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What's a Direct Support Professional (DSP)?

A Direct Support Professional provides the hands-on supports to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). DSPs are the reason people with I/DD are able to live meaningful lives in the community. They 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.

What's the problem?

The community-based, disability service system is in crisis with 44% turnover and nearly 30% vacancy rates because DSP wages are not proportional to the responsibility and skill required to do the job. At an average starting salary of just \$12 per hour, DSP wages are simply not competitive. It is very challenging to hire and retain staff and it's only getting harder with an increasing number of retailers paying \$15-18 per hour and New Jersey's minimum wage on a path to \$15 per hour for entry-level jobs that are far less demanding. The worsening DSP shortage is threatening the safety and health of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in community-settings.

What's needed to address the DSP workforce crisis?

Raising New Jersey's minimum wage was the right thing to do, but DSPs are far from minimum wage workers and cannot be left behind. In order to stay competitive and maintain a stable, quality DSP workforce for individuals with I/DD, the starting wage for DSPs must go up by 10% (to mirror the 10% increase in New Jersey's minimum wage to \$11 p/h on January 1, 2020). This equals a \$1.20 an hour increase, which would be applied to wages for all DSPs supporting adults with I/DD in community-settings. A \$16.5 million supplemental appropriation (plus \$16.5 million federal match) in FY20 is needed to achieve this DSP wage increase. In FY21, the Coalition is seeking an additional \$16.5 million in state funding (plus \$16.5 million federal match) to raise DSP salaries to accommodate the next increase to the minimum wage on January 1, 2021 to \$12 p/h.

**When New Jersey's minimum wage is increased, DSP wages MUST be increased as well. New Jersey needs to index DSP wages, NOW!
WE CAN'T WAIT!**