



Direct Service Worker Shortage in Kansas Home and Community Based Services

The inability to secure workers for individuals enrolled in Home and Community Based Services Self-Directed programs was evident prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in Kansas and has now risen to critical levels. The Kansas Association of Centers for Independent Living recently conducted a survey of HCBS consumers, current (and former) direct service workers. More than one thousand individuals provided information on reasons workers remain in this field despite low wages and no benefits, reasons for the high level of turnover and high position vacancies, and recommendations to address the issues.

Key takeaways: 31% of consumers report insufficient workers to cover their plan of care. 51% of workers report they are caring for a family member with many of these individuals stating they are providing this care because they can't find reliable workers. 45% of workers responded they had worked less than 3 years, demonstrating the high turnover rate. Low wages was the number one reason for declining job offers and/or resigning as a direct service worker. Low wages were listed by a 2 to 1 margin over lack of benefits, though benefits were the second most listed reason for resigning. With wages averaging \$10.70/hour for DSW's, there is a considerable need to increase HCBS Waiver rates across all Waivers. Consumers and DSW's consistently reported that plans of care did not cover the individuals needs.

Promising results: 91% of workers wanted to remain in their position and which suggests that raising wages to be competitive with local retail and fast-food markets may have the desired impact to reduce or eliminate the critical shortage of direct service workers.

Recommendations: Increase Waiver rates and implement rate parity across Waivers to increase worker wages; perform a critical review of processes utilized to develop plans of care; provide benefit options such as paid time off, reimburse travel and provide access to health insurance. These actions may have the needed impact to ensure individuals have access to community-based service options rather than forced institutionalization due to the critical shortage of workers.