

BUSINESS ACTION GUIDE

Leading at the Intersection of People & Profits

SET THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS

Innovative Scheduling Practices for Workplace Stability: Cooperative Home Care Associates

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 59 percent of all workers are paid hourly, and many of them are part-time. Their work schedules, which are often available only a few days ahead of time, are subject to change without notice. This makes it very difficult for workers to earn enough income to make ends meet and care for their families. Some employers have developed innovative scheduling practices to help prevent these challenges, while lowering turnover and creating a more stable workforce. To learn more about innovative scheduling practices, we



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spoke with Michael Elsas, President, and Adria Powell, Executive Vice President, at Cooperative Home Care Associates (CHCA), the nation's largest worker-owned cooperative. CHCA, with 2,050 worker owners, provides high-quality home care services to elders and individuals living with disabilities—primarily Latino and African-American residents of the South Bronx, Harlem, and Washington Heights.

Since 1985, there has been a significant increase in demand for in-home care for elderly and disabled individuals. Most retirees prefer to live at home as long as they can, and home care can be price competitive compared to nursing facilities. At the same time, the average employee turnover rate for organizations providing home care is 50 percent annually, making it difficult to meet the demand for services. Home health aides and other direct care workers are generally low-paid with few benefits, and work part-time and unpredictable hours, with inadequate training and support. We founded CHCA on the belief that home health aides who are given good salaries and benefits, training, support, and opportunities to advance and build wealth will provide much higher quality care.

We also observed that constantly fluctuating work schedules were challenging for workers and led to higher turnover, so we developed a guaranteed hours program. Implementing this program required a significant shift in mindset and practice both for us and the home health aides themselves. It was well worth it in terms of reduced turnover and increased quality of care. Our workers can count on a set paycheck, a less stressful work environment, and better managed overtime costs. These are some key lessons we have learned in the process:

1. Guarantee work hours

In CHCA's guaranteed hours program, home health aides are paid for a minimum of 30 hours a week, guaranteeing them a stable income even if they work less than this amount. To participate, employees must have worked at CHCA for three years, must accept all case assignments, and must work every other weekend. Since most CHCA aides actually work more than 35 hours per week, we rarely pay home health aides for hours not worked.

When a home health care aide meets the eligibility criteria (the threshold is 5,460 hours worked), the HR department explains the policy and expectations of the guaranteed hours program. Then the worker signs a document indicating that they wish to participate in the program and their status as a participant is activated in our database. After this, whenever the worker does not have a client to assist, they must call the office twice daily (morning and afternoon) to check for work. These check-in calls are documented so that if the aide worked less than 30 hours

CHCA'S FORMULA FOR INNOVATIVE SCHEDULING

1. Guarantee work hours
2. Provide flexible scheduling
3. Track for quality

but checked in for work they will be paid for 30 hours. A key lesson learned was to put the onus for calling on the aides rather than on administrative staff.

CHCA staff members are trained to check availability lists for those participating in the guaranteed hours program. CHCA staff are charged with assigning new clients and documenting case refusals by guaranteed hours workers. Workers are made aware that if they are not available for a particular day or period of time, they need to notify the office. If they continue to refuse the cases they are offered, their participation in the program could be jeopardized.

2. Provide flexible scheduling

We also try to be flexible where we can, and try to make the schedule work for each home health aide. For example, we coordinate full-time work for those who are looking for it by matching morning cases with afternoon cases and matching cases that are two to three days per week with additional work on off days. We also split large hour cases (seven or more hours per day) equitably among two or three aides so that no one has to work five or six days in a row. This also serves to control overtime. On a case-by-case basis, we make exceptions to certain scheduling practices such as the requirement to work every other weekend – perhaps allowing an aide to work only one day of the weekend, or giving them no weekend work for a designated period of time.

FINAL WORDS OF WISDOM

The guaranteed hours program has helped create the culture at CHCA, because we want people to work at least 30 hours per week. A lot of organizations think that such a policy will be costly – but if you tie it to full employment, it is less costly. For us, it is a means to the end of greater stability for workers and high-quality care for consumers.

HOW DO WE LEARN MORE?

[Business Know-How: Increase Productivity and Retention of Entry Level Employees](#)

[PolicyLink: Low Wage Workers Need Predictable Schedules and Minimum Hours](#)

[Harvard Business Review: Why “Good Jobs” Are Good for Retailers](#)

[New York Times: A Push to Give Steadier Shifts to Part-Timers](#)

[Nerdwallet: Just-In-Time Scheduling: Does It Really Save Companies Money?](#)

Other companies that excel at innovative scheduling practices include New Seasons Market.

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COOPERATIVE HOME CARE ASSOCIATES MISSION

Together, we strive to achieve the following goals:

- To provide reliable, high-quality home health care services for those who are elderly, chronically ill, or living with disabilities;
- To offer the highest possible salaries and benefits while building a profitable worker-owned company; and
- To give workers opportunities to learn and grow as members of a health care team.

3. Track for quality

To make these scheduling programs work, it is essential to have a good system to track the workforce. At CHCA we have developed processes and reports that tell us where workers are, how many hours they have already worked and how many they are scheduled to work, their level of service, their history of case acceptance and refusal, and whether they are eligible for the guaranteed hours program. We keep careful track of how many hours aides are working and how many hours are being paid for the guaranteed hours program. We also track their preferences, including whether they prefer to work in environments with or without pets, or in a smoking or non-smoking environment.