

State of the Direct Support Workforce

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Direct Support Workforce: Who are they?



- Worker wages do not respond to typical labor market dynamics.
- State Medicaid agencies and legislatures set reimbursement rates



Background

Growing demand for direct support workforce

- IDD and AD population both require direct support- competing for the same workers
- LTSS employers will need to fill 9.3 million job openings in direct support from 2021 to 2031 (PHI)
- HCBS Settings Rule further impacted demand for workers
- Challenges based on limitations on paid family caregiving

COVID-19 impacted the workforce

- Made the job more risky
- Stress and burnout
- Job market changes
- Emphasized the critical nature of these services

Workers struggle with poverty

- Median wage for direct support professional was \$18.39 in 2024
- Median earnings were \$37,440/yr if working 40 hour/week, 52 weeks/year
- 46% relied on some form of public assistance

Why Should We Care About The Direct Support Workforce Right Now?

- People thrive when they are supported by a stable, qualified Direct Support Workforce.
- High turnover and workforce challenges weaken the quality and reliability of services
- Changes to Medicaid eligibility and funding may create challenges for both service systems and the workers who sustain them
- Direct Support Workers are vital members of our communities and deserve wages that support a decent quality of life



2024 NCI State of the Workforce Surveys

What are we looking at?

AGING AND DISABILITY (AD):

Surveyed more than 966 provider agencies with more than 100,631 DSWs in 7 states.

INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES (IDD):

Surveyed more than 3936 provider agencies with more than 344,179 DSPs in 27 states.

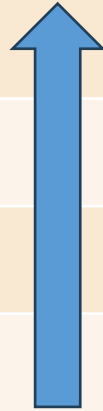
Workforce Demographics

Race	NCI-AD	NCI-IDD
Black or African American	49%	48%
White	33%	27%
Hispanic/Latino	4%	6%
Asian	3%	3%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1%	1%
Other/More than one race	2%	3%
Don't know	9%	12%

Gender	NCI-AD	NCI-IDD
Female	82%	62%
Male	15%	31%
Don't Know	3%	6%

Provider agencies

	Private for-profit agency	Private non-profit agency	State/county government	Other government
IDD 2024	61.7%	34.7%	2.4%	2.3%
IDD 2023	59.0%	36.1%	2.2%	4.1%
IDD 2022	53.4%	42.9%	2.0%	2.7%
IDD 2021	48.9%	47.1%	2.3%	3.1%
IDD 2020	44.6%	49.7%	1.2%	4.2%
NCI-AD 2024	80.3%	13.7%	6.9%	0.7%

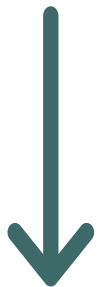


Turnover & Tenure

Measure	NCI-AD	NCI-IDD
Turnover	45%	37%
Tenure <i>*DSWs/DSPs who left responding agencies that had been employed there for less than one year</i>	70%	64%
Turning away referrals <i>*Responding agencies that reported having turned away or stopped accepting new service referrals due to staffing issues</i>	18%	27%

Of the 3 states that also participated in the 2023 State of the Workforce for AD Survey, **only one** saw a decrease in average turnover between 2023 and 2024.

Of the 24 states that also participated in the 2023 State of the Workforce for IDD Survey, **14 states** had a decrease in average turnover between 2023 and 2024.



MA ADDP Workforce Metrics Survey 2025

Staff FTE vacancy rates across ADDP providers have shown steady improvement over time:

- 24% in 2023
- 19% in 2024
- 15% in 2025

BLS reported an overall job opening rate of just over 3% statewide in December 2025

[ADDP Workforce Survey Report Sept 2025 Final.pdf](#); [Massachusetts Job Openings and Labor Turnover — December 2025 : Northeast Information Office : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). Job openings include all positions that are open on the last business day of the reference month.

How Do Turnover, Short Tenure and Vacancies Affect...

DSPs who stay?

- Leads to unpredictability in hours/schedule
- Lowers morale and trust of colleagues
- Inhibits the ability to create relationships with clients
- Increases stress

Provider Agencies?

- Increases costs due to recruiting and overtime
- Requires frequent training of new staff
- Restricts the ability maintain programming
- Potential health and safety vulnerability
- Impacts positive organizational culture

People with IDD and their families?

- Reduced access to services
- Limited choice and opportunity
- Impact on Quality of Life
- Increased support responsibilities for families
- Emotional toll and increased anxiety

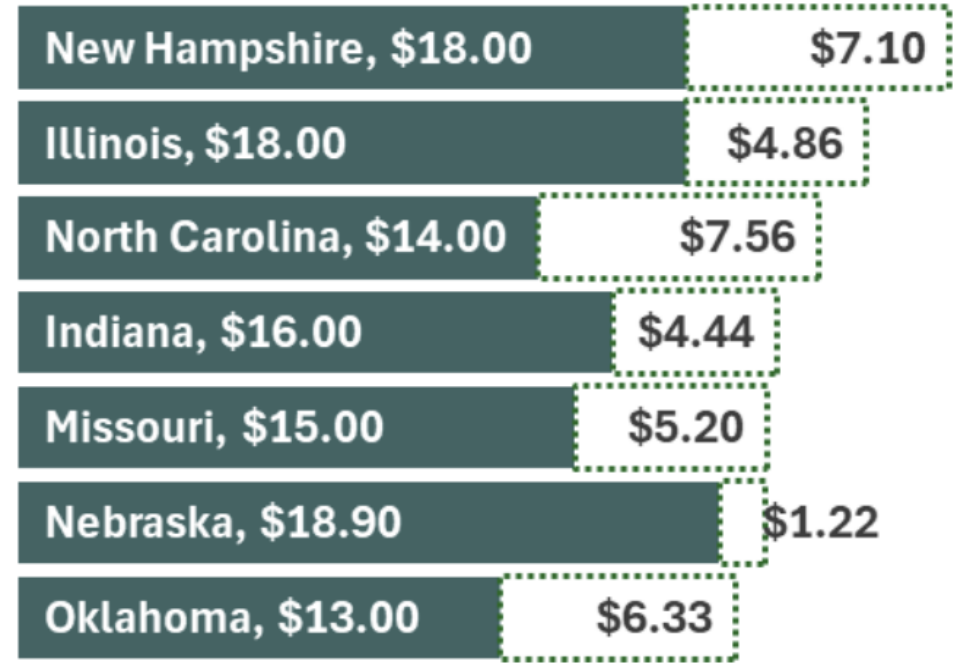
Wages

Median Hourly Wage	NCI-AD	NCI-IDD
	\$16.00	\$18.39



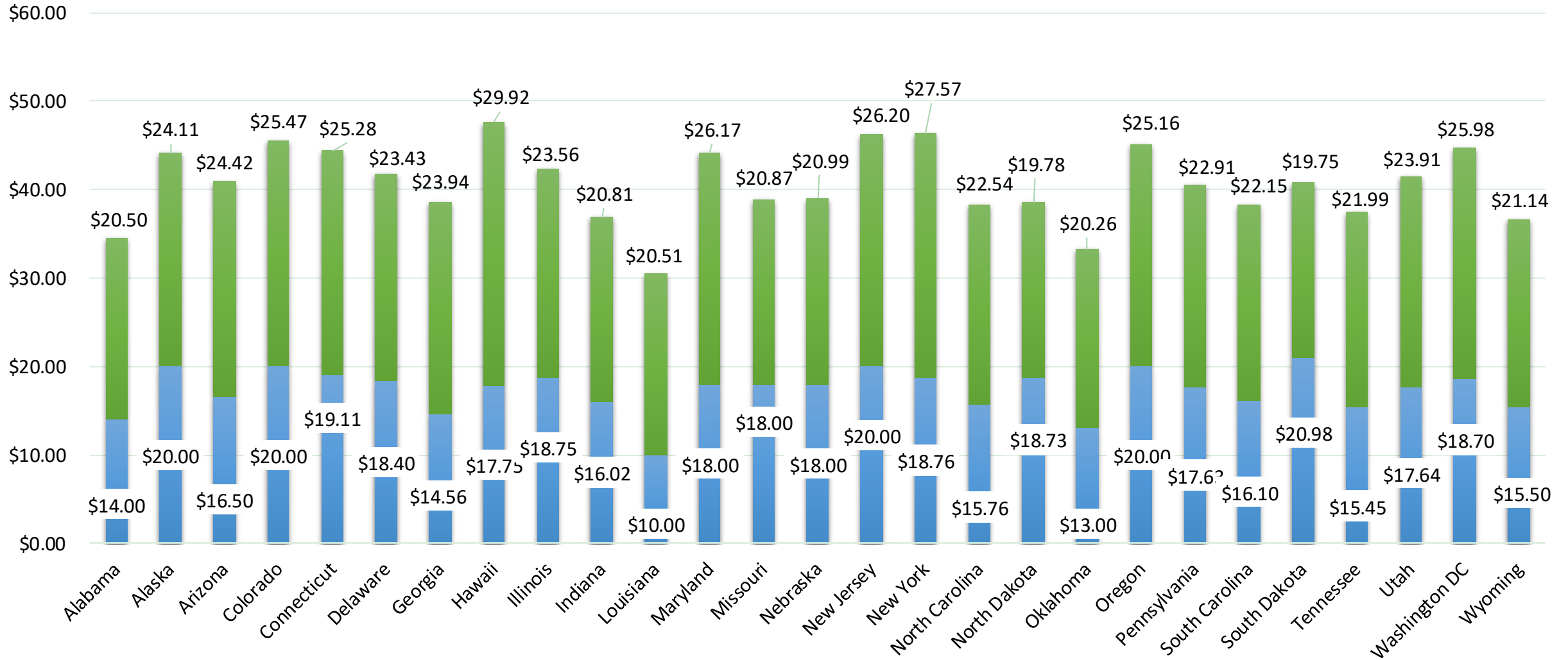
Of the 3 states that also participated in the 2023 State of the Workforce for AD Survey, all saw median hourly wages increase by \$0.50 or more.

No state has median DSW wages above the MIT Living Wage for households of 1 adult and 0 children.



Median hourly wage for DSWs versus the statewide living wage for one adult in 2024

NCI-IDD State Median Wages and Living Wages



NCI-IDD Median Hourly Wage: \$18.39



Median hourly wage for DSPs



Living wage for household of 1 adult and 0 children



Benefits

Benefit	NCI-AD	NCI-IDD
Paid time off	49%	70%
Health insurance	37%	57%
Employer-sponsored retirement plan	41%	54%

The MA ADDP Workforce Metrics Survey demonstrated that agencies in MA are experiencing large health insurance cost increases, constraining their ability to offer competitive wages and benefits.

33% of respondents reported actual premium increases of 11%+ after adjustments.

How can we use these data?

Data can be used to:

- Defend program integrity
- Drive decisions
- Be informed
- Clearly understand/identify an issue
- Ensure inclusion
- Effectuate change
- Measure success over time
- **Fulfill federal reporting requirements**



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