

2025 REPORT

Stability of the Direct Support Professional Workforce Providing Residential Supports to Adults and Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Oregon



Executive Summary

High turnover among Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who provide care to Oregon adults and children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) impacts the quality of care and contributes to high service costs.

This report is the fifth in a series that uses data from the National Core Indicators State of the Workforce Surveys (formerly named the Staff Stability Surveys) to examine trends in wages and turnover among DSPs employed by Oregon agencies that provide 24-hour residential services to adults with I/DD living in group homes. **This report is the first that includes DSPs providing care to children in addition to those supporting adults.** Survey data from 2018 – 2023 was used in this report; however, because prior surveys only included DSPs who care for adults, data from 2023 may not be comparable to prior years.

In 2023, 385 out of 399 (96.5%) eligible I/DD residential service provider agencies in Oregon completed the NCI State of the Workforce Survey. These agencies employed a total of 11,440 DSPs who were primarily full-time employees. During 2018 – 2023 the median DSP wage increased from \$13.20 to \$19.00. In the same time period, the overall turnover ratio (percent of DSPs who left their position) decreased from 50.2% to 33.3%.

This indicates that Oregon is making progress towards the goal of maintaining a stable DSP workforce that can support Oregon adults with I/DD.

Despite this progress, wages for DSPs continue to be considerably lower than those for the Oregon workforce as a whole. As in previous years, the median DSP wage was not sufficient to be considered a living wage for one adult in Oregon in 2023. In addition, DSPs often do not receive adequate or affordable workplace benefits.

Based on the findings of our analyses, we conclude that increasing wages is an important tool for reducing DSP turnover and vacancy rates. We further conclude that permanent pay increases are a more reliable mechanism for maintaining a stable DSP workforce than one-time bonuses. Additionally, we recommend the following strategies to help further reduce turnover:

- Provide key benefits and career growth opportunities for DSPs.
- Build on ongoing efforts to recognize the value of DSPs and the importance of their work.
- Ensure pay equity within the DSP workforce and with other types of skilled labor in the state.



Introduction

Many adults and children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) rely on Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) to provide quality support on a daily basis. The support of DSPs is crucial for helping individuals with I/DD live in community settings, maintain their health and well-being, have successful work and social lives, and develop and maintain independent living skills. Successfully providing these supports requires DSPs to be interdisciplinary professionals and bring a wide range of skills and knowledge to their job.¹ However, DSP positions are challenging and often come with low pay, limited benefits, and little social status or recognition of the importance of the DSP role.² High turnover and large numbers of vacant positions are common, costly, and dangerous.

High turnover and vacancies impact the continuity and quality of care available to individuals with I/DD and increase burdens on remaining staff.² These issues may amplify risk for medication errors, injuries, and abuse and neglect of people with I/DD.³ High turnover also has substantial budget implications for agencies that must continually recruit and train new staff. Estimates of the cost of replacing a single DSP range from \$2,413 to \$5,200.² With large numbers of DSP positions needing to be refilled the cumulative cost is massive, reaching an estimated \$2,338,716,600 per year nationally.² As such, DSP turnover and vacancies are centrally important issues to understand and address.

This is the fifth report on Oregon DSP staffing stability. Since the first report, which used data from 2018, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an already challenging situation and highlighted the important role that DSPs play in our society. In addition to making staffing more difficult, the pandemic increased the stress, expectations, and risk for both DSPs and the individuals with whom they work.⁴ The purpose of this updated report is to examine DSP turnover in Oregon among those who serve both adults and children, analyze factors associated with higher facility turnover and staffing vacancies, and propose strategies to create a more stable workforce. Contextual information was gathered from other sources for the compilation of this document (see references).

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Survey Information

The National Core Indicators Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (NCI-IDD) State of the Workforce Survey has been conducted in Oregon since 2016 and has been statutorily mandated since 2018.⁵ ODDS began enforcing completion of the survey in 2021 (representing the 2020 workforce) resulting in higher rates of participation.

The National State of the Workforce Survey collects information on facilities that provide services to adults with I/DD. In 2023, the most recent survey year available, Oregon additionally collected data from facilities that provide services to children with disabilities. This report is unable to distinguish Oregon facilities that provide services to adults and those that provide services to children. Oregon also expands on the national survey by collecting data on frontline supervisors and executive staff at facilities.

This report only includes facilities that provide residential services to adults or children with I/DD. However, some facilities may also provide in-home or non-residential services, and this report is unable to distinguish between DSPs that provide each type of service. A national report that analyses all facilities that provide services to adults with I/DD is published by NCI-IDD.⁶ Neither report includes information about support workers hired as independent contractors, who are not included in the survey data.

Statistical tests and terms used in this report are explained in the appendix.

DSP Workforce Description

DSP Roles and Tasks

On average, Oregon group homes have capacity for 3-4 residents with I/DD. DSPs in group homes provide 24-hour wrap-around care to residents, who have a wide range of needs. DSP tasks can vary extensively and often include assisting with personal care, assisting in the development of independent living skills, dispensing medications, monitoring individual behaviors and safety, setting up appointments, and transporting individuals to locations outside the home. DSPs working with children may significantly collaborate with parents, guardians, and educational institutions to support children's development and foundational learning.

Size of the Oregon DSP Workforce

In 2023, 385 out of 399 (96.5%) eligible I/DD residential service provider agencies in Oregon completed the NCI State of the Workforce Survey. As of December 2023, these agencies employed a total of 11,440 DSPs who provided care to 7,089 adults and/or children with I/DD.

Between 2020 and 2022, the size of the DSP workforce represented by this survey remained relatively stable while the number of group homes rapidly increased. In 2023 group homes that serve children were included in the survey for the first time, which largely explains the increase in DSPs represented (Table 1).

Full vs. Part-time

Of the DSPs at agencies in the 2023 survey, 23.5% were part-time workers and 58.7% were full-time; the remaining 17.9% worked at agencies that did not distinguish between full-time and part-time DSP positions. While the majority of DSPs are full-time, between 2018 and 2023 there was a steady increase in the proportion of part-time DSPs at agencies that completed the survey (Figure 2). The median proportion of DSPs who are employed part-time is higher at agencies that employ 1 – 10 DSPs (33.3%) compared to those that employ 11 – 50 (26.5%) or more than 50 DSPs (13.6%; $p < 0.01$).

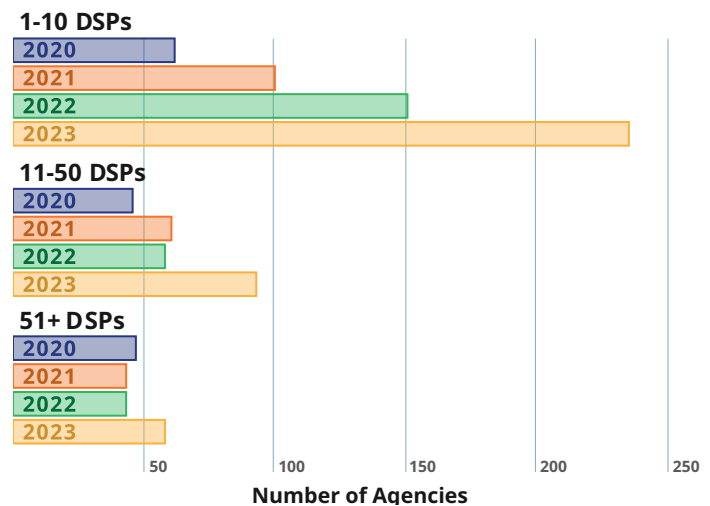
In 2023 the number of DSPs employed per agency ranged from 1 to 2,592. Most agencies, especially new agencies, are small and employ between 1 and 10 DSPs (Figure 1).

TABLE 1: Oregon residential agencies and survey participation by year, 2020–2023*

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Eligible residential agencies	159	212	295	399
Agencies that completed the survey	155	204	253	385
Total number of DSPs represented	8,732	8,369	8,342	11,440

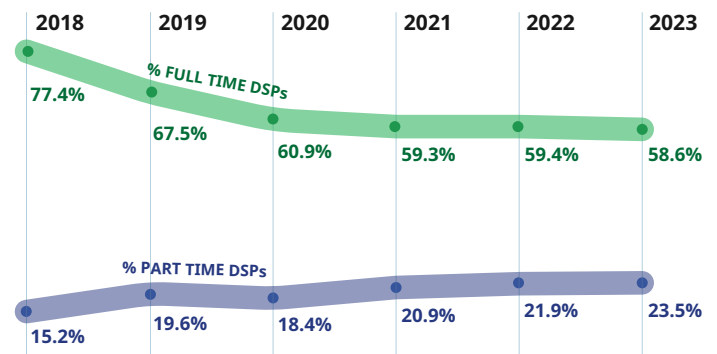
*2020–2022 counts only include facilities that serve adults with I/DD. 2023 counts include facilities that serve adults and/or children with I/DD.

FIGURE 1: Size of Oregon agencies providing residential services to adults with I/DD, 2020–2023*



*2020–2022 counts only include facilities that serve adults with I/DD. 2023 counts include facilities that serve adults and/or children with I/DD.

FIGURE 2: Trend in part-time and full-time employment among Oregon DSPs, 2018–2023*



*2018–2022 counts only include facilities that serve adults with I/DD. 2023 counts include facilities that serve adults and/or children with I/DD.



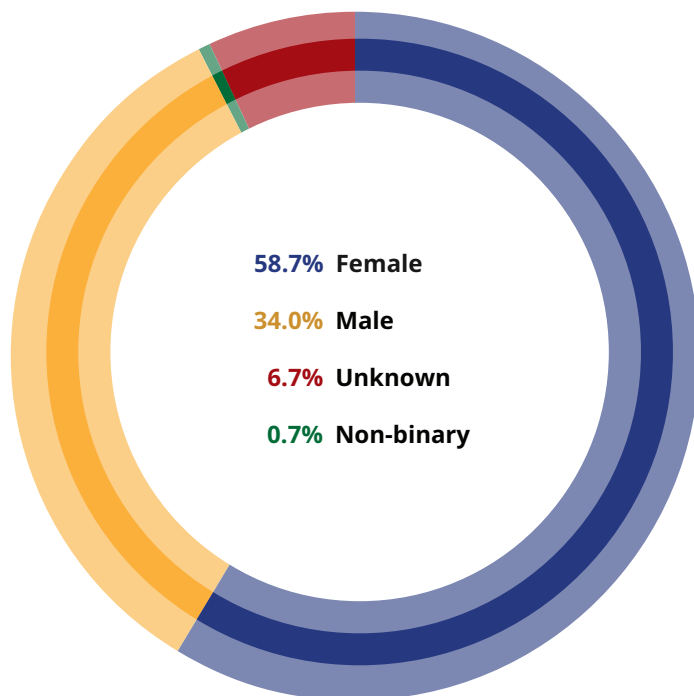
Demographic Characteristics of the DSP Workforce

Demographic information collected in the NCI State of the Workforce Survey is limited to gender and race and ethnicity. Demographics were reported by 375 agencies that employed a total of 11,277 DSPs.

Gender

Among DSPs employed at agencies which reported demographics, 58.7% identified as female, 34.0% as male, 0.7% as gender non-binary, and the gender identity of the remaining 6.7% was unknown (Figure 3).

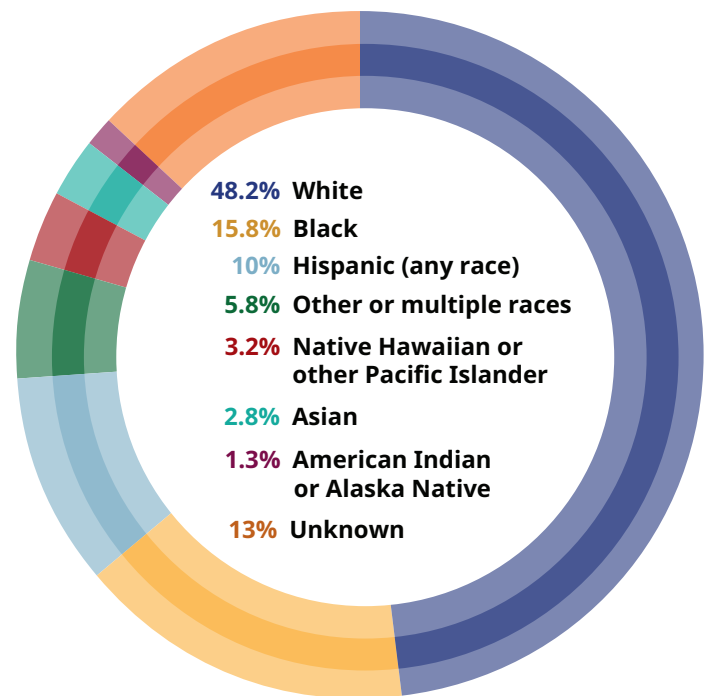
Figure 3: Gender of Oregon DSP Workforce, 2023



Race and Ethnicity

Among DSPs employed at agencies which reported demographics, 48.2% were White, 15.8% were Black, 10.0% were Hispanic, 10.9% were any other or multiple races, and race and ethnicity of the remaining 13.0% was unknown (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Race and Ethnicity of Oregon DSP Workforce, 2023



DSP Workforce Stability: Turnover, Tenure, and Vacancy Rates

Stability of the DSP workforce impacts both the quality of services that agencies provide, as well as their ability to provide services.

In 2023, 62 (16.1%) of agencies reported that they had to turn away or stop accepting new service referrals due to DSP staffing issues.

The three measures used to assess the stability of the DSP workforce in Oregon are the **turnover ratio, average staff tenure, and vacancy rate.**⁶ While this report represents agencies that provide residential services, sometimes those agencies provide other types of support as well, and these measures cannot distinguish between residential DSPs or DSPs employed in another capacity within said agencies.

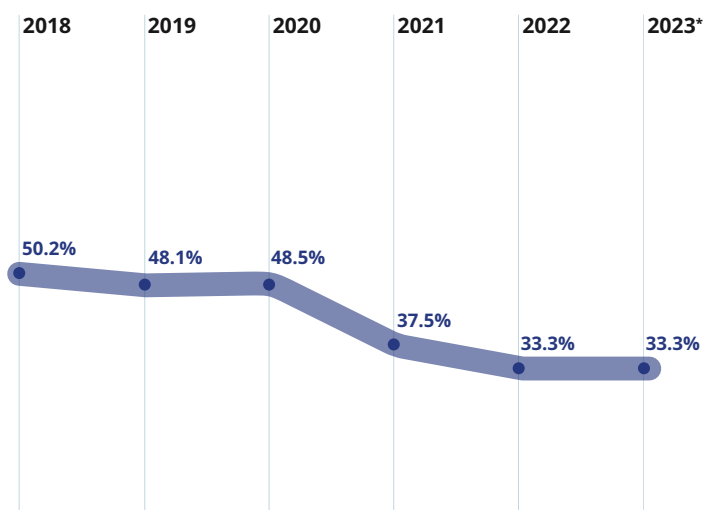
OVERALL TURNOVER RATIO

$$\text{Overall Turnover Ratio} = \frac{\# \text{ DSPs who left the agency during 2023}}{\# \text{ DSPs on agency payroll as of Dec. 31, 2023}}$$

Turnover Ratio

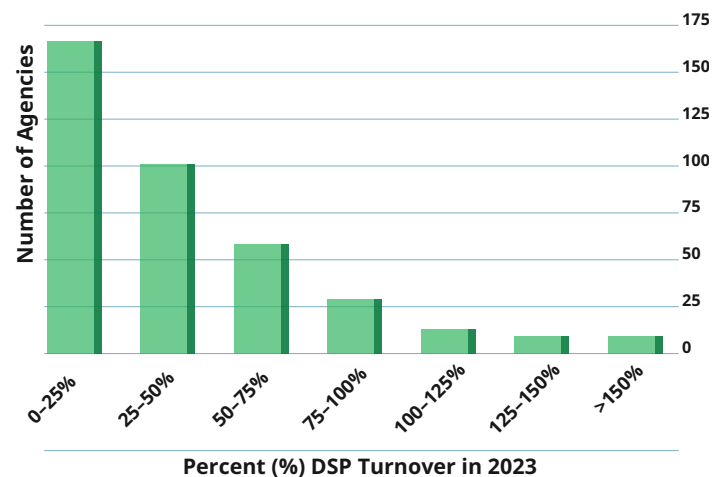
In 2023, the median overall DSP turnover ratio among facilities in Oregon that provide residential services was 33.3%. **This means that at a facility with an average turnover ratio, 1 out of every 3 DSPs left during the year.** This was the same as the turnover ratio found in 2022 for facilities providing services to adults only. While turnover rates remain concerningly high, they have trended downward since this study began: in 2018, 1 out of every 2 DSPs left during the year (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Overall DSP turnover ratio by year, 2018–2023*



Turnover ratios varied widely by agency in 2023 (Figure 6) and ranged from 0% (which indicates that no DSPs left during the year) to 440% (for every DSP employed in December, more than 4 DSPs left the agency during the year). The median turnover ratio was significantly higher at agencies that employ more than 50 DSPs (66.2%) compared to those who employ 11 – 50 (42.6%) or 1 – 10 DSPs (36.6%; $p < 0.01$).

Figure 6: DSP turnover ratios, 2023



*2018-2022 counts only include facilities that serve adults with I/DD.
2023 counts include facilities that serve adults and/or children with I/DD.

DSP Workforce Stability: Turnover, Tenure, and Vacancy Rates

Tenure of Current Staff

High turnover ratios mean that relatively few DSPs have a long tenure working at a single agency. Consequently, a substantial proportion of the DSP workforce consists of personnel with less experience in their current position. In 2023, only 30% had been in their role for more than 3 years, and 41% had less than one year of experience (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Tenure of current DSPs, 2023



As noted earlier, the 2023 State of the Workforce Survey included DSPs who work at residential facilities that serve children with I/DD for the first time. Despite this addition, there were no significant changes in the distribution of DSP tenure compared to prior years.

Turnover Ratio by Staff Tenure

We calculated turnover ratio separately for DSPs employed less than 6 months, between 6 months and 1 year, between 1 and 2 years, between 2 and 3 years, and more than 3 years. The highest turnover was among those with a job tenure of less than 6 months. Turnover decreased as staff tenure increased. However, the mean and median turnover ratios were both 50% or higher in groups with less than 1 year of tenure (Table 2). This means that for every 2 DSPs who had been in their position for less than a year during 2023, 1 left their position.⁷

Table 2: Turnover by duration of DSP Tenure Category, 2023

Tenure Category	Range in Turnover ratios	Median Turnover ratio	Mean Turnover ratio
Overall	0–250%	33.3%	42.2%
<6 months	0–2,300%	100%	117.5%
6–12 months	0–600%	57.2%	77.3%
1–2 years	0–700%	30.0%	48.0%
2–3 years	0–300%	33.3%	48.8%
>3 years	0–200%	17.1%	24.4%

DSP Workforce Stability: Turnover, Tenure, and Vacancy Rates

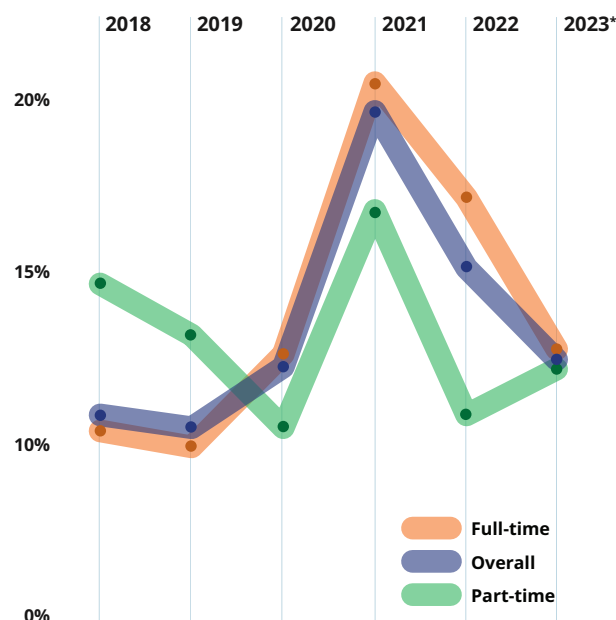
VACANCY RATE

$$\text{Vacancy Rate} = \frac{\# \text{ Vacant DSP Positions as of Dec. 31, 2023}}{\# \text{ DSP positions as of Dec. 31, 2023}}$$

Vacancy rate, or the percentage of DSP positions that are vacant, is another metric that can be used to assess stability of the DSP workforce in Oregon.

Overall, 12.6% of DSP positions were vacant statewide, including 12.9% of full-time DSP positions and 12.4% of part-time DSP positions (Figure 8). Vacancy rates appear to have decreased since a high in 2021, however 2023 data may not be comparable to prior years due to the inclusion of facilities that serve children with I/DD.

Figure 8: Proportion of DSP positions that were vacant in Oregon, 2018–2023*



*2018–2022 counts only include facilities that serve adults with I/DD. 2023 counts include facilities that serve adults and/or children with I/DD.

As of December 2023, there were 992 vacant full-time DSP positions and 375 vacant part-time DSP positions in Oregon among agencies that completed the survey.

Reasons for Departure

In 2023, 6,257 DSPs departed their jobs. While data are not directly comparable to prior years, a lower proportion left their positions voluntarily, and a higher proportion left their positions because they were terminated (Table 3).

Table 3: Number of DSPs who departed jobs by reason and year, 2020–2023*

	2020 (%)	2021 (%)	2022 (%)	2023 (%)
Voluntary	3,937 (72.4%)	4,051 (78.2%)	3,766 (77.9%)	4,339 (69.3%)
Terminated	969 (17.8%)	776 (15.0%)	905 (18.7%)	1,565 (25.0%)
Position Eliminated	247 (4.5%)	137 (2.6%)	6 (0.1%)	34 (0.5%)
Unknown	285 (5.2%)	214 (4.1%)	156 (3.2%)	319 (5.1%)
Total	5,438	5,178	4,833	6,257

*2020–2022 counts only include facilities that serve adults with I/DD. 2023 counts include facilities that serve adults and/or children with I/DD.

The NCI State of the Workforce Survey collects data at the agency level rather than from individual staff. Thus, we do not have specific information about why DSPs who left voluntarily chose to leave. Anecdotally, DSPs have reported that the work is challenging, and the pay is lower than they could receive elsewhere for easier work. Further, there are a large number of agencies in Oregon, including many new ones – it is not uncommon for DSPs to shift from one residential facility to another.

DSP Workforce Stability: Turnover, Tenure, and Vacancy Rates



DSP Agency Structure and Association with Staff Stability

Agency Size

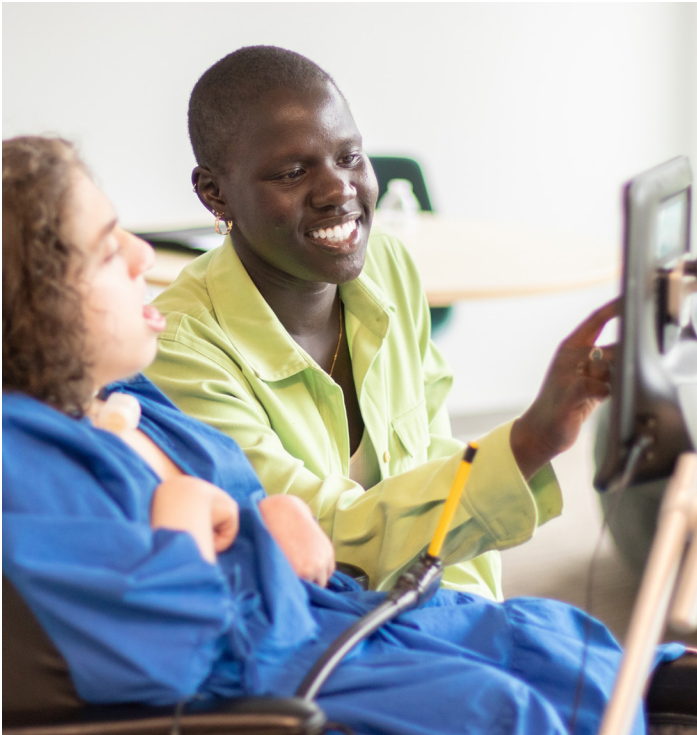
Agency size remains the strongest predictor of turnover ratios: turnover ratios are significantly lower at small agencies compared to medium and large ones ($p < 0.01$). The median turnover ratio was 25.0% (range 0 – 440%) at agencies that employed 1 – 10 DSPs, 33.3% (range 0 – 207%) at medium agencies, and 51.9% (range 0 – 203%) at large agencies.

Small agencies also had vacancy rates that were significantly lower than large agencies ($p < 0.01$) and trended lower than medium agencies ($p = 0.07$). The median vacancy rate was 0.0% (range 0 – 91%) at agencies that employed 1 – 10 DSPs, 13.9% (range 0 – 57%) at medium agencies, and 9.0% (range 0 – 34%) at large agencies.

Supervisory Support

Frontline supervisors are the first line of management in human service organizations. These are staff who supervise DSPs working with adults and children with I/DD and often also engage in direct support as part of their duties. Other responsibilities include overseeing implementation of Individual Support Plans (ISPs) and ensuring safety and medical protocols are followed. ISPs are the annual support service plan that each individual with I/DD must have in order to receive funded services. Supervisors provide training to DSPs on services and supports identified in the ISP and are also responsible for coordination of care for those they support. DSP stability is often directly impacted by the quality of oversight, training, and supervision they receive from a frontline supervisor.⁸

While the total number of supervisors increases with agency size, one key metric is the ratio of DSPs to frontline supervisors. In 2023, the mean ratio was 3 DSPs to 1 supervisor at agencies with 1 – 10 DSPs, 7 to 1 at agencies with 11 – 50 DSPs, and 11 to 1 at agencies with 51 or more DSPs. Overall, agencies with fewer DSPs per supervisor had lower turnover rates ($p < 0.01$).



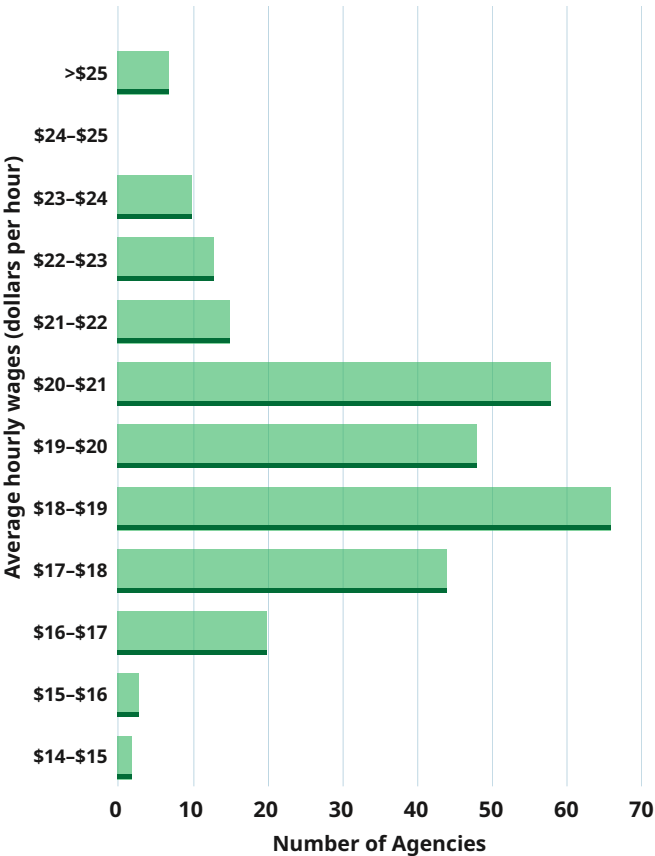
DSP Wages

Starting Wages and Average Wages

In 2023, the mean reported starting pay for residential DSPs in Oregon was \$18.27 per hour and ranged from \$14.75 to \$31.00. Mean starting pay was higher at agencies that employ more than 50 DSPs (\$19.02) compared to those that employed 1 – 10 (\$18.34) or 11 – 50 DSPs (\$17.89; $p < 0.01$).

Mean average wages across all tenure groups were only slightly higher than starting wages and ranged from \$15.00 to \$31.00 per hour (Figure 9). The state-wide average DSP pay was \$19.15 per hour. Mean average pay was higher at agencies that employ more than 50 DSPs (\$20.21) compared to those that employed 1 – 10 (\$18.96) and those that employ 11 – 50 (\$18.91; $p < 0.01$).

Figure 9: Average wages for Oregon DSPs providing residential care, 2023



Only 305 (79.2%) of eligible agencies that responded to the survey provided information about starting pay for DSPs providing residential care, and 284 (73.8%) provided information about average pay. Agencies that did not provide information about wages were more likely to be small (employing 1 – 10 DSPs).

DSP Wages and Benefits



Change in Wages

While there were temporary COVID-related wage enhancements that helped to increase DSP pay during 2020 – 2022, these were no longer in place during 2023. Despite that, wages did continue to increase during this reporting period.

The median starting pay increased by \$7.00 per hour between 2018 and 2023 ($p < 0.01$), and the median average pay increased by \$5.80 per hour ($p < 0.01$). Improvements have also been made in comparison to the Oregon Standard Minimum Wage (OSMW; Table 4). In 2018, the OSMW was \$10.75, and the average starting salary was only \$1.25 higher (\$12.00). In 2023, the OSMW was \$14.20 and the average starting salary was \$3.80 higher (\$18.00). However, these trends must be interpreted with caution: 2023 data may not be directly comparable to previous years, as it included residential facilities that provide care for children in addition to those that provide care for adults.

While some progress may have been made, wages for DSPs were still considerably lower than those for the Oregon workforce as a whole. According to 2023 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the mean hourly wage for the overall Oregon workforce in 2023 was \$32.07 and the median was \$24.04.⁹ Nationally, wages for DSPs are also consistently lower than for other direct care professionals, such as Home Health Aids, Personal Care attendants, Nursing Assistants, and Residential Advisors.¹

Table 4: Median DSP wages and Oregon standard minimum wage (OSMW) by year, 2018–2023*

	Oregon Standard Minimum Wage	DSP Median Salary	DSP Median Starting Salary
2018	\$10.75	\$13.20	\$12.00
2019	\$11.25	\$13.90	\$13.00
2020	\$12.00	\$15.00	\$13.75
2021	\$12.75	\$16.04	\$15.07
2022	\$13.50	\$18.00	\$17.00
2023	\$14.20	\$19.00	\$18.00

*2018-2022 counts only include facilities that serve adults with I/DD.
2023 counts include facilities that serve adults and/or children with I/DD.

While the median DSP wage in Oregon was above the minimum wage for all regions of Oregon in 2023, it was not sufficient to be considered a living wage for one adult in Oregon in 2023.¹⁰ The median wage of \$19.00 per hour was well below the estimated \$25.16 per hour that would be needed to support one adult; the \$45.17 needed to support one adult and one child, or the \$31.48 needed to support a household with two adults and two children if the other adult was also working.¹⁰

DSP Wages and Benefits



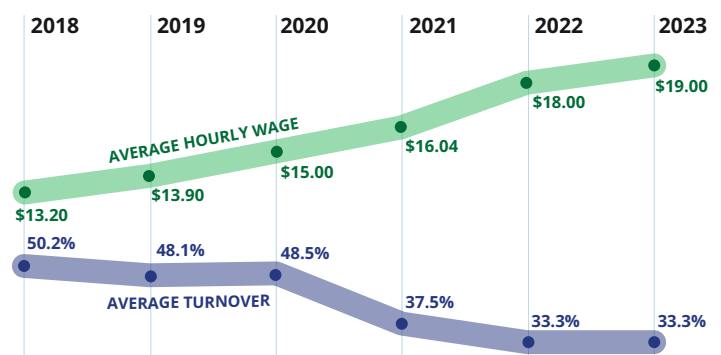
Starting Wages

During 2018 – 2021, starting wages appeared to be correlated with overall turnover ratio, meaning that as hourly starting wages increased, turnover decreased.¹¹ However, we did not see this correlation in 2022 or in 2023 ($R = 0.001$; $p = 0.56$), which may be consistent with the fact that starting wages have increased and turnover ratios have decreased. As in prior years, we also did not find a significant association between starting wages and the percentage of positions that were vacant ($R = 0.001$; $p = 0.67$).

Average Wages

Between 2018 and 2023 the turnover ratio decreased as average wages increased (Figure 10; $R = 0.94$; $p < 0.001$). In 2023, we did not find a significant negative correlation between average hourly wages of DSPs working in residential settings and overall turnover ratio at those settings ($R = 0.001$; $p = 0.74$). This finding is consistent with 2021 and 2022, but in contrast to 2018 - 2020, where we observed a strong negative correlation between average hourly wages and staff turnover. There was also no association between average hourly wages and overall vacancy rates ($R = 0.001$; $p = 0.84$). This may be due to the fact that average wages have increased overall and become more consistent between agencies in recent years.

Figure 10: Comparison between average hourly wages and staff turnover by year, 2018–2023



**2018-2022 counts only include facilities that serve adults with I/DD.
2023 counts include facilities that serve adults and/or children with I/DD.*

Bonuses

Overall, 190 agencies (49.4%) reported that they gave a wage bonus to DSPs in 2023. There was some grant money available through the State of Oregon to support agencies in hiring and retaining staff during 2023, and provider agencies may have offered additional bonuses outside the grant money to manage a staffing shortage. Agencies that provided bonuses to DSPs did not have lower overall turnover or vacancy rates.

DSP Workplace Benefits

The NCI State of the Workforce Survey asked agencies whether or not they provided a range of benefits that may increase retention or attract DSPs to their agency. We found that, in addition to low wages, many DSPs do not receive adequate or affordable workplace benefits.

DSP Wages and Benefits



Insurance

Overall, 143 (37.1%) reporting agencies offered health insurance coverage, 128 (33.3%) offered dental insurance, and 117 (30.4%) offered vision insurance. Among the agencies that offered health insurance coverage, only 13 (9.1%) offered insurance to all DSPs, with no eligibility criteria. Other agencies had one or more of the following requirements in place: 102 (71.3%) required that DSPs be full-time, 57 (39.9%) required that DSPs must work a minimum amount of time within a defined time period, and 81 (56.6%) required that DSPs must have been employed at the agency for a certain length of time. Even when benefits are provided and DSPs are eligible, associated out-of-pocket costs may not be affordable for all DSPs. In 2021, only 69% of eligible DSPs were enrolled in the health insurance benefit when it was offered by their agency¹¹ (these data were not collected in 2023).

Oregon requires that employers with 50 or more full-time employees offer health insurance. In 2023, all but one of the 54 agencies that employed 50 or more DSPs offered health and dental insurance, and 52 (96.3%) offered vision insurance. Of the 331 agencies that employed fewer than 50 DSPs*, 90 (67.1%) offered health insurance, 75 (56.3%) offered dental insurance, and 65 (50.8%) offered vision insurance.

Paid Time Off

Overall, 221 (57.4%) agencies offered some type of paid time off (PTO) to DSPs. Types of offered PTO included some combination of paid vacation, sick, and/or personal time; or pooled PTO, which is not distinguished by category.

Among the agencies that offer any type of paid leave, only 90 (40.7%) offered PTO to all DSPs, with no eligibility criteria. The other 59.3% of agencies had one or more of the following requirements in place: 81 (36.7%) required that DSPs be full-time, 58 (26.2%) required that DSPs work a minimum amount of time within a defined time period, and 93 (42.1%) required that DSPs be employed at the agency for a certain length of time.

Retirement Plan

Overall, 146 (37.9%) reporting agencies offered an employer-sponsored retirement plan (401k, 403b, or other plan) to some or all DSPs. Eligibility criteria varied between agencies and only 58 (39.7%) of agencies with plans offered them to all DSPs with no eligibility criteria. The other 88 (60.3%) had one of the following requirements in place: 41 (28.8%) required that DSPs be full-time, 33 (22.6%) required that DSPs work a minimum amount of time within a defined time period, and 60 (41.1%) required that DSPs be employed at the agency for a certain length of time. In 2023, 47 (87.10%) large agencies that employed 50 or more DSPs offered a retirement plan to some or all DSPs, compared to 99 (29.9%) agencies that employed fewer than 50 DSPs.

**Some organizations with fewer than 50 DSPs may have more than 50 overall employees, but this survey does not collect information on all residential home positions.*

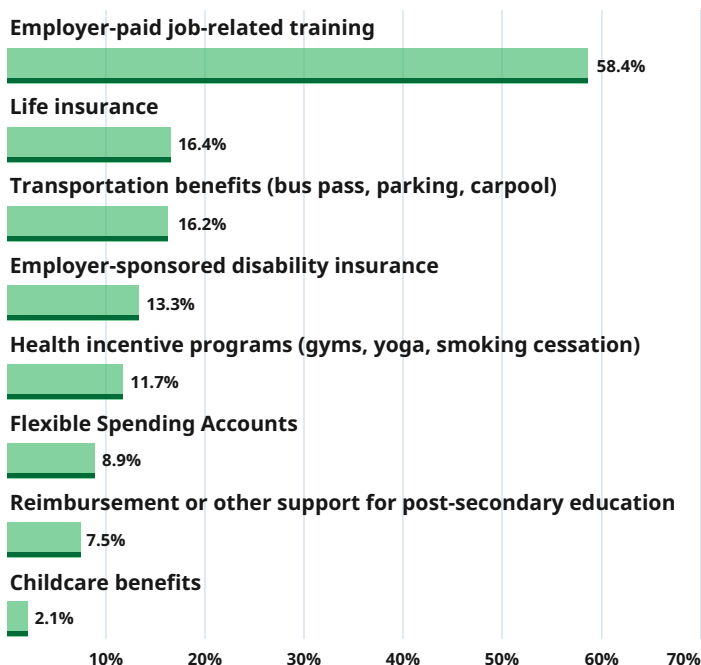
DSP Wages and Benefits



Other Benefits

There was a lot of variability in what additional benefits were provided by agencies in 2023. Additional benefits ranged from childcare benefits provided by only 8 (2.1%) agencies, to employer-paid job-related training, provided by 225 (58.4%) agencies (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Proportion of agencies that provided other benefits to DSPs, 2023



Compared to agencies that employ fewer than 50 DSPs, large agencies were more likely to provide all benefits captured in Figure 11 ($p < 0.05$) with the exception of transportation ($p=0.95$).

Association Between Benefits and Workforce Stability

Overall, we found limited associations between provision of benefits and turnover and retention. However, there was some indication that, among agencies that did offer benefits, additional eligibility criteria for obtaining benefits may be associated with increased turnover ratios:

- Agencies that employed fewer than 50 DSPs and provided PTO but had eligibility criteria had mean turnover ratios that were higher than those with no requirements for PTO (45.7% vs. 38.4%; $p = 0.05$).
- Agencies that employed fewer than 50 DSPs and provided health insurance but had eligibility criteria had mean turnover ratios that were twice as high as those with no eligibility criteria (44.9% vs. 20.0%; $p = 0.03$).
- Agencies that provided a retirement plan but required that employees be employed for a certain period of time before they were eligible to participate had turnover ratios that were slightly higher than those without this requirement or other eligibility requirements (53.0% vs. 46.9%; $p = 0.05$).
- Agencies that provided job-related training had lower turnover rates than agencies that did not provide training (20.5% vs. 35.3%; $p = 0.07$).

DSP Wages and Benefits

Staff Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Beyond wages and benefits, agencies utilize an array of additional strategies to recruit and retain DSPs. In the 2023 NCI State of the Workforce Survey, agencies were asked if they utilized the following 12 staff retention strategies:

- Realistic job preview (74.5%)
- Offer a sign-on bonus to newly hired DSPs (16.6%)
- Engage with high schools and/or local colleges/universities (15.8%)
- Offer or participate in apprenticeship programs (7.2%)
- Provide DSPs with code of ethics training (57.1%)
- Use a DSP career ladder to retain highly skilled workers (35.6%)
- Support staff to acquire credentials through a state or nationally recognized professional organization (23.9%)
- Provide DSPs with bonuses, stipends, or raises at key stages or completion of credentialing process (26.7%)
- Implement employee engagement surveys or other efforts aimed at assessing DSP satisfaction and experience working for the agency (32.7%)
- Employee recognition programs such as initiatives to reward DSPs for achievement, anniversaries, or other milestones (45.2%)
- Include DSPs in agency governance such as serving on advisory boards or playing a role in hiring (15.8%)
- Require trainings above and beyond those required by State of Oregon regulations (50.4%)



Association Between Retention Strategies and Workforce Stability

While most retention strategies were not associated with either DSP turnover or vacancy rates in 2023, we found that agencies that supported staff to acquire credentials had slightly lower turnover ratios than those without such support (44.6% vs. 34.6% $p = 0.07$).

Core Recommendations

1 Continue to Increase Hourly Wages

STRATEGIC ACTION:

Sustain and expand DSP wage increases across all service settings, ensuring parity with Oregon's living wage and comparable skilled labor.

RATIONALE:

In our previous analyses, higher starting wages were associated with lower turnover. These findings were supported by national data as well. While this association was not found in 2023, overall wages have increased compared to prior years. Oregon agencies implemented moderate pay increases in 2021 and 2022 and these increases corresponded with a decrease in turnover both years (compared to earlier years), as well as a decrease in vacancy rates in 2022. However, these pandemic-related increases have been discontinued and turnover and vacancy rates still remain high. Continuing to increase wages across the DSP workforce will likely contribute to further declines in turnover and vacancy rates and increase the stability of the workforce.

INTENDED IMPACT:

Decreases turnover and vacancies; enhances workforce stability.

2 Estimate Economic Costs of Turnover

STRATEGIC ACTION:

Quantify the fiscal impact of DSP turnover through collaboration with provider associations and state economists.

RATIONALE:

The State of the Workforce is a valuable resource but does not address the overall economic costs to the State of Oregon. These costs should be examined, potentially through collaborations with provider associations.

INTENDED IMPACT:

Demonstrates the financial urgency for sustained investment.

3 Enhance reporting and data systems

STRATEGIC ACTION:

Differentiate data from agencies serving children and adults; collect exit interview data to identify early turnover drivers.

RATIONALE:

This is the first report that incorporated data on DSPs that serve children. Future data collection efforts should differentiate between facilities that serve adults and those that serve children. In addition, it would be valuable to collect additional data on reasons for DSP departure. This may also include conducting exit interviews with DSPs to understand the actual reasons that they are leaving, specifically in the first few months of employment.

INTENDED IMPACT:

Enables targeted interventions and system-wide accountability.

4 Expand Benefits and Career Growth Opportunities

STRATEGIC ACTION:

Provide paid leave, health insurance beyond OHP, and advancement pathways for all staff, including part-time.

RATIONALE:

Provision of paid time off, health insurance (especially coverage beyond what is included in the Oregon Health Plan), and other benefits can help with reducing turnover. We specifically found that providing benefits to all staff, without restricting them to only full-time employees, was associated with lower turnover and vacancy rates. We also recommend instituting a way for agencies to share successful strategies for addressing employee turnover with each other.

INTENDED IMPACT:

Increases retention, equity, and professionalism.

Core Recommendations

5 Build on Efforts to Recognize and Elevate DSPs

STRATEGIC ACTION:

Continue ODDS partnerships, retention grants, and recruitment campaigns while formally recognizing DSP excellence.

RATIONALE:

The work of DSPs is generally considered low status, yet it is crucially important to the health, safety, and well-being of adults with I/DD. The DSP role requires considerable effort, skill, and dedication; these qualities should be recognized and rewarded. The Oregon Office of Developmental Disabilities Services (ODDS) has been addressing the workforce crisis by building partnerships with case management entities and employment agencies throughout Oregon and the country; disseminating recruitment and retention grants; and supporting innovation in service equity. While these and other efforts of ODDS have been helpful, the shortage of DSPs continues. Future long-term strategies, actions and funds are needed. As a matter of health equity, Oregon must prioritize the well-being of our citizens with I/DD and the professionals who support them.

INTENDED IMPACT:

Improves morale and public perception of DSP roles.

6 Ensure Pay Equity and Fair Valuation of Care Work

STRATEGIC ACTION:

Address gendered and racial pay disparities and align DSP pay scales with other skilled labor sectors.

RATIONALE:

The low value currently placed on DSP work goes hand-in-hand with the demographic characteristics of the DSP workforce. The majority of DSPs are women and many of them are people of color—demographic groups that consistently earn lower pay in the United States. As one report stated, DSPs receive gendered pay for gendered work,¹² highlighting the inherent inequity in a pay structure that values caregiving roles less than other forms of work. Oregon has an opportunity to take the lead not only in ensuring pay equity within the DSP workforce but also in elevating DSP pay scales to a level that is equitable in the context of pay levels for other types of skilled labor in the state.

INTENDED IMPACT:

Advances equity and long-term workforce sustainability.

Stretch Strategies and Innovative Goal Recommendations

1 Statewide DSP Credentialing and Career Lattice

INNOVATION:

Develop or provide an incentive for an existing or newly developed portable DSP certification (DSP I–III) tied to wages, training, and Career and Technical Education, college pathway, or workforce training. Embed the DSP core competency training in the curriculum.

RATIONALE:

Creating a structured credentialing system (e.g., DSP I–III) that recognizes DSPs as skilled professionals and provides clear advancement opportunities linked to wages and education. Embedding DSP training within Career and Technical Education (CTE) community college pathways or workforce training establishes a pipeline for new workers, promotes long-term retention, and builds a qualified, career-oriented workforce that can grow within the system.

STRETCH IMPACT

Professionalizes DSP roles and builds career mobility. This could also potentially reduce initial training costs for agencies.

2 DSP Wellbeing and Innovation Retention Fund

INNOVATION:

Support DSP-led pilot project grants to agencies (peer mentoring, flexible scheduling, trauma-informed supervision, housing supports).

RATIONALE:

Frontline DSPs often have the most practical insights into what helps staff stay and thrive. A dedicated innovation fund empowers DSPs and agencies to co-design and test creative workforce solutions—such as peer mentoring, flexible scheduling, trauma-informed supervision, and housing supports. This would include data collection regarding the issue they are trying to address and providing evaluation data and reporting on outcomes. Evaluating and scaling successful models will generate evidence-based approaches that improve satisfaction, retention, and quality of care.

STRETCH IMPACT:

Fosters innovation, empowerment, and improved retention.



3 DSP Workforce Data and Forecasting Hub

INNOVATION:

Integrate ODDS (NCI), Medicaid, and labor data for real-time monitoring of DSP supply, demand, and turnover trends.

RATIONALE:

Oregon currently lacks an integrated, real-time system for understanding DSP workforce dynamics. By linking ODDS (including NCI data), Medicaid, and labor datasets, the state can potentially forecast shortages, monitor turnover, and guide rate-setting decisions. A transparent dashboard also supports accountability, public awareness, and data-driven planning to sustain a strong and stable DSP workforce statewide.

STRETCH IMPACT:

Enables proactive policy and informed rate-setting and recruitment planning decisions.

Conclusion

Oregon has made progress toward stabilizing its DSP workforce, but short-term gains must evolve into long-term structural reform. Sustained wage increases, equity-focused investments, and innovation in training and recognition will ensure Oregon leads the nation in valuing DSPs—creating a system where **people with disabilities and those who support them can both thrive.**

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Appendix: Statistical Terms

There are several statistical terms included in this report. Brief explanations of these terms are provided below.

Mean

The mean (sometimes called an average) is the sum of a set of data points divided by the number of data points. For example, to calculate the mean daily rainfall during a given month, we add up the rainfall from all of the days in that month and then divide by the number of days in the month.

Median

The median is the “middle” value between the upper and lower halves of a set of data. Unlike the mean, the median is less likely to be influenced by extreme values that differ dramatically from the rest of the data.

Correlation

Correlation measures the extent to which two variables are related. If the variables are positively correlated, when one variable increases the other one does too. If the variables are negatively correlated, when one variable increases the other one decreases.

Correlation coefficient

The correlation coefficient is a statistical measure of the strength of a linear relationship between two variables. It is expressed as R.

T-test

A t-test is a statistical test used to compare the means of two groups to determine if they are similar or different.

Test for trend

A test for trend is used to determine if a set of values is increasing or decreasing over time, or if the set of values has remained constant over time.

P-value

When conducting a statistical test, the p-value is the probability of obtaining test results at least as extreme as the results actually observed, purely by chance. A commonly used p-value cutoff is 0.05, meaning there is only a 5% probability that the observed association was due to random chance.

Significant

Statistical significance means that the observed relationship between variables is most likely caused by something other than chance. For this report, when the p-value for a statistical test is less than 0.05, we describe the result of the test as statistically significant. If the p-value is between 0.05 and 0.10, we note that there is a trend toward a significant association.

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