

Perspectives from the Wake County Trenches

** Urgent Need to Include DSPs in Minimum Wage Increases **

By Alliance Wake Consumer and Family Advisory Committee

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Shortage Crisis of DSPs in I/DD Community

There are currently 20,000 individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) receiving services through North Carolina's Medicaid-funded Innovations Waiver. There are over 13,000 on the Innovations waitlist; over 9,000 of those on the waitlist receive no LME-MCO funded services and the others receive minimal services.

This program is historically underfunded and the situation will only get worse as we transition to meet the updated standards of community service delivery. The direct labor support budget usually takes most of the shortfall and the availability and quality of support for individuals with I/DD suffers greatly.

Direct Support Professionals (DSP) are specially trained health professionals on the front line of I/DD care. Their daily responsibilities include assisting and encouraging independence and inclusion at home, work, and in the community. **DSPs must be able to manage challenging situations that could directly affect the individual's health, safety, and well-being.** Specific job duties are based solely on the individual's needs and desired goals. These include supporting an individual's efforts to make choices, form positive social relationships, learn skills, and communicate thoughts and feelings. The specific tasks range from basic self-care to complex medical and behavioral supports. Their range of duties requires, at a minimum, CPR and First Aid. They may also need specialized training to implement behavior intervention plans, administer medications, respond to seizures, or use assistive technologies.

Nationally, the **turnover rate for direct support roles** was 43.8%. In large part, this can be explained by low **median hourly wages for DSPs**, which stood at just \$12.09 nationally.

*(Case for Inclusion 2020 Report) **

** Wage data sourced from NCI 2017 Staff Stability Report*

Key DSP Workforce Dynamics

- ◆ Need for DSPs has increased by 86% between 2005 – 2016 as the number of service recipients has grown from 433K to 807K nationally
- ◆ Turnover rates for DSPs are soaring due to high stress of job responsibilities coupled with low wages
- ◆ Wages have not kept up with inflation rate and do not meet the standards of a “living wage”
- ◆ Hourly workers do not qualify for benefits such as sick leave and vacation
- ◆ “Almost half of DSPs receive publicly funded benefits, such as medical, food or housing assistance” *(PHI, 2017)-Presidents Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities-2017 Report*
- ◆ There are **not enough DSPs** to meet the needs of all individuals with I/DD

The Lack of a Robust DSP Workforce: *Why it matters so much!*

Individuals and families affected by I/DD are in crisis due to the shortage of DSP workers. Already, approximately 80% of those who have an Innovations Waiver slot have unstaffed hours due to the shortage of DSPs. This directly impacts the quality of life for I/DD service consumers, whether living in the community or in an institution. It is crucial to recruit more DSPs to address current needs and the long waiting list. Without an increase in the number of workers, the **current crisis will only worsen.**

The direct impact on individuals with I/DD and their families is increased stress and trauma. With an insufficient number of DSP staff and high turnover rates, families must serve as both the frontline and the back-up support.

Without an adequate supply of well-trained DSP workers, parents are often required to:

- ◆ Adjust their lives and work schedules to cover hours when no DSP support is available
- ◆ Have contingency plans for what to do when DSP staff is late, out sick, or suddenly unavailable; parents are “on call” 24/7
- ◆ Make hard choices that impact relationships at home, work and in the community; they may miss out on family events due to the need to provide care for their loved one when no DSP staff is available
- ◆ Prioritize the individual’s needs over the emotional and daily needs of family, often straining relationships which reduces natural supports and increases need for paid supports long term
- ◆ Give up a career in order to fill in for the long periods during staff absences and vacancies
- ◆ Spend their free time repeatedly training new staff with specific knowledge required for person-centered support due to frequent turnover
- ◆ Neglect their own health and emotional welfare causing further stress at home
- ◆ Handle their loved one’s increased behaviors, depression and feelings of rejection as a result of the absence of staff

- Turnover Costs Taxpayers, Too -

“For agencies that support people with disabilities, because of recruitment and training costs, it can cost up to \$5,000 to fill each DSP vacancy.”

(Raustiala et al., 2015).—State Utilization of Direct Support Professionals in Medicaid HCBS Waivers, AAIDD Journal 2019, Vol. 57, No. 1, 1-13)

To Join Our Effort -

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ALLIANCE WAKE CFAC

The Alliance Wake Consumer and Family Advisory Committee (CFAC) consists of individuals and family members who receive mental health, intellectual/developmental disabilities, and/or substance use/addiction services and live in Wake County in the Alliance LME-MCO regional area of central NC.

The Alliance CFAC is a self-governing committee that serves as an advisor to Alliance administration and the Board of Directors.

<https://www.alliancehealthplan.org/consumers-families/alliance-cfac/>