



United For People with
Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities

The Emerging Roles & Changing Expectations of the Direct Support Workforce

Joseph M. Macbeth
President/Chief Executive Officer

The NADSP logo consists of a blue silhouette of the United States map. Inside the map, the letters "NADSP" are written in a large, white, bold, sans-serif font.

NADSP



ABOUT US

WHO WE ARE



NADSP VISION

A world with a highly qualified and professional direct support workforce that partners with, supports and empowers people with disabilities to lead a life of their choosing.



NADSP MISSION

To elevate the status of direct support professionals by improving practice standards, promoting system reform, and advancing their knowledge, skills and values.



ABOUT US

QUALITY = OUTCOMES FOR PEOPLE



“Quality is defined at the **point of interaction** between the staff member and the individual with a disability.”

- John F. Kennedy, Jr. (1996)



ABOUT US

QUALITY = OUTCOMES FOR PEOPLE

How Quality Happens... NADSP



Profession

Features of a Profession

While "occupation" and "profession" are often used interchangeably, they have distinct meanings in the world of work. In short, **every profession is an occupation, but not every occupation is a profession.**

- **Focus:** Professions involve specialized knowledge and skills acquired through formal education or *professional development*.
- **Formal Education/Training** Professions typically require a college degree, professional license, or *specialized certification*.
- **Regulation:** Professions are often governed by professional bodies or *associations that set ethical codes and standards*.
- **Career Path:** Professions typically offer well-defined career paths with advancement opportunities based on experience, expertise or the objective demonstration of skills.
- **Impact on society:** The profession offers the opportunity to make an impact on citizens, organizations, or society as a whole through the provision of specialized services.

Securing a Professional Identity with a Standard Occupational Code

The 2018 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system was used by Federal statistical agencies to classify workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating, or disseminating data.

All workers are classified into one of **840 detailed occupations** according to their occupational definition. To facilitate classification, detailed occupations are combined to form 461 broad occupations, 97 minor groups, and 23 major groups.



***Our efforts to have
DSP recognized as a job title
were denied in 2018.**

All "Direct Care" Jobs Are Not the Same!

NADSP Competencies	DSP	NA	HHA	PCA	LPN
Participant Empowerment	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐
Communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Assessment	✓	✓	☐	✓	✓
Community and Service Networking	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐
Facilitation of Services	✓	☐	☐	✓	☐
Community Living Skills and Supports	✓	✓	✓	☐	☐
Education, Training and Self-Development	✓	✓	☐	☐	✓
Advocacy	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vocational, Educational and Career Support	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐
Crisis Prevention and Intervention	✓	☐	☐	✓	☐
Organizational Participation	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐
Documentation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Building and Maintaining Friendships and Relationships	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐
Provide Person-Centered Support	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐
Supporting Health and Wellness	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Securing a Professional Identity with a Standard Occupational Code



In 2024, the Office of Management and Budget opened public comments for new occupational classifications during its new 10-year cycle, and we estimate that more than 10,000 direct support professionals submitted comments asking that "Direct Support Professional" receive consideration for Occupational Classification.

The Bureau of Labor statistics are now in the process of studying potential new occupational categories. This process occurs every 8-10 years and we hopeful that, given all the information that we provided along with our advocacy efforts, "direct support professional" will become an official job title and classification after the BLS process ends.

While We're Waiting for BLS!



The NADSP's highest policy priority was to advocate for federal legislation that would require the US Department of Labor's Office of Management and Budget to consider establishing a separate category within the Standard Occupational Classification system for direct support professionals during their typical review processes.

The "*Recognizing the Role of Direct Support Professionals Act*" (S.3211) has passed the HLS&GA committee, and its companion Bill (H.R.6137) is currently in Committee.

We have broad bipartisan support in both houses of Congress. I remain hopeful, but these are not typical times. Thank you ANCOR and PHI for strong partnership.

An impressionistic painting of a landscape. In the foreground, there's a dark, horizontal band of green and brown. Above it, a lighter, hazy area suggests a body of water. In the background, there are soft, painterly shapes in shades of yellow, orange, and purple, possibly representing a sunset or a distant shoreline. A small, dark blue shape in the water suggests a boat or a small island.

NCI STATE *of the*
WORKFORCE® 2024

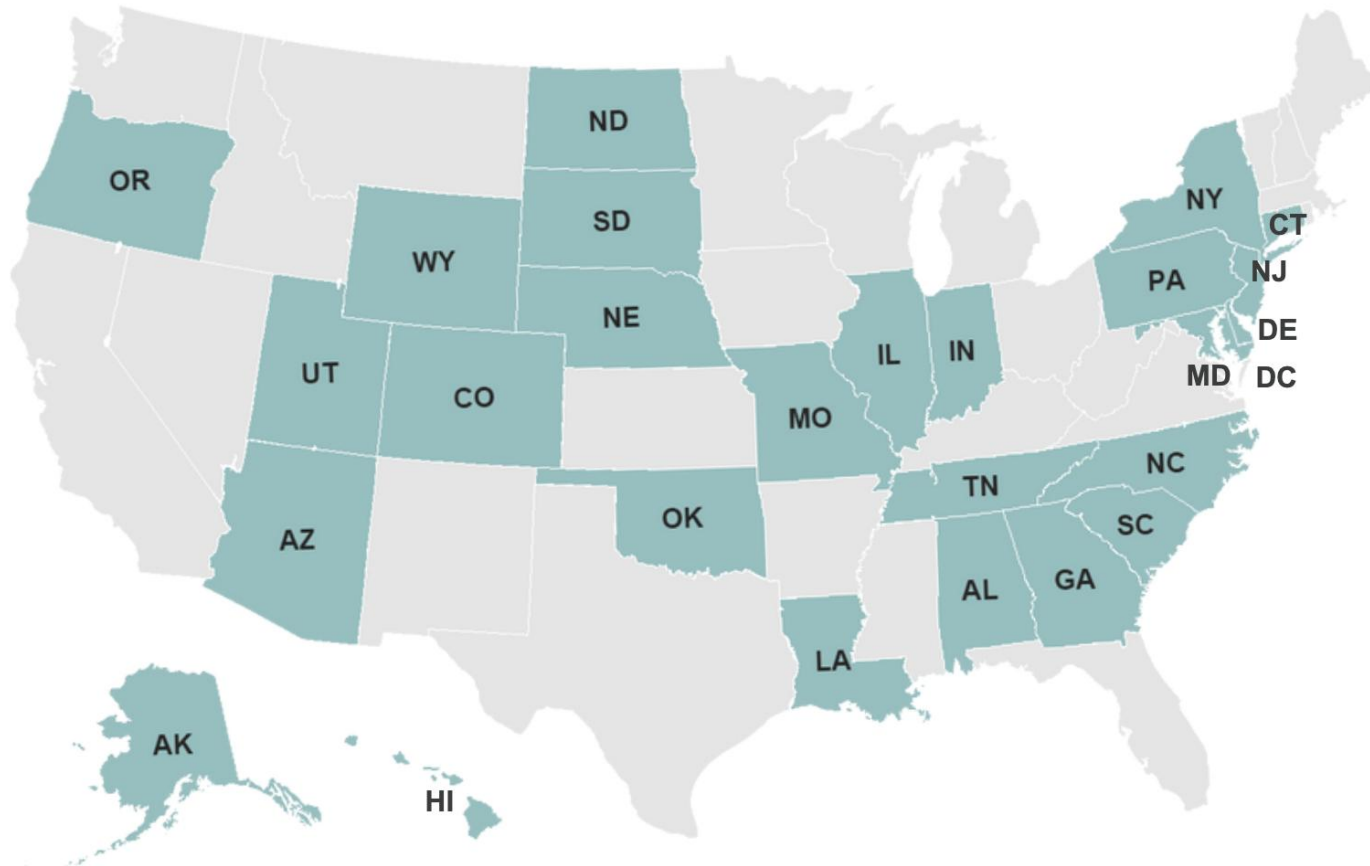
SURVEY REPORT

National Core Indicators® Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

State of the Workforce IDD in 2024

PARTICIPATING STATES & AGENCIES

More than **344,179** DSPs with
3,936 provider agencies in **26** states & D.C.

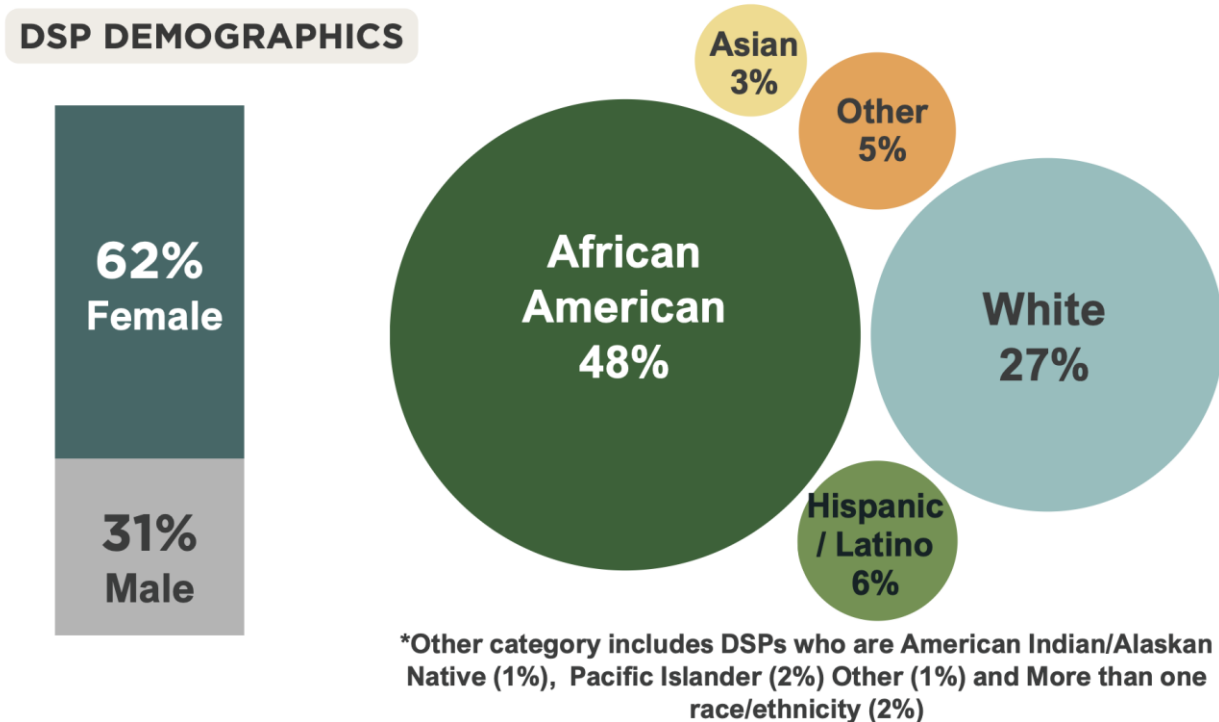


- More than 344,179 DSPs with 3,936 provider agencies in 26 states & D.C. participated.
- Data refers to period between Jan 1, 2024-Dec 31, 2024
- Most states administer the survey to all agencies who provide direct support to adults with IDD

*National Core Indicators Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.
(2025). NCI State of the Workforce for Intellectual and Developmental
Disabilities 2024 Survey Report.*

Race and Ethnicity of DSPs

Current National DSP demographics:



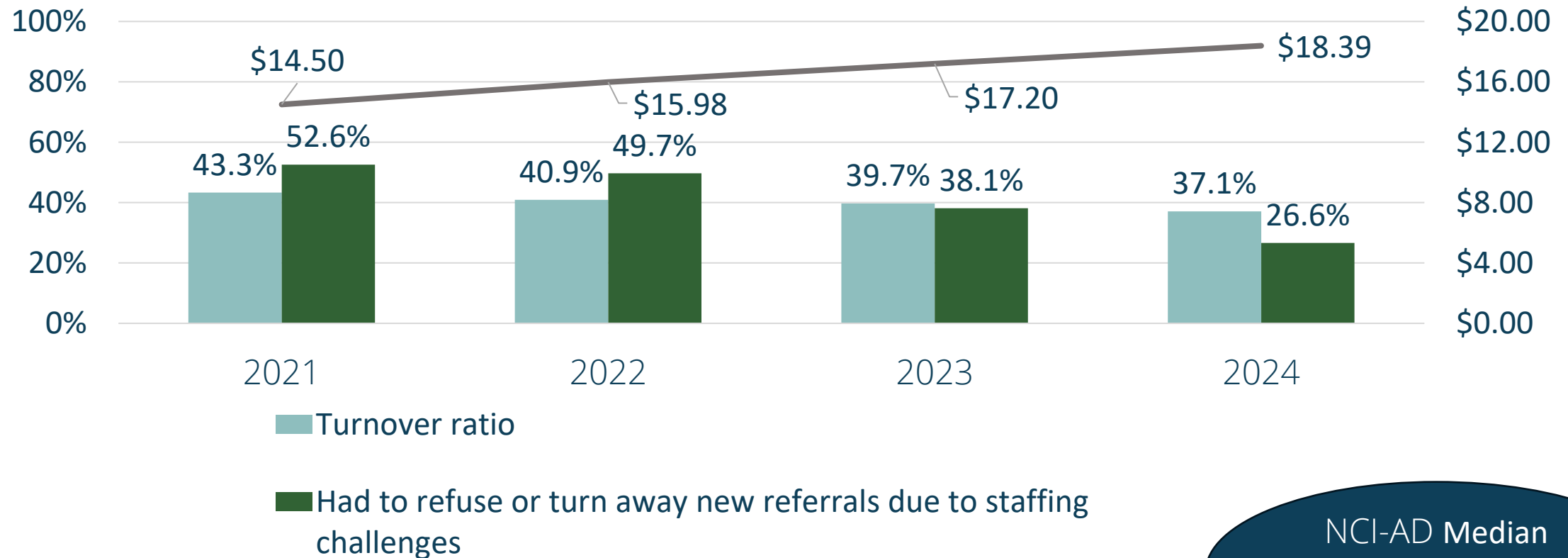
National Core Indicators Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. (2025). NCI State of the Workforce for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities 2024 Survey Report.

Current US population demographics:

- *White: 75%*
- *Black or African American: 14%*
- *American Indian and Alaska Native: 1%*
- *Asian: 6%*
- *Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: <1%*
- *More than one race: 3%*
- *Hispanic or Latino: 20%*

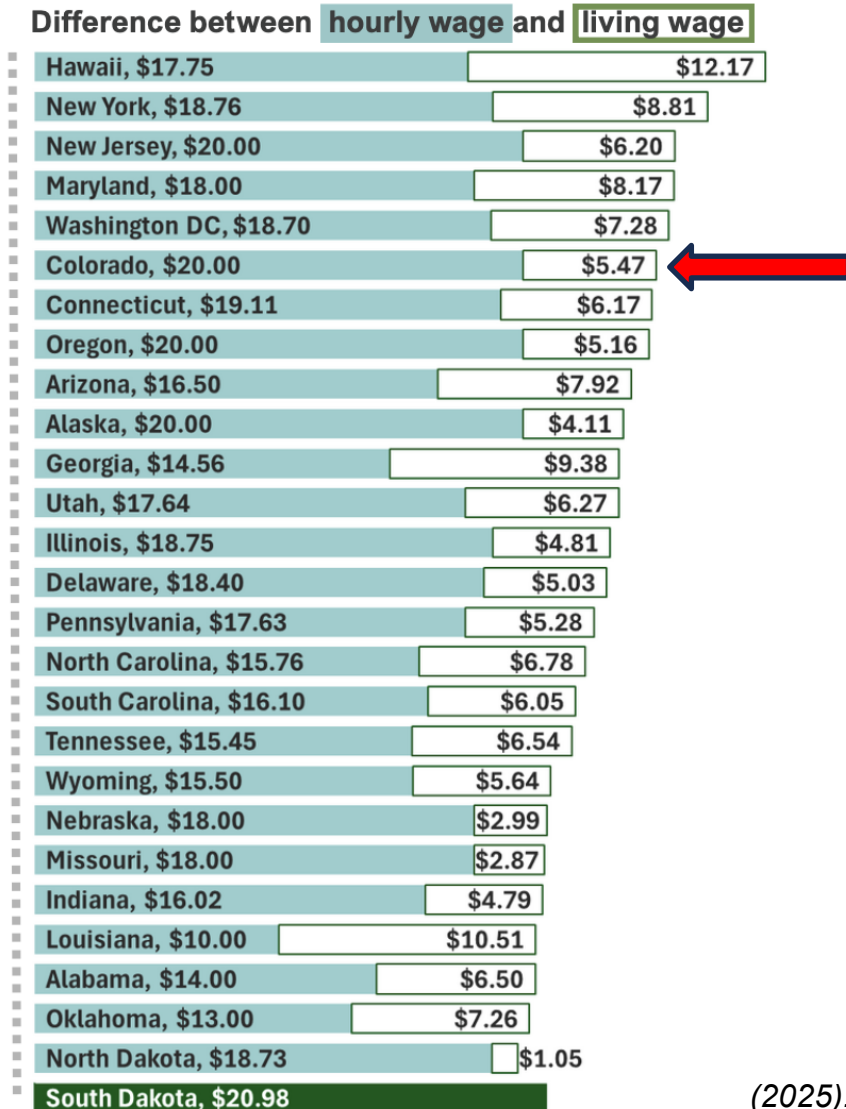
A look back over the past 4 years: NCI State of the Workforce for IDD

Turnover, Turning Away Referrals, and Wages from 2021-2024



NCI-AD Median
Hourly Wage in
2024: \$16.00/hour

Struggle To Provide A Living Wage



A living wage is the hourly wage one full-time worker must earn to cover the cost of their family's minimum basic needs where they live while still being self sufficient.

The graph to the right shows the median wage for DSPs by state, along with the difference between median wages and living wage for one adult without any children.

Only one state currently pays DSPs median wages at or above living wage for one adult, while other states would need to increase hourly wages between \$1.05 and \$12.17.



ADVOCACY



Looking Back on Social Justice Movements





People at the
center of impact
are the most
powerful
advocates for
change.

The Power of Lived Experience & Advocacy

- Authenticity & Credibility
- Empathy & Connection
- Representation & Diversity
- Resilience & Determination
- Expertise & Insight





The NADSP Foundation Conference & Professional Development Access Fund

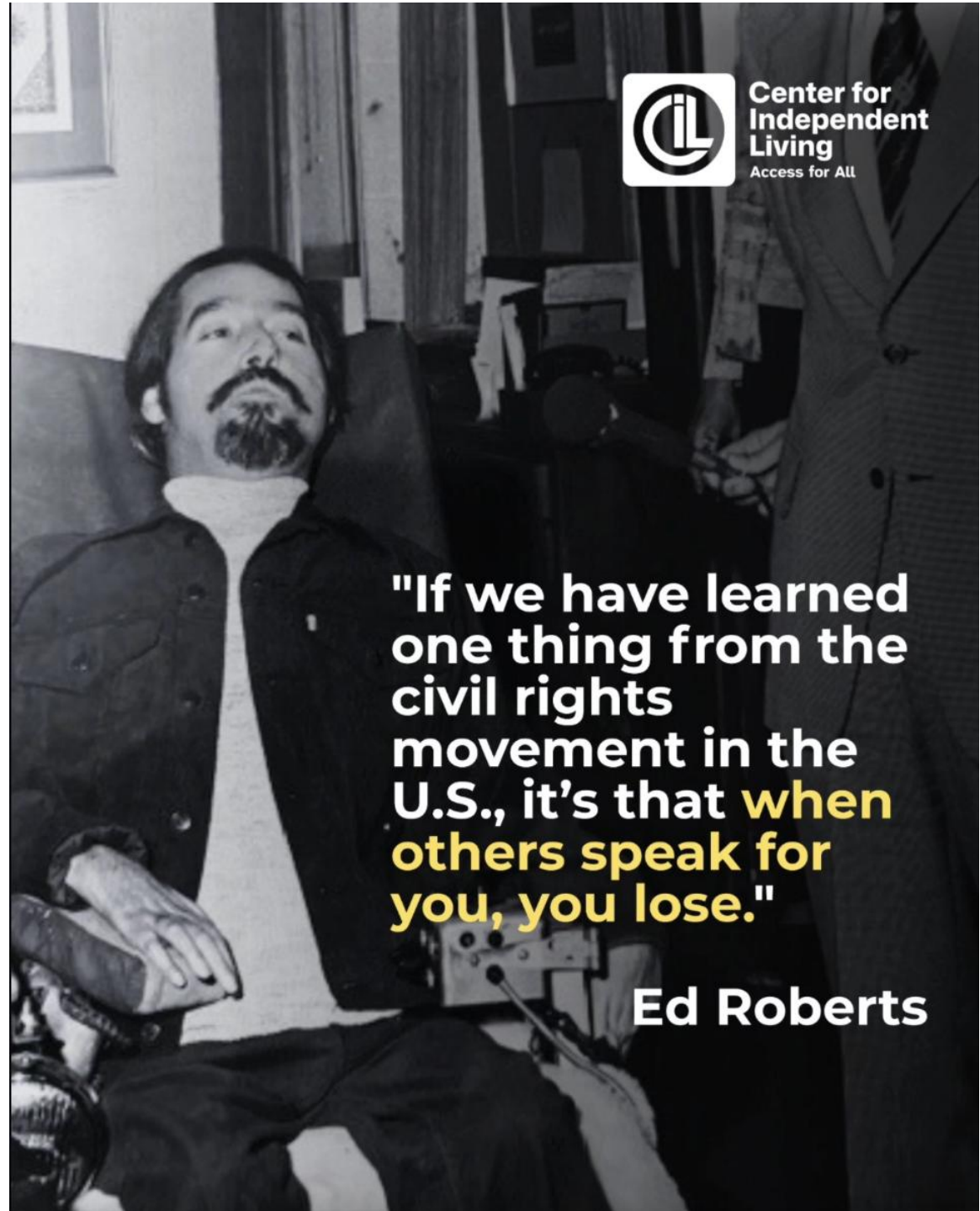
Advancing Professionalism: Conference participation strengthens direct support professionals' competence and exposure to evidence-based practices.

Developing Advocacy Skills: direct support professionals learn to effectively engage policymakers and advocate for Medicaid restoration and system improvements.

Enhancing Retention and Professional Identity: Professional growth improves morale and reduces turnover.

Who is speaking on
behalf of direct support
professionals?

And what are their
interests?



Center for
Independent
Living
Access for All

**"If we have learned
one thing from the
civil rights
movement in the
U.S., it's that **when
others speak for
you, you lose.**"**

Ed Roberts

Create Standardized Career Ladders & Career Lattices



CAREER PATH



NADSP E-Badge Academy



Create Standardized Career Pathways, Ladders & Career Lattices

- That are embraced and funded by state and federal government.
- That keep direct support professionals in the jobs that in which they excel and earn higher wages as they demonstrate higher skills.
- To rely less on busy and overworked supervisors.
- To promote lifelong learning and professional development.
- To reduce turnover and improve job satisfaction.
- To improve personal outcomes for people we support.
- Enable employers to hire direct support professionals with confidence.

Alaska Direct Support Professional Certification

- Alaska uses a centralized certification program run by the University of Alaska-Anchorage Center for Human Development.
- The UAA Center for Human Development has developed their own NADSP-accredited curriculum that is used to meet the accredited education requirements for certification.
- The program is online and available to DSPs statewide, including in some very remote locations.
- The program provides mentoring and support for the participating DSPs.

Alaska Direct Support Professional Certification Bonus Structure

- \$1000 for DSP-I (paid to both the DSP and the employer, \$2000 total)
- \$1000 for DSP-II (paid to both the DSP and the employer, \$2000 total)
- \$1600 for DSP-III (paid to both the DSP and the employer, \$3200 total)
- Additional bonuses are available for completing accredited training hours. (\$600 for the first 50 hours, and \$800 for the second 50 hours, these are also paid to both the DSP and the employer)

Alaska Direct Support Professional Certification Bonus Structure



DSP-I	97
DSP-II	49
DSP-III	47
FLS	0
Total Certifications	193

New York Direct Support Professional Certification Pilot

New York Workforce Development Grants



New York State's OPWDD dedicated a significant portion of its American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to initiatives designed to recognize the work of DSPs and to enhance workforce skills and capacity. Funds were invested to offer several grant programs that support the professional development, capacity, and tenure of the direct support workforce.

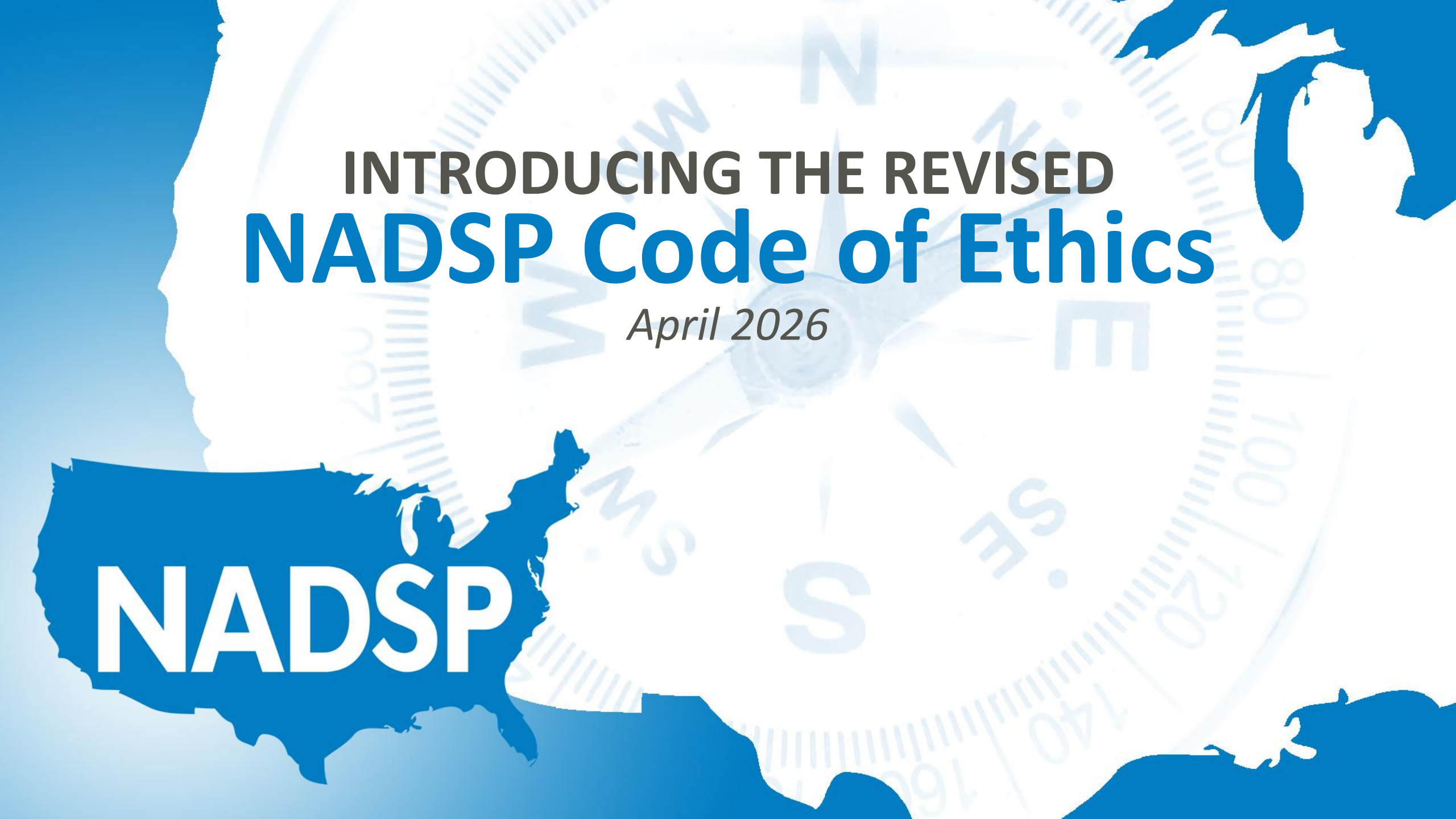
This pilot ultimately funded 3,297 DSP and FLS certifications.

Bershadsky, J., Kramme, J., Hall, S., & Healey, S. (2025). Evaluation of OPWDD-Funded American Rescue Plan Act Workforce Projects. Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota.

New York Direct Support Professional Certification Pilot Evaluation Findings

Impact on Workforce Outcomes

- **Reduced Turnover:** Data indicated that certified DSPs turned over at substantially lower rates than non-certified peers—11% vs 44% in 2022 and 8% vs 38% in 2023—with evidence that turnover declined for both groups in participating organizations.
- **Career Pathways:** In addition to pilot funded bonuses, many organizations created other recognition systems. About half included wage increases (\$0.10–\$1/hour) or annual bonuses (\$250–\$500) for certified staff. Some required certification for promotions or title changes, embedding the program into career advancement structures.
- **Cultural and Service Improvements:**
 - 80% of Local Administrators reported positive impacts on staff competencies.
 - 63% of Local Administrators reported positive impacts on organizational culture.
 - 79% of organizational leaders reported positive impacts on people receiving services, with many citing more person-centered supports and improved staff professionalism.

The background of the slide features a light blue compass rose with cardinal and intercardinal directions (N, NE, E, SE, S, SW, W, NW) and degree markings. Overlaid on this is a dark blue silhouette of the United States. The text is centered over the compass rose.

INTRODUCING THE REVISED **NADSP Code of Ethics**

April 2026

NADSP



- Developed in 2000/2001
- National conversations on professionalization
- Similar development process as 2025/2026 Version
- Subject Matter Expert Authored
- Validation Workshops with Direct Support Professionals
 - Scenarios
 - Feedback
- Initial version published by NADSP at UMN/ICI in 2001

www.nadsp.org



NADSP CODE OF ETHICS 2.0

Revision Process At A Glance

REVISION process

Step 1: National work group established to guide process

Step 2: Subject matter expert review of old version

Step 3: Integration of SME recommendations and collaborative review

Step 4: Virtual focus groups (22)

- 12 DSP
- 10 FLS
- Geographic and service type

Step 5: Validation workshops

Step 6: Communications review for clarity and reading level

Step 7: Final SME review



NADSP CODE OF ETHICS

REVISED TENETS (2026)

-  Advocacy
-  Confidentiality and Privacy
-  Justice, Fairness, Equity, and Inclusion
-  Person-Centered Supports
-  Physical and Emotional Well-Being
-  Professionalism, Accountability and Growth
-  Relationships and Social Roles
-  Respect
-  Self-Determination and Choice





NADSP CODE OF ETHICS

CALL TO ACTION & NEXT STEPS

Download The Code!



- **Endorse** (Organizations) *versus* **Adopt** (DSPs)
- Use the Guidebook
- Incorporate teaching scenarios
- The Code of Ethics is not to be punitive
- Never a “read and sign training”
- Supervisors should see the Code of Ethics as a positive way to develop staff
- The Code of Ethics builds a cultural shift within an organization
- Use the Code of Ethics to create and develop solutions to ethical dilemmas in our industry

KNOW the Code



Making a world of difference
in people's lives

CODE OF ETHICS

Advocacy. As a DSP, I will advocate with the people I support for justice, equity, inclusion, and belonging in their communities.

Confidentiality and Privacy. As a DSP, I will promote, protect, and respect the confidentiality of the people I support.

Justice, Fairness, Equity, and Inclusion. As a DSP, I will advocate for and promote justice, fairness, equity, and inclusion for the people I support.

Person-Centered Supports. As a DSP, I will work in partnership with the people I support, approaching their goals and aspirations with flexibility, curiosity, creativity, and commitment.

Physical and Emotional Well-Being. As a DSP, I will promote the emotional, physical, spiritual, and personal well-being of the people I support. I will respect their autonomy while ensuring safety and reducing harm.



Learn more
about the Code.

Professionalism, Accountability and Growth.

As a DSP, I will support people in leading the lives they choose. I will build strong partnerships with them, their families, support networks, other professionals, and the community. I recognize that these partners rely on me to bring my best self to this profession and to be accountable for my actions.

Relationships and Social Roles. As a DSP, I will assist the people I support in developing and maintaining relationships and social roles that matter to them.

Respect. As a DSP, I will respect the dignity, humanity, and uniqueness of the people I support. I will recognize that they have full lives and histories from before I started supporting them, and I will meet them where they are.

Self-Determination and Choice. As a DSP, I will honor and assist the people I support to make choices and direct their lives to the fullest extent possible and within the context of their culture and uniqueness.



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Poster

KNOW the Code



Making a world of difference
in people's lives

CODE OF ETHICS





THANK YOU!