



Washington State Auditor's Office

Performance Audit

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Barriers to Home Care Aide Certification

Despite the efforts made by the two state agencies involved in administering the home care aide certification program in Washington, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and the Department of Health (DOH), past performance audits showed that certification rates have remained static at about 57 percent of all applicants. During those audits, various stakeholders told us that barriers within the system contribute to the low completion rate. Some of the barriers they mentioned are limited access to training and the exam, and language barriers for limited English proficiency (LEP) applicants. Although DSHS and DOH have been trying to address barriers since the program's inception, they agree more long-term care workers are needed to help fulfill the growing demand.

We conducted this audit to identify the barriers faced by applicants and consider improvement opportunities for the agencies and their partners (including a non-profit school, the Training Partnership, and the testing company Prometric). We also noted changes already made and whether they were having the desired effect.

Survey respondents said aspects of both the training and the exam phases of certification posed barriers

We began by surveying 126 applicants who did not achieve certification to assess whether and where in the process they faced barriers to becoming certified as home care aides. A quarter told us they dropped out for personal reasons, but almost two-thirds left due to barriers, particularly in the training and exam phases.

Training issues. Almost 70 percent of the respondents who dropped out because of a barrier said a training issue contributed to their decision. About half said the most difficult problem in the training phase was finding course times that fit their schedule, with some mentioning that training required too much time away from their clients or other jobs. Another 14 percent said they could not find training close to where they lived, with one telling us there were no classes within a two-hour drive of her home in Omak. Finally, 16 percent thought the training included irrelevant information that did not prepare them for the exam.

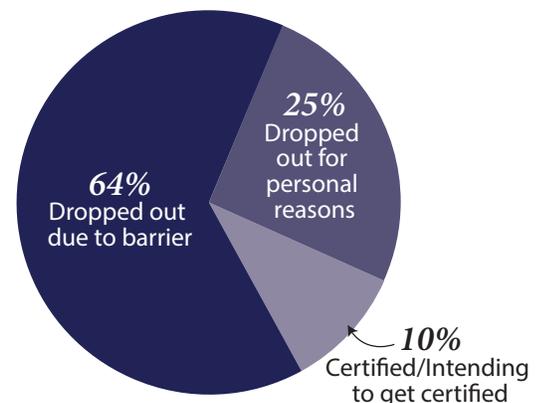
What do home care aides do?

Home care aides provide support and personal care to people with impairments due to age, cognitive or physical disabilities. Home care aides help clients with eating, bathing, dressing and carrying out many activities of daily living in the clients' homes or in residential facilities.

Most of these workers are required by law to complete training program and pass an exam to gain a certificate.

What happened to the applicants we surveyed?

Based on 126 respondents



Source: Auditor analysis of survey results.

“My training was at a hotel and they did not have all the supplies and equipment that they usually use. We had to constantly pretend to use items we did not have. I did not feel prepared going into the skills exam.”

~ Respondent interview.

Exam issues. More than half of the respondents who faced a barrier experienced a problem with the exam. These people said they had trouble signing up for the exam, or could not find testing sites close to home; one applicant said the assigned test location was an hour and a half away, at a time that did not accommodate her schedule. Other noted issues with the general testing environment, and several thought too much time elapsed between concluding training and the scheduled exam.

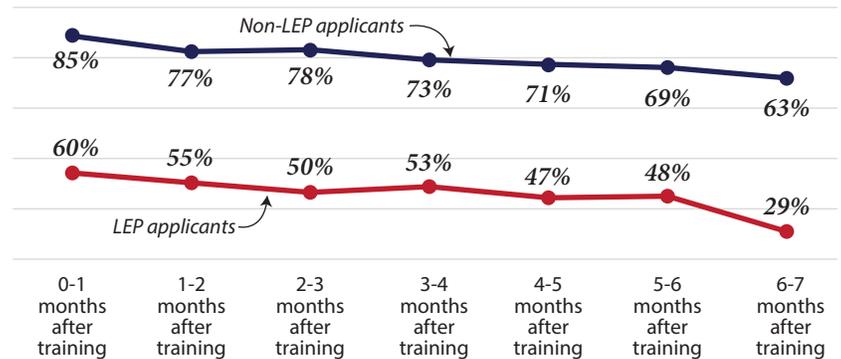
Applicants with limited English proficiency experienced these barriers and some unique to language

Sixty percent of LEP respondents told us they found language barriers insurmountable so they left the program. Many said it was difficult to find training and exams in their preferred language. A few of these respondents said they still want to take the exam, but have been waiting for DOH to find them an interpreter. Another said the exam was poorly translated, mentioning that medical terms were not translated correctly.

We found that LEP applicants already pass the exam at a lower rate than their English-speaking counterparts, and this difference becomes more pronounced as more time elapses between concluding training and taking the exam.

Passage rates for LEP applicants, already lower than for English speakers, drops further as time passes between concluding training and the exam date

Percent of applicants attaining certifications



Source: Auditor prepared using data from the DOH

The agencies and their partners have made efforts already

DSHS and DOH have taken steps to address these barriers. They have worked with their partners to try to increase the number of locations that offer training and exams, but they have run into barriers themselves, often experiencing difficulties securing facilities to hold the training and testing.

However, the agencies have mentioned successes in their efforts to address barriers for LEP applicants. In addition to offering translation and interpreter services, they recently created a new exam with simplified language, making it easier to understand for non-English speakers. DOH data show a 25-percentage-point increase in written exam passage rates for LEP applicants.

Recommendations in brief

Even with these successes, more can be done. We recommend DSHS and DOH continue to work to identify and resolve barriers to certification. To address specific barriers we identified in the survey, we recommend the agencies:

- ✓ Increase training locations and adopt flexible schedules
- ✓ Increase the number of testing sites in the state
- ✓ Consider expanding the number of languages currently available for training and the exam
- ✓ Emphasize the importance of taking the exam on the date scheduled

To learn more about performance audit of the long-term in-home care program, visit our website at: www.sao.wa.gov/state/Pages/LongTermCareWorkerCertification.aspx.