

# High turnover, low wages and disparities magnified during the pandemic for direct support professionals

April 28 2021

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New research from the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration and the National Alliance for Direct Support

Professionals provides insight on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the staff—called direct support professionals (DSPs)—who support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). These staff assist with daily activities, employment supports and community engagement.

In the largest study of its kind in the United States, approximately 9,000 DSPs were surveyed from November 2020 to January 2021. Among the report's key findings:

- Nearly half (47%) said they had been exposed to COVID-19 at work, with individuals in congregate facilities reporting more exposure than those working in individual or family homes.
- 97% of workers self-identified as essential workers, but only 30% received salary augmentations.
- Black/African American DSPs were paid less per hour than white DSPs, and a higher percentage of Black/African American DSPs worked 40 hours or more per week.

Researchers state that while the direct support workforce has been in crisis for years, the pandemic has exacerbated existing issues: high turnover and vacancy rates, low wages, and a lack of access to affordable benefits. More than half (54%) of respondents indicated their [work life](#) is getting worse. DSPs also reported that a significant number of the people with disabilities they supported experienced depression, behavior issues and loneliness during the pandemic.

"These findings underscore a number of systemic problems regarding the direct support workforce that provides services and supports for people with intellectual and [developmental disabilities](#)," said Amy Hewitt, director of the Institute on Community Integration's Research and Training Center on Community Living and a lead investigator on the study. "Turnover, vacancies and low wages—a national average that is

just more than \$12 an hour—has devastating effects on these professionals and, subsequently, on people with intellectual and developmental disabilities."

**More information:** Direct Support Workforce and COVID-19 Survey: Providing Support During the COVID-19 Pandemic.  
[ici.umn.edu/covid19-survey](https://ici.umn.edu/covid19-survey)

Provided by University of Minnesota

Citation: High turnover, low wages and disparities magnified during the pandemic for direct support professionals (2021, April 28) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-04-high-turnover-wages-disparities-magnified.html>

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