

# Standardized training established for personal care aides

ADAM BOWIE Fredericton Daily Gleaner  
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New Brunswick has a new professional training standard for agency-employed personal care aides.

Officials with the New Brunswick Home Support Association, working with the Department of Social Development and the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, have developed standardized training and have established a new certification process for home support workers employed by agencies in both urban and rural areas.

When seniors, people with disabilities, or their families hire a personal care aide through an agency to provide in-home care, they can rest easy knowing the employee has been screened for any previous criminal activities, has a current and up-to-date standard First Aid and CPR certification, has liability insurance, and has completed training that ensures they're qualified to offer care for people in the comfort of their own homes.

Janet Gee, executive director of the New Brunswick Home Support Association, said this is great news for New Brunswickers in need of home-based care and for their family members, who increasingly are forced to live away from their loved ones for employment reasons.

"We're very proud of this accomplishment, of getting our industry up to this level," she said.

"As our population ages and we know that there will be more and more seniors in our province requiring care, we also know that the needs keep increasing. For many years, a worker would be doing more housekeeping kinds of things. And now they need more care. We wanted to make sure that all of our workers were up to the level of what is needed to help New Brunswickers stay in their homes as long as they wish."

Gee said establishing a firm standard of training for the province will help to ensure personal care aides have the same skillset, whether they're working in Fredericton, Sackville, Bathurst, Saint John, or Edmundston.

"This is an unregulated industry. So across our whole province training was being offered by approved agencies, by people that were approved through the Department of Social Development and by institutes, such as (the New Brunswick Community College) and others," she said.

"But as an association, we know the business. We were finding that although training courses were being provided, they were all over the place in terms of what the student was able to do when they came out. So what we based our new training on was learning outcomes. Our goal is

that when the person comes out of the course, they will be able to perform the necessary work required to be a personal care aide.”

She said the move is going to better define exactly what a client, or their family, should expect when they seek the services of an agency-employed personal care aide.

“In our current environment, I’m getting an awful lot of questions from (a client’s) children, who are living out of province, about their aging loved one and where they should go. I’m able to provide them with that information and offer them the reassurance that if they go through an agency, this is what they’re getting,” she said.

Gee said that as part of this process, all of the province’s existing agency personal care aides were tested for competency, a review that found 98 per cent of the existing staff successfully met the standards.

Those that failed to meet that standard were able to receive some extra training and re-write the testing, or, to accept new jobs that require more modest training.

In the coming weeks, all agency-employed personal care aides will be issued cards that show whether or not they have met the requirements and are in good standing with the New Brunswick Home Support Association.

When asked if this was a popular move with people working in the industry, she said that while some worried about meeting the requirements there was a real sense of accomplishment there when they were recognized for their skills.

“There was recognition for workers that what they do is a valuable service,” she said.

“Now, though, they want to be paid for their abilities and for the service they provide.”

There are roughly 3,500 trained personal care aides in the province, earning about \$11 per hour for the care they provide with limited benefits.

Jean-Francois Pelletier, a spokesman for the Department of Social Development said the hope is that this move will help to make the industry more attractive to others considering the profession.

“Social Development provided funding and actively worked with the association and Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour to develop the standardized curriculum for Home Support Workers,” he said.

“The efforts to develop and implement an affordable and accessible training strategy for home support workers will assist in recruitment and retention for the sector.”