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 377 respondents, comprising direct support professionals (DSPs) and frontline supervisors (FLSs) from Michigan, gathered information about the experiences of workers 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**: 61%
- **yes, partially**: 2%
- **not yet, but scheduled**: 2%
- **no**: 35%

### COVID-19 DIAGNOSIS

Respondents reported whether they were diagnosed with COVID-19.

- **yes**: 19%
- **I was not diagnosed but suspect I had it**: 11%
- **no**: 70%

### 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%
- **cost**: 0%
- **difficulty accessing at place/time offered**: 2%
- **do not feel it is safe**: 54%
- **do not believe in the worth of COVID-19 vaccine**: 15%
- **do not feel they need it**: 16%
- **other**: 29%
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

30% of employers offered a financial incentive for vaccination
70% did not offer a financial incentive

12% of employers offered paid time off (PTO)
88% 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.

$13.07 mean hourly wage for workers before pandemic*
$13.97 current hourly wage for workers

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

86% received COVID-19 augmentation or bonus pay
14% didn’t receive COVID-19 augmentation or bonus pay

Of those receiving extra pay:
1% a lump sum bonus
4% more than $3.01 per hour
48% $2.01-$3.00 per hour
46% $1.01-$2.00 per hour
1% $0.01-$1.00 per hour

1% didn’t receive COVID-19 augmentation or bonus pay

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.

work more hours per week 41%
work fewer hours per week 6%
work different shirts 35%
work in different settings 20%
providing supports to different people 19%
additional responsibilities/different roles 45%
furloughed/laid off/unemployed/facility closed 2%
working remotely/telehealth 3%
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.

- testing positive for COVID-19: 16%
- quarantine due to COVID-19 exposure: 14%
- fear of becoming infected: 25%
- childcare issues (e.g. daycare closed): 22%
- fear of infecting others: 10%
- family reasons (e.g. caring for someone with health issues, homeschooling children): 23%

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.

- depression: 38%
- anxiety: 47%
- suicidal ideation: 4%
- sleep difficulties: 38%
- physical and/or emotional burnout: 55%
- physical health complications: 20%
- other: 4%

WORK LIFE BALANCE

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

- much worse: 12%
- worse: 33%
- better: 14%
- much better: 5%
- the same: 36%

PEOPLE SUPPORTED VISITING FAMILY & FRIENDS IN-PERSON

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

- never: 4%
- seldom: 11%
- sometimes: 37%
- often: 48%
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: 13%
- difficulty addressing pain management: 5%
- other health issues: 9%
- decreased exercise: 52%
- miss going out into the community: 76%
- increased behavior issues: 51%
- increase mood swings and/or depression: 49%
- more anxiety: 47%
- boredom: 68%
- loneliness: 42%
- academic concerns: 8%

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: 13%
- White: 80%
- Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin: 3%
- Another race: 1%
- Two or more races: 4%
- Other: 1%

86% women* (including transgender women) average age 45 years

- 26% family/individual homes
- 67% agency/facility sites
- 6% community employment

[39% 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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