

2022 REPORT

# Stability of the Direct Support Professional Workforce Providing Residential Supports to Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Oregon in 2020



## Executive Summary

High turnover rates among Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) that provide care to Oregon adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) impact the quality of care and contribute to high service costs. This report uses data from the 2018 – 2020 National Core Indicators Staff Stability Surveys to examine trends in wages and turnover among DSPs employed by Oregon agencies that provide 24-hour residential services to adults with I/DD living in group homes, and to assess factors that are associated with higher turnover rates.

In 2020, 155 out of 159 I/DD residential service provider agencies in Oregon participated in the NCI Staff Stability Survey. These agencies employed a total of 8,732 DSPs, who were primarily full-time employees. Starting pay for DSPs providing residential care ranged from \$11.00 to \$20.00 per hour (median = \$13.82) and average wages ranged from \$11.32 to \$21.21 per hours (median = \$15.00). Wages for DSPs were considerably lower than those for the Oregon workforce as a whole, and the median DSP wage was not sufficient to be considered a living wage for one adult in Oregon in 2020. In addition, DSPs often do not receive adequate or affordable workplace benefits.

The majority of DSPs depart their agencies for voluntary reasons. Agency turnover rates in 2020 ranged from 0 to 285% (median = 48%), similar to turnover rates in 2018 and 2019. The highest turnover was among those with a job tenure of less than 6 months. Turnover decreased as staff tenure increased. High turnover increases the likelihood of positions remaining unfilled for some period of time, resulting in potential gaps in care. As of December 31, 2020, 11.3% of DSP positions were vacant statewide. **We found that agencies with higher average hourly pay rates had significantly lower rates of staff turnover.** Agencies that provided a DSP career ladder and financial assistance with higher education also had significantly lower rates of staff turnover.

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated an already challenging situation. A constellation of pandemic-related changes in operations and health and safety protocols were implemented on an agency-by-agency basis in Oregon. Compared to 2018, turnover rates in 2020 increased among DSPs who had been working for more than 12 months, suggesting that turnover rates among longer term workers may have been impacted during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. To examine gaps and strengths in emergency response and gain a better understanding of how DSPs have experienced and been impacted by the pandemic, Oregon opted to include a Covid-19 survey supplement with the 2020 Staff Stability Survey. While most operations changes were not associated with turnover rates, **agencies that universally increased wages during 2020 saw significantly lower rates of staff turnover.**

**Based on the findings of our analyses, we conclude that increasing wages is an important tool for reducing DSP turnover.** Additionally, we recommend the following strategies to help further reduce turnover:

- Provide key benefits and career growth opportunities for DSPs
- Build on ongoing efforts to recognize the value of DSPs and the importance of their work
- Ensure pay equity within the DSP workforce and with other types of skilled labor in the state

In addition to the above strategies for immediate action, we offer the following recommendations for enhancing future data availability and analyses to provide more detailed and ongoing information:

- Continue periodic reviews of DSP turnover and pay to evaluate changes in turnover following pay increases and other relevant policy changes
- Pilot test collection of data on average wages by tenure category, which would provide insights on use of stepped pay scales to promote retention of experienced and skilled staff
- Consider a study of the association between staff turnover and abuse of residents with I/DD to further illuminate the human cost of high turnover in the DSP workforce
- Consider incorporating data on agency-specific dollar costs of turnover (e.g., costs of recruiting and training new staff)
- Expand reporting to include DSPs supporting children, as well as adults living outside of group homes

## Introduction

Many adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) rely on Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) to provide quality support on a daily basis. The support of DSPs is crucial for helping adults with I/DD live in community settings, maintain their health and well-being, have successful work and social lives, and develop and maintain independent living skills. Successfully providing these supports requires that DSPs to be interdisciplinary professionals and bring a wide range of skills and knowledge to their job.<sup>1</sup> However, DSP positions are challenging and often come with low pay, limited benefits, and little social status or recognition of the importance of the DSP role.<sup>2</sup> High turnover is common, costly, and dangerous.

High turnover impacts the continuity and quality of care available to adults with I/DD, increases burdens on remaining staff, and contributes to long wait-lists for services.<sup>2</sup> These issues may amplify risk for medication errors, injuries, and abuse and neglect of adults with I/DD.<sup>3</sup> High turnover also has substantial budget implications for agencies that must continually recruit and train new staff. Estimates of the cost of replacing a single DSP range from \$2,413 to \$5,200.<sup>2</sup> With large numbers of DSP positions needing to be refilled the cumulative cost is massive, reaching an estimated \$2,338,716,600 per year nationally.<sup>2</sup> As such, DSP turnover is a centrally important issue to understand and address.

This is the second report on Oregon DSP staffing stability. Since the first report, which used data from 2018, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated an already challenging situation and highlighted the important role that DSPs play in our society. In addition to making staffing more difficult, the pandemic has increased the stress, expectations, and risk for both DSPs and the adults they work with.<sup>4</sup> Adults with I/DD are more likely to contract COVID-19 and have higher rates of COVID-19 related mortality.<sup>5</sup> DSPs are often their primary supports. The purpose of this updated report is to examine DSP turnover in Oregon during the first year of the pandemic, analyze factors associated with high versus low turnover (including those related to the COVID-19 pandemic), and propose strategies to reduce turnover.



## Data Source

This report primarily uses data from the 2020 National Core Indicators Staff Stability Survey. While the data in this report reflect the time period of January to December 2020, data collection occurred from January to September 2021. National Core Indicators (NCI) is a collaboration between the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services, the Human Services Research Institute and participating state developmental disability agencies. The NCI Staff Stability Survey collects data on DSP workforce that provides direct support to adults with I/DD. Survey results provide participating states with important data on workforce challenges, benchmarks to assess their own state's performance compared to other participating states, and a means of assessing changes following policy or programmatic initiatives that affect the DSP workforce.<sup>6</sup> For the 2020 data year, 26 states plus the District of Columbia participated in the NCI Staff Stability Survey. This report focuses specifically on data from Oregon agencies that provide 24-hour residential services to adults with I/DD living in group homes. Data from the 2018 and 2019 National Core Indicators Staff Stability Survey are included in this report for trend analysis. Explanations of the statistical terms used throughout this report can be found in the Appendix.

## DSP Workforce Description

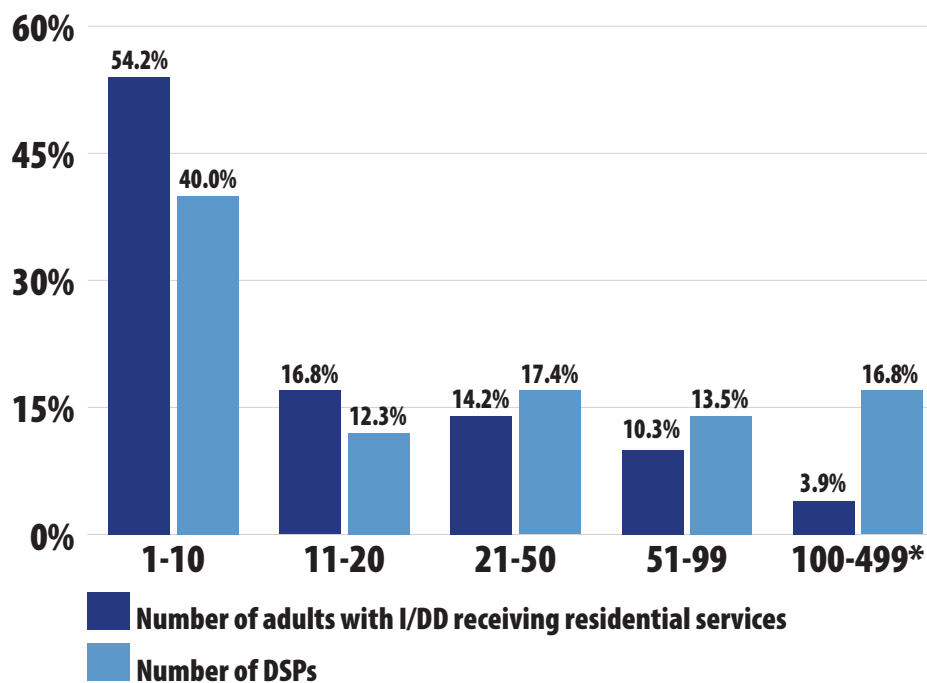
### DSP Roles and Tasks

On average, Oregon group homes have 3-4 residents. DSPs in group homes provide 24-hour wrap-around care to these residents. DSP tasks can vary widely and often include assisting with personal care, dispensing medications, monitoring individual behaviors and safety, teaching independent living skills, setting up appointments, and transporting individuals to locations outside the home.

### Size of the Oregon DSP Workforce

The agencies providing residential services in Oregon range from those serving 1-10 adults with I/DD to those serving 100-499 adults. Most agencies in Oregon are small, with more than half serving 10 or fewer adults with I/DD. Only seven Oregon agencies provide residential services to more than 100 adults (per agency) with I/DD (see Figure 1). In 2020, 155 out of 159 (97.5%) I/DD residential service provider agencies in Oregon participated in the NCI Staff Stability Survey. These agencies employed a total of 8,732 DSPs. Of these DSPs, 18% were part-time workers and 61% were full-time; the remaining 21% worked at agencies that did not distinguish between full-time and part-time DSP positions. The number of DSPs per agency ranged from 1 to 644 (Figure 1). The average number of DSPs per agency was 56 and the median number was 19.

**FIGURE 1: Size of Oregon Agencies Providing Residential Services to Adults with I/DD**



\*Includes one agency that serves > 499 adults

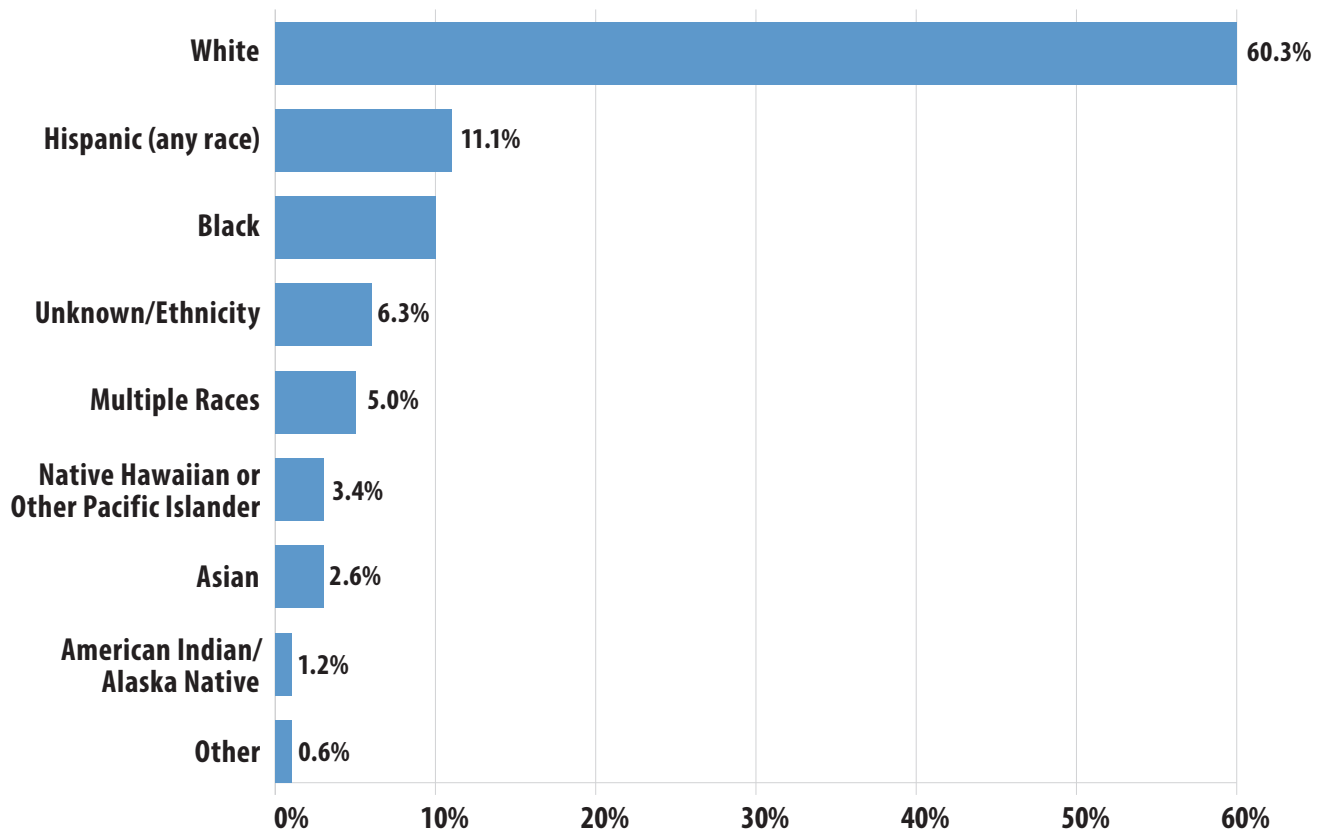
In 2020, 51 non-profit, 103 for-profit, and one state-funded agency responded to the survey. On average, non-profit agencies were larger. The median number of staff employed at a non-profit agency was 83 (range 4 – 644), and the median number employed at a for-profit agency was 8 (range 1 – 540). Most for-profit agencies served 1-10 adults per agency, while most non-profit agencies served 21-50 adults.

## DSP Workforce Description

### Demographic Characteristics of the DSP Workforce

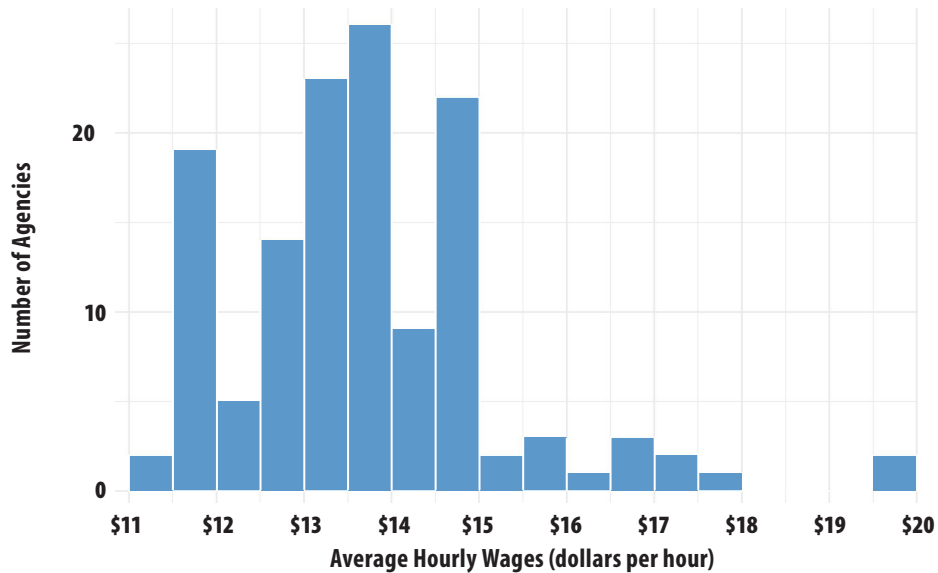
Limited demographic information is collected in the NCI Staff Stability Survey. Of the agencies participating in the survey, 130 agencies that employed a total of 8,456 staff reported on DSP gender. Among those agencies 62% of DSPs were female, 31% were male, 1% were other gender or gender non-conforming, and gender of the remaining 7% was unknown. Data on DSP race and ethnicity were reported by 115 agencies that employed a total of 7,238 DSPs. Among those agencies, 60% of DSPs were White, 11% were Hispanic, 10% were Black, 13% were any other or multiple races, and race and ethnicity of the remaining 6% was unknown (Figure 2). Nationally, the vast majority (71%) of DSPs are female, and 62% are people of color.<sup>1</sup>

**FIGURE 2: Race and ethnicity of DSP workforce in Oregon**



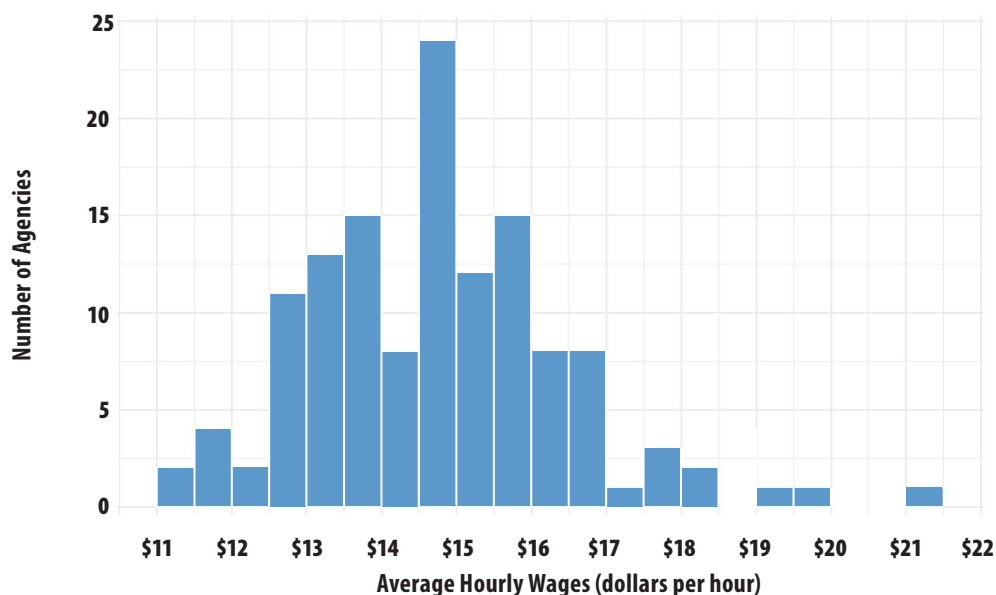
## Wages

**FIGURE 3: Starting Wages for Oregon DSPs Providing Residential Care**



In 2020, starting pay for DSPs providing residential care ranged from \$11.00 to \$20.00 per hour, depending on agency (Figure 3). The mean starting pay for residential DSPs in Oregon was \$13.87 per hour, and the median was \$13.82. Average wages across all tenure groups were only slightly higher than starting wages. Average wages at different agencies ranged from \$11.32 to \$21.21 per hour (Figure 4). The state-wide mean was \$14.86 per hour, and the median was \$15.00. Starting pay and average pay did not differ between for-profit and non-profit agencies. While starting pay did not differ by the number of residents served, agencies who served more residents paid a higher average hourly rate ( $t = 3.21$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ).

**FIGURE 4: Average Wages for Oregon DSPs Providing Residential Care**

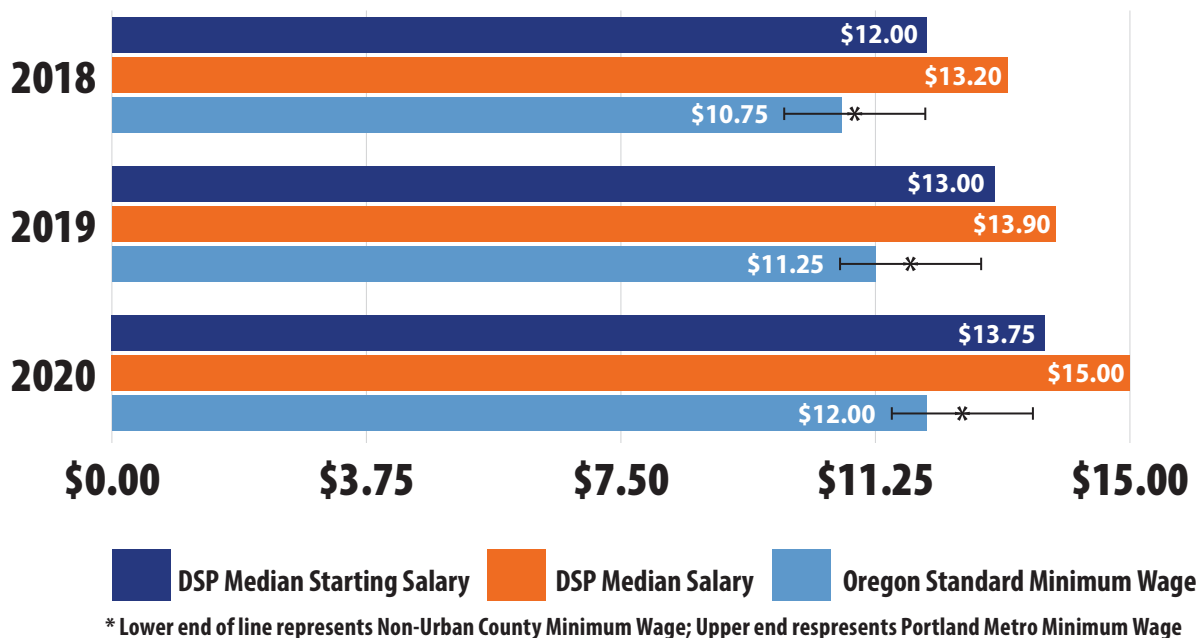


## DSP Wages and Benefits

### Change in Wages

Overall, the median starting pay increased by \$1.75 per hour between 2018 and 2020 ( $p < 0.001$ ), and the median average pay increased by \$1.80 per hour ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Figure 5). While this could be seen as progress, wages for DSPs were still considerably lower than those for the Oregon workforce as a whole. According to 2020 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the mean hourly wage for the overall Oregon workforce in 2020 was \$27.34 and the median was \$21.04.<sup>7</sup> The median (50th percentile) hourly wage for DSPs (\$15.00) was equivalent to the 25th percentile of hourly pay rates for the broader Oregon workforce (\$15.08).<sup>8</sup> Nationally, wages for DSPs are also consistently lower than for other direct care professionals.<sup>1</sup>

**FIGURE 5: Median Wages by Year**



The median DSP wage in Oregon was not sufficient to be considered a living wage for one adult in Oregon in 2020.<sup>5</sup> It was well below what would be needed to support one adult and one child, or a household with two adults and two children even if the other adult was also working.<sup>5</sup> The lower end of the DSP wage range was consistent with Oregon's standard (\$12.00) and non-urban (\$11.50) hourly minimum wages for the July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020 fiscal year, and considerably less than the Portland Metro minimum wage for the same time period (\$13.25 per hour).<sup>8</sup> At these wages, a DSP working full-time was making less than 138% of the Federal Poverty Level for a household of two.<sup>9</sup> Thus, many fulltime DSPs met income eligibility criteria for coverage under the Oregon Health Plan.

## DSP Wages and Benefits

### Benefits

In addition to low wages, many DSPs do not receive adequate or affordable workplace benefits. The Staff Stability Survey asked agencies whether or not they provided each of the following benefits:

- Paid time off—either in the form of pooled time off or specified as paid vacation, paid sick time, and/or paid personal time off
- Health insurance coverage
- Dental insurance coverage
- Vision insurance coverage
- Retirement plan
- Reimbursement or other support (e.g., tuition assistance) for post-secondary education
- Employer paid job-related training
- Employer-sponsored disability insurance
- Flexible Spending Accounts
- Health incentive programs (e.g., gyms, yoga, smoking cessation)
- Life insurance

Several agencies provided none of these benefits. (Oregon requires that employers with 50 or more employees offer health insurance; many of the agencies were smaller than that threshold.<sup>10</sup>) Only 3 agencies provided all 11 types of benefits. On average, agencies provided 4 – 5 benefits. There was a strong positive correlation between agency size and number of benefits offered ( $r = 0.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); larger agencies provided more benefits. There was also a strong association between agency type and number of benefits offered ( $t = 10.2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); non-profit agencies provided significantly more benefits (average of 7 – 8) than for-profit agencies did (average of 2 – 3).

Even if benefits are provided, they may be out of reach for some DSPs. Only 59% of eligible DSPs were enrolled in the health insurance benefit, even though it was offered.

Agencies also were asked if they utilized the following staff retention strategies:

- Realistic job preview (85.1% utilized)
- Code of ethics training (82.5% utilized)
- DSP career ladder to retain highly skilled workers (37.7% utilized)
- Support to acquire credentials through a state or nationally recognized professional organization (26.0% utilized)
- Employee engagement surveys or other efforts aimed at assessing DSP satisfaction and experience working for the agency (40.3% utilized)

Only 3 agencies did not employ any of these strategies, and 18 agencies utilized all 5 strategies. The median number of retention strategies per agency was 3. The number of staff retention strategies utilized was positively associated with the size of the agency ( $t = 3.31$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). We did not find significant differences by agency type in the number of retention strategies provided.

**TABLE 1: Benefits by Agency Type**

Benefit Type	Non-Profit (n = 51) % Provided	For-Profit (n = 103) % Provided
Paid Time Off	98.0	71.1
Health Insurance	94.1	34.3
Dental Insurance	92.2	30.3
Vision Insurance	78.0	23.5
Retirement Plan	78.4	28.6
Reimbursement for post-secondary education	17.7	4.9
Employer paid job-related training	68.6	64.7
Employer-sponsored disability insurance	49.0	6.9
Flexible Spending Accounts	41.2	5.9
Health incentive programs	29.4	8.8
Life insurance	72.6	15.7



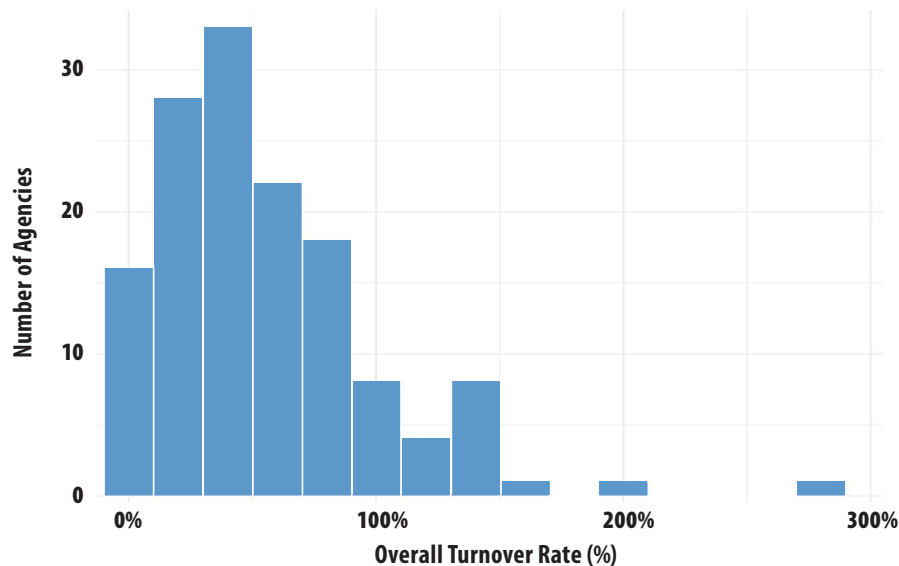
## DSP Turnover, Tenure, and Vacancy Rates

### Overall Turnover Rate

The overall turnover rate was calculated by dividing the total number of DSPs supporting adults with I/DD on each agency's payroll as of December 31, 2020 by the number of DSPs who had departed the agency between January 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020.<sup>5</sup> Turnover varied widely by agency, ranging from 0% to 285%, although all but 22 agencies had turnover rates below 100% (Figure 6).

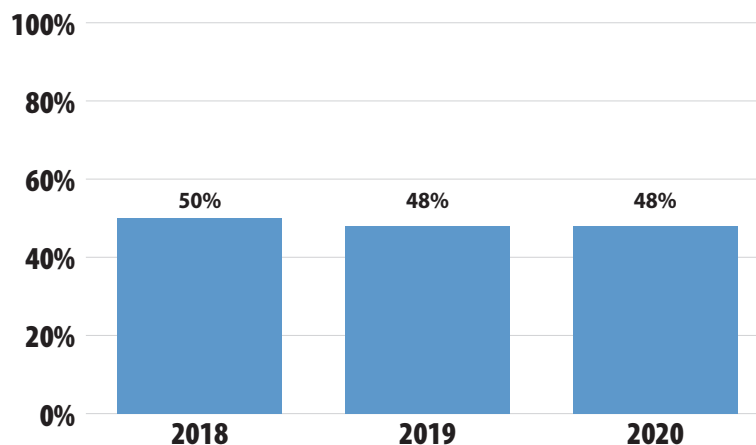
The median turnover rate in Oregon in 2020 was 48% and the mean turnover rate was 55%. Oregon's median exceeded that in 22 of the 27 other states participating in the 2020 Staff Stability Survey, placing Oregon in the top 19% of states with the highest turnover.<sup>5</sup> Agency size and agency type (for-profit versus non-profit) were not significantly associated with turnover rates.

**FIGURE 6: Overall DSP Turnover Rates in Oregon**



The median turnover rate in 2020 was identical to the median turnover rate in 2019. The rate was slightly higher in 2018, but the small decrease from 2018 to 2020 was not statistically significant (Figure 7).

**FIGURE 7: Median Turnover Rate (%) by Year**



## DSP Turnover, Tenure, and Vacancy Rates

### Turnover Rate by Staff Tenure

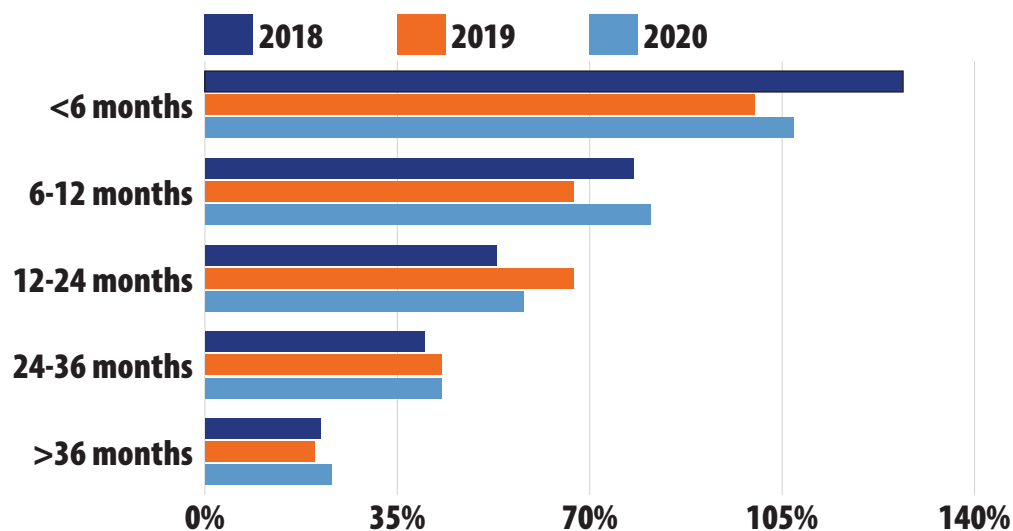
We calculated turnover rate separately for DSPs employed less than 6 months, between 6 and 12 months, between 12 and 24 months, between 24 and 36 months, and more than 36 months. The highest turnover was among those with a job tenure of less than 6 months. Turnover decreased as staff tenure increased. However, the mean turnover rate was above 50% in all tenure groups except those who had been employed as DSPs for longer than 3 years. The median turnover rate was above 50% in all groups with employment tenure less than 2 years (Table 2).

**TABLE 2: Turnover by DSP Tenure Category, 2020**

Tenure Category	Range in Turnover Rates	Median Turnover Rate	Mean Turnover Rate
< 6 months	0-1400%	107%	178%
6-12 months	0-750%	81%	111%
12-24 months	0-900%	58%	81%
24-36 months	0-200%	43%	51%
> 36 months	0-300%	23%	32%

Compared to 2018, turnover in 2020 increased among DSPs who had been working for more than 6 months (Figure 8).

**FIGURE 8: Median Turnover by DSP Tenure Category, 2018 – 2020**

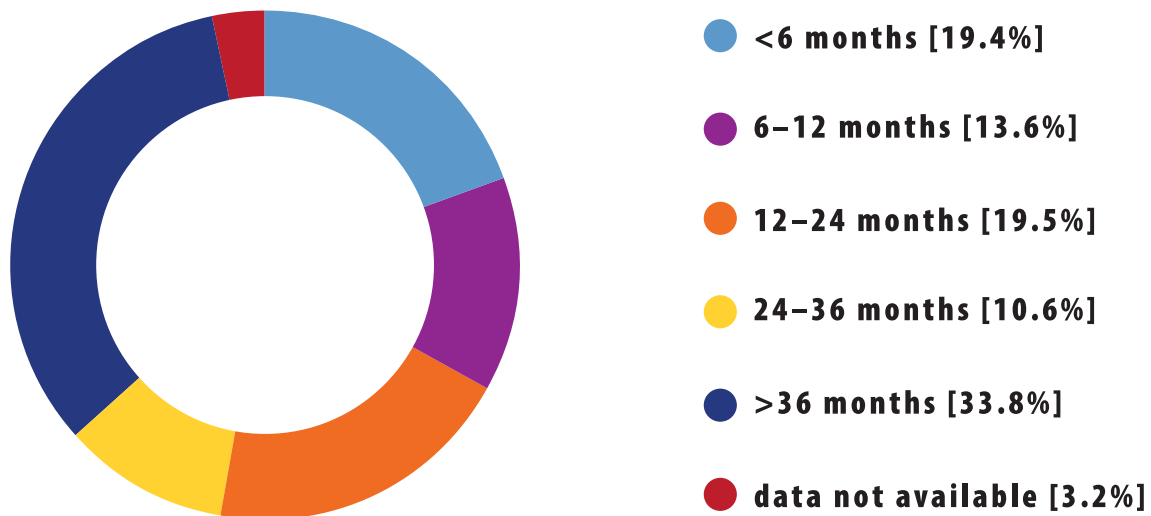


## DSP Turnover, Tenure, and Vacancy Rates

### Tenure of Current Staff

High turnover rates mean that relatively few DSPs have a long tenure. Thus, a substantial proportion of the DSP workforce consists of less experienced personnel. In 2020, fewer than half of DSPs had been on the job longer than two years, and only about one third had been on the job for more than 3 years. Nearly one third had less than one year of experience (Figure 9).

**FIGURE 9: Tenure of Current DSPs**



### Vacancies

High turnover also increases the likelihood of positions remaining unfilled for some period of time, resulting in potential gaps in care. As of December 31, 2020, 11.3% of all positions were vacant statewide, including 11.6% of full-time DSP positions and 10.7% of part-time DSP positions. These rates are higher than those in 44% of the other states that provided vacancy data as part of their NCI Staff Stability survey.<sup>5</sup>

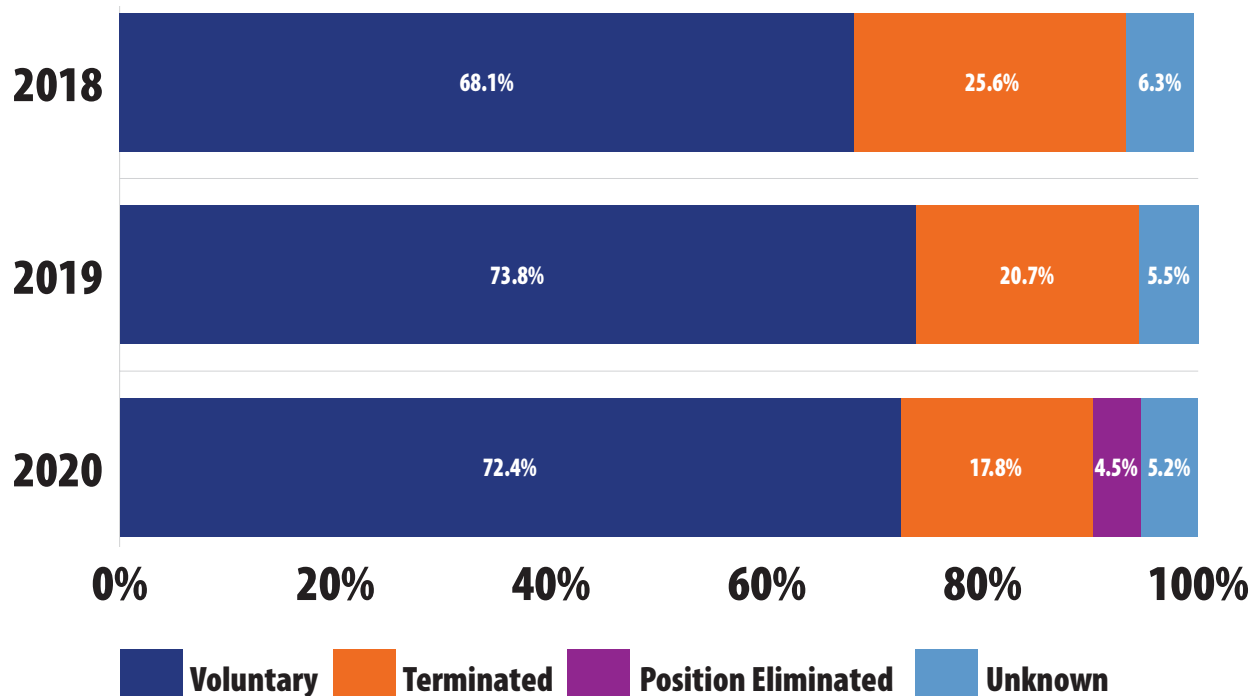
We did not find a significant association between agency size and vacancy rates, or between agency type (for-profit or non-profit) and vacancy rates.

## DSP Turnover, Tenure, and Vacancy Rates

### Reasons for Departure

In 2020, 5,438 DSPs departed their jobs. The majority (72%) of DSPs who departed their jobs left voluntarily, while 18% were terminated and 5% had their positions eliminated (Figure 10). The reason for departure was unknown for the remaining 5% of separated DSPs. In 2018 and 2019, no DSPs left their jobs because their positions were eliminated. There were no other significant changes in reasons for departure between 2018 and 2020.

**FIGURE 10: Reasons for Departure, by Year**



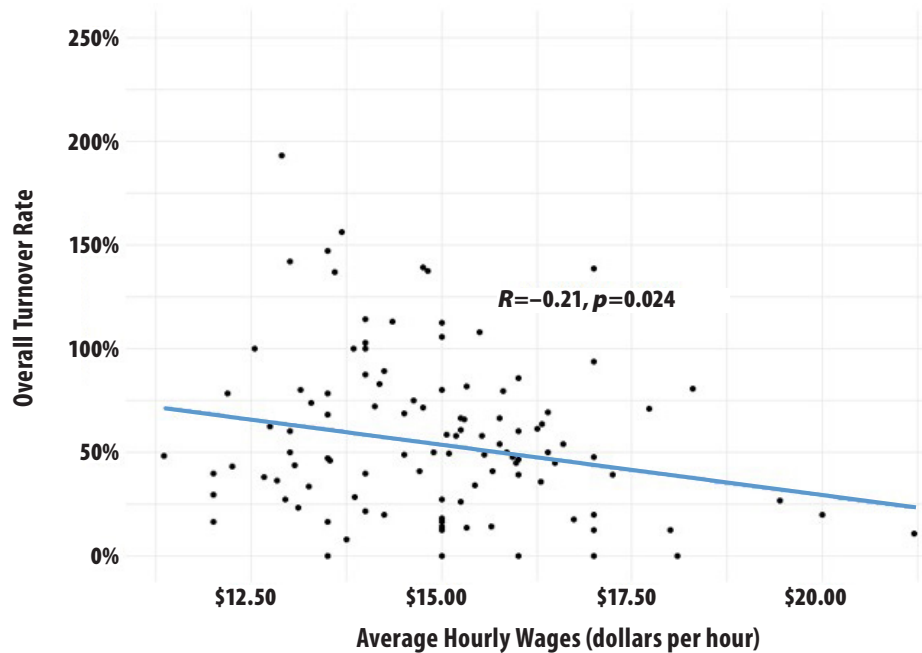
The NCI Staff Stability Survey collects data at the agency level rather than from individual staff. Thus, we do not have specific information about why DSPs who left voluntarily chose to leave. Anecdotally, DSPs have reported that the work is challenging and the pay is lower than they could receive elsewhere for easier work. A national study conducted during 2021 found that the majority of DSPs who left their position did so for reasons related to COVID-19, including testing positive or needing to quarantine, fear of becoming infected or infecting others, or due to lack of childcare or the need to care for a family member.<sup>3</sup> In the following sections, we examine associations between compensation, benefits, and pandemic related changes and turnover and vacancy rates.

## Relationship of Compensation with Turnover and Vacancy Rates

### Association of Wages with Turnover and Vacancies

We found a significant negative correlation between average hourly wages of DSPs working in residential settings and overall turnover rate ( $r = -0.21$ ;  $p = 0.02$ ). As average hourly pay increased, the turnover rate decreased (Figure 11).

**FIGURE 11: Correlation between average hourly wages and overall staff turnover**



A similar negative correlation between average hourly wages and staff turnover existed in 2018 and 2019 as well (Table 3).

**TABLE 3: Correlation between average hourly wages and staff turnover by year**

Year	Correlation Coefficient (R)	P-Value
2018	-0.25	0.013
2019	-0.18	0.060
2020	-0.21	0.024

We also compared average pay in agencies with the lowest and highest turnover rates. Agencies with the least turnover were those in the bottom quintile (lowest 20%) of the range of turnover rates. Agencies with the highest turnover were those in the top quintile (highest 20%) for turnover. We found that agencies with the least turnover had significantly higher average wages (\$15.45 per hour) than agencies with the most turnover (\$14.33 per hour) ( $t=2.19$ ,  $p=0.01$ ).

As in 2018 data, we did not find a significant association between wages and percent of positions that were vacant.

## Relationship of Compensation with Turnover and Vacancy Rates

### Association of Benefits with Turnover and Vacancies

Most of the individual benefits and retention strategies asked about in the Staff Stability Survey were associated with lower turnover, but few of the associations were statistically significant. Moreover, the correlation between number of benefits offered and turnover rates was not statistically significant. However, the following specific benefits and retention strategies were significantly associated with lower turnover rates:

- Financial assistance with post-secondary education ( $t=2.84$ ,  $p=0.03$ ). Agencies that offered this benefit had a mean turnover rate 6.0 percentage points lower than agencies that did not provide financial assistance with education. This strategy was also significantly associated with lower turnover rates in 2018.
- DSP career ladder ( $t = 1.81$ ,  $p = 0.07$ ). Agencies that have a DSP career ladder to retain highly skilled workers had a mean turnover rate 14.1 percentage points lower than agencies that do not have a career ladder in place.

However, offering an employer-sponsored retirement plan (401K, 403b, or some other plan) to some or all DSPs was associated with a higher turnover rate in 2020 ( $t = -2.19$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ). Agencies that provided this benefit had a mean turnover rate 16.4 percentage points HIGHER than agencies that did not provide a retirement plan. We did not see an association between retirement plans and turnover in 2018 or 2019 data. It is possible that the association found in 2020 could be because employees who had the opportunity to retire during the first year of the pandemic were more likely to do so. However, we do not have data on DSP age, details about retirement benefits and incentives, or specific reasons for voluntary departures. Without that information, we cannot examine possible reasons why agencies with retirement plans had higher turnover in 2020.

We did not find significant associations between individual benefits and vacancy rates or between number of benefits offered and vacancy rates.

## COVID-19 Supplement

### Background

The pandemic prompted many businesses and schools to transition to a remote workforce, following recommended safety protocol. However, for DSPs who provide residential services to adults with I/DD living in group homes, remote work was not an option. Instead, a constellation of pandemic-related changes in operations and health and safety protocols were implemented on an agency-by-agency basis DSPs faced staff shortages, disrupted routines, and inadequate supplies of personal protective equipment.<sup>1</sup> A national survey conducted to understand the effects of Covid-19 on the DSP workforce found that 62% of respondents reported working additional hours to respond to staffing shortages and 50% experienced physical and/or emotional burnout.<sup>1</sup>

To examine gaps and strengths in emergency response and gain a better understanding of how DSPs have experienced and been impacted by the pandemic, Oregon opted to include a Covid-19 survey supplement with the 2020 Staff Stability Survey. In this section, we share select findings from the Covid-19 survey supplement, including operations changes, health and safety protocols implemented, and wage adjustments. We also evaluated whether any of these operational changes were associated with staff turnover. To note, this survey was conducted in 2021 and represents only changes made during 2020. Policies and procedures surrounding vaccination or wage increases that occurred during 2021 are not included.

### Pandemic-related changes in operations

The pandemic response prompted a wide array of additional operational changes across agencies. These changes included closing locations or sites, altering how some supports were delivered, stopping delivery of some supports either temporarily or permanently, limiting the number of sites at which a DSP could work, opening temporary respite locations, and requiring that DSPs not work for more than one agency (Table 4).

**TABLE 4: Pandemic-related changes in operations put in place in 2020, stratified by agency size**

	Overall (N = 153)		Large Agencies (N = 48)		Small Agencies (N = 105)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Closed locations/sites	33	21.6	<b>23</b>	<b>47.9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9.5</b>
Limited the number of DSPs rotating into a location by increasing the hours per shift	42	27.5	17	35.4	25	23.8
Began live-in services	7	4.6	2	4.2	5	4.8
Altered how some supports were delivered	49	32	<b>26</b>	<b>54.2</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21.9</b>
Stopped delivering some supports temporarily or permanently	50	32.7	<b>29</b>	<b>60.4</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>20.0</b>
Limited the number of sites/locations/addresses at which a DSP could work	44	28.8	<b>22</b>	<b>45.8</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20.9</b>
Opened temporary respite locations	3	2	<b>3</b>	<b>6.3</b>	0	0
Required that DSPs not work for more than one agency	13	8.5	4	8.3	9	8.6
Tracked DSPs who were working for more than one agency	21	13.7	6	12.5	15	14.3
Paid family members as caregivers during the emergency	5	3.3	2	4.2	3	2.9

Large agencies are those serving more than 20 individuals with I/DD; Small agencies serve 20 or fewer individuals with I/DD; **Bold font** denotes significant difference in proportion of large vs. small agencies that implemented this change.

Larger agencies (those that serve more than 20 individuals with I/DD) were more likely to implement changes in operations during the pandemic, compared to smaller agencies who serve 20 or fewer individuals ( $p < 0.01$ ). A total of 62 agencies (40.3%) did not report implementing any changes in operations. This included 11 non-profit agencies (21.6%) and 51 for-profit agencies (50.0%). The range of changes implemented was 1 – 7.

Most operational changes were not associated with DSP turnover in 2020. However, agencies that reported closing locations or sites had a mean turnover rate 20 percentage points higher than agencies that did not ( $t = -2.2, p = 0.03$ ).

## COVID-19 Supplement

### Pandemic-related implementation of health and safety protocols

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, most agencies implemented changes in health and safety protocols in 2020. Overall, large agencies were more likely to implement many changes, including DSP training on health and safety, requiring DSPs to wear masks, and requiring additional cleaning of sites (Table 5).

Most agencies (81.7%) implemented at least one Covid-19 related health and safety protocol in 2020, and 32 agencies (20.9%) implemented all 12. There was no association between the number of health and safety protocols implemented and staff turnover rate, or between most of the individual protocol changes and turnover. However, agencies that required additional cleaning of sites had a turnover rate that was 18.8 percentage points higher than those that did not add this requirement ( $t = -2.66, p = 0.001$ ). The survey does not provide information about who performed the additional cleaning (DSPs or others) or why it may have been associated with higher turnover.

**TABLE 5: Measures/changes in health and safety protocols implemented in 2020, stratified by agency size**

	Overall (N = 153)		Large Agencies (N = 48)		Small Agencies (N = 105)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Tested temperature for all people upon entry to facilities	108	79.1	38	79.2	70	66.7
Revised visitor policy/protocol	121	79.1	42	87.5	79	75.2
Implemented COVID-19 related DSP training on health and safety	122	79.7	<b>43</b>	<b>89.6</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>75.2</b>
Communicated guidelines on proper handwashing to staff and people receiving services	121	78.6	46	90.2	74	72.6
Communicated guidelines on social distancing to staff and people receiving services	119	77.8	<b>46</b>	<b>90.2</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>73.3</b>
Made changes to physical sites to optimize social distancing and/or quarantine requirements	77	50.3	<b>33</b>	<b>68.8</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>41.9</b>
Required DSPs to wear masks/ other PPE	122	79.7	<b>43</b>	<b>89.6</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>75.2</b>
Required additional cleaning of sites	118	77.1	<b>42</b>	<b>87.5</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>72.4</b>
Internal communications with COVID-19 updates sent to people receiving services and their families	93	60.8	<b>38</b>	<b>79.2</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>52.4</b>
Implemented surveys/questionnaires about staff health/symptoms	73	47.7	<b>29</b>	<b>60.4</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>41.9</b>
Took temperatures regularly	106	69.3	36	75.0	70	66.7
Required COVID-19 testing for some or all DSPs	70	45.7	28	58.3	42	40.0

Large agencies are those serving more than 20 individuals with I/DD; Small agencies serve 20 or fewer individuals with I/DD; **Bold font** denotes significant difference in proportion of large vs. small agencies that implemented this change ( $P \leq 0.05$ ).



## COVID-19 Supplement

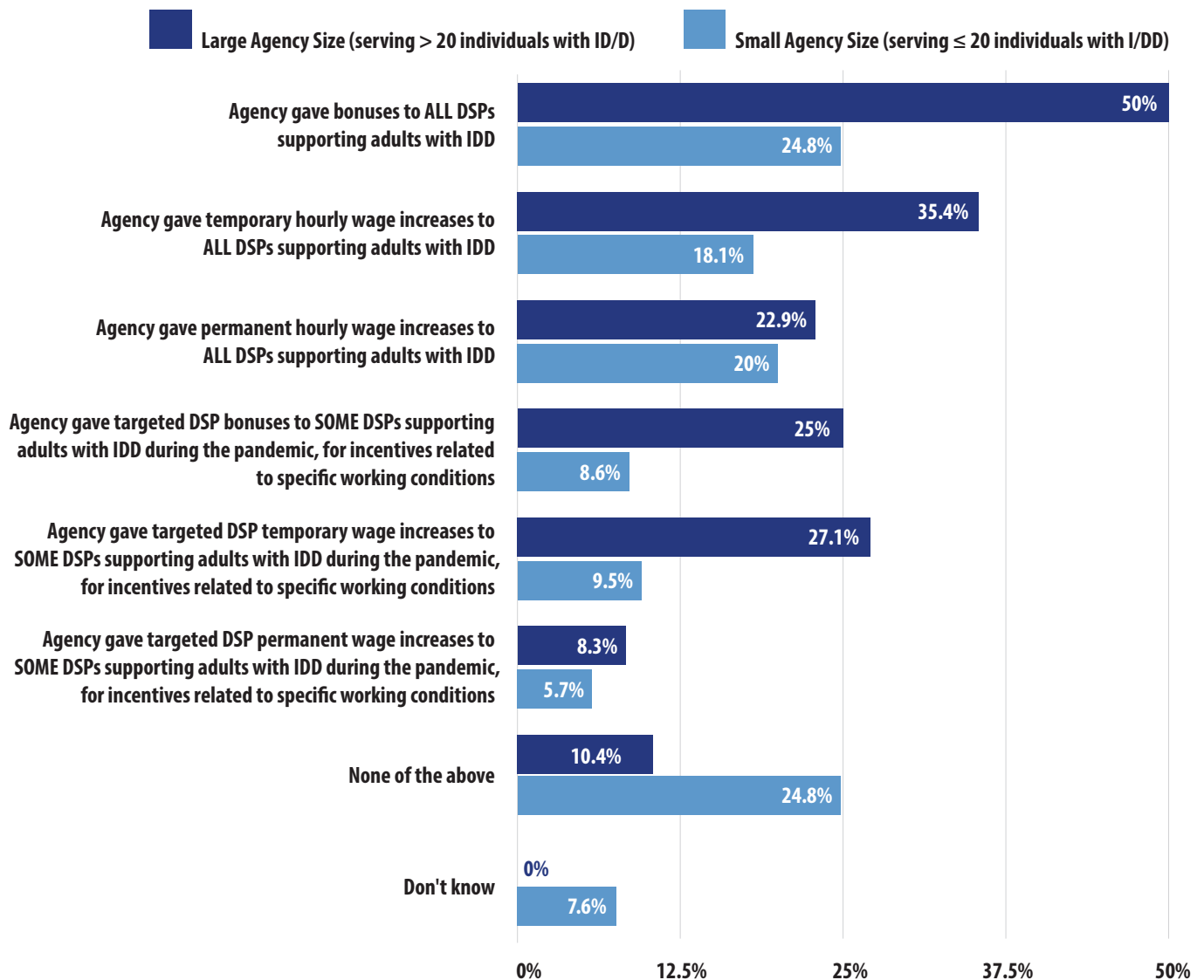
### Pandemic-related wage adjustments

Most agencies in Oregon implemented at least one type of wage adjustment in response to the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 12). However, the amounts and durations of these wage adjustments were not captured in the staff stability survey.

With the exception of permanent hourly wage increases to ALL DSPs supporting adults with I/DD, larger agencies were more likely to implement each kind of wage increase, compared to small agencies ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). For-profit agencies were less likely to implement any wage adjustments during 2020, compared to non-profit agencies ( $x2 = 5.12, p = 0.02$ ).

Agencies who gave permanent hourly wage increases to ALL DSPs supporting adults with I/DD had a mean turnover rate that was 14.6 percentage points lower than those who did not implement this wage adjustment ( $t = 1.92, p = 0.06$ ). No other wage adjustments were associated with mean turnover rate.

**FIGURE 12: Wage adjustments implemented by the agency specifically for the purposes of retaining DSPs (not mutually exclusive), by agency size**



## Summary and Recommendations

The state of the Oregon DSP workforce is dire and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nationally, worker shortages and high levels of turnover among DSPs have been described as a crisis.<sup>2</sup> Turnover in Oregon is even higher than the national average. In fact, with a median turnover rate of 55% among DSPs working for agencies that provide residential care to adults with I/DD, Oregon's turnover is higher than all but 5 of the 27 other states that participated in the 2020 NCI Staff Stability Survey. Action is urgently needed to reduce turnover and improve continuity of care for adults with I/DD.

**Based on the findings of our analyses, we recommend the following strategies to reduce turnover:**

- 1. Increase hourly wages.** In our analyses, higher wages were associated with lower turnover. That finding confirms prior data showing the same association nationally,<sup>11</sup> as well as our previous findings in Oregon when we analyzed 2018 NCI Staff Stability Survey data.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Oregon agencies that permanently increased hourly wages for all DSPs in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had significantly lower turnover than agencies that did not increase wages. This new finding provides additional evidence that turnover can be reduced by increasing pay. (Note: Oregon DSPs have received further pay increases since 2020. Data are not yet available on turnover rates since those pay increases were implemented.)
- 2. Provide key benefits and career growth opportunities.** Provision of paid time off, health insurance (especially coverage beyond what is included in the Oregon Health Plan), and other benefits can help with reducing turnover. In particular, we found that financial assistance with pursuing post-secondary education, and a career ladder for retaining and advancing highly skilled workers were each significantly associated with lower turnover. Agencies need sufficient resources in order to provide these benefits and opportunities.
- 3. Build on ongoing efforts to recognize the value of DSPs.** The work of DSPs is generally considered low status, yet it is crucially important to the health, safety, and well-being of adults with I/DD.<sup>2</sup> The DSP role requires considerable effort, skill, and dedication; these qualities should be recognized and rewarded. ODDS has been addressing the workforce crisis by building partnerships with case management entities and employment agencies throughout Oregon and the country; disseminating recruitment and retention grants; and supporting innovation in service equity. While these and other efforts of ODDS have increased the direct support workforce in Oregon, the shortage continues. Future long-term strategies, actions and funds are needed. As a matter of health equity, Oregon must prioritize the well-being of our citizens with I/DD and the professionals who support them.
- 4. Ensure pay equity.** The low value currently placed on DSP work goes hand-in-hand with the demographic characteristics of the DSP workforce. The majority of DSPs are women and many of them are people of color—demographic groups that consistently earn lower pay in the United States. As one report stated, DSPs receive gendered pay for gendered work<sup>13</sup> highlighting the inherent inequity in a pay structure that values caregiving roles less than other forms of work. Oregon has an opportunity to take the lead not only in ensuring pay equity within the DSP workforce but also in elevating DSP pay scales to a level that is equitable in the context of pay levels for other types of skilled labor in the state.

## Summary and Recommendations

In addition to the above strategies for immediate action, we offer the following recommendations for enhancing future data availability and analyses to provide more detailed and ongoing information:

- 1. Continue periodic reviews of DSP turnover and pay.** Ongoing analysis is needed to monitor DSP turnover and evaluate changes in turnover following pay increases and other relevant policy changes. Such analyses will inform future efforts to decrease turnover and maintain a stable DSP workforce in Oregon.
- 2. Pilot test collection of data on average wages by tenure category.** A limitation in the current national Staff Stability Survey data is that it does not include data on DSP pay ranges within agencies (e.g., based on tenure). The data only provide average starting wage and overall average hourly pay for everyone in a given agency. Oregon could serve as a test venue for collecting more detailed wage information via the NCI Staff Stability Survey. Separating pay data by tenure would allow a more fine-grained analysis of relationships between size of pay increases and extent of turnover. Such analyses would yield additional recommendations on stepped pay scales to promote retention of experienced and skilled staff.
- 3. Consider a study of the association between staff turnover and abuse of residents with I/DD.** The Oregon Office of Developmental Disabilities Services separately maintains data on the number of allegations and substantiated reports of abuse and neglect for each agency. These data could be analyzed in conjunction with the NCI Staff Stability Survey data on staff turnover to test the hypothesis that greater turnover contributes to more abuse and neglect of adults with I/DD. Findings would contribute substantially to building evidence of the human cost of high turnover in the DSP workforce.
- 4. Consider incorporating data on agency-specific dollar costs of turnover.** Such costs include overtime pay to fill staffing gaps, as well as the expenses of recruiting and training new staff. These data would allow a formal cost-benefit analysis of the financial savings that could be realized by raising wages to reduce turnover.
- 5. Clarify response options.** For survey questions that use a “check all that apply” format, it is impossible to tell if an unchecked box truly means that item was not applicable, or if the survey respondent simply skipped that item. This was an issue with some of the questions on pandemic-related changes. Switching to use of yes or no check boxes for each item would allow data analysts to distinguish between missing data and a “no” response. Oregon could provide feedback to HSRI regarding response formats to facilitate future analyses.
- 6. Expand reporting to include DSPs supporting children, as well as adults living outside of group homes.** The current report is limited to DSPs working for agencies that provide residential services to adults with I/DD. However, DSPs also provide important services to adults living in other settings (e.g., their own or a family member’s home) and to children with I/DD. The Office of Developmental Disabilities Services is currently working with the National Core Indicators team to expand the survey to represent all DSPs. Collecting and analyzing data on the full spectrum of the DSP workforce will provide additional information on turnover challenges and possible strategies to reduce turnover.

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## Appendix: Statistical Terms

There are several statistical terms included in this report. Brief explanations of these terms are provided below.

**MEAN** – The mean (sometimes called an average) is the sum of a set of data points divided by the number of data points. For example, to calculate the mean daily rainfall during a given month, we add up the rainfall from all of the days in that month and then divide by the number of days in the month.

**MEDIAN** – The median is the “middle” value between the upper and lower halves of a set of data. Unlike the mean, the median is less likely to be influenced by extreme values that differ dramatically from the rest of the data.

**PERCENTILE** – Percentiles are values below which a certain percentage of the data fall. At the 10th percentile, 10% of the values in the data range are below the 10th percentile value. At the 25th percentile, 25% of the values are below that point. (The median is the 50th percentile.)

**QUINTILE** – Quintiles divide the data into five equal segments. Each segment contains 20% of the data distribution. When we present data on turnover, we will examine differences between agencies in the top quintile (the 20% of agencies with the highest turnover) and those in the bottom quintile (the 20% of agencies with the lowest turnover).

**CORRELATION** – Correlation measures the extent to which two variables are related. If the variables are positively correlated, when one variable increases the other one does too. If the variables are negatively correlated, when one variable increases the other one decreases.

**T-TEST** – A t-test is a statistical test used to compare the means of two groups to determine if they are similar or different.

**TEST FOR TREND** – A trend test is used to determine if a set of values is increasing or decreasing over time, or if the set of values has remained constant over time.

**P-VALUE** – When conducting a statistical test, the p-value is the probability of obtaining test results at least as extreme as the results actually observed, purely by chance. A commonly used p-value cutoff is 0.05, meaning there is only a 5% probability that the observed association was due to random chance.

**SIGNIFICANT** – Statistical significance means that the observed relationship between variables is most likely caused by something other than chance. For this report, when the p-value for a statistical test is less than 0.05, we describe the result of the test as statistically significant. If the p-value is between 0.05 and 0.10, we note that there is a trend toward a significant association.

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