



Mental Health Association in Michigan



Michigan Developmental Disabilities Institute

Michigan



WITH LIBERTY AND ACCESS FOR ALL



It shouldn't be this hard.

When a Michigan resident experiences a mental illness or has a developmental disability, it shouldn't mean a family member needs to leave a good job to provide much-needed care. It shouldn't require older adults with diminishing physical strength to spend their retirement years supporting an adult son or daughter.

But right now, it does. And it shows few signs of changing.

Today's tight labor market means the Direct Support Professionals that often help Michigan families care for their loved ones are nearly impossible to find. When fast-food and retail chains offer \$18+ hourly salaries—complete with signing bonuses—it's tough for a DSP who's being paid much less to justify continuing in their current work.

While the FY 2022 Michigan budget includes a permanent \$2.35 per hour wage increase for DSPs—and we thank the Legislature for this support—their overall compensation is still too low to justify long-term careers in the profession. As a result, it's challenging for individuals and families to find any stability in their care teams. Often, they end up going without the much-needed personal care, training, emotional support and respite they urgently need. The same is true for behavioral health providers, who must turn away people in need because they can't find staff. It's nothing short of a crisis.

DSPs provide essential support to an estimated 100,000 of Michigan's most vulnerable residents. They help keep families strong by providing practical care that is individualized, needs-based, and innovative. They should earn as much as a fast-food employee, at minimum—but right now, the average starting wage rate for a Michigan DSP is estimated at \$14.00 per hour. Entry level jobs for high school students pay at least that much, are much less physically and emotionally challenging, and require far less skill.

To be competitive, Michigan should boost funding for DSPs.

Workforce stability is critical to ensuring the health, safety and well-being of persons supported through the behavioral health system. Staffing shortages resulting from low pay may place vulnerable people at risk.

Our coalition proposes a General Fund appropriation of \$127.0 million in FY 23 which would increase the average starting wage rate in the behavioral health system by \$4.00 per hour to approximately \$18.00 per hour. This calculation is based upon an estimated 50,000 DSPs providing community living supports and other services funded through the behavioral health system. This GF appropriation to increase the average starting wage rate to \$18.00 per hour would provide the funding which is critically necessary to address the staffing crisis.

Our coalition recommends that the proposed appropriation would be earmarked for wages in the funding provided to the PIHPs, to ensure adequate Medicaid funding for DSPs working in the behavioral health system (i.e., all billing codes for direct client work). There should be a means of accountability to ensure DSPs receive the money, and the funding should also apply to immediate supervisors who also provide direct care.

With significant amounts of GF dollars and pandemic-related federal funding available to the state right now, Michigan has perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to address the long-standing direct care workforce crisis in a meaningful and sustained manner.

While the investment is significant, [it pays huge investment returns](#). The total ROI currently for a \$363 million investment is upwards of \$205 million, and consists of reduced turnover, reduced public assistance, and increased state tax revenue and economic activity.

Other Professional Supports

As any DSP will tell you, it's not just about the money. There are other steps Michigan can take to stabilize and advance the profession well beyond the basic level of fast-food or retail work. In addition to ensuring adequate compensation, we recommend the development of a DSP statute that includes:

- Mandatory spending that is annually earmarked and tied to inflation;
- A special fund to support direct care worker training programs, ongoing professional development and the annual expense of DSP certifications; and
- Career pathways that can help workers grow and advance in the profession.

Our membership will continue to advocate for the value being added by Michigan DSPs, recognizing it's not just about the resources—it's also about ensuring the work is appropriately recognized for its intellectual and physical demands.

We look forward to working with MDHHS and other state policy leaders to build a framework capable of supporting all Michigan residents in ways that make sense.