Direct support workers provide an array of critical supports making it possible for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to live, work, and thrive in their communities. The pandemic has affected this work in many ways. This survey, completed by 535 respondents, comprising direct support professionals (DSPs) and frontline supervisors (FLSs) from Iowa, gathered information about the experiences of DSPs related to the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine availability. Vaccinations are a key way to prevent COVID-19 from spreading and prevent severe infections and hospitalizations. It was completed between June 1-July 23, 2021. The results are intended to inform efforts to support public health and prepare for future waves of the pandemic.

**VACCINATION STATUS**

Respondents reported whether they were vaccinated against COVID-19.

- yes, fully: 71%
- yes, partially: 4%
- not yet, but scheduled: 2%
- no: 23%

**COVID-19 DIAGNOSIS**

Respondents reported whether they were diagnosed with COVID-19.

- 11% I was not diagnosed but suspect I had it
- 26% yes
- 63% no

**REASONS FOR VACCINATION HESITANCY**

If respondents were not vaccinated, they were asked to report any reasons that affected their decision (indicated by the darker bar). They also reported on any reasons that their coworkers are hesitant to get vaccinated (indicated by the lighter bar).

- not eligible: 0% DSP/FLS 0% Co-worker
- cost: 0% DSP/FLS <1% Co-worker
- difficulty accessing at place/time offered: 1% DSP/FLS 2% Co-worker
- do not feel it is safe: 52% DSP/FLS 53% Co-worker
- do not believe in the worth of COVID-19 vaccine: 25% DSP/FLS 32% Co-worker
- do not feel they need it: 30% DSP/FLS 32% Co-worker
- other: 25% DSP/FLS 4% Co-worker
REQUIREMENTS AND INCENTIVES

Employers of respondents utilized a number of strategies to ensure that workers were not contracting or spreading COVID-19. Respondents reported whether their employer required vaccinations and provided a financial incentive or paid time off for them to get their vaccine.

3% of employers required a vaccination to continue working
97% did not require a vaccination

32% of employers offered a financial incentive for vaccination
68% did not offer a financial incentive

21% of employers offered paid time off (PTO)
79% did not offer PTO

WAGES

Respondents reported on their wages before the pandemic and whether they received extra pay for pandemic-related risks. Many received extra pay, although states and businesses had varying levels of access to additional dollars to compensate essential workers.

$13.82 mean hourly wage for workers before pandemic*

$14.11 current hourly wage for workers

*This is higher than the national median wage of $12/hour due to respondents including DSPs and FLs and having worked in their positions for more than 3 years.

26% received COVID-19 augmentation or bonus pay
74% didn’t receive COVID-19 augmentation or bonus pay

Of those receiving extra pay:

46% a lump sum bonus
10% $0.01-$1.00 per hour
18% $1.01-$2.00 per hour
22% $2.01-$3.00 per hour
4% more than $3.01 per hour

SCHEDULES AND STAFFING

Respondents were asked to report on how the pandemic affected the number of hours they worked, where and when they worked, and how their role may have shifted.

29% work more hours per week
5% work fewer hours per week
26% work different shirts
23% work in different settings
18% providing supports to different people
43% additional responsibilities/different roles
1% furloughed/laid off/unemployed/facility closed
11% working remotely/telehealth
**REASONS FOR LEAVING POSITION**

The pandemic affected many aspects of peoples’ lives and their ability to work. Respondents reported on reasons that they or their co-workers were no longer working in direct support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>testing positive for COVID-19</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quarantine due to COVID-19 exposure</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fear of becoming infected</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>childcare issues (e.g. daycare closed)</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fear of infecting others</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family reasons (e.g., caring for someone with health issues, homeschooling children)</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESULTS OF PANDEMIC ON DIRECT SUPPORT WORKERS**

Respondents reported whether they have experienced any mental or physical health concerns as a result of the pandemic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Concern</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>depression</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anxiety</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suicidal ideation</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sleep difficulties</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>physical and/or emotional burnout</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>physical health complications</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WORK LIFE BALANCE**

Respondents were asked to gauge the quality of their work life compared to the beginning of the pandemic.

- 5% much worse
- 25% worse
- 20% better
- 42% the same
- 8% much better

**PEOPLE SUPPORTED VISITING FAMILY & FRIENDS IN-PERSON**

Respondents reported how frequently people they support visit family or friends in person.

- 66% often
- 25% sometimes
- 25% seldom
- 7% never
ISOLATION DURING THE PANDEMIC

Many people experienced social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents were asked about the consequences of increased isolation on the people they supported.

- difficulty addressing dietary issues: 10%
- difficulty addressing pain management: 7%
- other health issues: 12%
- decreased exercise: 56%
- miss going out into the community: 74%
- increased behavior issues: 52%
- increase mood swings and/or depression: 53%
- more anxiety: 55%
- boredom: 70%
- loneliness: 46%
- academic concerns: 6%

DEMOGRAPHICS, ROLE, AND SETTING

Respondents self-reported demographic information and the primary setting where they worked.

- American Indian/Native American: 1%
- Asian: 1%
- Black/African American: 4%
- White: 91%
- Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin: 4%
- Another race: 1%
- Two or more races: 2%

- 86% women* (including transgender women)
- Average age: 42 years

- 30% family/individual homes
- 61% agency/facility sites
- 7% community employment

|43% reported working in more than one setting|

Please contact Jerry Smith with questions at smith495@umn.edu. View the full report at z.umn.edu/dsp-covid19.

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