

The Direct Care Alliance Personal Care & Support Credential

Direct care workers who provide personal assistance services¹ are a crucial link in our health care system, helping elders and people living with disabilities stay at home and maintain their independence and quality of life. Yet the employers and consumers who depend on these workers have a problem. With no national credentialing or training requirements for personal assistance, elders, people with disabilities and their families have no reliable way to assess the knowledge of those they hire; agency employers must devise their own assessment procedures; state policy makers have no national standard to depend upon; and workers in this field

Building Value and Boosting Professionalism of the Workforce

Direct care workers, employers, elders, people living with disabilities and their families all benefit from a professionalized workforce. These stakeholders benefit from the credential in several ways:

For direct care workers, the credential:

- ▶▶ Demonstrates a broad knowledge base that is required to be a competent personal assistance professional
- ▶▶ Provides formal, portable professional recognition at the national level
- ▶▶ Promotes a sense of pride in the role
- ▶▶ Increases skills and market value
- ▶▶ Potentially increases career opportunities

For consumers, the credential:

- ▶▶ Assures that staff has met a national industry standard
- ▶▶ Provides access to better-qualified workers that allow them to control and direct their own care
- ▶▶ Provides access to information about the skill and competency level of those they hire

For employers, the credential:

- ▶▶ Assures a higher quality workforce and more competent staff
- ▶▶ Provides access to workers that consumers want to hire: reliable, competent, and supportive
- ▶▶ Creates a pool of qualified home care professionals that exhibit professionalism and pride in their profession

have no way to demonstrate their professionalism and skill.

The Direct Care Alliance has developed a solution to that problem. The national Direct Care Alliance Personal Care and Support Credential is a competency-based test for personal assistance workers in home and community-based settings. Developed with generous support from the Ford Foundation, the credential meets Institute for Credentialing Excellence standards and tests for the skills and knowledge personal assistance workers need to do their job well. The long-range plan is to build a career lattice with additional specialty credentials in topics such as dementia care, geriatrics and working with adults with disabilities. The criteria were developed by personal assistance workers and vetted by people with disabilities and employers who hire them. This rigorous process included a detailed job analysis based on national competency standards, development of test specifications and validation of test items. The test reflects what personal assistance workers do on the job and is not based on any specific training

- National Advisory Council Members as of October 2010
- John Booker, President, National Association of Direct Care Workers of Color
- Terry Bucher, Founder & President Emeritus, Florida Professional Association of Care Givers
- Susan Chapman, Ph.D., RN, Center for Personal Assistance Services
- Judy Clinco, Board Chair, Arizona Caregivers Association
- Tracy Dudzinski, Vice Chair, Wisconsin Direct Care Association
- Dennis Fitzgibbons, Executive Director, Alpha One
- Priscilla Gonzales, Director, Domestic Workers United
- Amy Hewitt, Ph.D., Senior Research Director, Institute of Community Integration, University of Minnesota
- Gloria Horton, Executive Director, Visiting Nurse Plus, Inc.
- Gail Hunt, President and CEO, National Alliance for Caregiving
- Karyne Jones, President and CEO, National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc.
- Kathy Kelly, Executive Director, Family Caregiver Alliance
- Jane Lipscomb, Ph.D., University of Maryland
- Sandra Nathan, National Council on Aging
- Juan Ramos, Ph.D, National Hispanic Council on Aging
- Robyn Stone, Ph.D., Executive Director, Institute for the Future of Aging Services
- For the Direct Care Alliance:
 - Helen Hanson, CNA
 - Vera Salter, Ph.D
 - Leonila Vega, Esq.
- The credential is governed by a committee appointed by the Direct Care Alliance Board of Directors and advised by the National Advisory Council.

program. Instead, it was built to complement existing trainings. If requested, the Direct Care Alliance is able to recommend training programs to prepare for the test.

How It Works

This test includes a multiple choice section to assess knowledge and a situational judgment test to assess judgment and problem solving. In order to take the DCA Personal Care and Support Credential exam, candidates must be at least 18 years of age. Candidates must also:

- Show documented evidence of successful completion of at least an 120-hour course that covers the essential elements of the work of a personal assistance professional; or
- Show documented evidence of successful completion of at least a 40-hour course that covers the essential elements of the work of a personal assistance professional AND six months work in good standing providing personal support services; or
- Have worked for at least two years in good standing providing personal assistance services.

In addition, candidates must:

- Comply with state regulatory training requirements for the level of service provided in the state where the individual works; and
- Not have a criminal record or have been convicted of neglect or abuse; and

What's in the Exam?

Subject Area	Percentage of the Test
1. Understanding the Role of the Direct Care Worker	18%
2. Ethics and Integrity	12%
3. Judgment and Interpersonal Skills	23%
4. Personal Care Knowledge and Skills	11%
5. Health Related Knowledge and Skills	6%
6. In-Home and Nutritional Support	8%
7. Safety and Emergencies	14%
8. Knowledge of Consumer Specific Needs	8%

- Demonstrate a commitment to the code of conduct/ statement of ethical standards

The exam cost is \$140.³ Candidates who pass the exam will be credentialed for three years, with the opportunity to apply for recertification.⁴

Next Steps

To learn more and to apply for the exam, visit www.directcarealliance.org/credential. Employers interested in registering a group of 100 or more employees for the exam should contact DCA to discuss registration and special group rates.

For more information on how the credential impacts existing training programs or state requirements, and for any other questions, email hhanson@directcarealliance.org.

Footnotes

¹ Personal assistance services refer to hands-on or cueing assistance with the performance of activities of daily living (ADL) such as eating, bathing or dressing, or instrumental activities of daily living (IADL) such as meal preparation, using the telephone, and transportation. These services help older people and people with disabilities maintain their independence in their own homes and communities. Some personal assistance workers also assist those they support with health-related tasks.

³ Exam cost is \$140 for individuals and \$125 for DCA members. If candidate is determined ineligible for exam, \$70 will be refunded. Fees may be paid by the worker, employer or state.

⁴ Candidates must work at least 24 hours per year providing personal assistance services and document completion of 36 hours of continuing education or in-service education over a three-year period in topics related to personal support work. The fee for recertification is \$15.

To learn more about the DCA Personal Care and Support Credential, contact Helen Hanson at hhanson@directcarealliance.org or (347) 563-1193