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Barriers to Home Care Aide Certification

Program background

Long-term care workers in Washington provide support and personal care to elderly and disabled adults, helping them with eating, bathing, dressing, and carrying out many activities of daily living. They can work in the client's home or in residential facilities, such as adult family homes and assisted living facilities. The work is demanding, wages tend to be low, and there are few opportunities for advancement in the field. The demand for these workers is growing as Washington's population ages and a growing number of people need long-term care. Nonetheless, the state is facing a shortage of workers, and the gap between supply and demand is likely to grow.

Related audit

This audit is being done in concert with an audit mandated by the Initiative.

In 2011, voters approved Initiative 1163, which requires workers to undergo state and federal background checks, complete 75 hours of training within 120 days of being hired, and pass a home care aide certification exam and skills test within 200 days. Some workers are exempt from these requirements, including children and parent caregivers, workers grandfathered into the system, and workers with other certifications such as registered nurses and nursing assistant certified.

The Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) are responsible for implementing, overseeing and enforcing the initiative's requirements.

As a result of our prior work, we found that only 58 percent of the applicants successfully completed the requirements in 2013. Both DOH and DSHS have made improvements to the certification process, but some stakeholders are concerned that barriers remain that make completing the training and exam difficult. Concerns include:

- Multiple applications and steps make the process complicated
- Training may not be offered at convenient times and locations
- People with limited English proficiency tend to have more difficulty navigating the process
- DSHS' criteria for approving training classes may be too narrow

Scope and objectives

This audit will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What barriers do home care aide applicants face in completing the certification process?
2. What improvements can be made to help more people complete the process?

Timing

Audit results will be published in the summer of 2016.