

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.



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References

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DSP TURNOVER

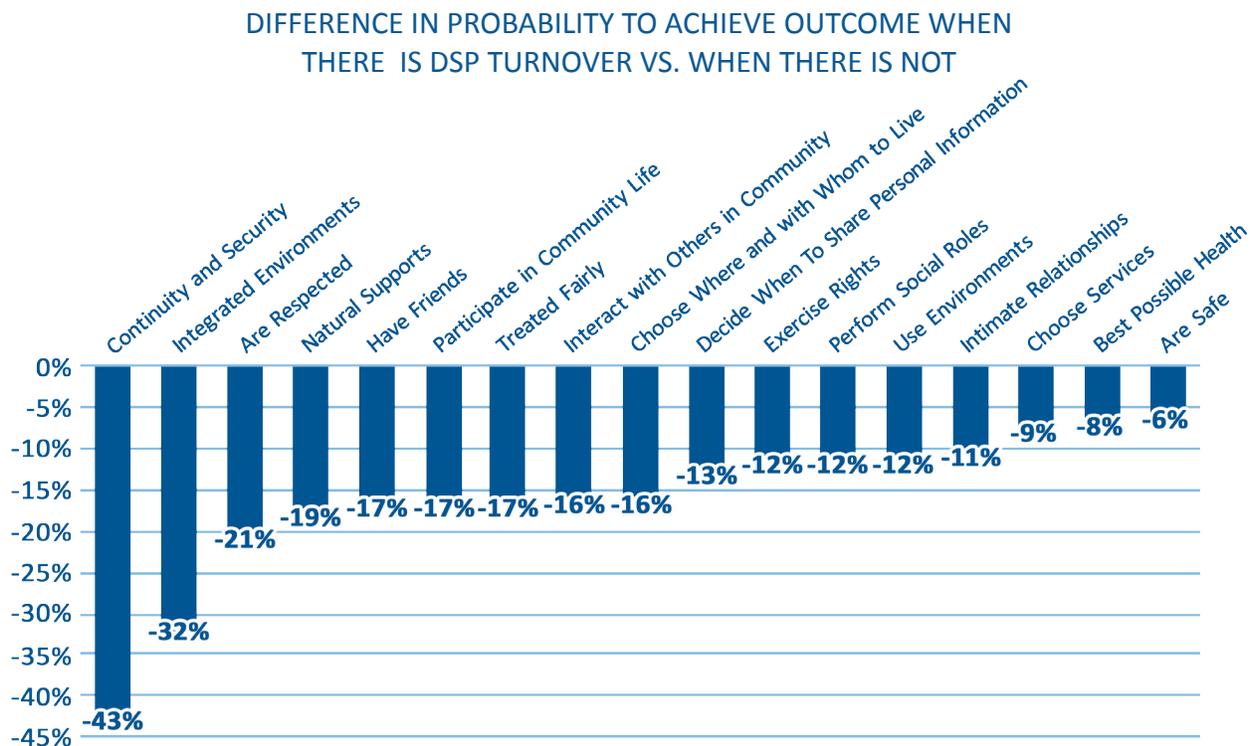
THE HARMFUL IMPACT ON PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Despite being the “backbone” of long term services and supports (LTSS) in the United States¹, direct support professionals (DSPs) “are among the nation’s most vulnerable workers”². Wages, benefits, and career ladder opportunities have not kept up with the increased responsibilities and workload of DSPs.

CQL | The Council on Quality and Leadership recently conducted a study³ which analyzed over 1,300 Personal Outcome Measures® interviews with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to examine the impact DSP turnover had on different aspects of people with disabilities’ quality of life.

Major Findings: DSP Turnover Negatively Impacted Every Area of Quality of Life

People with disabilities were significantly less likely to have almost every quality of life indicator present when they experienced DSP turnover (see figure).



The findings also reinforced the critical role DSPs play in the lives of people with disabilities; these benefits are wide-ranging from safety to community integration. For example, people with disabilities are 32% less likely to have friends when they experience turnover than those who do not experience DSP turnover.

DSPs are central to the quality of life of people with disabilities and should be recognized and paid accordingly.



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1. Bogenschutz MD, Hewitt A, Nord D, & Hepperlen R. (2014). Direct support workforce supporting individuals with IDD: Current wages, benefits, and stability. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 52, 317-329.
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.
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DSP TURNOVER WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

Recent estimates suggest the average organization supporting people with disabilities or older adults may see anywhere from 30% to 70% direct support professional (DSP) turnover a year^{1,2}. This tremendous turnover negatively impacts people with disabilities as DSPs are critical for the community integration and quality of life of people with disabilities.³

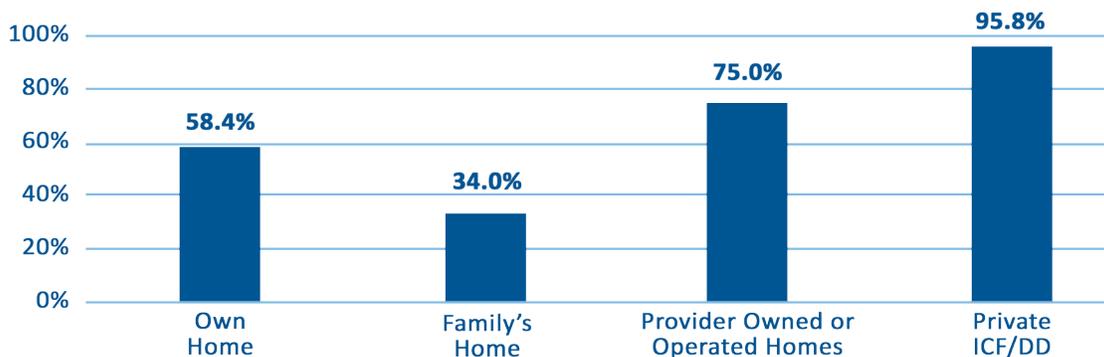
The aim of a recent study³ conducted by CQL | The Council on Quality and Leadership was to examine who among people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) is the most vulnerable to DSP turnover. To do so, CQL analyzed Personal Outcome Measures® interviews from approximately 1,300 people with IDD.

Findings revealed there were a number of factors that increased the likelihood that people with IDD would experience DSP turnover.

Disability type and support needs

- People with behavioral challenges are 3 times more likely to experience DSP turnover than people with other disabilities.
- The more daily support someone needs, the more likely they are to experience DSP turnover.

LIKELIHOOD TO EXPERIENCE DSP TURNOVER BY SETTING



Residence type

- People in provider owned and operated homes and private ICF/DD are more to experience turnover than people living in their own homes or family homes (see figure).
- In terms of residence size, as the number of housemates increases, the likelihood of experiencing turnover increases.

By paying attention to disparities and adjusting services, organizations can ensure people with disabilities who experience turnover receive the same quality of services as those who do not.



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