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Direct Support Professionals Receive Higher Wages After General Assembly Action

DSPs provide support, training, supervision, and assistance to adults with disabilities

Survey results from the Tennessee Comptroller's Office of Research and Education Accountability show that increased funding intended to boost the pay of direct support professionals (DSPs) working with adults with disabilities has had a positive effect on employee wages.

In 2018, the General Assembly appropriated \$49 million in state and federal matching funds to increase the hourly wages of DSPs working under the home and community-based services (HCBS) waivers program administered by the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The appropriation was calculated to raise the average hourly wage of DSPs to \$10. The appropriations act also directed the Comptroller's Office to survey private provider agencies to determine how they used the increased funding.

The Comptroller's Office sent a survey to 171 agencies and 157 (92 percent) responded. Analysts then checked documentation for a sample of the survey responses. 16,365 DSPs were employed by the 157 agencies that responded to the survey.

The Survey results indicate the 2018-2019 appropriation has effectively increased the hourly wages of DSPs working under Tennessee's HCBS waivers program. Average hourly wages increased from approximately \$9.77 to \$10.36. The Comptroller's Office found no indication that agencies spent the increased funds on executive level salaries.

96 percent of the survey respondents spent the increase only toward DSP compensation. Of the remaining agencies, nine used the funds to increase DSP compensation, but also spent the increase on other items. One agency did not use the increase to raise DSP compensation, but it already paid DSP hourly wages above \$20.

A portion of the 2018-2019 increase (\$34.3 of \$49 million) was passed on a nonrecurring basis, meaning it was only passed for the 2019 fiscal year. Private provider agencies anticipate that the nonrecurring funding may become permanent if the wage increase is carried out according to the legislative intent.

To read the report and view the summary snapshot, please visit OREA's website by clicking [here](#).

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