



## **LTQA Webinar Recap: Advancing Self-Direction in LTSS: Empowering Individuals and Mitigating the Direct Care Workforce Crisis**

**Event:** July 16, 2024

### **Speakers:**

Molly Morris, Applied Self Direction

Brendan Flinn, AARP

Kris Kubnick, Elevance Health

### **Key Takeaways**

- Self-direction in LTSS empowers individuals and improves outcomes by allowing them to control their own care, offering a personalized alternative to traditional services.
- Enrollment in self-direction has risen sharply by 23% since 2019, with 1.52 million participants nationwide in 2023, largely influenced by the closure of traditional services during the pandemic, highlighting the critical need for enhanced support of self-directed models.
- To combat direct care workforce shortages, strategies include recruiting family caregivers, simplifying onboarding processes, and advocating for policy changes aimed at sustaining and enhancing the self-directed care workforce.

Self-direction is a transformative model in Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) that empowers individuals to take control of their own care. Almost all states allow self-direction for adults over age 65, individuals with physical disabilities, and adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities. By allowing participants to act as the legal employer of their caregivers, self-direction offers a level of autonomy and personalization that traditional services often lack. According to recent data from the 2023 Self-Direction National Inventory, enrollment in self-direction has increased by 23% since 2019, reaching 1.52 million people nationwide in 2023. Advancing self-direction not only addresses the growing direct care workforce (DCW) crisis, but also ensures that care is more equitable and tailored to individual needs, ultimately leading to a more resilient and effective LTSS system.

On July 16th, 2024, the Long-Term Quality Alliance hosted a webinar titled "Advancing Self-Direction in LTSS: Empowering Individuals and Mitigating the Direct Care Workforce Crisis." The event featured expert insights from Molly Morris of Applied Self-Direction, Brendan Flinn of the AARP, and Kris Kubnick of Elevance Health, who discussed the significant impact of self-direction on the LTSS landscape.

### **Positive Outcomes of Self-Direction**

Self-direction has a positive impact on participants' lives, and advances LTSS by leading to better health outcomes, higher satisfaction, and reduced unmet care needs. Brendan Flinn provided a preview of an upcoming AARP report, which further emphasizes these benefits, showcasing the success and potential of



self-directed models. Common misconceptions were also addressed by growing research provided by Applied Self-Direction, such as the belief that self-direction is more prone to fraud or only suitable for those with substantial natural support.

### **Significant Growth and Expansion**

[The 2023 Self-Direction National Inventory](#), collaborated on by Applied Self-Direction and AARP was the first inventory to be conducted since the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings demonstrated that the pandemic played a significant role in accelerating the growth of self-direction, prompting states to expand self-directed programs and implement new ones. The inventory highlighted the growing interest and reliance on self-direction to fill the void left by traditional service closures during the pandemic.

### **Addressing Workforce Challenges**

Elevance Health sponsored a report entitled, [Bridging the Gap: Insights into Strengthening the Self-Directed Workforce](#), developed by Applied Self-Direction, to address the impact of direct-care workforce (DCW) shortages in self-direction. State efforts to recruit family caregivers and reduce onboarding barriers were highlighted as key strategies to address this crisis. Policy recommendations included streamlining paperwork, raising wages, and providing bonuses for recruitment and retention. These measures aim to make the self-directed workforce more robust and sustainable.

### **Support for Family Caregivers**

The webinar also underscored the critical role of family caregivers in the LTSS system. AARP's research highlighted that family caregivers provide an estimated \$600 billion in unpaid care annually, emphasizing the need for stronger support of self-directed models that include family caregivers to enhance the quality and accessibility of care for vulnerable populations. States with robust family caregiver supports performed best overall in the LTSS [State Scorecard](#).

### **Best Practices in Care Coordination**

In the evolving landscape of long-term care, establishing and adhering to best practices is essential to ensure optimal outcomes and support for individuals managing self-directed services effectively. Elevance Health shared their best practices in care coordination, focusing on person-centered planning, informed choice, and strong partnerships with Fiscal Management Services (FMS) providers. Their comprehensive approach ensures that participants receive the support they need to effectively manage their self-directed services.

The webinar on "Advancing Self-Direction in LTSS" vividly showcased the transformative power of self-direction in reshaping the landscape of long-term care. By empowering individuals with choice and control, self-direction not only enhances personal autonomy, but also leads to significantly better health outcomes and higher satisfaction levels. As we confront the challenges of an aging population and a strained DCW, the expansion of self-directed models offers a beacon of hope. The insights shared by our expert panelists underscore the urgent need to champion and advance self-direction across the nation. Self-direction provides the potential for a future where everyone, regardless of their circumstances, can lead a dignified and fulfilling life with the support they need.