



Rhode Island Statewide Workforce Initiative

SupportWise Workforce Data Summary for Reporting Period July 1, 2024 – Dec. 31, 2024,
Easy Read Report

This report is about the provider agency staff paid to support people with disabilities in Rhode Island. It shares information about direct support professionals (DSPs) and frontline supervisors (FLSs). It is meant to show if the statewide work in Rhode Island is making a difference. It shares information for employers, families, self-advocates, direct support workers, policymakers and advocacy groups.

About the Employers

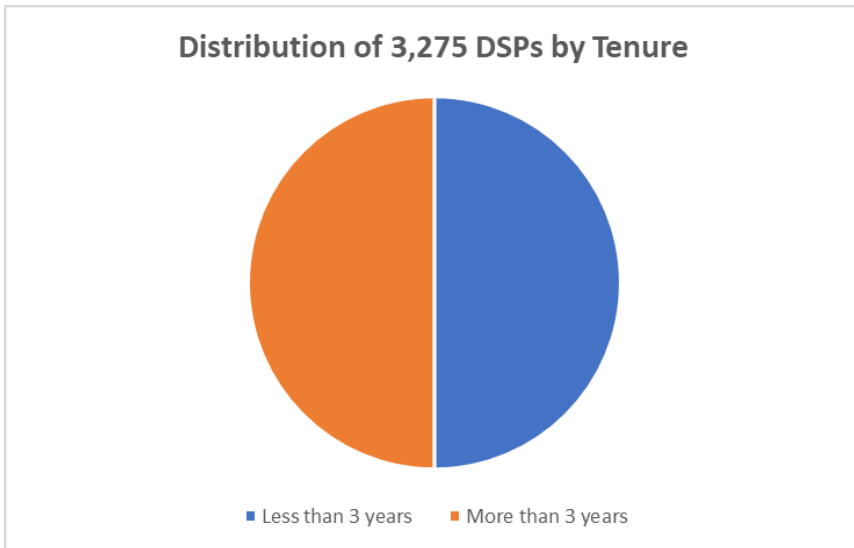
The information in this report is from 33 employers in Rhode Island. All of them serve people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs). Most provide support where people live. Sometimes, support was given in group homes (70%). Group homes are run by agencies, and staff work there to help people. At other times, support was given in people's own homes (61%). These are homes that people or their families own or rent. Nearly all organizations (97%) provided support in places other than where people lived, like where they worked and spent their free time.

About the People

The agencies reported 2,703 people were receiving services on Dec. 31, 2024, which is 36 more than reported on July 1.

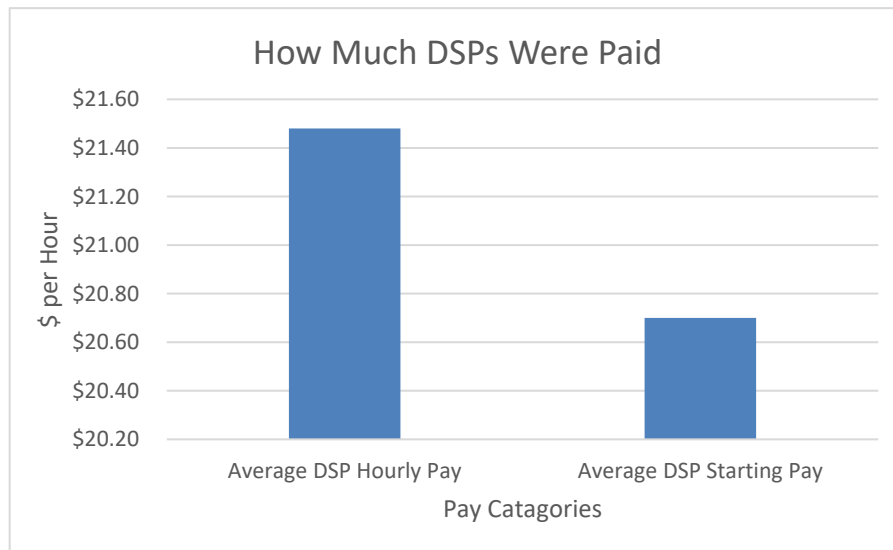
About the DSPs

On Dec. 31, 2024, 3,275 DSPs were working for these employers. Most were female (63%), and most were either White (43%), Black/African American (37%), or Latino/Hispanic (10%). These DSPs were mostly between the ages of 21 and 40 (48%) or 41 and 60 (35%). Half of the DSPs who worked for these employers had been there for less than three years. Half of them had been a DSP for more than three years.



How Much Were DSPs Being Paid?

Between July 1, 2024, and Dec. 31, 2024, the average wage for all DSPs was \$21.48/hour. New DSPs were paid \$20.70/hour on average. New DSPs earned almost as much as DSPs who had worked for a while. At 64% of agencies, DSPs, could earn extra pay, called bonuses. Almost all employers offered DSPs paid time off. This could be vacation or sick time. Almost all (91%) of employers offered DSPs health insurance. The agencies varied in deciding who could get benefits and who could not, based on things like how many hours they work and how many years they have been working. Sometimes, full-time staff received better access to benefits than those who worked part time.



Front Line Supervisors

On Dec. 31, 2024, the 33 agencies employed 319 frontline supervisors (supervisors). Supervisors guide and direct DSPs and provide direct support. Just over half (53%) of agencies paid supervisors hourly, 31% paid them a set amount each year, and 16% paid some hourly and some annually. Fifty percent of organizations paid FLSs overtime. Of the total amount of those eligible, 55% of FLSs received overtime. DSPs and supervisors are from similar racial and ethnic groups, but more DSPs are Black or African American. More supervisors are White. More supervisors are Black or African American compared to the overall state population.

Helping DSPs Stay: Better Pay and Job Growth

Paying direct support professionals more money helps keep them in their jobs, but it's not the only way. Some workplaces lose a lot of staff, while others don't lose anyone. On average, about 17% of DSPs left their jobs during this report period, which shows that the way agencies are run is important, too.

The pay raises have helped, but they've caused a new problem. New DSPs and experienced ones are paid almost the same pay, with just a 78-cent difference. This might feel unfair and can make experienced workers quit. Agencies need help to understand these problems and find solutions.

One solution is to pay DSPs more when they finish training, earn certificates or get promoted. Right now, less than half of agencies have programs to help DSPs grow. About two-thirds help DSPs earn certificates, but fewer than half give extra pay when certificates are finished. There is no statewide program to connect certificates to higher pay, but this could really help.

The report had both good news and challenging news

Good News

- There were 35 more DSPs on payroll on Dec. 31, 2024, than on July 1.
- More jobs are filled. The vacancy rate went down from 17% in 2022 to 10.7% at the end of 2024.
- Pay is higher. Starting wages for DSPs went up by 10%, from \$18.87 per hour in 2022 to \$20.70 per hour at the end of 2024.
- Average pay for DSPs is higher too. Wages increased by 13%, from \$18.94 per hour in 2022 to \$21.48 per hour at the end of 2024.
- More people are getting support. The number of agencies turning people away dropped from 63% in 2022 to 30% at the end of 2024.

Challenging News

- Lots of people leave their jobs soon after they start. Of the reported DSPs who left their jobs, 51% quit in the first year, and 35% left in just six months.
- Many DSPs are getting older. About 13% are close to retirement age.
- Open jobs are fewer, but overtime is a problem. DSPs working overtime or supervisors filling openings. So, there are fewer empty jobs now, but overtime costs are high. 12% of payroll was overtime during this period.
- Not enough staff. Some agencies cannot take new referrals because they don't have enough workers.
- DSPs are more diverse than most of Rhode Island and more diverse than supervisors. DSPs come from different backgrounds, so supervisors need training to understand and support them better.
- Supervisors work extra. Supervisors are working overtime to help with staffing, but this gives them less time to train workers.
- This data is only from agencies. It does not include those self-directing their services. It also only includes those DSPs and supervisors who support adults, not children.

What are we doing about this?

Rhode Island is working hard to make jobs for DSPs better and to help keep workers. Since 2021, groups like the University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration (UMN ICI) and Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities / Rhode Island College have helped agencies find ways to fix problems like too many people quitting. Eleven agencies are getting extra help, and by 2025, we'll see if this has improved job vacancies and turnover.

Split into three groups, 147 supervisors from 26 organizations took part in the Foundational Skills in Supervision training. This training was a team effort by the Community Provider Network of Rhode Island (CPNRI), UMN ICI and the Department of Labor and Training (DLT). Another group of 65 supervisors is completing the training. Of those who completed the training, 69% said the training makes them want to stay in their jobs and 74% said the training will help them do their job better. Some are continuing advanced training to learn even more about supporting DSPs.

The Rhode Island Statewide Workforce Initiative Coordinating Council, in partnership with the Department of Behavioral Healthcare Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH), UMN ICI, Sherlock Center, CPNRI and its groups, are working on developing better tools, plans and policies for supporting DSPs. The Sherlock Center leads the Coordinating Council. The five groups working on different topics are:

- Data & Reporting – Keeping track of job numbers and workers.
- Policy Guidance & Worker Voice – Listening to DSPs and making fair rules.
- Marketing & Recruitment – Finding new ways to bring in workers.
- Selection & Retention – Making jobs better so people stay longer.
- Training & Professional Development – Helping workers learn and grow.

Conclusion

Rhode Island has made good progress in building a stronger direct support workforce. This success is thanks to a statewide plan, dedicated staff and strong teamwork. In the last six months: Slightly more staff have left their jobs, but fewer than in 2022. Fewer jobs are unfilled than before. Pay has gone up for new and current staff. Fewer agencies are saying “no” to new people because of staffing problems. More people are working as direct support professionals (DSPs). More DSPs have health insurance. These are all signs of improvement, but the work isn’t done. The goal is to keep making things better to ensure better services for people with disabilities.

