



## ***INSTITUTE ON PUBLIC POLICY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES***

**COLLABORATION**

**INNOVATION**

**BEST PRACTICE**

### **Introduction**

The Illinois community service system has been underfunded for decades. Community agencies are desperately aware of the impact the DSP workforce shortage is having on the lives of people supported by the community service delivery system in Illinois, if not the very future of the system itself. The vacancy and turnover rates among DSPs are alarming yet not unexpected within the context of an improving economy, increased competitiveness for hourly workers and expanding requirements that DSP workers must fulfill. The new CMS regulations requiring person-centered, community integrated services will only intensify the impact the workforce crisis is having on the state of the community service system. Illinois is long overdue for structural changes that will ensure the continuation of the community service system as a viable option and respond to the demand for smaller and more customized support models.

### **Scope of Survey**

The Institute on Public Policy for People with Disabilities invited provider organizations from across Illinois to complete a survey addressing their experience in recruiting and retaining Direct Support Professional (DSP) and Qualified Intellectual Disability Professionals (QIDP) positions. 35 provider organizations representing 31 counties from Southern, Central and Northern Illinois, including the Chicago metropolitan area, responded to the survey. 55% of respondents were CEO's of the organization with an additional 40% identifying themselves as CFO/VP/Chief HR Officer positions.

Collectively, these organizations provide the following services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities supported in the community service system:

- 2,880 people in Community Integrated Living Arrangements (CILA), 98% of whom are supported in 24/7 settings
- 5,333 people in Developmental Training (DT)
- 784 in 24/7 Intermediate Care Facilities for the Developmentally Disabled (ICFDD)
- 1,393 in Supported Employment Programs (SEP)
- 2,867 in Home Based Services (HBS)

Clearly, the respondents support a sizable number of people who depend on community agencies for care and services on a daily basis.

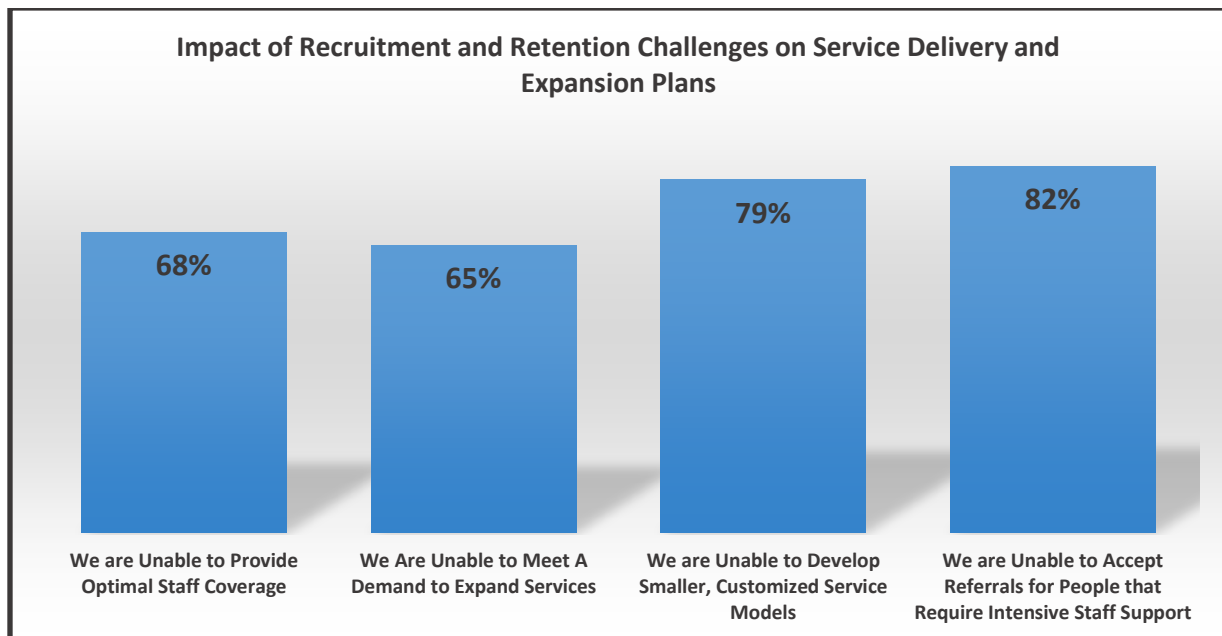
### **Findings**

Organizations responding to the survey employ 4,089 people in DSP positions at an average wage of \$9.87/hour (note – this is the average, not starting wage). Just under 35% of responding agencies provided services in Cook and the surrounding collar counties, where the average wage was slightly higher at \$10.09/hour. According to respondents, the average wage necessary to attract and sustain a competent workforce is \$11.94/hour. Accounting for the complexity of DSP

duties, qualifications that must be met and physical intensity of the work, an average hourly wage that is barely above the minimum wage is likely the most important variable to be addressed overcoming the DSP recruitment and retention crisis.

In 2014, the average DSP turnover rate for all respondents was 30.3% - nearly 1/3 of the total DSP labor force, with 5 organizations reporting turnover rates in excess of 50%. Survey-wide, the average DSP vacancy rate was 13.7%, with 10 organizations experiencing vacancy rates in excess of 20%. Generally speaking, organizations that operated within more densely populated areas experienced (significantly) higher levels of vacant positions than organizations in areas where employment options may be more limited. In light of the constriction that has taken place within many organizations over the past decade as they have had to reduce personnel expenses to compensate for rising business costs and flat or declining reimbursement levels, the vacancy and turnover rates represent an alarming situation for the community service delivery system – there simply isn't elasticity within staffing plans to absorb double-digit vacancy rates.

Perhaps the most concerning aspect of the survey is the response from the key decision makers within organizations regarding the impact that the DSP recruitment and retention crisis is having on the capacity of the community system to sustain and expand services. The charts that follow highlight areas which respondents identified as being of **critical** concern to their organization.



These areas directly mirror the interests of families and advocates across the state, as well as national best practice trends and explain the inability of the Illinois community system as a whole to shift to smaller settings and respond to the needs of people with more significant support needs.

Respondents were also asked to rate their concern in several workforce areas that affect agency services. 99% of respondents identified rates and reimbursement levels as a serious or critical

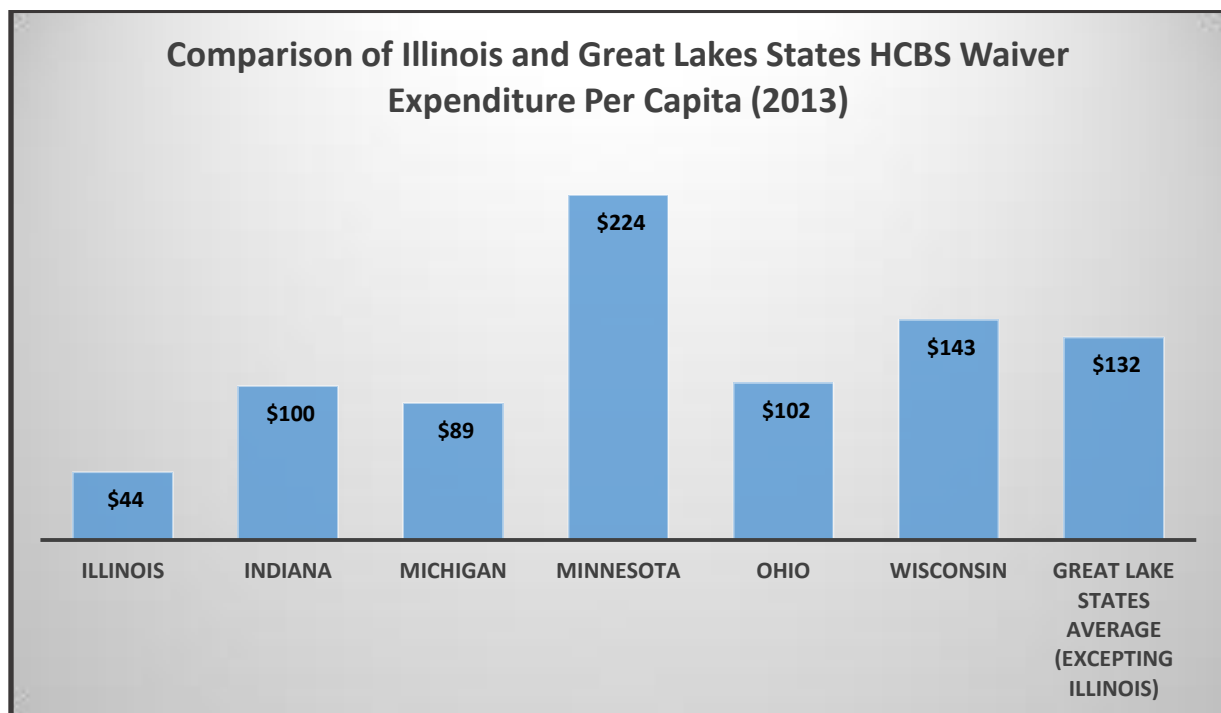
concern. Securing a stable and competent workforce was listed as a serious/critical concern by 81% of respondents and rising business expenses represent a serious/critical concern for 74% of respondents.

As evidenced by responses to this survey, the workforce crisis is the central, if not the sole reason providers cannot meet the demand for smaller settings. Providers challenged to fill vacant DSP positions are remarkably reluctant to downsize a setting or open a new setting when doing so will increase the already overwhelming challenge of maintaining adequate staffing. There is well-documented evidence that Illinois families are frustrated in their efforts to secure smaller, community integrated settings for their family member with a disability. In fact, the lack of such available options is considered the primary reason Ligas class members are overwhelmingly selecting Home Based Services over community residential options.

Interestingly, among those families in Illinois that have selected the Home-Based Services option, the average Personal Support Worker (PSW) salary is \$13.50/hour, based in information from the state's largest payroll processor for this program. Families themselves recognize the value of the work done by direct support professionals, and the need to pay a competitive wage to attract and retain a capable workforce.

### Illinois and National Data

Illinois has failed to invest in the community service system for decades. The chart below compares Illinois spending to other Great Lake states and demonstrates the disproportionate disinvestment Illinois makes in its citizens with disabilities, this despite the fact that nearly half of every state dollar invested in HCBS services is reimbursed by the federal government.



According to 2013 data from the DOL Bureau of Labor Statistics, the adjusted median hourly wage for DSP staff in Illinois only rose 9.7% in the 10 year period between 2003 and 2013, from \$9.28/hour to \$10.18/hour. During that same period of time, the U.S inflation rate rose 20.63%; 47% greater than the increase in wages.

The average median wage translates into an average annual salary of \$21,174. The Illinois median wage places DSP staff below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for 1-person households and a typical DSP profile of a single parent household caring for 2 children falls below 150% of the FPL at the median wage. According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, the living wage for a single parent with 2 children in Illinois is \$27.64/hour; the poverty wage in that same household is \$9.00/hour – barely below the average (not starting) median hourly DSP wage in Illinois.

Unlike other low-wage hourly positions, Direct Support Professionals in Illinois are by regulation, required to be adults and must meet a variety of requirements not typical of other low-wage hourly positions. 89% of the Illinois DSP workforce is female whose average age is 43. 45% of Illinois DSPs rely on some form of public benefits, despite being employed on a full-time basis.

Reliance on the DSP workforce will only increase in the coming years. Illinois is forecasted to experience a 30% increase in demand for Personal Care workers and a 42% increase in demand for Home Health workers between 2012 and 2022. In Illinois in 2014, these job classifications collectively included more than 73,500 employees, with an additional 51,000 workers classified as Nursing Assistants. If Illinois hopes to be competitive with other Midwest states where people and businesses can choose to live, having a viable community service system and workforce to meet the needs of family members of taxpaying citizens is essential.