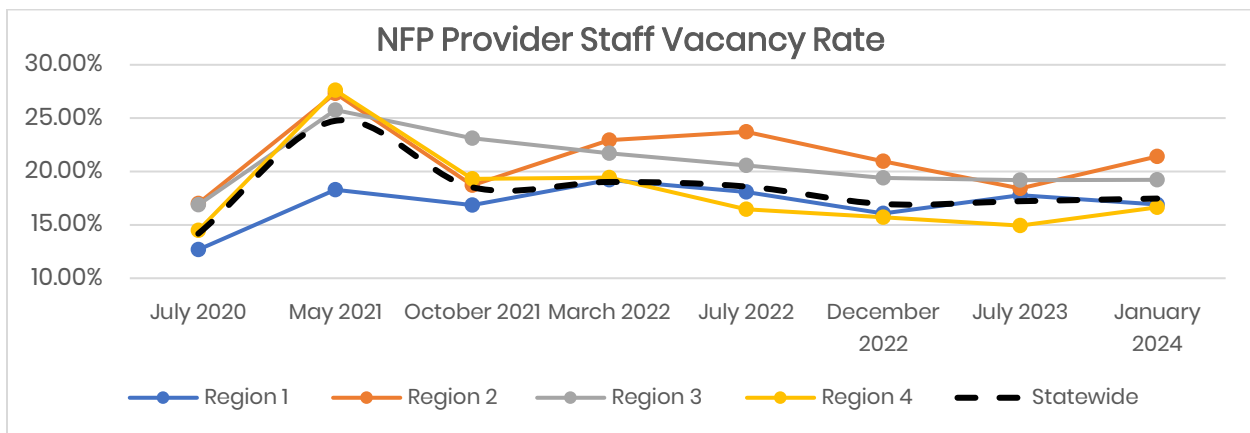


**Testimony on behalf of New York Disability Advocates (NYDA), a coalition representing seven statewide provider associations that offer vital support and services to over 85% of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) in New York**

Currently, non-profit provider agencies are grappling with a 17.5% vacancy rate and an annual turnover rate of 34% statewide among Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). These dedicated professionals serve as the backbone of the service delivery system, and the alarming vacancy rate translates to over 20,000 unfilled DSP positions across the state.

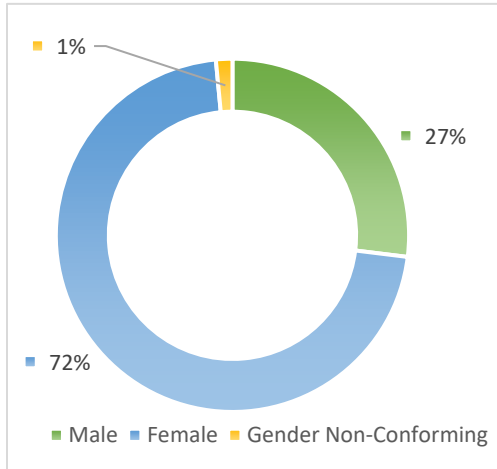


The implications of this high turnover and vacancy rate have precipitated a system-wide crisis, given the instrumental role DSPs play as the frontline workforce responsible for the direct care and support of New Yorkers with I/DD. From aiding with daily living activities to advocating for the rights and choices of individuals with I/DD, DSPs bear a multifaceted responsibility.

One common misconception is that the role of a DSP is similar to home health aides, and that DSPs have benefited from the State's enactment of the Home Care Minimum Wage. This is simply not true; the Home Care Minimum Wage does not apply to DSPs. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand the distinct role of DSPs, which involves services such as skill development, personalized care planning, behavioral support, advocacy, community inclusion, health and safety monitoring, and detailed documentation and reporting.

The significance of DSPs cannot be overstated, given their entrusted tasks that directly impact the quality of life for individuals with I/DD, promote community integration, ensure regulatory compliance, offer relief to families through respite care, and contribute to the economic fabric of various communities.

However, the current workforce crisis in the field can be traced back to a lack of investment in the I/DD service delivery system over the past 15 years. Insufficient funding and cuts have led to stagnant provider rates, preventing non-profit I/DD agencies from offering competitive wages necessary to attract and retain skilled direct care staff.



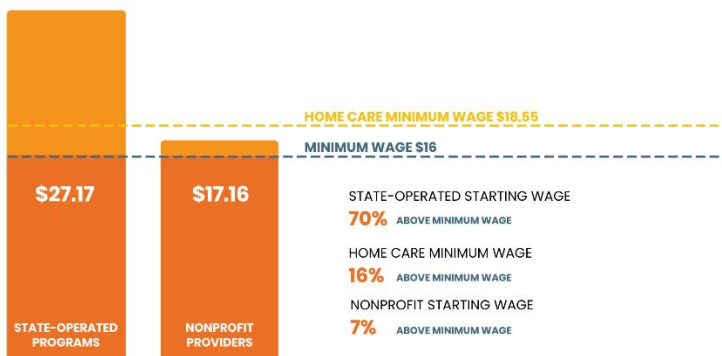
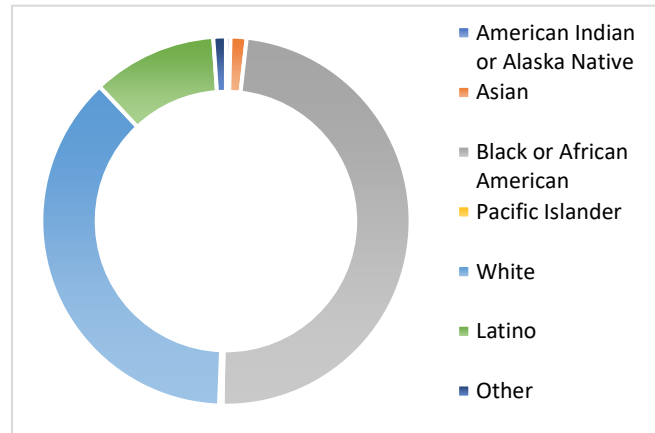
It is also crucial to understand that in New York, there are approximately 110,000 DSPs employed by non-profit provider agencies, the State of New York, and individuals themselves to provide support across various settings, including group homes, day programs, and community-based environments.

The diversity of the DSP workforce, comprising 74.2% women and 62.6% of DSPs identifying as Black, African American, Asian, or Latino, highlights the multicultural composition of the DSP workforce. This diversity enriches the field and emphasizes the importance of creating an inclusive and culturally sensitive environment for individuals with I/DD.

In 2023, NYDA commissioned a groundbreaking workforce study with Miami University, surveying nearly 4,500 DSPs across New York on a range of quality-of-life issues such as food and housing security, well-being, burnout, and turnover.

The study found that low pay is causing nearly half of DSPs to experience food insecurity and unstable housing conditions while providing critical life support for people with disabilities.

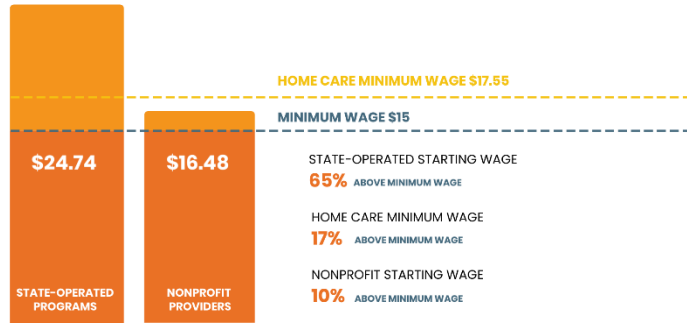
The study also revealed a "Satisfaction Gap" among DSPs, with 85% of those surveyed reporting satisfaction with their work, but only one in four satisfied with their pay. This "Satisfaction Gap" drives turnover among current DSPs and deters those looking to enter the field. Pay is critical to addressing the systemic issues facing this field, as evidenced by the nearly universal sentiment from the 4,500 respondents that pay is too low for workers to maintain even a minimally decent standard of living. Nearly one in three DSPs surveyed reported they often struggle to meet their household's financial demands.



NYC

As of January 2024, the average starting wage for DSPs employed by non-profit providers is \$17.16 per hour downstate and \$16.48 per hour in the rest of the state. This starkly contrasts with the starting wages for DSPs employed by the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), which are approximately \$24.74 per hour outside of New York City and \$27.17 per hour in New York City.

This wage gap highlights inequities within compensation systems, prompting our call for the inclusion of a Direct Support Wage Enhancement (DSWE) as part of the SFY 2024-25 New York State budget. The DSWE proposes an annual funding allocation of \$4,000 per eligible employee for non-profit provider agencies, resulting in an approximate increase of \$2.00 per hour for full-time DSPs.



This initiative aims to raise starting wages to approximately \$19.06 per hour downstate and \$18.40 per hour for the rest of the state, which, while an improvement, still remains lower than OPWDD wages by 35% and 29%, respectively.

Furthermore, while acknowledging recent efforts by the Legislature to increase Medicaid rates tied to the CPI-U through the Human Services Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA), this increase has only allowed providers to maintain the status quo. The COLA increase functions as a Medicaid rate increase for provider agencies, supporting mandated fringe benefits, repairs and maintenance, utilities, food, supplies, transportation, and insurance.

However, the Governor's proposed 1.5% COLA falls short of providing the necessary resources to keep pace with inflation, especially considering the COLA in SFY 2024 that was more than 50% lower than actual inflation. Therefore, we also ask that the Legislature increase the proposed 1.5% COLA to 3.2%. This financial support is vital to cover expenses related to food, supplies, transportation, repairs, maintenance, employee benefits, and insurance over the coming year.

**Thank you for your attention to these critical issues affecting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the dedicated professionals who support them.**