



WHAT IS A DSP?

A Direct Support Professional, or DSP, is a skilled professional responsible for the care and support of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The varied roles of DSPs involve many types of routine and emergency supports, including:

- first aid & CPR,
- medication administration
- meal preparation & feeding
- personal hygiene
- transportation
- communication
- behavioral de-escalation
- money management
- work & life skill development

These dedicated staff are the foundation of our system of supports and services. Their essential work facilitates independence and inclusion for New Yorkers with I/DD.

What is the DSWE?

The Direct Support Wage Enhancement, or DSWE, is a targeted workforce investment intended to bring the wages of Direct Care Staff more in line with their skill and responsibility. There is currently a bill proposal to enact the DSWE, and we are calling for funding to support it in the 2024-25 NYS Budget.

How much funding would the DSWE provide?

Through the proposed DSWE, provider agencies would receive \$4,000 per eligible employee to enhance the hourly rate of pay for staff who have direct care and support responsibilities for individuals with I/DD.

The total amount of funding would be determined by the number of eligible employees. A provider with 10 employees would receive \$40,000 in DSWE funds. A provider with 100 employees would receive \$400,000 in DSWE funds.

This would equate to an average increase of approximately \$2 an hour for direct care staff.

Would funds go directly to staff?

The DSWE would provide agencies with a pool of money equal to \$4,000 per eligible employee. These funds must be used to enhance the base pay and benefits of direct care staff.

Each provider would determine the best way to distribute the funds. Some possible approaches include an across the board increase for all staff, targeted increases for specific positions, or to help address wage compression for long-time employees. DSWE funds would also support the additional benefit costs associated with pay increases.

Is the DSWE a bonus?

The DSWE is not a one-time bonus. It would provide annual funding to permanently increase the base wages of direct care staff.

WHY DO WE NEED THE DSWE?

Years of Underfunding

New York state failed to make adequate investments in services and supports for New Yorkers with I/DD for more than a decade. Over the last 10 years, inflation rose nearly 30%, but investment in our system only increased by 10.5%. This systemic underfunding eroded our workforce and created a critical staffing crisis.

Stagnating Wages

More than 90% of funding for the field comes from Medicaid and other government support. The state establishes rates for individual programs and services.

Providers set salary levels for DSPs, however the amount they are able to pay is constrained by state funding and state-established program rates. All program operations, including staff wages and benefits, must be funded within the state rate structure. Without additional investment, providers cannot meaningfully increase wages.

15 years ago, the average DSP wage was nearly TWICE minimum wage. Today, the average DSP wage is barely 10% above minimum wage.

WITHOUT STAFF WE CANNOT PROVIDE SERVICES

20,000

critical direct care positions are currently unfilled

ONE IN THREE

DSPs leave their jobs every year



The Issue of Inequity

New York state provides supports and services to 140,000 people with I/DD. Nonprofit providers deliver 85% of these services. The other 15% of people are supported in state-run programs.

Nonprofit and state-operated providers are all funded through Medicaid and overseen by OPWDD. The two sectors work in partnership to support New Yorkers with I/DD.

While wages for direct support staff at nonprofit providers stagnated, the state provided significant increases for staff doing the same work at state operated providers.

Today, DSPs at nonprofit providers make 30% LESS than DSPs working for the state

