



Talking Points on Direct Care Workforce and Federal Minimum Wage Increase: Congress Must Provide Funding to Offset Harm to this Essential Workforce

- People with disabilities and aging adults rely on direct care workers to provide the supports and services that they need to live in their homes and communities.
- Having a skilled, properly trained and fairly paid workforce is the lynchpin for success for so many people with disabilities to live the independent life that they choose, and in some cases it can literally mean life or death.
- For people with disabilities the workforce includes personal assistance, home care workers and Direct Support Professionals or DSPs who play a fundamental role in the lives of people with disabilities. Their presence and assistance allow people receiving services to lead the independent and full lives.
- The work that the direct care workforce does varies, but it can include providing supports in personal care, communication, household tasks, building relationships, and navigating the community.
- The work that direct care workers do is invaluable to the disability and aging communities and the service system that relies on their abilities to keep people out of more costly, restrictive and often segregated institutional settings that have been particularly dangerous during the COVID pandemic.
- This issue is compounded by factors that are all outside of the workers and individuals with disabilities control.
- The vast majority of the services provided by direct care workers is funded by Medicaid home and community-based (HCBS).
- Service providers don't get to set the rate that they are paid by the state to provide specific services, the rates are negotiated in advance between the state government and the federal government.
- Neither the individuals served, the direct care worker, or the provider have a seat at the table and there has been a lack of federal investment for decades and states have not picked up the slack, in fact many cut human services budgets at any opportunity.
- The rates providers receive to ultimately pay direct care workers do not take into account the wages of competing occupations, the need for benefits and the actual costs of services or MINIMUM wage. What has resulted are rates and therefore wages that have been flat for decades, without even cost of living increases.
- Years of inadequate Medicaid rates prevent these direct care professionals from receiving compensation commensurate with the value they produce for

our nation with the majority earning just above current state minimum wage levels.

- This problem is exacerbated by proposals to raise the minimum wage, without additional funding to pay the direct care workers more in conjunction with any proposals.
- As Congress debates increasing the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour, we urge you to incorporate a requirement and Federal funding so that state Medicaid programs can pay at a level above the federal minimum wage increase with corresponding reimbursement rate increases for Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS).
- Currently the low wages that direct care workers face lead to high turnover for providers, leading to a workforce crisis in serving people with disabilities and aging adults.
- Without additional funding to ensure that direct care workers make a family sustaining wage, people with disabilities and aging adults will be left without this vital workforce.