

Direct Support Workforce Crisis Fact Sheet

People with developmental disabilities rely on the assistance and support of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) to help them with activities of daily living. In some cases, this could be help with eating or personal grooming, and in other cases, a DSP administers medicine and provides supports to the medical and healthcare needs of an individual. Each person's needs are unique.

According to the President's Committee on People with Intellectual Disabilities, the United States of America is facing a direct support workforce crisis. In a report issued in 2017, entitled, "America's Direct Support Workforce Crisis: Effects on People with Intellectual Disabilities, Families, Communities and the US Economy," the committee indicates that low wages, high staff turnover, growing demand for services, and the high stress and demands of direct support employment are all contributing factors to this workforce crisis.

In 2015 and again in 2017, the Ohio General Assembly provided additional resources to allow for increases in wages paid to DSPs. However, even with these resources, Ohio continues to face challenges in recruiting and retaining DSPs for individuals with developmental disabilities. The average national wage of a DSP is \$10.72 per hour. In comparison, the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that non-farm animal care-takers, working in animal shelters, kennels, zoos and aquariums, average \$11.74 per hour.

The President's Committee on People with Intellectual Disabilities also notes that roughly half of all working DSPs rely on government-funded and means-tested benefits. Additionally, the average annual turn-over rate is 45 percent, with some states experiencing a turnover rate as high as 76 percent. The report also indicates that when the unemployment rate is low, employers of DSPs experience increased difficulties in finding and attracting individuals into the workforce.

In 2018, the Ohio Provider Resource Association, with support from the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council and county boards of developmental disabilities launched a public awareness campaign to educate the general public about the role of a Direct Support Professional and the opportunities for employment. Targeted marketing began in January and a website featuring providers and work opportunities in every county of the state was established (www.dspohio.org).

Ohio has taken positive steps to improving the DSP Workforce Crisis, but more will need to be done. In addition to wage increases, the state can examine and support ways to improve and increase the use of technologies such as smart homes and remote assistance. Support for education and training to improve retention and recognition of credentialed DSPs are also needed. And with so many DSPs on government-funded services, changes in these programs have a direct impact on this workforce.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services maintains a list of jobs that are in demand in Ohio, but Direct Support Professional is not recognized as a unique job opportunity and is not included in the data provided by the state. Direct Support Professionals provide a wide range of services and supports, including administering medications. Yet, the duties of a DSP are not confined to the occupational definition of a health care worker.

Person First Talking Points:

As a person with a disability, we rely on the help of others. Whether it is to move around, to eat or go to the bathroom, or to go to work, the people that help us live our lives are very important. This person is called a Direct Support Professional. It is hard to find a good Direct Support Professional. The pay is low. The hours are long. A lot of people who work as a Direct Support Professional quit because it is a hard job. This makes it hard for people with disabilities to keep good people to help them. It is getting harder to find people who are willing to do this job. What will happen to people with disabilities if we can't find people to help us every day? The state needs to make sure people with disabilities can get the help they need.

Listed below are examples of what you can say to your legislator about this issue:

Hi, my name is _____.

I live in _____.

I need help to do things.

Direct Support Professionals help me live my life the way I want.

Thank you for giving money for Direct Support Professionals in the budget.

It has helped some people, but more is needed.

(Tell how your DSP helps you!)

(You can give them a copy of the fact sheet if you'd like.)