**Could paid family caregiving solve the DSP crisis?**

There is an acute shortage of nursing assistants, home health aides and personal care attendants, referred to collectively as direct support professionals (DSPs). Family members have long been the ones to step in. Across the country, more than 40 million people serve as unpaid caregivers to family members in need.

**Key facts about Tennessee’s DSP shortage before the pandemic:**

* The shortage was documented by the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury in April 2017 and January 2019 reports. An audit conducted by the TN Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) characterized the shortage as “critical”
* The vacancy rate for full-time DSPs in Tennessee pre-pandemic was 12%, the vacancy rate for part-time DSP’s was 19% - *well above the national average*
* The pre-pandemic turnover rate for DSPs in the state was 54%, compared to 46% nationwide

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the crisis – **staff vacancy is 26% higher than before the pandemic.** Nationwide, 73% of provider agencies have had staff refuse to work. Over 30% of agencies report DSPs contracting Covid-19, and 30% of people they serve have contracted the virus. This situation is untenable and family members have again stepped up on behalf of their kin.

**Cost to family caregivers during the pandemic:**

* Family caregivers have suffered mentally and emotionally as a result of their increased workloads, with increased rates of depression and anxiety
* Caregivers are also more likely to be unemployed as a result of their care duties
* 38% of caregivers have also taken on greater financial responsibilities related to caring for a family member and 29% of parents of children with disabilities are facing extreme financial problems as a result of the pandemic

**Solution:**

The federal 1915(c) waiver to the Medicaid statute allows family caregivers to be temporarily be paid for their services. This flexibility is found in Appendix K of these waivers submitted by states. Other home-and community-based services (HCBS) waivers also permit this option.

At least 32 states have implemented this flexibility since April 2020, including Louisiana, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi and Georgia. Last year, Tennessee chose not to enact this flexibility, despite the fact that it would cost the state no additional money.

Outside of pandemic times, several states have programs that permit family caregivers to be paid for their support in some circumstances.

* Some states like Washington have a set-aside fund to reimburse family caregivers
* Other states use consumer directed choice to permit payment to family members

The Tennessee Disability Coalition is gathering family stories about experiences with long-term services and supports (LTSS) during the pandemic in pursuit of a paid family caregiving option.

Contact us at: ddh@tndisability.org or 615-383-9442