

Healthcare Support

Home Health Aides

Home Health Aides assist people who are disabled, chronically ill, cognitively impaired, or elderly adults who live in their own homes but require more assistance than their friends and families can provide. They help people go to work and remain engaged in the community. Their duties include helping patients with moving in and out of beds, wheelchairs or automobiles, dressing and grooming. They also provide emotional support and advice to patients and their families on preparing healthy meals, living independently, or adapting to disability or illness. Some may take charge of changing bed linens and doing laundry, entertaining and conversing with the patient, planning, purchasing, and making meals according to the patient's diet. Home health aides direct patients in exercise and the use of braces or artificial limbs, changing dressings, monitoring heart rate, temperature, and respiration rate. Other household duties, such as running errands are often part of the job. Aides may work with one patient or several patients depending on the severity of the client's condition.

Home health aides work for certified home health or hospice agencies that receive funding from the government and comply with government regulations. They usually work under the supervision of nurses, keep patient records, and report their client's condition to their supervisor.

Work as a home health aide is physically demanding because it is often necessary to help patients get in and out of bed and patients with limited mobility may necessitate heavy lifting. In addition home health aides can be exposed to infectious agents and communicable diseases. Some duties performed are unpleasant, like emptying bed pans and changing soiled linens. Aides may spend a significant amount of time traveling between homes if they have several clients and conditions of the homes may vary from neat and tidy to those that are untidy and have a depressing atmosphere. Client temperament can vary as well and some can be angry, abusive, and uncooperative.

Education/Training

How to Obtain:

Home health aides who work for agencies that receive reimbursement from Medicare or Medicaid must receive a minimum of 75 hours of training and complete a competency evaluation or certification program and a minimum of 16 hours of supervised practical training is required before an aide can have direct, unsupervised contact with a resident.

The National Association for Home Care and Hospice (NAHC) offers national certification for aides. The requirements for certification through the NAHC are:

- 75 hours of training
- Observation and documentation of 17 skills for competency, assessed by a registered nurse
- Passing a written examination developed by NAHC

Each state has different licensing and certification guidelines for home health aides. In New York, a home health aide must comply with state rules and regulations, and individual healthcare agencies provide training and examinations for certification. Workers who apply for employment with a home care services agency are required to undergo a background investigation that determines an individual's eligibility for employment.

Advancement for home health aides is limited. In some agencies, workers start out performing homemaker duties, such as cleaning. With experience and training, they may take on more personal care duties.

More Information on Licensing and Certification:

- HomeCare University, Home Care Aide National Certification Program:
<http://www.nahc.org/education/PDFs/HCAcert.pdf>,
- New York State Department of Health, Personal Care Aide Training Programs:
http://www.health.state.ny.us/professionals/home_care/personal_care_aide_training_programs.htm

Average Costs:

Costs of training programs vary by locality. In New York State, home health aide training classes are free, but you are responsible for your own physical, which costs around \$100. The examination is also free, but each agency's costs may vary.