



Massachusetts

For people with intellectual
and developmental disabilities

Workforce Crisis: Direct Support Professionals & Front-Line Managers

There is a workforce shortage crisis in Massachusetts for Direct Support Professionals (DSP) and frontline managers. This crisis affects in-home workers for families and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) along with the entire human services system of care in the Commonwealth. Solutions to the workforce crisis are critical to ensuring that people with I/DD can live, work, and contribute in their communities.

- 72 % of Massachusetts human service providers report that it has become increasingly more challenging to fill job openings over the past three years.
- National 2017 survey of family caregivers reported that 9 out of 10 (92%) caregivers indicated difficulty with finding DSPs.¹

What Can We Do to End the Workforce Crisis?

The Arc of Massachusetts requests that Governor Baker's Administration develop a Planning Commission, effective July 1, 2019, with relevant stakeholders to address the workforce crisis.

To recruit and retain a stronger, more qualified DSP and managerial workforce, effective July 1, 2019, we ask that a minimum \$17/hour prevailing required wage should be implemented for entry level direct care or support staff. This should be reviewed every two years for marketplace adjustments with a goal of achieving \$24/hour for direct care/support staff by 2025. Increased salaries for front-line managers and directors will also be adjusted based on salary compression. Additional long-term solutions must be addressed to achieve quality supports and services for people with I/DD. We support passage of "*An act relative to meeting the human services workforce demand*," which addresses this critical issue. (House Docket #1130, Sponsors: Rep. D. Garlick and Sen. Barry Finegold)

What DSPs and Frontline Managers Do

DSPs could have many different titles including direct support specialist, personal care assistant, habilitation specialist, job coach, residential counselor, family care provider, personal assistant, and others. Direct Support roles include (but not limited to) assisting people with I/DD with activities of daily living such as dressing, toileting, medication administration, or mobility and addressing medical emergencies or behavioral crises. DSPs also serve as bridge builders to the community so that individuals can be employed, participate in community social activities and make use of resources such as transportation and medical services.

In agency programs (employment, residential, etc.), Frontline Managers oversee DSPs and ensure a coordinated approach to supporting individuals' goals and activities. In the case of assistance provided in an individual's home (self-direction, family support, etc.), they may be responsible for the development of personalized plans and helping recruit DSPs through matching skills with needs or goals.

¹ A. E. Hewitt et al., Minnesota: Research and Training Center on Community Living, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, FINDS Community Report 2017, Minnesota: Research and Training Center on Community Living, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. <https://www.thearc.org/FINDS>.

DSP Workforce Challenges and Other Key Factors

- Mean wages of DSPs are below Janitors
- Poor benefits and limited training/education opportunities
- High student loans
- High cost of living/low unemployment rates in Massachusetts

These Workforce challenges negatively impact the retention and recruitment of DSPs and frontline managers. **Other key factors include:**

- Increase in incidence rates of Autism Spectrum Disorder and people with I/DD are living longer
- Immigration (H1-B Program) concerns impact hiring
- Poor status/image (unlike teachers/police officers/nurses)

Harmful Consequences for Individuals with I/DD, Families and Businesses

People with I/DD: The health, safety and well-being of people with I/DD is at risk because of the workforce crisis. DSPs coming in and out of a person's life, often providing support in intimate, personal care routines, disrupts the development of an effective professional relationship with an individual with I/DD. Symptoms of illness or opportunities for community involvement are missed. In addition, people with I/DD could be forced to live in group homes because community staffing is insufficient or unstable.

Families: Having skilled and committed direct support and clinical professionals is critical for family members to maintain employment and their own health. According to the 2017 FINDS Community Report, more than half of parent caregivers reported major career concessions (e.g., not taking a job, dropping out of the workforce, working fewer hours, or turning down a promotion) related to having a child with I/DD. Family members report they find it challenging to get any respite and this causes stress, health issues, and ultimately, added societal costs.

Businesses: The high costs and wasted resources related to high DSP turnover has resulted in serious consequences for providers. Vacancy rates create the need for high overtime hours on top of salaried positions. In addition, high turnover translates into added cost and time of repeated trainings. This sustained turnover rate alone is devastating; when coupled with low unemployment rates across industries, organizations simply cannot find enough qualified individuals to fill positions. The limited candidate pool, and greater competition from other industries that pay better wages, have resulted in organizations being forced to consider applicants they wouldn't have previously hired resulting in less dependability among DSPs, and a rise in unacceptable workplace behavior among some employees.

We Must Act Now!

If we act now, ultimately, we will see cost-effective savings created by reducing the costs associated with high workforce turnover. This will allow family members of individuals with I/DD to keep jobs and accept promotions, increasing families' economic security. As importantly, finding solutions will improve the quality of supports and services for people with I/DD and increase their participation in community life.

The time for acceptance of this Workforce crisis has passed. We need a valued and qualified workforce now!

To support The Arc's Workforce Campaign, please visit <https://thearcofmass.org/workforce/> or contact Ellen Taverna at taverna@arcmass.org.