

# It's Time to Stabilize the Disability Workforce in CO

Services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are a unique marriage of the public and private sectors. Providers, who range from small, family-operated agencies to multi-state organizations, offer services funded by the government so that individuals with IDD can live full lives in the community instead of state-run institutions. These services are delivered through a dedicated workforce called Direct Support Professionals (DSPs).

A DSP is a worker who assists a person with disabilities to lead a fulfilling life in the community through a diverse range of services like helping him or her get ready in the morning, take medication, go to or find work, and participate in social activities.

## What's the problem?

Low wages and strenuous work for Direct Support Professionals result in high turnover and vacancy rates. This workforce shortage has not only resulted in negative impacts on the lives of people with IDD, but it has also meant financial inefficiencies for the IDD system in Colorado.

Colorado currently has a 39% DSP turnover rate, with some agencies experiencing up to 81% turnover.

Each turnover costs agencies between \$4,200 and \$5,200 in direct costs (e.g. separation, training a new employee, etc.) and indirect costs (e.g. lost productivity and revenue).



## Comparison to State-Run Institutions

DSP wages at state-operated Regional Centers for people with IDD are a more accurate reflection of what's needed for a stable, quality workforce. Their starting wage for DSPs is \$14.25 per hour, plus PERA and other benefits, while the average starting wage for DSPs working for community providers is just \$10.91 per hour, with many relying on public assistance and working multiple jobs to get by.

In FY17-18, the state invested \$5.8M in wage increases for DSPs working at the Regional Centers which serve only 261 people state-wide. In the same year, the state invested only \$7.3M in rate increases for community providers serving about 12,000 people on the IDD waivers alone.

**The average starting wage for DSPs in Colorado is only \$10.91 per hour, with many earning just the minimum wage of \$9.30 per hour.**

## What should Colorado do?

***Make an investment of \$17.39M general fund for DSP compensation***

### INVESTING IN THE DSP WORKFORCE WILL:

- Preserve the well-being of individuals with disabilities by keeping those who wish to remain in the community with their friends and family to do so, in the manner that they choose;
- Allow a segment of the private sector, including many family-operated small businesses, to be competitive employers and stay in business;
- Create a more financially sustainable future for IDD services while maintaining service quality and meeting ever-growing demand;
- Reduce the number of people drawing down resources in other state programs such as Medicaid and food stamps.



Please contact Emma Hudson, Alliance's Director of Government & Community Relations, for more information or with questions:  
ehudson@alliancecolorado.org, 608.669.3662