



People with Disabilities Deserve More in Illinois

The Issue

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities deserve the opportunity to lead full, meaningful lives. But they must have support for everything from eating, bathing and administering medication to job and life-skills training. That support comes from a statewide network of nonprofit provider agencies and their dedicated, trained workforce of **direct support professionals (DSPs)**.

For decades, the state has failed to adequately fund nonprofit provider agencies that serve people with disabilities. Due to vigorous advocacy by the They Deserve More Coalition, over the past four years the state, has increased reimbursements in small increments to help. And during the pandemic, the state provided temporary rate increases to mitigate the financial impact of the coronavirus. Still, more and more providers have been forced to shut down or curtail programs and turn people away who need and deserve support. The wait list for services is more than 18,000 in Illinois.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, these already-strained provider agencies have risen to the immense challenge of continuing to serve people with disabilities. DSPs have been risking their own health and family time daily to keep people with disabilities safe and healthy. Sadly, these frontline heroes continue to be among the low-income workers hit hardest by the pandemic's economic and societal fallout. **Nationally, 87% of DSPs are women and 60% are people of color, which is consistent with Illinois' provider agencies. So it's not just a matter of what's right for those with disabilities, it's also a matter of equity.**

The Solution

We now have a clear roadmap to solve the crisis facing people with disabilities in Illinois. In December 2020, the Illinois Department of Human Services released the results of a [two-year, independent study](#) commissioned to determine the level of state funding needed to stabilize our nonprofit provider system (see executive summary on pages 1-3).

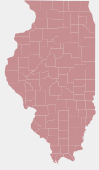
The study, conducted by Guidehouse Inc., identified a series of recommendations to adequately reimburse provider services, and to keep pace with upcoming minimum wage increases in Chicago and across the state.

Recommendation number one is to reimburse DSP wages at 150% of the minimum wage, which will help address the system's long-festering and damaging staffing crisis.

We understand that the Governor and General Assembly face a daunting task of closing a budget shortfall of billions of dollars, due in large part to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, the state meets other obligations – funding jails, skilled nurses and schools among others. **This year's budget must include enough funding to make meaningful progress toward implementing the Guidehouse recommendations.** Now more than ever, it is imperative that legislators ensure that our state's most vulnerable citizens are not left behind.

The Direct Support Professional (DSP) Crisis

Illinois is still behind



47th

Illinois' rank among states for spending commitment for people with disabilities based on The State of the States in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2017.

54.5%

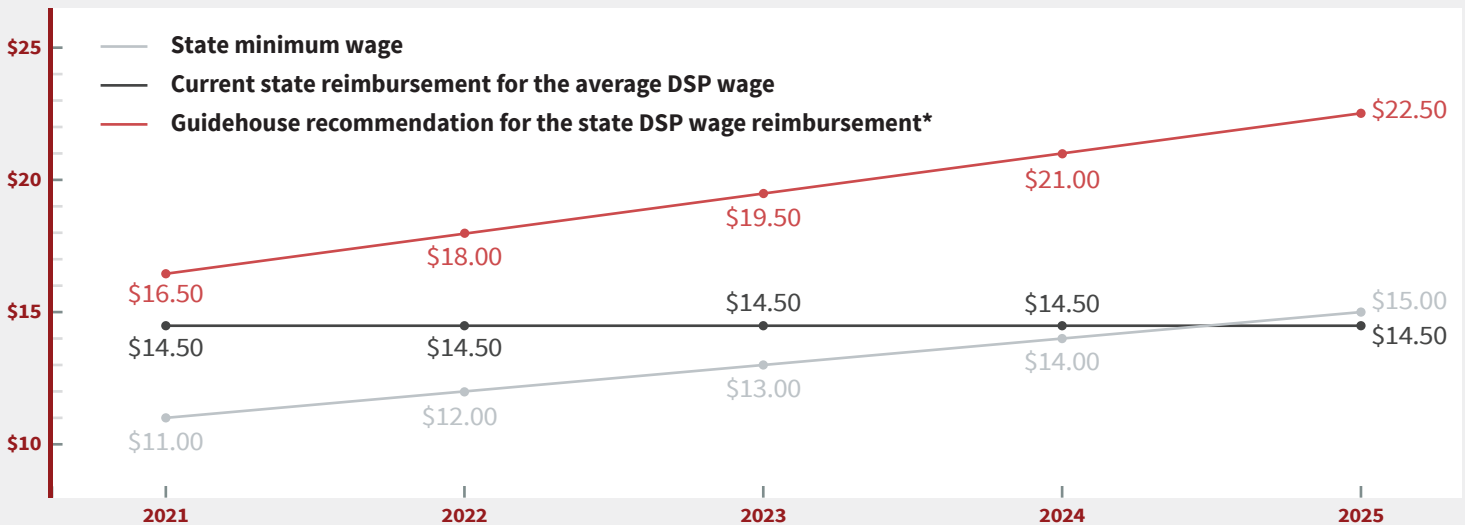
Turnover rate of direct support professionals in Illinois based on the National Core Indicators Staff Stability Survey Report, December 2019.

DSPs deserve a living wage

The below table is taken from the Guidehouse study and abbreviated to focus on the first two of seven priorities. **The effect of these two priorities would be to increase wages for direct support professionals in both residential and non-residential settings.**

FY22 Implementation Priorities	Additional FY22 Funding Needed	Projected FY22 Spend	Percentage Increase Over Baseline
Priority 1: Increase residential program components to benchmark statewide wage and fringe assumptions.	\$113,767,813	\$1,275,402,287	10%
Priority 2: Increase existing non-residential service rates to statewide benchmark.	\$31,330,662	\$1,306,732,949	12%
FY22 Full Implementation (Including All Priorities)	\$329,462,654	\$1,491,097,128	28%

Guidehouse recommends DSP state reimbursements at 150% of the minimum wage



*The study also recommends implementing separate service rates for the Chicago area, reflective of higher wages and cost of living requirements in the city of Chicago, Cook County and surrounding counties, including counties of Lake, McHenry, Kane, DuPage and Will.

They Deserve More, a coalition of nearly 90 agencies along with trade and advocacy organizations, was founded in 2017 to ensure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Illinois get the services they deserve. After nine years without a DSP wage increase, several small wage increases were secured, resulting in the current \$14.50 an hour reimbursement—which is 50 cents less than Chicago’s scheduled increase to a \$15 minimum wage this July. Additionally, the 2019 state budget provided the first cost-of-doing-business increase in 11 years for programs for people with disabilities.