



**NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
OFFICE OF CARE WORKFORCE  
NEEDS ASSESSMENT EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY TO SUPPORT STRATEGIC  
PLANNING 2026**





## New Jersey Office of Care Workforce Needs Assessment Executive Summary to Support Strategic Planning

The New Jersey Department of Labor, Office of Care Workforce Needs Assessment was undertaken to identify gaps, challenges, and opportunities in supporting New Jersey’s care workforce across key sectors, including early childhood care and education, maternal and infant mental health, direct care for seniors, and care for people with disabilities. Specifically, the assessment was designed to inform actionable recommendations and guide the development of the Office of Care Workforce’s strategic plan by:

- Centering care professional voice and lived experience through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and listen-back sessions
- Examining care workforce conditions related to recruitment and retention, including compensation, access to benefits and worker supports, professional development, career pipelines and pathways, and mental health supports and well-being
- Identifying cross-sector alignment opportunities and identifying initiatives and programs that can strengthen workforce stability and job quality
- Serving as a starting point for cross-agency collaboration and strategy development

219 surveys were distributed, and 342 responses were received. The largest group of responses represented direct care professionals, followed by supervisors and program administrators. The responses spanned the spectrum of care sectors. Additionally, five listen-back sessions, six focus groups, and seven interviews were conducted. Through the development and implementation of the Needs Assessment activities, structured, multi-stage feedback loops were embedded to ensure the findings and recommendations accurately reflect the experiences, needs, and priorities of the entire care workforce and the geographic and cultural differences across New Jersey.

Additionally, a systems scan of both ongoing initiatives and national and state research was conducted to ensure the efforts complemented, rather than duplicated, existing work.

The Needs Assessment found that while investments in the care workforce have made some difference in recent years, care professionals still struggle with their quality of life, and high turnover and workforce shortages persist.

The following actionable recommendations emerged for consideration in developing the Office of Care Workforce’s strategic plan. Notably, all respondents had similar experiences across sectors and positions, with minimal difference.

## Centering Professional Engagement and Gathering Data

- **Actionable recommendation:** Create a mechanism to incorporate professional voice into all decision-making by establishing an ongoing Care Workforce Council, with sector-specific subcouncils, to center professional voices in all policy and initiative decision-making. Ensure equitable workforce representation, including self-employed individuals, small organizations, and families.
- **Actionable recommendation:** Conduct further focus groups and interviews with new care professionals across the sectors to result in increased understanding of their motivations for entering the field, their career outlook, and the limitations they face.
- **Actionable recommendation:** Raise awareness of the Office of Care Workforce and its mission, particularly its role in encouraging collaboration across state agencies, resulting in increased understanding of and collaboration with the Office.
- **Actionable recommendation:** Review the bright spots provided by participants and identify common elements that are replicable and scalable.

## Recruitment: Attracting Talent and Building Educational Pathways

- **Actionable recommendation:** Scan and catalogue talent pipelines across sectors; highlight alignment, identify bright spots, gaps, and opportunities; and promote strategies to increase talent pool pipelines.
- **Actionable recommendation:** Scan and catalogue community college courses that support care professional certification and degree-granting courses; identify gaps; and work to increase access to paid on-the-job training across the workforce.
- **Actionable recommendation:** Scan and catalogue all apprenticeship opportunities and active mentor programs across sectors to begin alignment across sectors.
- **Actionable recommendation:** Establish successful pathways for self-employed entrepreneurs. This could include access to business professional development and grants to support start-ups and promote sustainability.

### What should the system look like in three years and how do we get there?

Participant responses can be summarized by saying,

*“A stable professionalized workforce with tiered pay, career pathways, meaningful incentives for professional development, and strong leadership support can be achieved by aligning funding flexibility, incentives, and workforce voice included in policy decision making.”*



## Retention: Creating a Sustainable and Rewarding Workplace

- **Actionable recommendation:** Increase access to mental health and well-being supports by all care professionals, no matter their organizational affiliation. To assist in identifying strategies, conduct an initial scan and catalogue existing mental health supports and content-specific professional development available across the care workforce sectors.
- **Actionable recommendation:** Identify and raise awareness of affordable insurance options for the workforce.
- **Actionable recommendation:** Explore examples of child care subsidies for professionals across the care sector.
- **Actionable recommendation:** Implement a public awareness campaign elevating care professionals and their essential and valuable work across sectors, particularly among policymakers, employers, and the general public.
- **Actionable recommendation:** Examine and document opportunities to reduce administrative burden, such as access to shared services and shared databases that reduce redundancies, like portable professional development tracking across sectors.

Participants made it clear that the workforce challenges cannot be solved through isolated initiatives and programs. Real change will take coordinated cross-sector strategies that align policies, expectations, requirements, and funding. Long-term solutions include breaking down silos across agencies and investing in a shared infrastructure.