

Address Critical Workforce Issues Facing HCBS Agencies



The Ask Change state statute to reduce the time allotted to process a background check from 15 to 5 days and/or allow agencies to contract with third party vendors to assure timely processing.

"The current state of the Direct Support Professional workforce has been called a crisis but some argue that the current situation is far too predictable and persistent to be considered a crisis any longer; experts have called it a systemic failure of the long-term services and supports system." (Hewitt et al., 2018)

Summary

HCBS agencies cannot provide critical support services without a workforce. This means **individuals and families are going without critical services guaranteed in their support plans.**

Agencies are competing with other businesses from a labor pool that is extremely scarce. While the issue is complex, **one very important factor in the hiring process is the timely processing of background checks.** Currently statute allows fifteen days for background checks to be processed. (Current issues with the system have made this process *significantly* longer.) **Because of the current delays in the background check process, applicants are forced to accept employment elsewhere** rather than wait for weeks to begin earning an income. Statute currently requires agencies to use the state's Background Check Unit. State statute must be changed to reflect the current crisis and reduce the time allotted to process a background check from 15 to 5 days and/or allow third party vendors to assure timely processing.

Complexities of the HCBS Workforce

- Current Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) funding is NOT ADEQUATE to support our system. **Medicaid HCBS rates have not been re-based in 12 years.**
- Although the Alaska medical consumer price index increased by almost 50% from 2011 to 2021, reimbursement rates for HCBS during this same time period only increased by 18%.
- Medicaid HCBS providers have had numerous unfunded mandates and significant cost increases over the past 10 years that currently impede their ability to attract and retain a qualified workforce.
 - Maintenance of electronic health records required under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
 - Electronic visit verification
 - Increased training requirements
 - Increased expenses associated with the pandemic
 - Self-audit requirement
 - Affordable Care Act insurance requirement
- As a result, providers have implemented numerous cost containment measures, which reduce their ability to attract and retain staff and foster a positive work environment.
 - Reduction in benefits like paid holidays, vacation and sick leave
 - Wage freezes
 - Elimination or reduction of management positions
- Retention research suggests that both extrinsic (wages, benefits) and intrinsic (culture, stability, positive work environment) rewards greatly influence job satisfaction (Cosgrove, 2021). Retention is directly related to job satisfaction, which includes adequate pay and benefits.

A recent survey of providers conducted by the Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities indicated:

- **25% - 65%** of direct service shifts were canceled in 2021
- **33% - 50%** of shifts were covered by managers
- Agencies experienced **38% -65% turnover.**
- In 2019 **287** positions needed to be filled compared to **589** in 2021.
- Of all applicants, **38%** were interviewed in 2019 compared to **13.2%** in 2021
- Only **3.2%** were actually hired in 2021 compared to **18.8%** in 2019

Priority Two: Change state statute to reduce the time allotted to process a background check from 15 to 5 days and/or allow agencies to contract with third party vendors to assure timely processing.