

THE WORKFORCE CRISIS

For decades, New York state has not invested enough to sustain essential supports and services for New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). The nonprofit agencies that provide these supports are funded almost entirely by Medicaid, and more than 70 percent of their costs go directly to wages for staff who provide direct care.

Without adequate funding, I/DD providers are unable to offer competitive wages to recruit and retain the skilled direct support staff that provide the foundation of care for more than 140,000 New Yorkers with I/DD.

The existing workforce crisis escalated dramatically in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Without immediate action, this emergency will continue to force service reductions, program closures, and loss of care people with I/DD throughout the state.

THE NUMBERS

According to a recent survey conducted by New York Disability Advocates, including all Chapters of The Arc New York:

- **93%** of providers saw a decrease in job applicants this year
- Statewide vacancy rates increased **75%** since pre-pandemic levels
- **25%** of all DSP positions are currently vacant statewide
- **48%** of providers were forced to close or reduce programs due to lack of staff
- **39%** of providers did not reopen programs due to staff shortages
- Senior & administrative staff at **69%** of providers were pulled from leadership responsibilities to cover direct care shifts.



THE FOUNDATION OF CARE

DSPs are the backbone of services for New Yorkers with I/DD. Their 24-hour support includes:

- Supporting activities of daily living
- Administering medication
- Tube feeding, wound care, mobility support, and oxygen administration
- Delivering physical and behavioral health services
- Teaching money management
- Transporting to appointments and community activities

DSP staff shortages directly impact people with I/DD and put this vital system of supports in jeopardy.

THE SOLUTIONS

DSPs are highly skilled essential workers and a critical component of New York's public health system. They deserve a living wage. Immediate action is needed from the State to address the current crisis and implement long-term solutions to address the I/DD sector's workforce challenges. This will require a multi-pronged approach to elevate the DSP position and innovate within the field.

ESTABLISH A LIVING WAGE

Include not-for-profit providers in the statutory Cost-of-Living-Adjustment which has been notwithstanding for more than a decade. Unlike for-profit entities that have the ability to raise prices, not-for-profit providers have only been able to pay rates as afforded by the funding provided by OPWDD, which has caused stagnation in the wages.

CREATE A STANDARD OCCUPATIONAL CODE

DSP wage and occupation data is not accurately captured by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, leading to an understatement of the workforce crisis. A discrete standard occupational classification for DSPs will yield the appropriate data to assist states and federal agencies in better understanding the workforce and addressing challenges.

EXPAND THE BOCES PROGRAM

A successful pilot program with Capital Region BOCES teaches students the skills necessary for a long-term career supporting people with disabilities. The pilot project aligns state education standards with quality DSP training metrics and offers certification in six areas. We recommend that the State establish a plan to replicate this program statewide by 2023.



PROFESSIONALIZE THE DSP ROLE

Many direct care workers lack access to a career pathway or advanced training opportunities. This limits their ability to build competency and expertise in their field that, when gained, may lead to an increase in their earning capacity. By providing grant opportunities for the recruitment, retention, and advancement of direct care workers, we can enrich the DSP role, and provide opportunities for career growth.

Learn more, and find out how you
can join our advocacy efforts at
www.thearcny.org