

THE VALUE OF DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Direct support professionals (DSPs) provide personal assistance, including facilitating health, activities of daily living, and community integration, to people with disabilities and older adults.

DSPs are critical to the quality of life of people with disabilities

- DSPs are crucial to support not only the health and safety but overall quality of life of people with disabilities¹.
- DSPs are also critical for the community inclusion and integration of people with disabilities^{1, 2}
- People with disabilities who experience DSP turnover are less likely to experience human security, integrate into the community, have relationships, and make choices, all of which people with disabilities are entitled to via human and civil rights, such as the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, *Olmstead*, and the *CMS HCBS Settings Rule*¹.

A national crisis: Poverty wages and the astronomically high DSP turnover rate

- The annual turnover rate, which ranges from 30-70% (costing an estimated \$784 million annually), is due to poor DSP wages, limited benefits, and minimal opportunities^{2, 3}.
- DSP wages are commonly barely above the minimum wage often lagging behind other health and service industries⁴.

Strategies for states to improve DSP wages and reimbursement rates

- Organizations cannot simply increase rates to alleviate the DSP crisis as the majority of providers receive reimbursement through Medicaid and therefore do not have the control or funding to raise prices to increase DSP wages².
- When developing rates it is critical for states to consider both the important and difficult work DSPs do, and the business costs of the provider, including skills training and retention of qualified workers, in order to promote rates that facilitate wage increases⁴.
- Other methods to increase reimbursement rates include states “establishing minimum percentages of service rates directed to direct labor costs...[and/or] lift[ing] wages for a broader group of workers, for example indexing the state minimum wage to inflation or passing living wage laws”⁵.

Community infrastructure hinges on the DSP labor. Increasing the wages of DSPs will improve the lives of DSPs and people with disabilities.



www.c-q-l.org

References

1. Friedman C. (2018) Direct support professionals and quality of life of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 56(4), 234-250.
2. American Network of Community Options and Resources. (2014). *Ensuring a sustainable work force for people with disabilities: Minimum wage increases can not leave direct support professionals behind*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
3. Hewitt, A. & Larson, S. (2007) The direct support workforce in community supports to individuals with developmental disabilities: Issues, implications, and promising practices. *Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews*, 13, 178-187.
4. Wachino V. (2016). *CMCS informational bulletin: Suggested approaches for strengthening and stabilizing the Medicaid home care workforce*. Baltimore, MD: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.
5. Wright B. (2009). *Strategies for improving dsw recruitment, retention, and quality: What we know about what works, what doesn't, and research gaps*. Washington, DC: National Direct Service Workforce Resource Center.