



Direct Support Work is NOT Minimum Wage Work

\$54 Million Needed in FY2020 to Provide Competitive Wage 25% Above Minimum Wage

The Direct Support Professional (DSP) workforce that serves individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) under the Division of Developmental Disabilities **is in crisis**. The average starting wage of a DSP is only \$11.00 per hour – which will be New Jersey’s minimum wage in less than one year for jobs that require significantly less skill and responsibility.

A state appropriation of \$54-million in new funding is needed in FY2020 to ensure the starting DSP wage for those who support adults with I/DD is 25% above New Jersey’s minimum wage and accommodates raises to pay rates for work performed. Without this state funding, the DSP workforce crisis will worsen. Workers will likely move to less demanding jobs at comparable pay, leaving individuals with I/DD without the critical supports they need to survive each day.

Background:

What is a DSP? DSPs provide the hands-on supports that enable over 30,000 New Jersey residents with I/DD to live as active members in the community. Moreover, DSPs are:

- Skilled professionals, who must complete extensive training and continuing education to attain the knowledge needed to support the diverse physical and intellectual needs of individuals with I/DD.
- They implement complex behavioral health plans, oversee and administer essential medical care, comply with regulations and reporting requirements, and serve as advocates, companions, mentors and caregivers. They keep individuals safe, happy and healthy in their homes and in their communities.

A Workforce in Crisis: The current disparity between the specialized skill sets required to be a DSP and low compensation has resulted in **44% turnover** and **20% vacancy rates**. This is costing taxpayers thousands in lost training and overtime pay, and worse, regularly jeopardizes the health and safety of individuals with I/DD.

If the state fails to invest \$54 million in FY2020 to ensure that the DSP starting wage remains 25% above New Jersey’s minimum wage, and thus, places DSPs at a comparable pay level with entry-level jobs such as fast food workers, cashiers, and retail sales clerks whose positions require significantly lower levels of skill and responsibility, the recruitment and retention efforts in the field will dramatically worsen. DSPs will leave for less demanding jobs at comparable pay rates resulting in an inadequate workforce to provide vital and fundamental supports, including staffing day programs and group homes, and supporting employment. The health, safety, and general well being of individuals with I/DD will be significantly at risk.

What is needed in FY2020 to move DSPs to a Competitive Wage 25% Above Minimum Wage? Under the Division of Developmental Disabilities fee-for-service delivery system, an individual with I/DD is assigned a budget and every service delivered to that individual is assigned a corresponding rate that is billed to Medicaid directly. This means rates to DSP services and individual budgets must be increased to facilitate a DSP wage increase.

To move DSPs towards a competitive wage and ensure the starting rate remains **25% above** the minimum wage, the state must appropriate \$54 million in state dollars in FY2020. This appropriation would generate a \$54 million match from Medicaid, resulting in a total of \$108 million to increase DDD’s funding for services delivered by DSPs.



What's a DSP?

DSPs are the men and women who carry out incredibly varied and important responsibilities to support New Jerseyans with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) live self-directed, fulfilling lives with dignity and pride in communities across the Garden State.

DSPs are professionals who are highly-trained in a wide variety of critical areas, from interpreting complex behavioral plans, ensuring community inclusion, caring for personal and medical needs to complying with numerous health, safety and other rules and regulations.

Despite the high demands of the job, DSPs in New Jersey currently earn an average starting wage of \$11 per hour. In less than one year, this will be the same exact amount as New Jersey's minimum wage for jobs that require significantly less skill and responsibility, only further exacerbating the DSP workforce crisis.

NJ lawmakers must invest \$54million in FY2020 to keep DSP wages ahead of New Jersey's minimum wage and put DSPs on a path toward a competitive wage that reflects the skill required for the complex work.

What DSPs Do Everyday

- Provide services to people with I/DD in their homes, at their jobs, at day programs and in the community.
- Provide for (often complex) medical needs (CPR, tube feeding, diabetic care, operate durable medical equipment, administer medications).
- Compliance competencies required, including, compliance with OSHA regulations, emergency procedures, Core Competency requirements, Medicaid billing and documentation, regulations to provide for individuals health and safety, and adhering to a Code of Ethics.
- Assistance with activities of daily living (ADL's) (meal prep, personal care, incontinence, nutrition, and safe feeding for people needing assistance)
- Ensure community inclusion which consists of implementing person centered planning, assisting with participation in educational, recreational, and leisure activities while respecting the individual's goals and interests as well as develop opportunities for connections with community members and facilitate relationships and interactions.
- Teach and reinforce skills related to community inclusion, incorporating, financial services, social skills, and employment skills.
- Implement complex behavioral plans and de-escalate challenging situations, at home and in the community. Apply therapeutic intervention techniques as needed to individuals with verbal or physical aggression.
- Advocate on behalf of the individual in order to protect the individual's dignity and rights.
- Form close, trusted relationships with individuals with disabilities and their families, making possible lives of purpose and value for individuals with I/DD in the New Jersey communities they call home.

It's time DSPs earn a competitive wage in New Jersey that reflects the skill, training and responsibility required for their complex and demanding work.
Direct Support is NOT MINIMUM WAGE WORK.