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### Summit Snapshot: Rural Personal Assistance Services

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# SUMMIT SNAPSHOT: RURAL PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES



FACT SHEET

JANUARY 2023

Jeff Gutierrez and Catherine Ipsen



## SUMMIT INTRODUCTION

For the 2023 Rural Disability Research and Practice Summit, RTC:Rural combined presentations by researchers and panels of individuals with lived experience. The summit took place over two days, with two different themes. The theme of Day 1 was Rural Personal Assistance Services (PAS), and the theme of Day 2 was Rural Digital Access. This snapshot provides a summary of the presentations on rural personal assistance services.



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# RURAL PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH

Catherine Ipsen, Andrew Myers, and Lillie Greiman

The supply of rural PAS workers is shrinking due to low wage rates and working conditions, particularly during COVID-19. At the same time, demand is growing due to an aging population and growing number of people with disabilities who require personal assistance services. This has resulted in a persistent and increasing gap between supply and demand of PAS workers.

RTC: Rural researchers have studied the challenges and opportunities of rural PAS. Major findings include:

- There is a growing awareness of the mismatch between Home and Community-Based Service (HCBS) rules regarding reimbursement and hours and worker rights for living wages and worker protections.
- Those who need care and the workers who provide the care are not evenly distributed across the country, geographically or between urban and rural areas. This is particularly true in Southern states where there are fewer workers for the number of people who need services.
- PAS workers are critical to ensuring that people can live and be part of their communities. Going without PAS leads to dire and sometimes inhumane outcomes.
- Rural PAS workers highlighted the importance and value of meaningful work and human connections.

With this background in mind, we wanted to hear ideas from PAS consumers, workers, and systems stakeholders about their ideas to alleviate challenges.

## CONSUMER PERSPECTIVES



Greg English, self-directed PAS consumer, and Chris Gaspari, PAS consumer and disability advocate, provided perspectives for finding and maintaining PAS workers. These included:

- Using all of your community connections to find quality workers.
- Relying on word of mouth to share positive experiences.
- Finding creative ways to recruit workers.
- Creating a positive work environment through humor.
- Developing good relationships and making decisions together.
- Creating accessible homes, for safety and daily living, and to reduce the time required and burden on workers.
- Maintaining access to their communities and services.

## WORKER PERSPECTIVES



Lacian Gordon and Simone Tatman, PAS workers, provided perspectives for finding and keeping good PCA jobs. These included:

- The use of technology to coordinate, improve scheduling, and reduce miscommunication.
- Maintaining the safety, privacy, and dignity of all parties.
- Accessible living space, which allowed for better service delivery and opportunities to build closer relationships.
- The importance of good personal relationships and meaningfulness of the work.

## SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVES



Jeff Hughes, Director, Progressive Independence, and Jane Johnson, Executive Director, Florida Association for Centers for Independent Living, provided systems change perspectives. These included:

- Partnering with managed care organizations to incentivize the work and remove barriers.
- Speaking the language of policy makers: numbers, data, costs, and illustrative stories.
- Examining reimbursement rates and how this shapes PAS worker availability.
- Partnering with organizations to advocate for home modifications and assistive technology.
- Incorporating social determinants of health to create more livable communities.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS



The presentation led to some key takeaways:

- Value the needs of both consumers and workers.
- Recognize the role of the physical and social environments in the home and the community.
- Communication is key, especially with policymakers and people in power.
- Rural perspectives are critical.
- There is a need for improved data collection on both PAS workers and consumers.

## CONCLUSION



The research and the perspectives of presenters illustrate the importance of overcoming the challenges of rural PAS. Rural people with disabilities need assistance to remain in their homes, and rural caregivers deserve increased pay and benefits for the vital work they do. While easy solutions may be hard to come by, there should be a vested interest in increasing the supply of rural PAS workers and improving the existing systemic structures.

Visit our [Summit webpage](#) to view the full presentation on Rural Personal Assistance Services.

## CITATION



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## FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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