

Home healthcare workers: invisible during the pandemic

Written by Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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Home health care is a demanding profession that has been made even harder by the COVID-19 pandemic.

An organization called New Mexico Caregivers in Action was created to address some of the issues facing home health care workers.

Because the wages for these workers are so low, NMCA, a 501©6 non-profit, has provides health insurance, as well as vision, dental and life to caregivers for \$15 a year.

In addition to New Mexico, NMCA is offering this same service to people in Arizona.

Some of the people who have taken advantage of this include people outside of New Mexico.

Shane Roanhorse has been taking care of his 92-year-old grandmother by himself for four years. Despite the heavy workload, Roanhorse is paid \$12.15 an hour by the state of Arizona, which only compensates him for five of the 24 hours he works each day

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“People don’t realize the ins and outs and the behind-the-scenes work that goes into it,” Roanhorse said. “I think a lot of people just assume ‘oh, you’re just looking after an old person.’ But, oh my gosh no, it’s so much more than that.”

He believes the low pay is at least partially a result of a view that caregiving is something a family copes with, as opposed to a paid position.

According to the organization’s website, the average hourly wage of a New Mexico home health care aide was only \$9.51 an hour in 2018. That wage increased thanks to legislation passed in 2019, but many people still find themselves struggling.

Another Arizona caregiver taking advantage of what NMCA has to offer is Sacheen Begay who takes care of her 18-year-old son, who has Down Syndrome.

“It’s really helped me understand that if I didn’t have insurance, it is a way for me to get [it],” she said.

Valerie Tsosie, another Arizona caregiver who receives support through NMCA told the *Sun* that in some cases caregivers actually die before their clients do.

She said that sometimes a caregiver gives so much to their work, they forget about themselves.

Tsosie emphasized practicing self-care. She suggested caregivers ask themselves if they’ve eaten that day, or if they’re getting enough rest. She explained that self-care is just as important as the health care they provide to others.

“Because if you don’t [take care of yourself], who’s going to take over for you?”

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For more information about how the NM Caregivers Association can help caregivers with insurance and other needs, visit nmcareaction.org or call them at (505) 867-6046.

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