



# The State of America's Direct Support Workforce

## The Situation: A Direct Support Workforce in Crisis

For decades, the United States has witnessed a significant shortage of direct support professionals (DSPs), the frontline workers who support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to be included in the community.

Although we know the workforce crisis is substantial, it is nearly impossible to describe the full depths of the national shortage of direct care workers due to a lack of sufficient data. Certain sources have been instrumental, such as the National Core Indicators Staff Stability, which reveals among other things that the turnover rate among participating states stands at 43%. However, data are not available for all states, and the number of measures remains limited.

Within this context, ANCOR surveyed providers of community-based I/DD services to glean a deeper understanding of how the direct support workforce crisis is impacting them and their ability to deliver the highest-quality supports possible to the full number of people in need in their communities. The survey was fielded for a five-week period beginning in February 2020, and ultimately garnered 805 responses.

We know through our work with our network of 1,600+ private providers that the direct support workforce crisis has been amplified substantially by the COVID-19 pandemic. On the one hand, the temporary or permanent discontinuation of services forced many providers to furlough staff. On the other hand, many DSPs were forced to take temporary leave or resign from their positions for reasons including, but not limited to, the need to care for a loved one who contracted COVID-19, the need to stay home with children whose schools were shuttered by the pandemic, and fear of working with individuals who had tested positive for the virus.

Readers should note that although the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the direct support workforce crisis were profound, the data presented in this issue brief were collected prior to the pandemic and thus do not account for more recent changes to the contours of the crisis. Nevertheless, we believe these data are valuable resources for providers, advocates and policymakers in their quest to understand how the direct support workforce crisis is impacting:

- The quality and availability of services for people currently leveraging community-based long-term services and supports.
- The prospects of minimizing the number of people on states' waiting lists for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). This is especially compelling given that the Kaiser Family Foundation reports there were nearly 590,000 people on states' HCBS waiting lists as of 2019.
- The fiscal impact of the direct support workforce crisis, including costs associated with overtime, training and onboarding, and more.

## The Ask: Support *Better Care Better Jobs* Proposal

In response to the challenges illuminated by the data that follow, ANCOR strongly encourages the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress and the Biden administration to take swift action to adopt the policies set forth in the Better Care Better Jobs Act. The legislation, which operationalizes the Biden administration's proposal to invest \$400 billion in the Medicaid HCBS program, would spur innovation in community-based I/DD services and represent the most significant commitment to these services in a generation. For opportunities to take action in support of the Better Care Better Jobs Act, visit the ANCOR Amplifier at [amplifier.ancor.org](https://amplifier.ancor.org).

## **FACT: 66% of Providers are Turning Away New Referrals**

Two-thirds of the 805 respondents indicated that they had turned away or stopped accepting new referrals due to insufficient staffing.

- Many respondents turned away referrals for people with higher support needs (medical, behavioral, etc.) or those that require 1:1 staffing.

## **FACT: 34% of Providers are Discontinuing Programs and Services**

Fully one-third of respondents indicated that they had discontinued programs or service offerings due to insufficient staffing.

- Several respondents have waiting lists for services due to a lack of staff. Even with approved services and sufficient program capacity, many people lack support because there's no one to support them.

## **FACT: 65% of Providers are Delaying the Launch of New Programs or Services**

Just under two thirds of respondents indicated that they had delayed the launch of new programs or service offerings due to insufficient staffing.

- Individual choice is significantly hindered due to lack of staff when providers can't launch new services.

## **FACT: 69% of Providers are Struggling to Achieve Quality Standards**

Nearly 7 in 10 respondents indicated that they had experienced difficulties in achieving quality standards due to insufficient staffing. In some cases, compliance with the final HCBS Settings Rule is at stake.

- As a result, hiring standards are forced to be lower, and people leveraging supports have limited choice when it comes to who they live with and where.

## **FACT: 40% of Providers are Seeing Higher Frequencies of Reportable Incidents**

Four in 10 respondents indicated that they had experienced higher frequency of reportable incidents due to insufficient staffing.

- In a constant cycle of hiring and orientation, provider organizations struggle to focus on quality because too many of their resources are directed to onboarding and required training.

## **FACT: The Average Provider Spends an Additional \$904,000 Annually**

From overtime pay to onboarding costs and more, the average provider spent an additional \$904,000 in the past fiscal year due to insufficient staffing.