

Recognizing and Fixing the 2019 DSP Workforce Crisis

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) with their daily tasks, employment supports, medical needs and much more. These supports and services are almost entirely funded by Medicaid. This critical workforce is experiencing a severe shortage with a 51 percent yearly average turnover. However, there is not enough data on this workforce for policymakers to devise effective solutions to address this workforce crisis.

Federal data for DSPs does not accurately reflect the unique responsibilities of the work performed. Currently, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) classifies DSPs in the larger standard occupational code (SOC) of personal care aides and home health aides. Combined, personal care aides and home health aides are the fastest growing careers in the country, requiring over 1 million new workers over the next decade. These categories do not adequately capture the unique qualities of the DSP workforce. DSPs highly tailor their work to individuals' needs, resulting in more diverse responsibilities such as employment supports or teaching social skills, compared to home health aides or personal care aides.



The lack of DSP-specific data hinders decision-makers' ability to craft effective policies, which ultimately impacts the quality of supports. States heavily rely on SOC data to determine the rates paid to providers of disability supports, including the cost of DSP wages. Without accurate federal data, states do not have adequate tools to project employment trends, establish wage rates that reflect the responsibilities of the work and otherwise invest in the DSP workforce. Similarly, the federal government does not have accurate data on how states are investing in the growth of this workforce. This is leading to missed opportunities to strengthen this workforce and critical supports for people with disabilities.

BLS needs legislative encouragement to turn this solution into a reality. Disability service providers already code DSPs in their payment system, so there is minimal administrative change required by BLS. However, BLS only revises SOCs roughly every decade. This is too long a timeframe given the severity of the workforce crisis and its impact on people with disabilities. Congress must send legislative encouragement for BLS to seriously consider a DSP SOC.

How Can Congress Help?

U.S. Senators Maggie Hassan (D-NH) and Susan Collins (R-ME) will soon be introducing legislation to create a DSP SOC. The offices of U.S. Representatives Kathleen Rice (D-NY), Sean Maloney (D-NY), John Katko (R-NY), Pete King (R-NY) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) will introduce. Please co-sponsor by contacting:

- Kenzie Marshall with Senator Hassan's office at kenzie_marshall@hassan.senate.gov
- Mike Demakos with Representative Rice's office at Michael.demakos@mail.house.gov

For More Information:

You can also contact Sarah Meek, ANCOR's Senior Director of Legislative Affairs, at smeek@ancor.org or 703.535.7850, ext. 104.