

Rhode Island Statewide Workforce Initiative

SupportWise Workforce Data Summary for Reporting Period January 1, 2024 – June 30, 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 DSPs

On June 30, 2024, 3,210 DSPs were working for these employers. Most were female (64%), and most were either White (41%), Black/African American (34%), or Latino/Hispanic (10%). These DSPs were usually between the ages of twenty-one and forty (47%) or forty-one and sixty (35%). Employers do not know the race or ethnicity of many DSPs. A little more than half of DSPs who worked for these employers had been there for less than three years. Slightly less than half had been a DSP for more than three years.

How Much Were DSPs Being Paid?

On June 30, 2024, the average wage for all DSPs was \$21.12/hour. New DSPs were paid \$20.69/hour on average. New DSPs earned almost as much as DSPs who had worked for a while. In 70% of organizations, DSPs could earn extra pay, called bonuses, when they did great work. 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 June 30, 2024, the 33 organizations employed 298 frontline supervisors (FLSs). FLSs guide and direct DSPs and provide direct support. Just over half (55%) of organizations paid FLSs hourly, 29% paid them a set amount each year, and 16% paid some hourly and some annually. Some FLSs got extra pay when they worked overtime hours (47%). DSPs and FLSs are from similar racial and ethnic groups but more DSPs are Black or African American. More FLSs are White. More FLSs are Black or African American compared to the overall state population.

Helping DSPs Stay: Better Pay and Job Growth

Paying Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) more money helps, but it's not the only way to keep them in their jobs. Some workplaces lose a lot of staff, while others don't lose anyone. On average, about 15% of DSPs leave their jobs, which shows that the way workplaces are managed 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, with just a 43-cent difference. This feels unfair and can make experienced workers quit. Organizations 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 organizations 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

- Fewer people are quitting. The turnover rate went down from 21% in 2022 to 15% in 2024.
- More jobs are filled. The vacancy rate went down from 17% in 2022 to 12% in 2024.
- Pay is higher. Starting wages for DSPs went up by 10%, from \$18.87 per hour in 2022 to \$20.69 per hour in 2024.

- Average pay is higher, too. Wages increased by 11%, from \$18.94 per hour in 2022 to \$21.12 per hour in 2024.
- More people are getting support. The number of organizations turning people away dropped from 63% in 2022 to 33% in 2024.

Challenging News

- Lots of people leave their jobs soon after they start. Over 60% of DSPs quit in the first year, and 42% leave in just six months.
- Many are getting older. About 15% of DSPs are close to retiring.
- Open jobs are fewer, but overtime is a problem. DSPs working overtime or FLSs are filling openings. So, there are fewer empty jobs now, but overtime costs are high.
- Not enough staff. Some organizations cannot take new referrals because they don't have enough workers.
- DSPs are more diverse than most of Rhode Island and more diverse than FLSs. 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.

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 organizations find ways to fix problems like too many people quitting. Eleven organizations are getting extra help, and by 2024, we'll see if this has improved job vacancies and turnover.

Two groups, including 22 provider organizations, have finished 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). Almost 100 supervisors finished training to do their jobs better and to support DSPs. Most said the training makes them want to stay in their jobs and work harder. Some are continuing advanced training to learn even more about helping 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 and 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.

These plans will keep going into 2025 to make DSP jobs better in Rhode Island.