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Elderly will lose caregivers due to Trump's immigration policies

A good deal of news coverage recently has dealt with the Trump Administration's immigration policies, particularly concerning prosecuting illegal immigrants and crime perceived to be committed by illegal immigrants. However, *Kaiser Health News* featured an article that brings up another aspect of stricter immigration policies that many may not have considered. The elderly, both in facilities and at home, will be put at risk by the loss of thousands of direct care workers who happen to be immigrants. <https://khn.org/news/trump-immigration-policies-put-immigrant-caregivers-and-elderly-patients-at-risk/>.

In a thoughtful article, Melissa Bailey portrays the work life of a Haitian immigrant, Nirva, who is living in the U.S. under Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which is a humanitarian program that gives those who fled Haiti permission to work and live here after the devastating January 2010 earthquake there. Many of the 59,000 Haitians living here under this program work in health care as nursing assistants or home health aides, doing this difficult work for low wages. Nirva works five overnight shifts in a rehab facility, three shifts in a chiropractor's office, and also helps care for an elderly woman who wishes to remain in her own home. Nirva's days as a care worker are numbered, however, since the Trump Administration has decided to end TPS for Haitians, saying that they have until July 22, 2019 to leave or face deportation. The Honduras TPS designation expires this July. Many Haitians have already fled the country for Canada in fear.

The Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute (PHI), a New York based organization that studies the workforce, tells us that nationwide one million immigrants work in direct care as CNAs, personal care attendants, or home health aides. Robert Espinoza, PHI's vice president of policy, indicates that the work is difficult and wages are low. Espinoza states that the "totality of the anti-immigrant climate" threatens the stability of the workforce—and "the ability of older people and people with disabilities to access home health care."

The country faces a severe shortage of home health aides. With 10,000 baby boomers turning 65 each day, a more serious shortfall is coming, per Paul Osterman, a professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management. He also says that sum of the proposed and current immigration policies may have a serious impact. "People aren't going to be able to have quality care," he said. "They're not going to be able to stay at home."

The converse argument is that direct care jobs are filled by Americans now. And with the number of unemployed Americans, the facilities and home care agencies should be recruiting U.S. citizens. However, Sister Jacquelyn McCarthy, CEO of Bethany Health Care Center in Framingham, which runs a nursing home with 170 patients, looks at this problem differently. She has eight Haitian and Salvadoran workers through TPS who show up reliably, and never call out sick. They have worked there for over five years. Sister McCarthy has six CNA vacancies and cannot afford more. There are no Americans coming to take these jobs. Caring for the elderly and those with disabilities is hard work and not for everyone.

Current employers are fighting to hold onto their immigrant workers. The elderly who currently benefit from the presence of TPS workers are fearful of what will happen when their caregivers leave. We all need to brace for the loss of direct care workers if current government policies continue to be implemented.