



# ADDRESSING THE DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY WORKFORCE CRISIS IN OHIO

A report of the Ohio DD Workforce Crisis Task  
Force

## [Abstract](#)

This report presents the findings and outcomes of the Ohio DD Workforce Crisis Task Force, a task force convened by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) to address the developmental disability (DD) workforce crisis in Ohio.

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## Introduction

Convened by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD), the Ohio DD Workforce Crisis Task Force (WCTF) met for the first time in May 2021 to address the growing workforce crisis in Ohio's developmental disability (DD) system. The WCTF was made up of representatives from a variety of stakeholders, including self-advocates, parents/family members of people with developmental disabilities, advocacy organizations, provider organizations, and state agencies.

The WCTF's mission was to improve conditions to attract, recruit, and maintain a DD workforce large enough to meet adequate staffing levels in the face of a highly competitive job market. The WCTF was responsible for:

- Completing a data review to document and understand the current state of Ohio's DD workforce.
- Projecting Ohio's DD workforce needs and anticipated challenges to address and opportunities to seize over the next decade.
- Evaluating solutions, making recommendations, and pursuing strategic immediate, short-term, and longer-term actions to improve conditions to attract, recruit, and maintain a DD workforce large enough to meet adequate staffing levels in the face of a highly competitive job market.
- Making necessary adjustments and/or recommendations for change to the DD system's design, policies, procedures, rate structures, and other necessary elements to sustain the DD system.
- Pursuing communication techniques to ensure the DD system understands strategic actions being undertaken to address workforce issues.

## Data Review

Many workforce challenges are having a negative impact on the DD system in Ohio. People living with developmental disabilities are not getting the services they need, and providers are struggling to provide essential services. It is important to address these challenges to ensure that the DD system can continue to provide quality services to people with developmental disabilities.

- The turnover rate for direct support professionals (DSPs) in Ohio is 56%<sup>1</sup>, which is much higher than the national average of 43%<sup>2</sup>. This high turnover rate is a major challenge for

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<sup>1</sup> [https://dodd.ohio.gov/about-us/DODD\\_Data/DSP+Compensation+Survey/2021+DSP+Compensation+Survey+Summary+Report](https://dodd.ohio.gov/about-us/DODD_Data/DSP+Compensation+Survey/2021+DSP+Compensation+Survey+Summary+Report)

<sup>2</sup> [https://idd.nationalcoreindicators.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/2020StaffStabilitySurveyReport\\_FINAL.pdf](https://idd.nationalcoreindicators.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/2020StaffStabilitySurveyReport_FINAL.pdf)

the DD system, as it means that providers are constantly having to recruit and train new staff.

- As reported in the 2021 DSP Compensation survey, there were approximately 8,500 job vacancies for DSPs in Ohio. This means that there are not enough DSPs to meet the demand for services.
- According to the Ohio Mean Jobs (OMJ) Critical and In-Demand Job list, 3 of the 10 most in-demand careers are in the Direct Service Professional category (Home Health Aides, Personal and Home Care Aides, and Medical Assistants)<sup>3</sup>
- The average wage for a DSP in Ohio is \$13.64 per hour. This is lower than the average wage for other entry-level jobs, such as retail and food service.
  - OMJ lists Home Health Aides and Personal Care Aides with the lowest median annual salary (\$23k) of the top 10 Critical and In-demand jobs.
  - According to Indeed<sup>4</sup>, the National average hourly rate for DSPs is \$16.03, and for Zip Recruiter<sup>5</sup>, the average is \$13 an hour. Ohio's average wage is \$13.64, which put the state within national rates.
- Although the majority of agency providers offer some type of benefits, many DSPs do not have access to health insurance, paid sick leave, or paid vacation.
- The job of a DSP can be very stressful. DSPs often work long hours, and they may have to deal with challenging behaviors from the people they support.

The DD system in Ohio faces a serious workforce crisis that affects the quality and availability of services for people with developmental disabilities. The main reasons for this crisis are low wages, the lack of benefits, high stress, growing demand, job vacancies, and a high turnover rate for DSPs. These factors make it difficult to recruit and retain qualified and committed DSPs who can provide essential support and services to people with disabilities.

## Timeline of Meetings and Topics

The WCTF held a series of meetings from May 2021 through July 2023 to discuss and develop strategies and recommendations to address the DD workforce crisis in Ohio. The meetings were facilitated by Jacqui Romer-Sensky and covered various topics related to the WCTF's mission, such as workforce data and trends, best practices and innovations, barriers and challenges, and proposed solutions and actions.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://topjobs.ohio.gov/top-jobs-list/ohios-top-jobs-list>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.indeed.com/career/direct-support-professional/salaries>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Jobs/Direct-Service-Provider>

May 26, 2021

- Launch of the DODD Workforce Crisis Task Force (WCTF)
- Review of the WCTF Charter
- Discussion of the context for the WCTF's work
- Brainstorming of short-, intermediate-, and long-term actions to mitigate the workforce crisis

June 9, 2021

- Finalized the WCTF Charter
- Reviewed DODD's proposal for initial WCTF ideas

July 14, 2021

- Updates from Data "Hot Spot" and DSP committees.
- Consideration of proposals

July 14, 2021

- DODD updates
- Consideration of proposals

August 11, 2021

- Unemployment compensation presentation
- Consideration of proposals

August 25, 2021

- Proposal consideration
- Updates from Hot Spot visits
- Technology discussion
- Workforce shortage letter

September 8, 2021

- Updates from Hot Spot visits
- Technology recommendations

September 23, 2021

- Proposal consideration
- Updates from Hot Spot visits
- DODD waivers

October 13, 2021

- Recommendations from Hot Spot visits

- Review of WCTF proposals

October 27, 2021

- Review of the WCTF process
- American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

December 8, 2021

- Technology updates and approaches
- Rate consultant RFP
- DSP recruiting marketing effort

February 9, 2022

- Proposal consideration

March 9, 2022

- Crisis staffing support
- Rate consultant RFP update
- DSP RFP consideration
- Proposal consideration

April 13, 2022

- Retention payment
- Crisis staffing support update
- Rate consultant RFP update
- DSP RFP update
- Outreach efforts
- Proposal consideration

May 11, 2022

- Rate consultant RFP update
- DSP RFP update
- DSP recruiting marketing effort update
- DSP survey results

June 8, 2022

- Workforce and technology data report
- DSP recruiting marketing effort update
- Rate consultant RFP update
- DSP RFP update
- Cross-Agency workforce task force
- Retention payment update

October 12, 2022

- Risk toolkit presentation
- DSP roundtables
- DSP wage compensation survey results
- DSP recruiting marketing effort update
- Cross-Agency workforce task force updates
- Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services workforce presentation

January 11, 2023

- Retention payment update
- DSP roundtables preliminary findings
- Workforce reports

April 12, 2023

- DSP workforce crisis project
- DSP roundtables findings

July 12, 2023

- Budget updates
- Report review
- DSP-U

## Outcomes and Successes

The WCTF has been working diligently to address the challenges and opportunities facing the DSP workforce in Ohio. The task force has identified and implemented several proposals, strategies, and initiatives that have resulted in positive outcomes and successes for the DSP workforce and the people they support. Some of these outcomes and successes include: adding DSPs to Ohio's Critical Jobs list, providing retention payments to eligible DSPs, promoting the use of technology to enhance service delivery, and selecting a rate consultant to modernize the funding system for DODD waivers. These outcomes and successes demonstrate the commitment and collaboration of the task force and its stakeholders to improve the quality and availability of services for people with developmental disabilities in Ohio.

### Critical Jobs List

The addition of DSPs to [Ohio's Critical Jobs list](#) increases the visibility of available DSP jobs for those seeking employment. The Critical Jobs list specifically focuses on workforce development in areas that impact the health and well-being of Ohioans and qualifies employers of DSPs to access certain resources to assist in recruitment.

## Retention Payments

As a direct result of proposals submitted through the WCTF, DODD launched the county board-funded [DSP retention payment initiative](#) for independent providers and DSPs of agency waiver providers. The goal is to address the workforce crisis and retain DSPs. Eligible providers receive quarterly payments to distribute to each eligible DSP, with reporting requirements. Independent providers are also eligible for payments. This investment is expected to improve retention rates for DSPs and support Ohio's developmental disabilities system in providing quality services.

## Technology

[Ohio's Technology First initiative](#) is promoting the use of remote supports and assistive technology to reduce the strain on in-person supports and expand the outreach of scarce DSP resources. While technology cannot replace the need for DSPs, it can provide a redistribution of where the need is and extend the reach of DSPs. Embracing technology is essential to address the workforce crisis and conversations about technology should be a central part of every person's planning process. Prioritizing technology as one of many solutions gives Ohio a head start on limiting the adverse effects of the workforce crisis as outlined in the [Technology First and the DSP Workforce Crisis report](#).

## Rate Consultant Selected

The selection of a rate consultant in the [Waiver Redesign initiative](#) is an important role because they are responsible for designing fair and logical payment systems for Ohio's waiver services system. By modernizing the funding system for DODD waivers, the initiative aims to create a more sustainable structure that will attract and retain DSPs, as well as improve the quality of services provided to people with developmental disabilities.

## DSP Experience

The [DSP Experience project](#) was conducted to learn directly from DSPs to improve recruitment, retention, and job satisfaction and compile a report for the WCTF. The findings and recommendations of the project are the result of qualitative and quantitative observations made during DSP Experience meetings held with DSPs in December 2022 and January 2023. The report suggests the next steps needed to remove obstacles that require DSPs to make significant life choices and to provide ongoing opportunities for their involvement in addressing critical issues.

## Direct Care Worker Public Service Announcement

DODD and other state agency partners launched a public service announcement campaign to promote the recruitment of DSPs in Ohio. The campaign invested over \$1 million and was featured on various media platforms, including TV, streaming services, radio, billboards, and social media. The campaign [encourages Ohioans to consider direct care jobs](#) as their employment and directs them to [www.ohiomeansjobs.com/directcare](http://www.ohiomeansjobs.com/directcare), a landing page that will be used long-term to find direct care jobs in developmental disabilities, aging, and mental health spaces.



## Direct Care Workforce Expansion Working Group

The [Direct Care Workforce Expansion Working Group](#) was formed to address labor shortages in direct care professions. The group consisted of subject matter experts from 11 departments within state government and external partners, including members of the WCTF. The purpose of the group was to solicit public comments, review responses, provide a forum for public testimony, and collaborate with community leaders to [create a report](#) that highlights the issues faced by community members in direct care professions. The group focused on topical areas associated with the direct care workforce shortage, including rules, regulations, laws, education and training support, scope of practice, employee wellness, and leveraging technology and innovations.

## DSP-U

DODD partnered with the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals to offer a program called [DSP-U](#) that allows high school students to earn industry-recognized credentials preparing them for a career as a DSP along with credits towards graduation. The program offers two types of credentials, a Basic Certificate and a Certificate of Initial Proficiency, that require completion of courses and internships.

## Shared Living Resources

Ohio Shared Living (OSL) is a service that allows adults with developmental disabilities to live with family members or caregivers who provide most of their care and support. OSL helps people with disabilities to enjoy a home-like environment and a sense of belonging. The WCTF worked to update the resources and [videos](#) related to OSL on the [DODD website](#). The goal was to provide more accurate and up-to-date information about OSL and its benefits with the hopes that raising awareness and interest in OSL, could help address the shortage of DSPs in Ohio.

## DSP Projects

The DSP Magnet Recruiting Training Series is now available in [DODD MyLearning](#). This course, developed in collaboration with Blitz Creative, provides practical strategies for attracting exceptional direct support professionals. The training consists of lessons, activities, and videos on key recruitment and retention themes such as fostering a person-centered mindset, crafting effective job posts, creating the perfect DSP profile, and reducing ghosting. An introductory video of the course is available on [YouTube](#).

The Vision for DSPs grant is an opportunity for DODD to support providers to address the DSP workforce shortage and enhance the quality of person-centered services. The project has five desired outcomes: inspire confidence, reimagine recruiting and retaining, promote career paths, support and encourage empowerment, and provide quality training. Applicants were asked to propose a plan to achieve one or more of these outcomes.

Three organizations: Iron and String Life Enhancement (ISLE), New Avenues to Independence, and Vocational Guidance Services (VGS) received the grant and will implement various training

programs for their staff and DSPs through Bridges Out of Poverty formal supervisory training and individual training for DSPs.

## Biennium Budget

Ohio's FY24-25 biennium budget inclusion of rate increases can be seen as a direct result of the collective efforts made by the Workforce Crisis Task Force. Thanks to dedicated advocacy and support, in the second year of the budget, investments will raise the average pay for DSPs in the DD system to \$18 per hour. Additionally, the transition of the local county board retention payment into the rate increase will further support DSPs through a \$1. These rate increases will have a significant impact on various services, including Homemaker/Personal Care, Shared Living, Remote Support, Respite, Adult Day Support, Transportation, and the Behavioral, Medical, and Complex Care add-ons, marking the largest increases in the history of Ohio's DD system.

## Conclusion

The Ohio DD Workforce Crisis Task Force has made significant progress in addressing the workforce crisis in Ohio's developmental disability system. The task force has recognized the importance of direct support professionals (DSPs) as skilled and valued workers who provide essential support and services to people with developmental disabilities. The task force has also implemented various initiatives to enhance the recruitment, retention, recognition, and compensation of DSPs.

These initiatives have resulted in positive impacts for the DSP workforce and the people they support, such as increased visibility, improved wages and benefits, expanded use of technology, and a modernized funding system. The task force will continue to monitor the outcomes and impacts of these initiatives and explore other strategies to address the ongoing challenges and opportunities facing the DSP workforce in Ohio. The task force is committed to ensuring that people with developmental disabilities can access the services they need and deserve to live independently and participate fully in their communities.

## Thank You

DODD would like to thank all the members of the task force for their time, expertise, and commitment to this issue and the people living with disabilities throughout Ohio. Their contributions have been invaluable and appreciated. We look forward to continuing our collaboration and partnership with them in the future.

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