Providing Support During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Direct Support Workforce 24-month follow-up survey | Iowa version

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 239 respondents, comprising of direct support professionals (DSPs) and frontline supervisors (FLSs) from 44 states and the District of Columbia, gathered information about the experiences of DSPs related to the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents’ health and well-being, vaccination experiences, and the use of technology. It was completed between June 1-July 22, 2022. The results are intended to inform efforts to support public health and prepare for future waves of this and other pandemics.

VACCINATION STATUS
Respondents reported whether they were vaccinated against COVID-19.

- 82% vaccinated
- 58% boosted
- 18% not vaccinated
- 42% not boosted

COVID-19 DIAGNOSIS
Respondents reported whether they were diagnosed with COVID-19.

- 9% I was not diagnosed but suspect I had it
- 50% yes
- 42% no

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

- 36% of employers required a vaccination to continue working
- 60% did not offer a financial incentive
- 81% of employers offered paid time off (PTO)
- 64% did not require a vaccination
- 40% of employers offered a financial incentive for vaccination
- 19% did not offer PTO

WAGES
DSPs reported on their wages before the pandemic and their current wages. Note that these wages are only DSP wages and Frontline supervisors are not included.

- Mean hourly wage for DSPs before pandemic*: $14.39
- Current hourly wage for DSPs: $15.40

*This is higher than the national median wage of $13.36/hour (NCI, 2022).
EXTRA PANDEMIC PAY

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

Of those receiving extra pay:

- 34% received COVID-19 augmentation or bonus pay
- 23% received extra pay for less than $1.00 per hour
- 18% received extra pay for $1.01-$2.00 per hour
- 15% received extra pay for $2.01-$3.00 per hour
- 10% received extra pay for more than $3.01 per hour
- 10% received a lump sum bonus
- 5% received extra pay of more than $3.01 per hour

58% of those receiving extra pay: received COVID-19 augmentation or bonus pay
42% of those receiving extra pay: didn’t receive COVID-19 augmentation or bonus pay

SCHEDULES

Respondents were asked to report on how the pandemic affected the number of hours they worked.

- 18% no additional hours weekly
- 49% 1-15 additional hours weekly
- 22% 16-30 additional hours weekly
- 6% 31-40 additional hours weekly
- 5% 40+ additional hours weekly

PRESSURE TO WORK

Respondents were asked if they felt pressure to work extra days and/or hours.

- 75% yes, pressure to pick up days/hours
- 25% no pressure to pick up days/hours

IMPACT OF ISOLATION ON PEOPLE SUPPORTED

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: 13%
- difficulty addressing pain management: 8%
- other health issues: 15%
- decreased exercise: 56%
- miss going out into the community: 71%
- increased behavior issues: 53%
- increase mood swings and/or depression: 62%
- more anxiety: 62%
- boredom: 73%
- loneliness: 55%
- academic concerns: 5%
RESULTS OF PANDEMIC ON RESPONDENTS

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

- Depression: 52%
- Anxiety: 65%
- Suicidal ideation: 6%
- PTSD: 8%
- Other mental health issue: 12%
- Sleep difficulty: 50%
- Burnout: 63%
- Health complications: 22%
- Loss of loved one: 26%
- Other: 2%

WORK LIFE BALANCE

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

- Much worse: 12%
- Much better: 4%
- Better: 35%
- The same: 38%

QUALIFICATION OF NEW STAFF

Respondents were asked if they thought that new staff (hired within the past 6 months) were qualified to do the work that they were hired for.

- New staff all qualified for work: 33%
- New staff some qualified some not for work: 55%
- New staff not qualified for work: 12%

CHANGE IN USAGE OF TECHNOLOGY: PEOPLE SUPPORTED

Respondents were asked a number of questions about technology, such as video conferencing or remote supports, and the change in usage of technology since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on their work. Specifically, respondents were asked how usage of technology has changed for the people they support.

since the beginning of COVID:

- People use tech lot less: 3%
- People use tech some less: 2%
- People use tech the same: 47%
- People use tech some more: 31%
- People use tech lot more: 18%
CHANGE IN USAGE OF TECHNOLOGY: RESPONDENT

Respondents were asked if their usage of technology has changed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

since the beginning of COVID:

- 24% DSPs use tech lot more
- 2% DSPs use tech lot less
- 44% DSPs use tech the same
- 28% DSPs use tech some more
- 1% DSPs use tech some less

IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON WORK

Respondents reported the impact that the use of technology has had on their work.

COVID impact on DSP tech use:

- 7% very positive
- 35% somewhat positive
- 33% none
- 22% somewhat negative
- 2% very negative

DEMOGRAPHICS, ROLE, AND SETTING

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

American Indian/Native American: 2%
Asian: 1%
Black/African American: 1%
White: 93%
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin: 3%
Another race: <1%
Two or more races: 3%

90% women (including transgender women)
average age 46 years

2% other

64% agency/facility sites

26% family/individual homes

9% community employment

37% reported working in more than one setting


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