

# ASSESSING THE NEEDS OF DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE: DATA AND STORIES FOR ADVOCACY

David Ellsworth, PI, Ohio Disability and Health Partnership  
Lauren Hackenberg, Ohio Disability and Health Program Coordinator  
Christine Brown LEND Faculty, Clinical Research Assistant



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER

# Why this project?

- Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) are *critical* to the lives of individuals with disabilities. They not only support but empower individuals in all aspects of living.
- The DSP role faces wage challenges and employment shortages
  - Detrimental to individuals who serve as DSPs, the workforce, and the people they serve.
- **The shortages can lead to negative economic and social consequences impacting individuals with disabilities and their families, caregivers, DSPs, provider agencies, and communities.**
- **Widely overlooked as a public health issue that impacts the health and wellbeing of thousands of workers and people with disabilities.**



# Project Purpose

1. Gain a deeper understanding of the DSP workforce crisis
2. Create a survey for DSP professionals to gain a better understanding of the workforce, challenges, and opportunities
3. Summarize what we are hearing from DSPs to inform policy



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER

# DSP Workforce Landscape and Retention

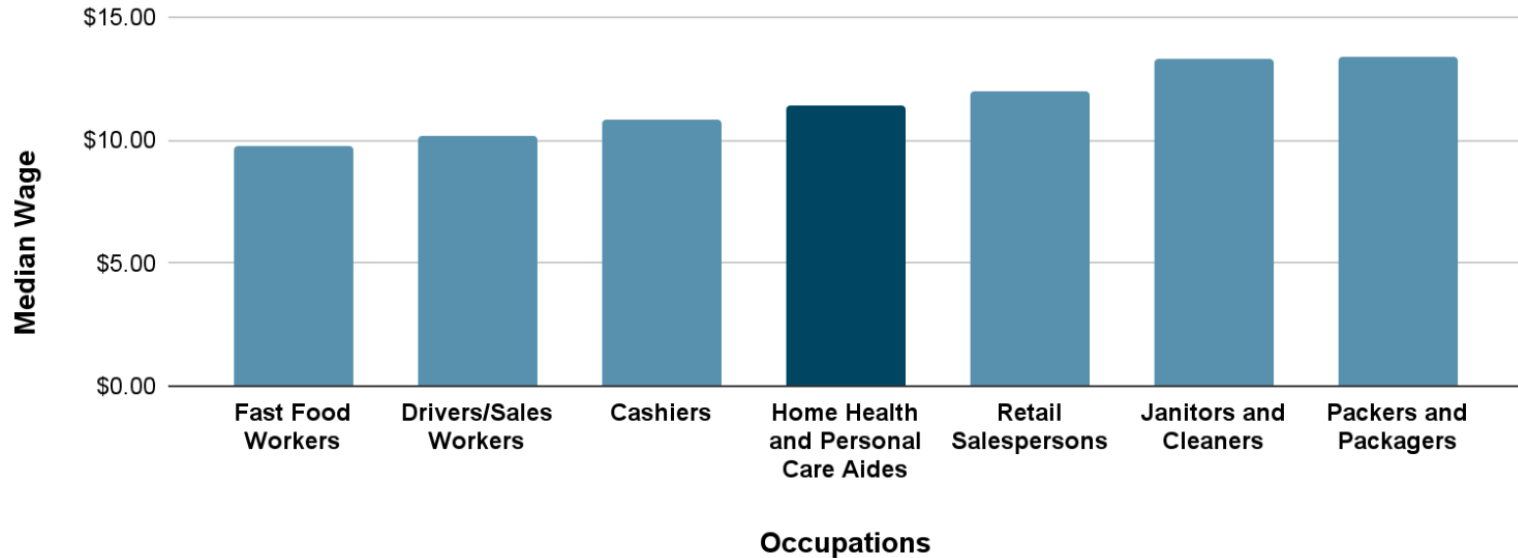
- Nationwide, the number of jobs for DSPs and Personal Care Aides is projected to increase by 33% between 2020 and 2030
- Wage growth and earnings remain low
- Median annual salary was \$27,080 barely above the Federal Poverty Level

	Median Salary	Growth	Employment	Openings
Home Health Care Aides (Direct Support Professional)	\$23,000	1,725	56,510	9,025
Personal and Home Care Aides (Direct Support Professional)	\$23,000	1,487	46,454	8,998
Medical Assistants (Direct Support Professional)	\$34,000	432	24,124	3,327



## 2020 Occupational Employment and Wages in Ohio

### Home Health and Personal Care Aide Wage Comparisons



Source: Ohio Department of Jobs and Family  
Services: Ohio Labor Market  
Information(*OesWageByArea*, n.d.)



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER

# Effects on People with Disabilities and Families

- People with disabilities share the burden of the workforce shortage
  - Compounding stresses can make health conditions worse
  - Increases strain on mental health
  - Force some individuals to go without the care they need, or risk being placed in an assisted living facility against their will
  - Added strain on families struggling to find Caregivers







## LEND DSP Survey

- Worked with Provider Agencies and Disability-led organizations to design the survey
- 950+ DSPs responded to the survey representing every region of Ohio

DSP Survey Map



Source: diymaps.net



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER

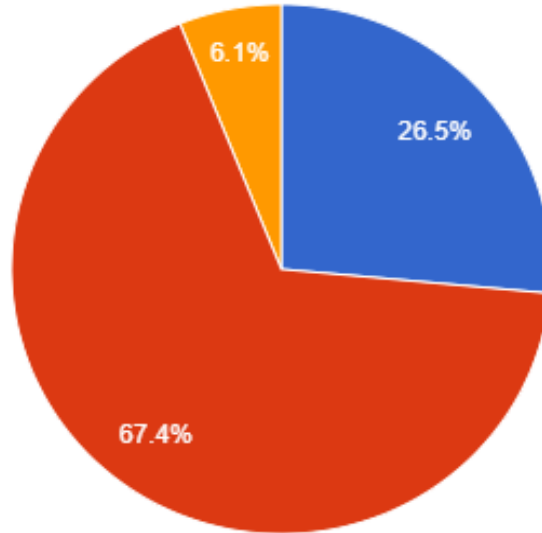


# Methods

- Looked at responses to closed and open-ended questions
- A team of four reviewers independently analyzed more than 2,500 open-ended responses before meeting in groups to arrive at a consensus among the themes
- Compared this data to closed-end responses to look at alignment and determine opportunities for policy changes to better support DSPs in the field



Are you an Independent Provider, employed by an Agency Provider or both?



**Both**- 6.1%

**Independent  
provider**-  
26.5%

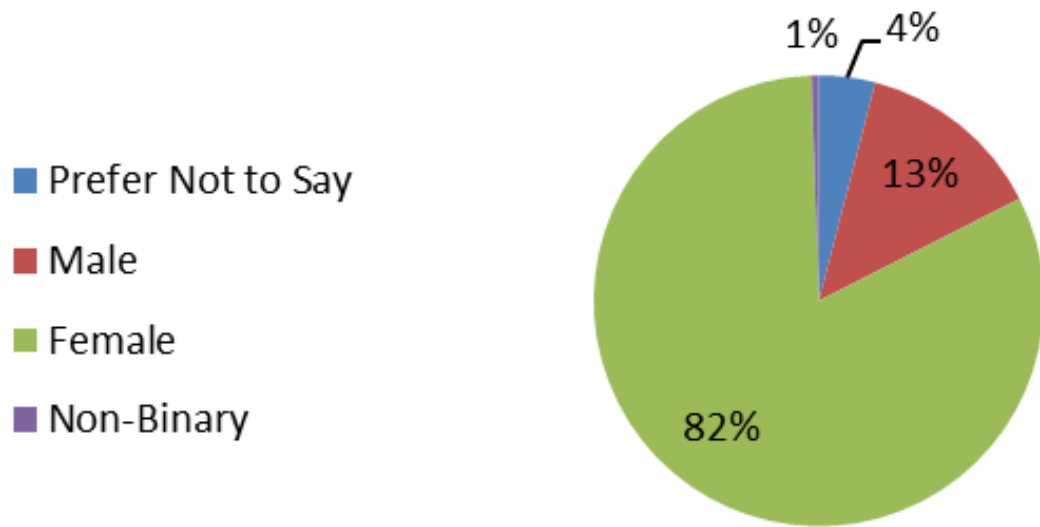
**Agency  
provider**-  
67.4%



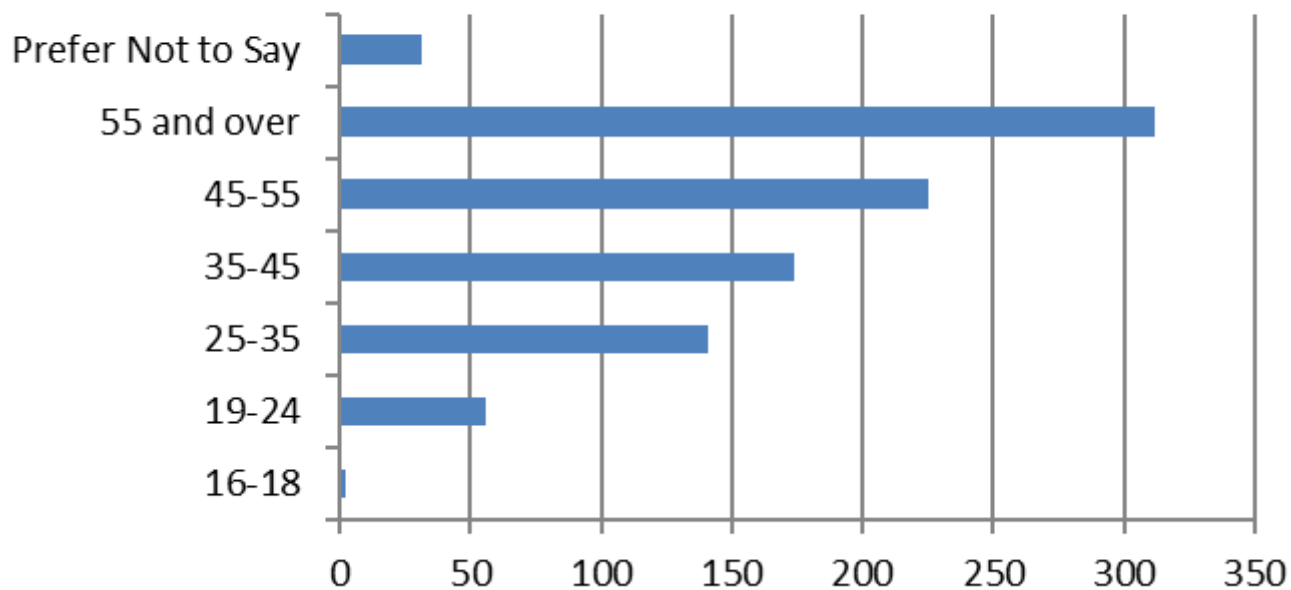
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER

## What is your Gender?



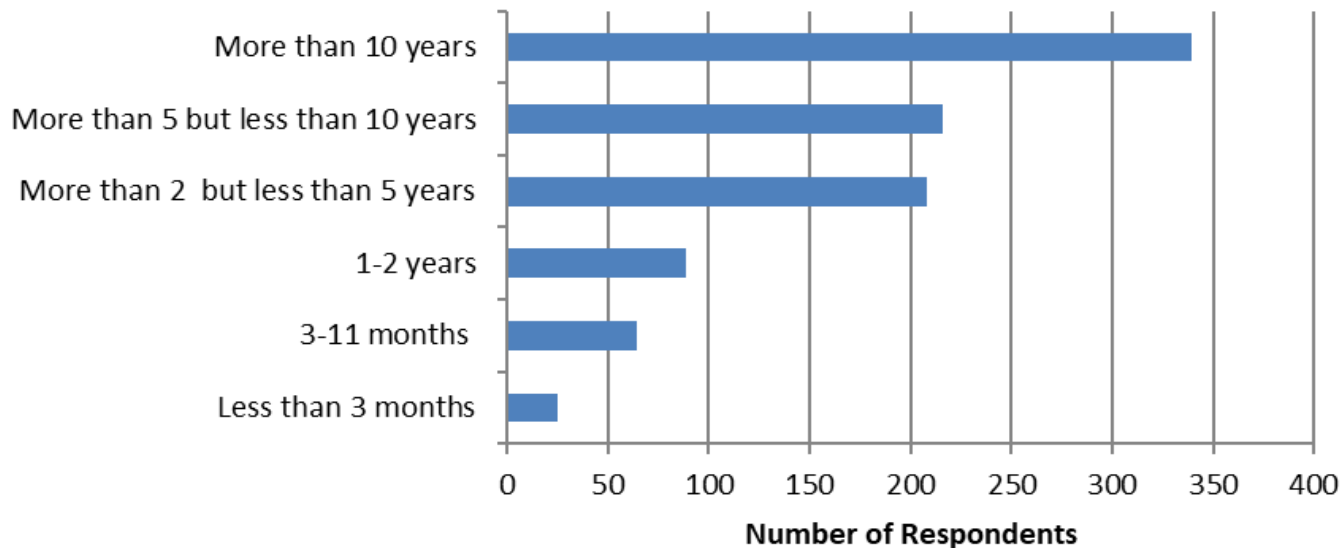
## Please Select Your Age Range



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER

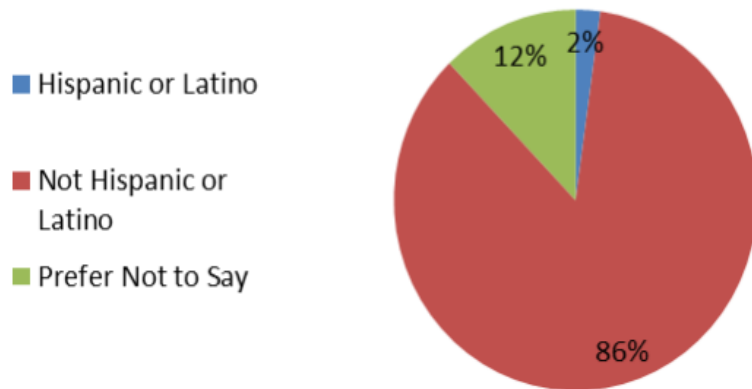
## How Long Have You Been Employed as Direct Support Professional?



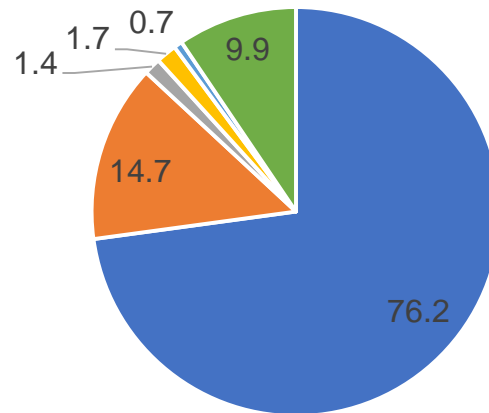
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER

## Please Select Your Ethnicity



## Please Select Your Race



### 2020 Ohio Census Comparison

81% White  
 13.1% Black or African American  
 4% Hispanic & Latino  
 0.3 American Indian and Alaskan Native  
 0.1% Asian

■ White  
 ■ Hispanic/Latino  
 ■ Asian

■ Black or African American  
 ■ American Indian/Alaskan Native  
 ■ Prefer Not to Say

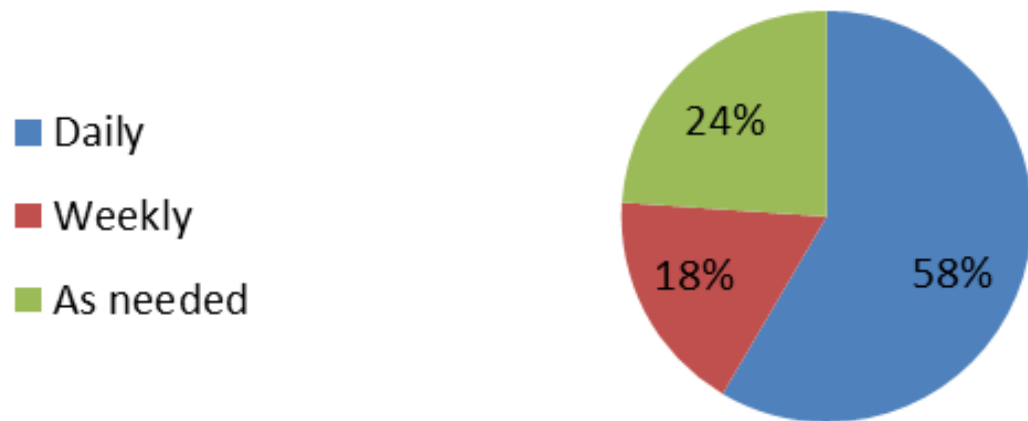


THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER



## How Often Do you Service More Than One Client?

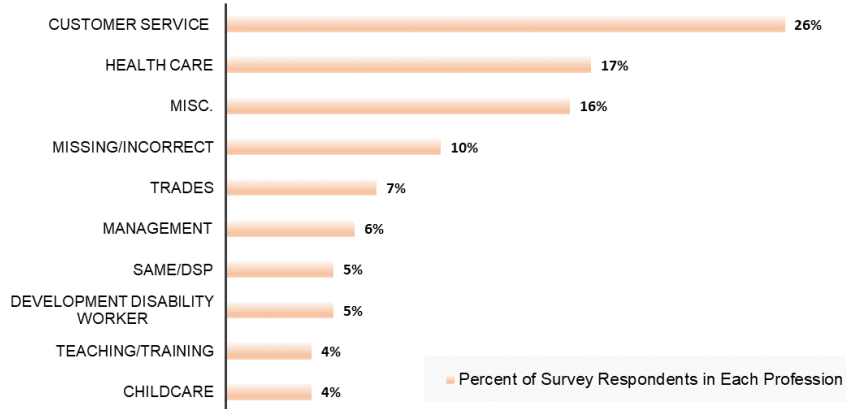


## Do You Plan on Staying in Your Role as a DSP Over the Next Two Years?



# What was your most recent job or experience before becoming a Direct Support Professional?

**Previous Job Professions Prior to Becoming a DSP**



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER

# Top Five Concerns and Opportunities

Pay	Job Stability	Career Opportunities & Advancement	Benefits	Company Culture & Management
<i>"As a new parent... there are not enough benefits and pay needed to continue employment. ... The main reason for staying is the love I have for my individuals. "</i>	<i>"I love being a DSP but I also love my family... I have been working so much that I can't take care of myself or my family. When I do take time for my family, I feel like I am letting people down at work..."</i>	<i>"There is no security in this position. After working as a DSP for nearly a decade I only recently was promoted to Team Leader and began to make \$16/hr (still not enough..."</i>	<i>"Love being a provider but there are no benefits, insurance, vacation"</i>	<i>"To many changes in policies. And to much turnover. The job I was hired for is not the same as the job I am completing now. "</i>
<i>"I like the field I'm in and also like my client. Only thing is pay. It's hard to stick around when you have people in the fast-food industry making more than you are."</i>	<i>"I am new to the field, coming in is very overwhelming. There is not enough support within the field. I Fear burnout and emotional exhaustion"</i>	<i>"I work for an agency for over 10 years and have had my hours cut ... when asked if I could get a raise was met with a question as to why would they give me one."</i>	<i>"No benefits or health insurance and every time you ask for a day off or two ... then usually lose hours the next few weeks."</i>	<i>"...there are no unions that investigate or carry out surveys to make sure that we as staffs are well respected or treated and way forward for career advancements or development."</i>



## Independent Provider

- “...I work 60 hours a week or 48 hours a week. I have one Friday off, and frankly I’m exhausted.”

## Consumer

- “...I need the assistance of...all the things that people take as human rights for granted that we all want to have access to.”

## Consumer

- “...It really is a crisis because there’s people that are suffering and potentially dying because we don’t have people caring for us.”



## How Important are these Factors as a DSP?

MOST

Wages and Benefits

Opportunity to Support  
Individuals with Disabilities

Supportive Work Environment

Ongoing Training and  
Professional Development

Opportunities for Career  
Advancement

LEAST



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER



## What incentives or supports (other than increased compensation) would allow you to have a long-term career as a Direct Support Professional?

“...if I could **pay my bills** and **provide for my family** without have to work 100 hours a week...I was not in survival mode while trying to provide exceptional care.”

**"Support  
from upper  
management"**

**"When my shift  
ends, being able to  
leave on time.."**

**"Tuition  
Reimbursement, Certified  
Training"**

**"To be appreciated  
more."**



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER

# Top Incentives to Promote Retention

1. Benefits and Insurance
2. Financial Incentives
3. Paid Time Off
4. Training Opportunities
5. Supportive Management
6. Other Bonuses and Incentives



# Reasons DSPs Stay

*"My daughter needs me, and I don't trust anyone else. I've had an issue in the past with abuse that led to a lawsuit and it was a nightmare"*

***This is my passion and I enjoy working in this field. I am family to the individuals that don't have a family.***

*"... rapid turn over hurts our people. They become attached to us as quickly as we do to them. Stability and reliability ... lessen behaviors, keeps them safe..., and helps them build trust in a world that can quickly take advantage of them. This job is... draining, but worth it seeing ... THEIR growth."*



Enjoys the Work

Client Relationships

Altruism

Fulfilling Vocation

Desirable Job  
Attributes



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER

# DSPs care about clients

*“Because I love their smiles. I wish I was able to do more things that They want to do though. But I stay because I care about them all and I want to make their lives as happy as I can.”*

*“I take care of a family member.”*

*“Because my clients need me(main reason) and I just renewed my certification.”*

***“There are times it is physically, emotionally and mentally draining, but seeing individuals thrive in their day to day life is the reason I stay.”***



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER

# What do these results mean?

Through DSPs who took this survey, we found that...

DSPs care about their clients, know what they do is essential, but often feel unsupported.

- Low wages
- Inadequate benefits
- Lack of paid time off
- Limited career development



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER

# Next steps

1. Share findings with workers, provide agencies, state policy makers
2. Explore policy solutions that address financial concerns among DSPs
3. Identify additional opportunities and promising practices to improve retention



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER



# Thank you to our partners, and to you!

Department Of Developmental Disabilities

Breaking Silences Advocacy Group

The Ability Center of Greater Toledo

The Center for Independent Living Options

Lucas County Board of Developmental Disabilities

The Ohio Self-Determination Association

Ohio Association of County Boards

The Ohio Provider Resource Association

**All DSPs for taking the survey**



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER

# Questions?

What strategies we should use to publish our results.

Are there questions that we should have asked?

Are there ways you feel this data should be used?



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER

## References

1. 2017 PCPID Full Report\_0.pdf. Accessed March 23, 2022. [https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/programs/2018-02/2017%20PCPID%20Full%20Report\\_0.PDF](https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/programs/2018-02/2017%20PCPID%20Full%20Report_0.PDF)
2. Home Health and Personal Care Aides : Occupational Outlook Handbook: : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Accessed March 9, 2022. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/home-health-aides-and-personal-care-aides.htm#tab-6>
3. oesWageByArea. Accessed March 9, 2022. <https://ohiolmi.com/Home/oesWagebyArea>
4. Fastest growing occupations : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Accessed March 9, 2022. <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/fastest-growing-occupations.htm>
5. Poverty Guidelines. ASPE. Accessed March 9, 2022. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>
6. Competency-Based Training and Longevity Add-On | Department of Developmental Disabilities. Accessed March 23, 2022. <https://dodd.ohio.gov/training-policies/competency-based-training-longevity-add-on>
7. Living Wage Calculator - Living Wage Calculation for Franklin County, Ohio. Accessed March 23, 2022. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/39049>
8. 2019StaffStabilitySurveyReport\_FINAL\_1\_6\_21.pdf. Accessed March 23, 2022. [https://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/upload/core-indicators/2019StaffStabilitySurveyReport\\_FINAL\\_1\\_6\\_21.pdf](https://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/upload/core-indicators/2019StaffStabilitySurveyReport_FINAL_1_6_21.pdf)
9. the\_state\_of\_americas\_direct\_support\_workforce\_crisis\_2021.pdf. Accessed March 23, 2022. [https://www.ancor.org/sites/default/files/the\\_state\\_of\\_americas\\_direct\\_support\\_workforce\\_crisis\\_2021.pdf](https://www.ancor.org/sites/default/files/the_state_of_americas_direct_support_workforce_crisis_2021.pdf)
10. DODD Waiver Waiting List Information | DataOhio. Accessed March 9, 2022. <https://data.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/data/view/dodd-waiver-waiting-list-information>



## References

11. DIRECT CARE WORKFORCE CRISIS VIRTUAL FORUMS – Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council. Accessed March 23, 2022. <http://www.ohiosilc.org/direct-care-workforce-crisis-virtual-forums/>
12. OOTF Direct Care Workforce Crisis Advocacy. Ohio Olmstead Task Force. Published November 8, 2021. Accessed March 9, 2022. <https://ohioolmstead.com/issues-advocacy/ootf-direct-care-workforce-crisis-advocacy/>
13. stabilization-and-beyond-ohio-workforce-call-to-actionl.pdf. Accessed March 23, 2022. <https://ddc.ohio.gov/Portals/0/stabilization-and-beyond-ohio-workforce-call-to-actionl.pdf?ver=K8yb0Ql4E4lxqIGm6TJ1yg%3D%3D>
14. September 12 P on, 2021. SEEC's Program Aims to Improve DSP Training In Maryland. The Council on Quality and Leadership. Accessed March 9, 2022. <https://www.c-q-l.org/resources/articles/seecs-program-aims-to-improve-dsp-training-in-maryland/>
15. Secondary Education – DSP U – OADSP. Accessed March 23, 2022. <https://www.oadsp.org/community-connections-career-partnership-ohio/>
16. OPRA | EaRNeD Success: Employer Resource Networks. Accessed March 9, 2022. <https://www.opra.org/aws/OPRA/pt/sp/earned-success>
17. Shaefer HL, Rivera J. Employer Resource Networks. :18.
18. About Sunshine : Developmental Disability Services Maumee, OH. Published April 7, 2016. Accessed March 23, 2022. <https://www.sunshine.org/about-us/>
19. Technology First | Department of Developmental Disabilities. Accessed April 7, 2022. <https://dodd.ohio.gov/about-us/resources/tech-first/tech-first>
20. Letter: Director Davis Explains DSP Rate Increase | Department of Developmental Disabilities. Accessed March 9, 2022. <https://dodd.ohio.gov/about-us/communication/news/news-director-davis-explains-dsp-rate-increase>



# Contributors

Contributors include: the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, Ohio Provider Resource Association, Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals, The Center for Independent Living Options, Inc., Lucas County Board of Developmental Disabilities, The Ohio Olmstead Task Force, The Ohio Developmental Disability Workforce Crisis Task Force, Maryland Department of Health, and both family and self-advocates.

*PCPID Full Report\_0.pdf*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 9, 2022, from [https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/programs/2018-02/2017%20PCPID%20Full%20Report\\_0.PDF](https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/programs/2018-02/2017%20PCPID%20Full%20Report_0.PDF)

*DODD Waiver Waiting List Information | DataOhio*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 9, 2022, from <https://data.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/data/view/dodd-waiver-waiting-list-information>

*Fastest growing occupations: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 9, 2022, from <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/fastest-growing-occupations.htm>

*Home Health and Personal Care Aides: Occupational Outlook Handbook: : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 9, 2022, from <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/home-health-aides-and-personal-care-aides.htm#tab-6>

*OesWageByArea*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 9, 2022, from <https://ohiolmi.com/Home/oesWagebyArea>

OOTF Direct Care Workforce Crisis Advocacy. (2021, November 8). *Ohio Olmstead Task Force*. <https://ohioolmstead.com/issues-advocacy/ootf-direct-care-workforce-crisis-advocacy/>

*Poverty Guidelines*. (n.d.). ASPE. Retrieved March 9, 2022, from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>

*Stabilization-and-beyond-ohio-workforce-call-to-actionI.pdf*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 9, 2022, from <https://ddc.ohio.gov/Portals/0/stabilization-and-beyond-ohio-workforce-call-to-actionI.pdf?ver=K8yb0Ql4E4lxqIGm6TJ1yg%3D%3D>



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

NISONGER CENTER