. Dee entered the caregiving profession 18 years ago when her mother's friend, who had been diagnosed with cancer, needed care. When she was interviewed in 2023, before the new SEIU 2015 contract was implemented, she had two part-time jobs and received Supplemental Security Income (SSI), resulting in a \$28,000 personal annual income. When asked to describe her experiences as an IHSS worker, Dee alluded to the financial challenges she underwent as a result of her low wages. She recalled a time when she could not afford to pay her electric bill and needed to seek assistance.

Dee also experienced a non-payment from IHSS for three months of care she provided to a client. Despite bureaucratic errors leading to coverage cancellation for her elderly client, Dee continued to provide care without compensation. Initially, Dee believed her client was the one defaulting the payment, but later realized it was an error within the IHSS office. After assisting her client with additional measures to be reapproved for IHSS, which were futile, Dee stopped her services. Unfortunately, her client passed away and Dee was unable to receive compensation for the many hours she provided care.

In addition to the low wages earned, Dee attributes this line of work to be physically and mentally exhausting. Despite caring for her client for 18 years, the client's mental conditions impact her ability to effectively support them. She states, "she has bipolar and dementia to the point where half the time she doesn't know who I am. And so that's very complicated to deal with." While attempting to submit her electronic timesheet to be compensated for her care, she also describes her autistic client becoming frustrated from the diverted attention. She described "they don't understand that what you're doing is to help them, so that you get paid, so that you can take care of them. They don't understand that, they want food, they want their hair brushed, or whatever it is that they're feeling that they want. It's all about them."

While Dee's primary concerns with IHSS is the poor compensation, she highlighted the importance of the recent victory Local SEIU 2015 had. The implementation of a floating wage in this new contract is a grand victory. She describes her own role in this new contract, "we work very hard to get them to understand what we do, understand how hard this is, how horrible the job is, how mistreated we are and we finally got a fairly decent raise, which was \$1, that we'll get right away, then the 50 cent raise that will come when the minimum wage goes up in January. The county is not doing that the state is, and then a 60 cent raise in February. So it'll be a total of \$2.10. But I don't care where it comes from, that's \$2.10 More than I have today."

INTERVIEW SUMMARY: MANUEL REYES – LED REPRESENTATIVE UDW

As the lead representative for UDW, Manuel Reyes oversees other representatives in the county of Riverside to help with the expansion and growth of the union, assist in educating IHSS providers of their rights, and increasing awareness of the resources members have access to. For example, UDW regularly holds membership meetings and area information meetings where representatives travel to distant communities across the county, including Palm Desert, Indio, and Menifee, to provide information to union members. Across these meetings, members are informed about upcoming changes that may affect them, including the election. However, one of the barriers of maintaining IHSS providers informed about their worker rights is the high turnover rate in the industry. Oftentimes provider's recipients pass away or they are no longer able to provide care due to their age.

As contract negotiation season approaches, UDW draws on membership surveys to understand the needs and wants of providers. While negotiations occur county by county, for the most part, members across UDW describe hoping to see increases in wages, benefits, sick hours, and a negotiation for vacation hours. However, at the county level, UDW is unable to negotiate sick and vacation hours for providers.

Drawing from the recent contract win UDW had, providers in Riverside County are currently earning \$18 an hour despite the state of California's base wage being \$16.50. While the current contract is set to expire on December 31, 2024, there is a clause that allows UDW to negotiate for a contract reopener for higher wages if the county is unable to increase wages due to the state cap. Since the state's minimum wage cap has not increased, UDW is entering negotiations with the county on only wages in October 2024. UDW's new contract also includes a \$20,000 life insurance policy for all providers, their spouses, and their dependents. After witnessing many IHSS recipients pass away during the pandemic, IHSS providers highlighted the need for a life insurance policy, which led UDW to negotiate with the County of Riverside. In addition, UDW's contract includes a health insurance policy, which includes medical, dental, and vision for \$30 a month through Kaiser. Providers also stressed the need for PPE supplies such as masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer, all which was won in the new contract.

However, since the majority of providers in Riverside County are people of color, low income, and face language barriers, they often face difficulties in accessing the resources they need. Workers are required to work 80 hours and pay \$30 a

month to access health benefits through the union. As folks are often not working sufficient hours and may not be able to pay the monthly fee, many workers rely on health fairs to access necessary resources. To help support UDW members, UDW collaborates with local organizations and the Board of Supervisors to connect people with resources such as getting vaccinated, access to prescribed glasses, and health benefits.

In addition to connecting members to resources, UDW has also recently developed a resource center to provide members and their families with access to training and a pathway to higher education. Among the training courses provided include CPR, first aid, bloodborne pathogens, infectious diseases, hazardous waste and materials, and cleaning materials. Similarly, the UDW Resource Center provides members with guidance in completing their Associates degree and obtaining certifications. While the Career Pathways Program is no longer funded by the state, it was a program UDW was able to lobby for that supported providers in continuing to expand their training and expertise to better assist their recipients. Rather than providers leaving the care industry when their recipients passed, the Career Pathways Program provided them with an additional \$500 incentive, a \$2000 maximum, after the completion of every 15 hours of training. Despite the lack of funding for the program, UDW is actively connecting members to local resources through the UDW Training Center.

Across the state, there is an increasing need for IHSS providers due to the growing age of the population. However, due to the high turnover rates, UDW, in collaboration with SEIU 2015, are attempting to engage in statewide bargaining to transition IHSS from a job to a career. Since the only time IHSS providers can see an increase in sick hours or vacation is when a new state law or mandate is introduced in California, state level bargaining will allow unions to fight for more worker benefits including sick and vacation hours and paid travel benefits. By allowing providers to earning liveable wages, receive employee benefits, and prevent them from taking on multiple jobs to survive, Manuel states providers are extending their recipients lives:

“When you're able to be a caregiver in this program and not be worried about taking on a second job to pay the bills, when you have a job that's taking care of a life, you're extending that life for everyone.”

Another key statewide concern is the share of cost associated with recipients. When a recipient earns too much money from their state benefits or if they save more than \$2,000, they are required to pay a portion of the costs associated with their care. However, having to share the costs of care can trigger financial

hardship for the recipient and lead to the provider not being paid for their hours. As a result, the provider would be forced to report to the state their lack of payment, leading to having to go through small claims court and the recipient losing care.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY: MIGUEL BENITEZ – REGIONAL 2 DIRECTOR FOR SEIU 2015

“To be a home care provider, you have to have compassion, you have to have a love for the person you take care of, because if not, I think it just be a very difficult job to do if you didn't have that.”

As the Southern California Regional Director for SEIU 2015, Miguel Benitez oversees San Bernardino, San Diego, Orange, Ventura, and Santa Barbara counties. In region 2 alone, SEIU 2015 represents about 46,000 home care providers with San Bernardino having the largest population, about 37,400 providers. In San Bernardino, the two primary languages providers speak are English and Spanish. To ensure providers are able to understand their workers rights and available resources, SEIU 2015 conducts membership meetings in both languages. While provider's demographics across the counties differ, they all share the same concerns over not being paid enough and not having sufficient benefits.

In San Bernardino, specifically, IHSS providers are earning \$18.10 as a result of SEIU 2015's recent contract win. Miguel, as part of the bargaining team, was able to secure a “floating wage,” which is an additional \$2.10 on top of the minimum wage for homecare providers regardless of minimum wage changes. In addition to securing a floating wage, SEIU 2015 was able to win a \$250 one time payment from the American Rescue Plan for providers and increase budgets for health care, training, and PPE. Similarly, the contract included for the first time Stewart pay and bargaining team pay, which granted providers who were actively working with the union access to pay.

In addition to the wins secured, IHSS providers have also requested the need for a pension plan. However, because IHSS contracts are negotiated at the county level, SEIU 2015 has been unable to secure pension benefits for providers. As a majority of providers are older, people of color, and women, they are encountering growing concerns over their retirement.

As a social justice driven organization, SEIU 2015 has collaborated with multiple community organizations to support their members and local residents.

In San Bernardino County, SEIU 2015 connects providers to the Center for Caregiver Advancement (CCA) to access training opportunities. Training courses are offered online and in-person as well as in multiple languages. In addition, since San Bernardino has become a growing hub for the warehouse and logistics industry, SEIU 2015 has become involved in ensuring new warehouses have union jobs and they are not polluting the environment. In collaboration with Teamsters, SEIU 2015 has highlighted the community's concerns to ensure they are not suffering the environmental consequences of the industry.

The visible support SEIU 2015 has provided to local communities also assisted the union in winning their previous contract negotiations. Miguel stated San Bernardino County has witnessed the dedicated involvement of the union members and their power. He states, "I think now in San Bernardino County, folks know that home care providers from SEIU 2015 have a lot of power in their voice and also because of what they're able to do."

Miguel also highlighted the growing need for home care providers in San Bernardino county alone.

"In 2021, folks who were 60 years old, or more, it was about 388,000 [who needed care] and we project by 2060 that number is going to go to 530,000. So it's going to go up roughly about 150,000 and who's going to care for them, right? So if we don't have home care providers who are making decent wages and benefits, we're going to be in a care crisis."

In order to address the care crisis, SEIU 2015 is working on transforming IHSS from a job into a career with liveable wages and benefits. By making IHSS a career, this will also help reduce the high turnover rate that leads providers to different industries with higher pay and lower responsibilities. They also hope to attract younger populations into the field who can develop a career as they advance in the field. One method to do so is by fighting for contracts with a \$20 minimum wage. Another reason it is important to strengthen providers' income is due to their economic support to the regional economy. Since home care is funded through three different levels, including federal, state, and county, the money they earn at the federal and state level is being spent locally, ultimately boosting their local economy. Not only are providers offering quality care to the local community, but they are also ensuring federal and state funding remains local.

Another method to ensure IHSS become a sustainable career is through statewide bargaining. AB 1672, the IHSS Employee Relations Act by Assemblymember Matt Haney, sought to have IHSS contract negotiations move from being county by

county to statewide bargaining. Miguel states statewide bargaining is not only going to streamline the bargaining process, but it will also help IHSS providers develop a career with liveable wages and benefits. He states, "We know that the senior population is going to continue to grow, right? So that's going to be an issue that we have across the state. The average [earnings] is \$16.46 for home care providers, but the average living wage in California is \$43.44. So you see that huge gap. So this makes a huge problem for the state of California."