

# WORKFORCE IN CRISIS: WHAT CAN BE DONE TO MEET THE CHALLENGE

Valerie Bradley,  
Human Services Research Institute

Massachusetts Commission on the Status  
of Persons with Disability



# Agenda

- Who are DSPs
- DSP workforce challenges
- MA data from the 2021 NCI-IDD State of the Workforce Survey
- What about other types of workers? NCI-AD State of the Workforce Survey
- State strategies: Best practices
- Other strategies
- Questions?



# Who are DSPs

---

- Paid staff whose primary job responsibility is to provide the following at any location or during any activity (e.g., at home, at leisure activities, at work, during recreational activities, etc.):
  - support,
  - help with skills development,
  - guidance,
  - or personal assistance
- DSPs are critical to ensuring that people receiving services can
  - live the lives they want in the community,
  - experience person-centered practices,
  - make choices
  - have employment and other value-driven outcomes



# Challenges Faced by DSP Workforce

COVID-19 has increased the challenges faced by the workforce



**Demand for home-based care increases demand for quality DSP workforce; HCBS settings rule will impact further**



**Aging population also require direct support- competing for the same workers**



**High vacancy rates/turnover rates impact service delivery – staffing ratios, access, trust and delays in progress**



**High turnover rates: extra incurred costs to providers**

- Recruitment costs
- Onboarding and Pre-Service Training
- Additional costs associated with overtime



# NCI-IDD State of the Workforce in 2021: Survey Basics in MA

## Agencies and providers included in the sample:

- Massachusetts included all licensed and certified residential and day/employment providers in the sample

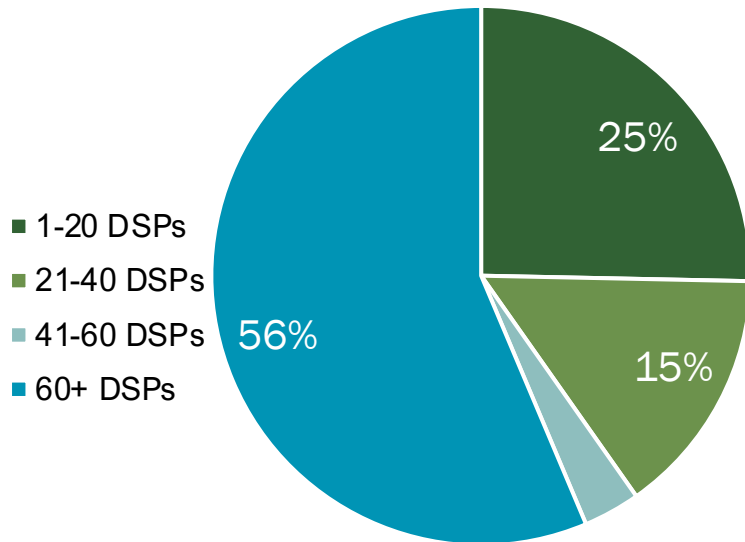
## Implementation strategies included:

- Using the executive director email address on record, providers were emailed, the opportunity to complete the survey.
- Participation was encouraged but was voluntary.

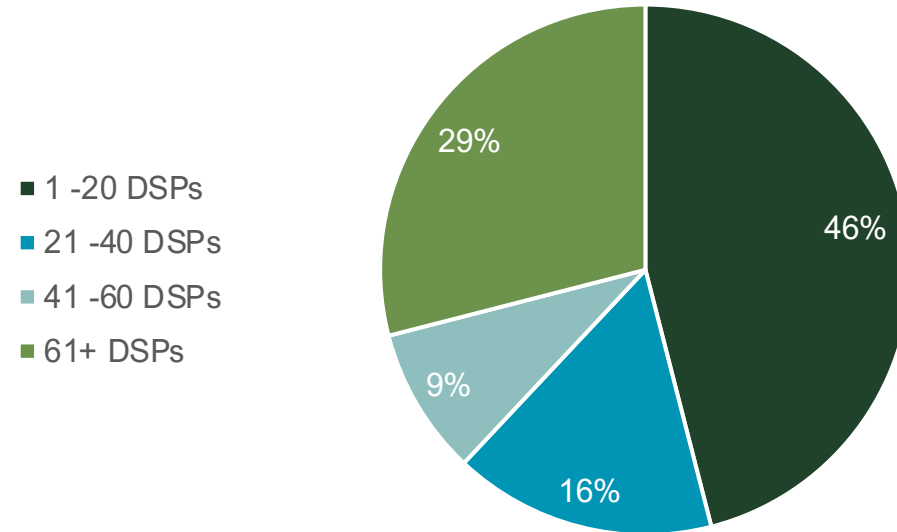
	Valid responses	Total population	Response rate	Margin of Error
MA	87	181	48.1%	7.59%

# Agency Size Based on Number of DSPs on Dec. 31, 2021

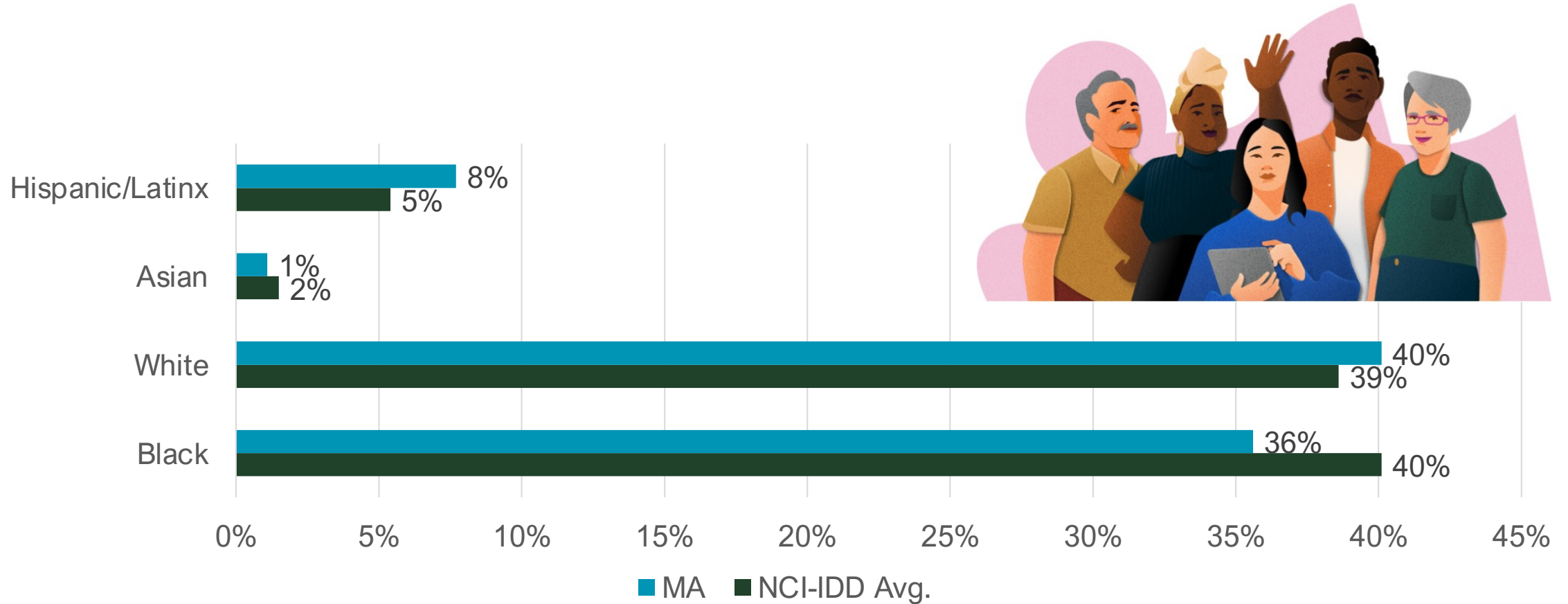
% MA Agencies



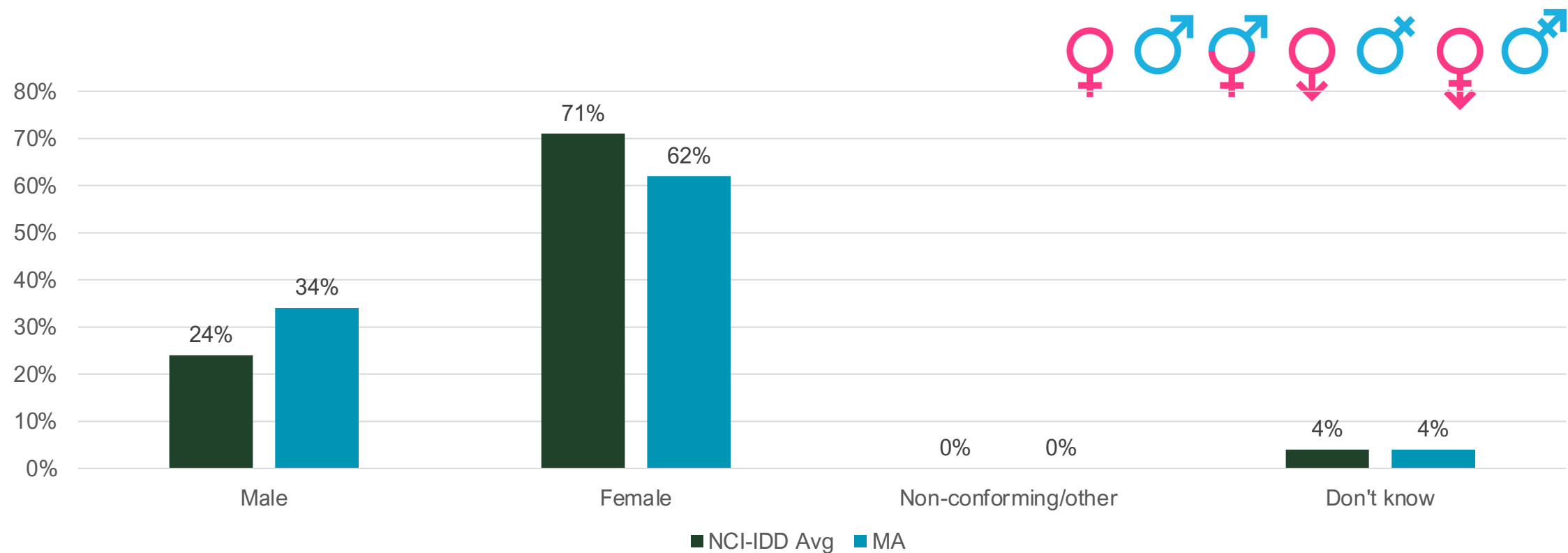
NCI-IDD Avg.



# DSP Workforce Demographics: Race/Ethnicity



# DSP Workforce Demographics: Gender Identity







# MA Data at a Glance

## Wages

\$17.22 overall average hourly wage

NCI-IDD average \$14.41

## Health Insurance

94.2% of agencies offer to some or all DSPs

NCI-IDD average 59.9%

## Paid Time Off

94.2% provide any paid time off to DSPs

NCI-IDD average 73.7%

## Turnover Ratio

31.4%

NCI-IDD average 43.3%

## Vacancy Rate

18.8% full-time and 18.1% part-time

NCI-IDD average 16.5% and 20.3%



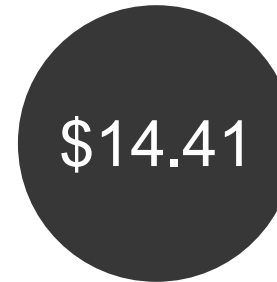
# Wages Benchmark: Overall Average Hourly



Massachusetts



East Coast  
Peers\*\*



NCI-IDD

	MA	CT	NY	NJ	NCI-IDD
State Minimum	\$13.50	\$13.00	\$12.50	\$12.00	\$7.25*
Average Starting	\$16.25	\$16.03	\$15.58	\$16.06	\$13.61
Overall Average	\$17.22	\$17.04	\$16.64	\$16.92	\$14.41
Median	\$17.00	\$16.78	\$16.43	\$16.50	\$14.50

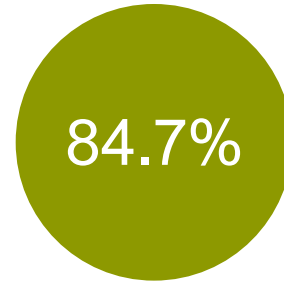
\*Federal minimum wage



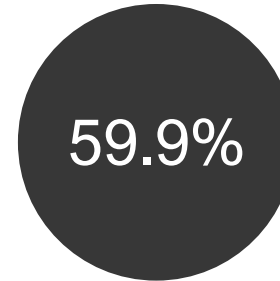
# Health Insurance Benchmark



MA



East Coast  
Peers



NCI-IDD



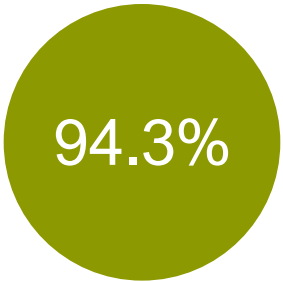
MA	CT	NY	NJ	NCI-IDD
94.2%	86.8%	95.0%	72.3%	59.9%



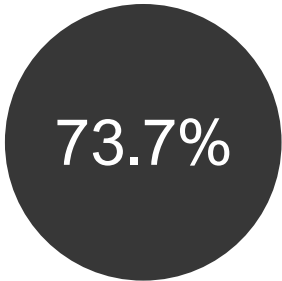
# Paid Time Off Benchmark: Any Type



MA



East Coast  
Peers

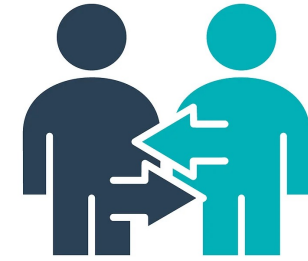


NCI-IDD

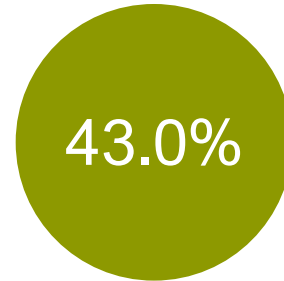
MA	CT	NY	NJ	NCI-IDD
94.2%	98.1%	99.0%	85.9%	73.7%



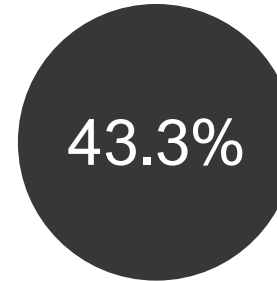
# Turnover Ratio Benchmark: Mean



MA



East Coast  
Peers



NCI-IDD

	MA	CT	NY	NJ	NCI-IDD
Mean	31.4%	52.8%	38.3%	37.9%	43.3%
Median	25.8%	40.1%	33.8%	33.3%	33.3%

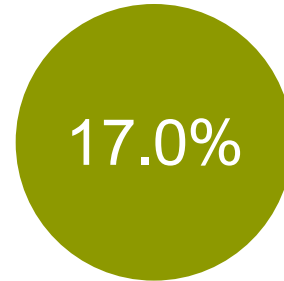




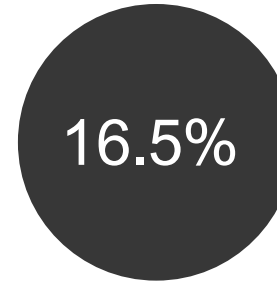
# Vacancy Rates Benchmark: Full-Time



MA



East Coast  
Peers



NCI-IDD

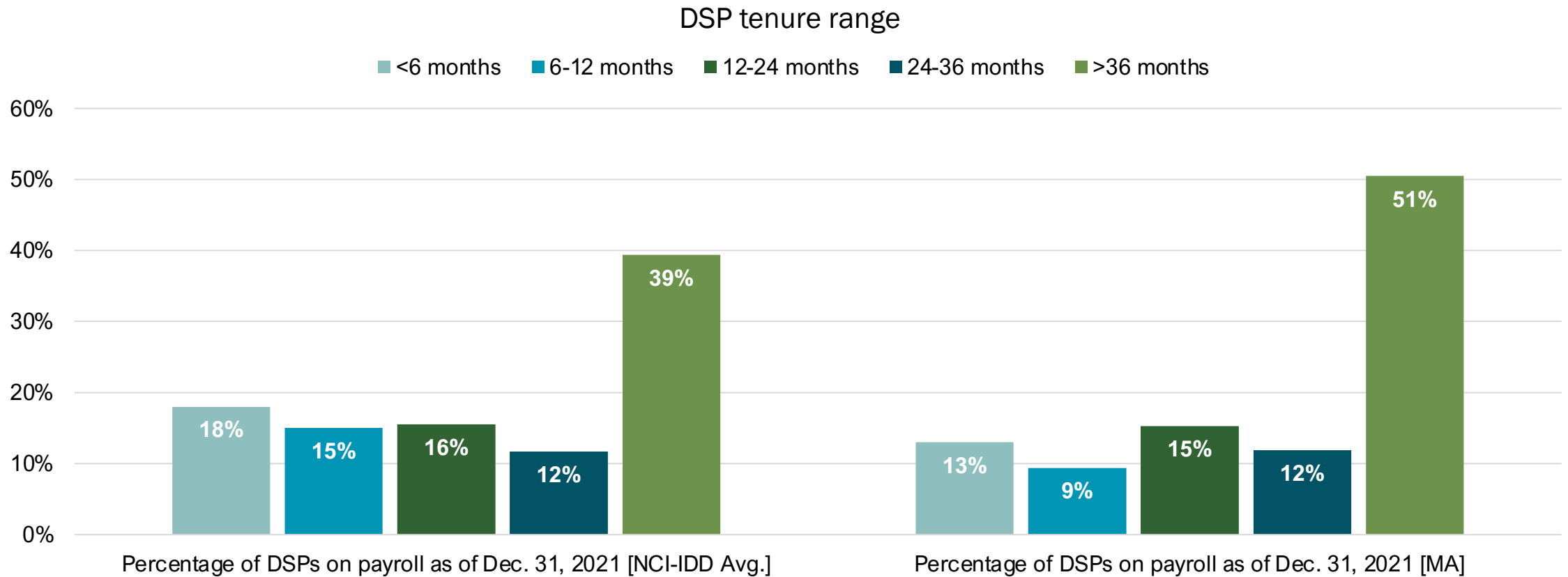


	MA	CT	NY	NJ	NCI-IDD
Full-time	18.8%	12.6%	21.3%	17.2%	16.5%
Part-time	18.1%	18.8%	25.0%	22.6%	20.3%



# Tenure Among Employed DSPs

*DSPs on payroll at responding agencies = 10,269*

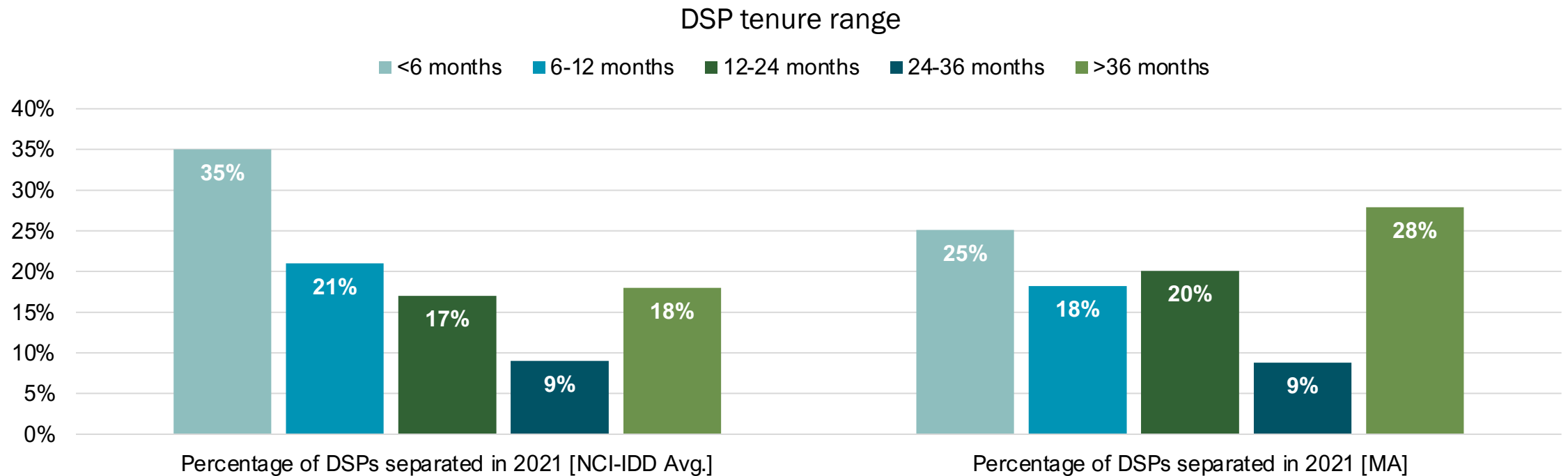


Only includes agencies that provided information on both the total number of DSPs employed as of Dec. 31, 2021, and the tenure of those DSPs. State tenure rates are an average of all cases in the state. Only includes the number of DSPs reported by respondents that also reported the tenure of those DSPs.



# Tenure Among Separated DSPs

*DSPs separated from responding agencies = 3,828*



Only includes agencies that provided information on both the total number of DSPs employed as of Dec. 31, 2021, and the tenure of those DSPs. State tenure rates are an average of all cases in the state. Only includes the number of DSPs reported by respondents that also reported the tenure of those DSPs.

# Recruitment and retention in MA

Realistic Job Preview

85%

NCI-IDD Avg. 83%

Train on code of ethics

81%

NCI-IDD Avg. 87%

DSP ladder

23%

NCI-IDD Avg. 32%

Staff supported to acquire credential

31%

NCI-IDD Avg. 32%

DSP included in agency governance

22%

NCI-IDD Avg. 22%

Agency requires training for DSPs\*

69%

NCI-IDD Avg. 52%

\*Above and beyond those trainings required by state regulations

# What About Other Types Of Workers?

## NCI-AD State Of The Workforce Survey

- NCI-IDD State of the Workforce Survey examines the workforce supporting adults with IDD.
- NCI-AD State of the Workforce Survey rolled out in 2023

NCI-AD SoTW Survey examines the workforce of DSWs providing support to the AD population

What is the “AD population?”

Older adults and/or individuals with physical disabilities who access publicly funded services through

1. Medicaid waiver programs;
2. Medicaid state plan programs;
3. State-funded programs;
4. Older Americans Act programs.



# What Workers Are The Surveys Focused On?

**IDD: DSPs are workers whose primary responsibilities were some or all of the following tasks:**

- support
- help with skills development
- guidance, or personal assistance

at any location or during any activity (i.e., at home, at leisure activities, at work, during recreational activities, etc.) to adults with IDD.

**AD: DSWs are workers whose primary responsibilities were some or all of the following tasks:**

- Support people to maintain independence
- Provide personal assistance such as support to get out of bed, bathe, dress and groom
- Conduct basic clinical tasks such as monitoring vital signs, helping with prescribed exercises or administering medications
- Assist with housekeeping, grocery shopping and cooking, accompany clients to doctor appointments or other errands
- Provide companionship
- Provide support in community engagement activities
- Provide support in day centers or other day activities
- Provide respite support

A photograph of three young adults, two women and one man, laughing and interacting joyfully. They are positioned in front of a large backdrop that features the U.S. flag, the U.S. Capitol dome, and the text 'U.S. Embassy, Tel Aviv' and 'viva leT yssadmE .S.U'. The woman in the foreground is wearing a grey t-shirt and has her hair in a ponytail. The woman behind her is wearing a patterned sweater. The man on the right is wearing a grey hoodie. The overall mood is positive and energetic.

# STATE-LEVEL STRATEGIES





## \*First and Foremost, Increase Wages and Financial Incentives\*

- Necessitates changes in **reimbursement rates**
- Requires making sure that **rate increases are passed to DSPs**
- Should include provider re-evaluation of how **current resources are allocated**
- Includes giving **staff incentives** to recruit staff
- CMS Notice of Proposed Rule Making on Access to HCBS has explicit reference to ensuring robust workforce wages relative to overall revenue—ensure DSP workforce is represented

# Most States Plan on Continuing Workforce Initiatives After the Public Health Initiative Has Been Lifted

- Allow Medicaid payment to parents, spouses, and/or legally responsible individuals — at least 23 states
- Increase Medicaid payment rates for direct care workers — at least 22 states



<https://nashp.org/state-tracker/most-states-plan-to-continue-medicaid-home-and-community-based-flexibilities-they-implemented-during-the-public-health-emergency/>

# Indiana Workforce Grants

Indiana announced Workforce Investment Grants in November 2022.

This \$130 million grant opportunity is available only to HCBS providers that employ DSWs.

95% of the funding must go directly to the DSWs.

The purpose of the grant is to support HCBS providers to invest in their Direct Service Workforce through recruitment and retention efforts, financial compensation and wraparound benefits.

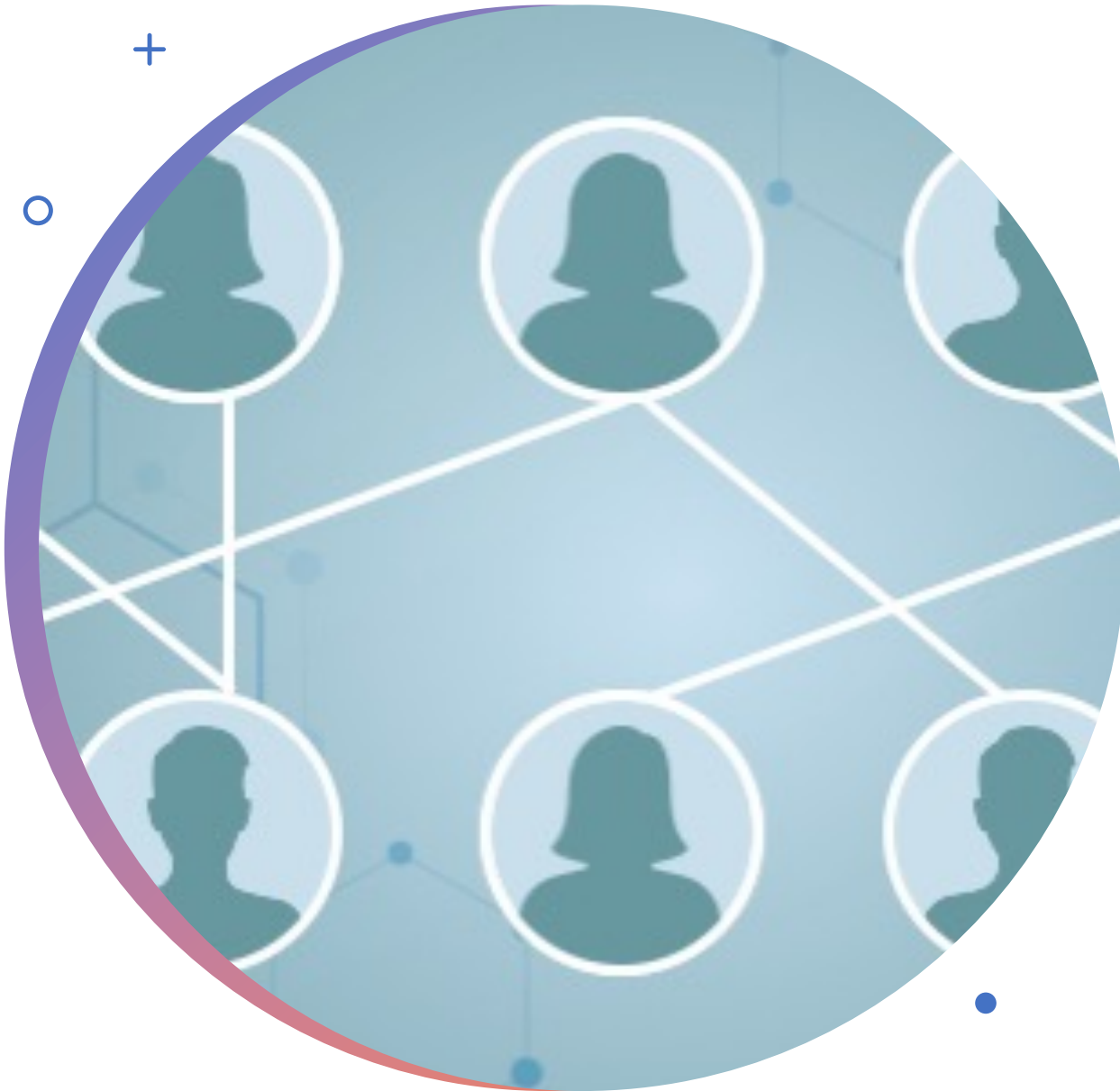




# Indiana Workforce Plans

- Wages and Benefits Action Group to explore strategies to address employment-related costs, benefits and value-based incentives.
- Indiana looked to develop expanded self-directed service options across FSSA's HCBS programs to expand the pool of qualified DSWs and diversify opportunities.
- Addressing Benefits Cliffs. To address the high prevalence of DSWs who must rely on public benefits, FSSA would like to better understand where "cliffs" exist. Simply stated, FSSA wants to learn more about how wage increases may impact financial eligibility criteria for certain benefits.



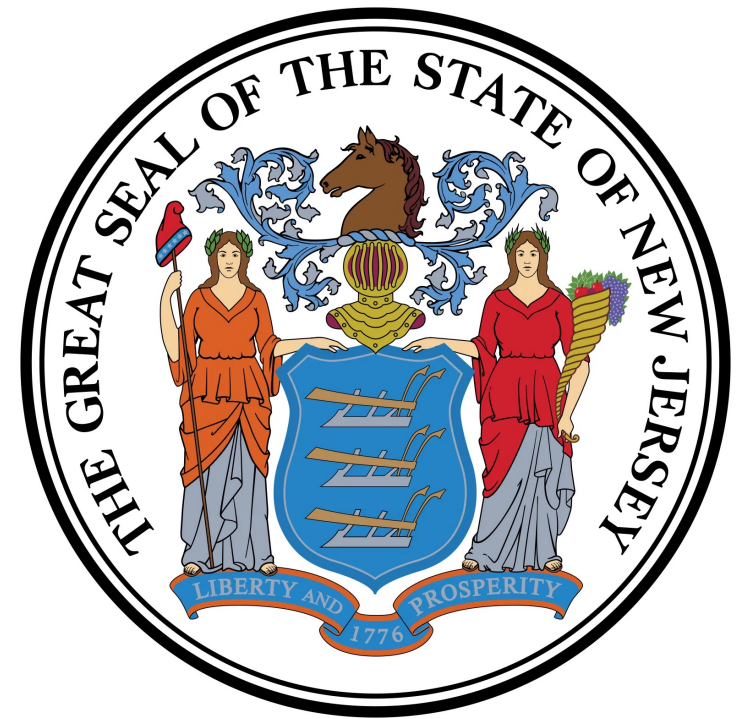


## \*Improve the Match Between Workers and People they Support\*

- **Involving service users in screening and hiring staff** makes it possible to match staff with service users based on interests, skills, culture, and personality.
- **Including the users in the hiring decision** minimizes conflicts that may result in termination down the line.

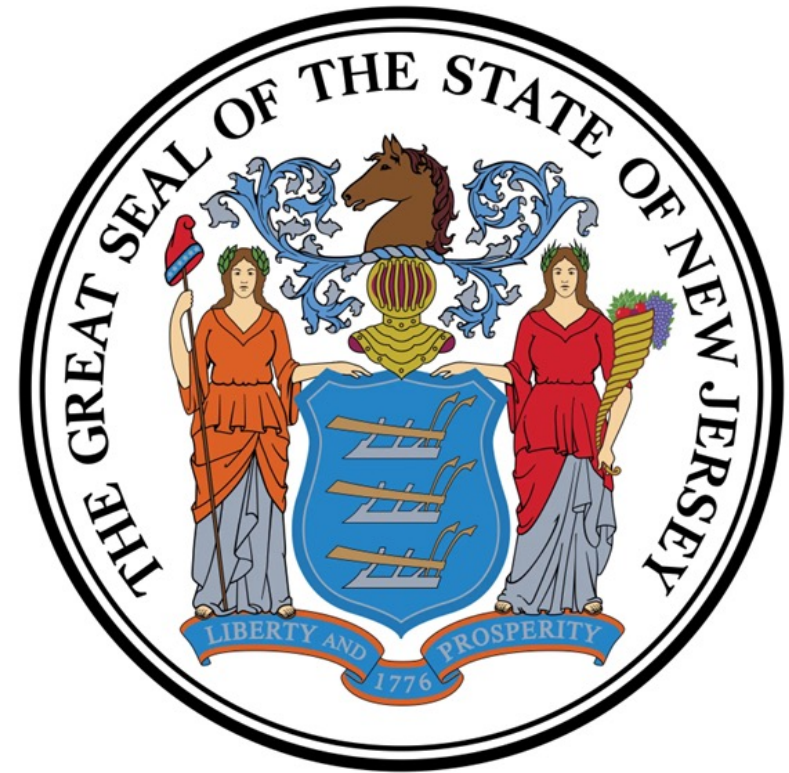
# Matching System in New Jersey

- The Collaboration for Citizen Directed Supports received an ACL prize for their interactive map that helps people with IDD identify compatible staff. (<https://acl.gov/DSPchallenge>)
- The initiative includes an interactive virtual map indicating where DSPs and people needing support are available for work now so that people and families can contact them directly for an immediate start date. People and families in need of services can also post their request for support on the Map (<https://www.thecollaborativenj.org/nj-interactive-map.html>)



# Other New Jersey Workforce Initiatives

- NJ is looking to continue their work developing career pathways and additional training opportunities for direct care workers
- NJ is working on a statewide media plan to advertise the DSP role
- The [state will be working with managed care entities](#) to ensure an adequate workforce as it rolls out its new Medicaid managed long-term services and supports (MLTSS) program in 2024.



# \*Invest in Credentialling and Career Pathways\*

---

- Beyond ensuring competencies, **credentialling** can professionalize the workforce, and offer a clear track to increased wages and roles
- Creating **career pathways** and training can teach people about the DSP career and create a clear trajectory from school to a job as a DSP
- **Apprenticeship** programs can also create a career pathway for workers

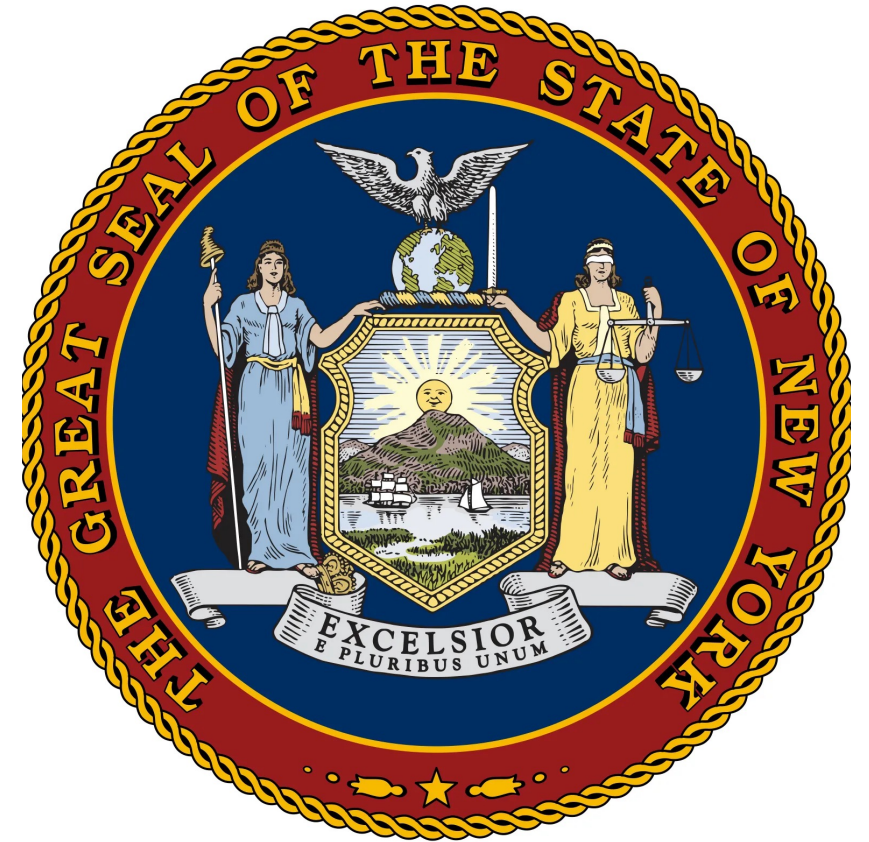




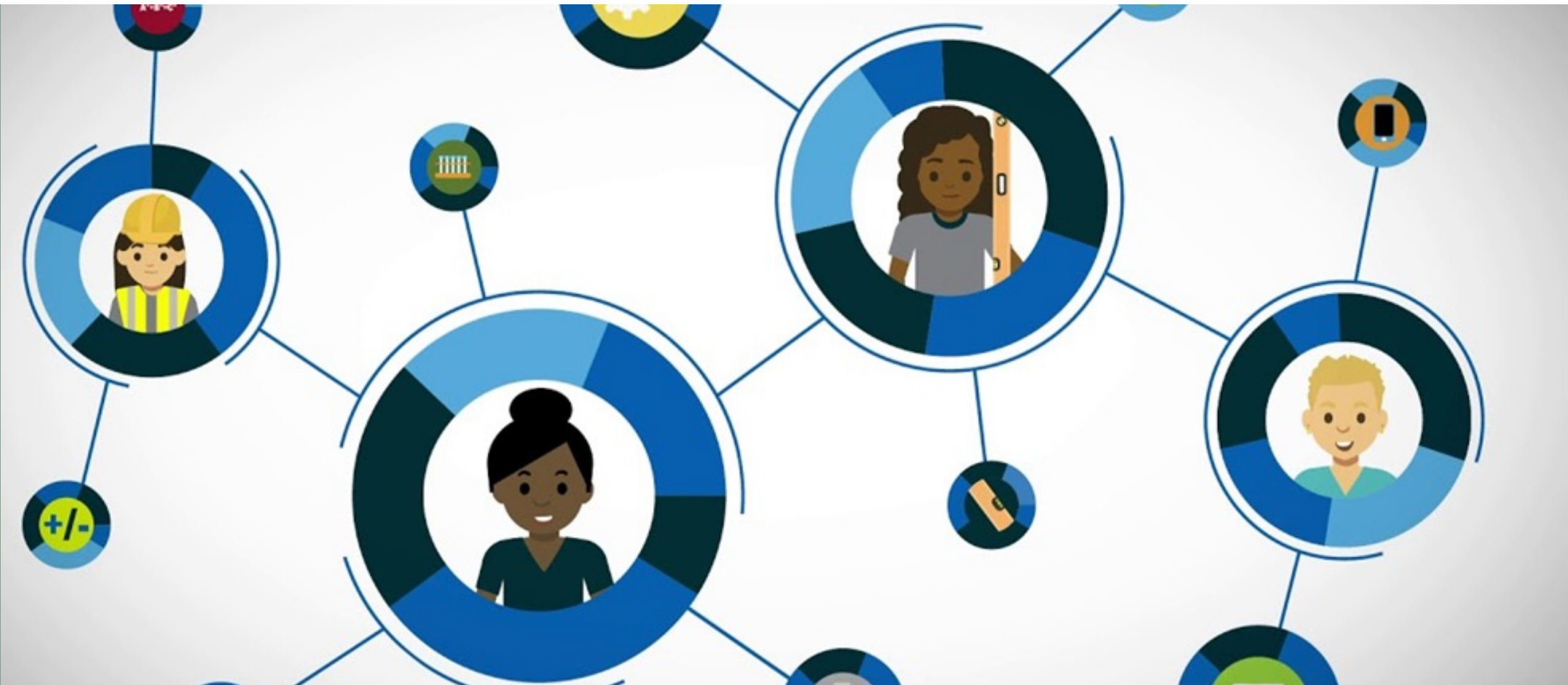
# New York Multiple Initiatives

---

- Credentialing initiative through the E-Badge Academy sponsored by the National Association of Direct Support Professionals
- High School DSP Training and development of a Certification Career and Technical Education initiative
- Partnerships with State Universities of New York designed to recruit, strengthen and develop DSP career paths
- Statewide DSP Marketing and Retention Campaign
- Provider technical assistance re: recruitment and retention



# BEST PRACTICES TO SUPPORT THE WORKFORCE



# Employee Resource Networks

- One innovative model is the Employee Resource Networks (ERNs). ERNs pull together job retention services, work supports, education, and training.
- While the focus is on entry-level and low wage employees, the services are available to all who work for ERN member companies. The goal of the ERN programs is for:
  - (1) workers to gain economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their families,
  - (2) employers to retain an engaged and skilled workforce,
  - (3) public agencies and nonprofits get better outcomes from programs that advance economic independence, and
  - (4) community colleges to add students and build closer ties to area businesses



# Ohio Employee Resource Networks

In Northwest Ohio, an ERN was made up of six employer members plus the county agency, covering approximately 1100 employees. During their first year,

- 505 total employees had barriers to employment retention addressed.
- 174 Success Coach/Community Health Worker referrals were addressed.
- 289 Employer Sponsored Small Dollar Loan app/disbursements were provided.
- 42 ERN provider employees participating in Getting Ahead in the Workplace class through December 2017
- 69 fewer staff turnover events occurred.

One ERN, operating in Lucas County Ohio, identified the most frequent issues facing direct care staff as problems with day care, cars, and problems requiring short term loans.

“When employees are stressed, they are distracted, have less coping ability, and are less engaged overall.”  
Lucas County Board of  
Developmental Disabilities Success  
Coach Coordinator

# Increase Training and Promotional Opportunities



- **Pay for training** through a range of different learning platforms including College of Direct Support, Relias, and Open Future.
- **Seek certification** through the NADSP E-Badge Academy and other certification programs
- **Create career ladders** to give promotional opportunities to DSPs who complete designated training, show initiative, and/or have high performance ratings
- Attach **wage increases** to **training and certification**



# More ways to support DSPs

## Supervisor ratio

The recent study by New York State found that the ratio of supervisors to DSPs also influenced the length of tenure.

Specifically, the ratios of 10 DSPs to one supervisor or less was associated with longer tenure.

## Include DSPs in agency governance and decision-making

To ensure that the organization is taking DSP needs/concerns into account at all levels, provide opportunities for DSPs to participate in decision-making.

## Organizational culture

Opportunity for DSPs to participate in governance of the organization, to provide feedback for quality enhancement, and to be empowered to innovate and be creative in the ways in which they provide support.



# What can organizations do?

- Use NCI State of the Workforce data to **inform and persuade** legislators, Medicaid rate setters, and IDD leadership about the extent of the workforce crisis.
- **Chart the impact** of any workforce initiatives on improved tenure and turnover
- Work with researchers to **examine the relationships** between provider, policies and other variables on turnover and tenure
- [Take the NCAPPS \*\*person-centered practices\*\* self-assessment for your organization](#)
- Encourage the House to **support The Recognizing the Role of Direct Support Professionals Act**. This act aims to create a Standardized Occupational Classification (SOC) for DSPs.



# Thank You.

[nationalcoreindicators.org](http://nationalcoreindicators.org)

[Vbradley@hsri.org](mailto:Vbradley@hsri.org)

[Dhiersteiner@hsri.org](mailto:Dhiersteiner@hsri.org)