

Shortage of care workers looms

It could impact the care of older adults and disabled people.

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if you go: A community forum on the direct-care worker shortage will be held from 8 to 9:30 a.m. Tuesday, Sept. 17, at Northeast Iowa Community College Town Clock Center for Professional Development, 680 Main St.

A growing shortage of workers could impact the care of older adults and people with disabilities.

Iowa has about 75,000 direct-care workers to serve the needs of these groups but will need 20,000 additional workers in seven years.

"The looming direct support workforce shortage is a pressing matter not only at the state level but throughout the nation," said Marilyn Althoff, CEO of Hills & Dales in Dubuque. "It is good that this crisis is coming to the forefront of community conversations, and through discussion and advocacy we can potentially avert or alleviate the problem."

A community forum on the direct-care worker shortage will be held this week.

Dubuque's Area Residential Care struggles with the shortage daily.

"We absolutely have that problem, and it's getting worse," said Jon Romaine, ARC's executive director. "There aren't enough people in (the profession), and we have to make sure the individuals we serve are safe."

Area Residential Care provides community-based services to people with intellectual disabilities.

"Since September 2009, ARC has never had less than five full-time openings," Romaine said. "This week, we have 23 full-time openings. If people are looking for a job, this is the place to come.

Direct Care Task Force organizers hope increased, standardized training will help mitigate the impacts of the shortage by stemming high turnover rates and attracting employees to the profession.

Current training for direct-care workers lacks standardization, which leads to costly retraining. Direct-care workers change jobs or leave the profession at an annual rate of 64 percent.

Hills & Dales is a member of the Iowa Association of Community Providers, which has provided input to the task force

"We know that a well-trained workforce will have a positive impact in retaining quality staff to support persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities," Althoff said.

Current trends find individuals with disabilities living in community-based models, outside of institutional settings.

"It will be challenging to meet all the demands due to the lack of qualified persons available to fulfill the need," Althoff said.