

Meeting summary for Focus Sessions with Direct Support Professionals (1) (04/30/2025)

Quick recap

This meeting was facilitated by Sachs Policy Group in collaboration with the National Academy for Direct Support Professionals. The goal was to get input from Direct Support Professionals about how services and support for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities could support them more wholistically. There were separate session involving o total of approximately 50 DSPs.

Some of the DSP recommendations included:

- Explore ways to improve integrated, comprehensive medical records systems that are accessible to direct support professionals and individuals receiving support.
- Improving direct support professional pay rates and addressing high turnover in the field.
- Provide more training for direct support professionals on supporting friendships, relationships, and appropriate risk-taking for individuals with disabilities.
- Investigate potential solutions for improving communication and information sharing between different service providers, healthcare professionals, and direct support staff.
- Create more flexible staffing schedules to accommodate students and single parents in direct support roles.
- Explore ways to assess the both the positive and negative impacts of managed care on funding and resources for agencies providing services to individuals with disabilities.

Summary of Major Areas of Discussion

Improving Support for People with Intellectual Disabilities

The DSPs emphasized the importance of their role in providing holistic support, being honest and respectful, giving choices and inclusion, and forming a nurturing team environment. They also discussed the challenges of navigating different systems and funding for individuals with complex needs. The coalition for whole person supports has a created a website that features some best practices and would like to add ideas from DSPs on the site about ways to improve the support system.

Effective Communication in Patient Care

DSPs discussed the effectiveness of their communication and teamwork in addressing health changes among their patients. They highlighted a specific case where a patient's unusual behavior was noticed and reported by the weekend staff, which led to a timely intervention and successful treatment when the week day staff returned. The group emphasized the importance of having staff members who work on weekends and during the week, enabling them to share information and make informed decisions. They also discussed the use of verbal communication, communication logs, and email for effective communication. The DSPs expressed mutual respect and professional relationships with the nursing staff, which facilitated better care for their patients.

Effective Communication and Staff Retention

One DSP expressed concerns about the lack of effective communication and teaching of communication skills to staff, particularly new hires, which he believes contributes to a barrier in their ability to provide services effectively. Another DSP highlighted the issue of HIPAA laws limiting the sharing of information between professionals, which can hinder the provision of accurate services. She suggested the need for an internal release of information system that does not override HIPAA. The meeting attendees also discussed the high turnover rate in the field, attributing it to low pay rates and the demanding nature of the job. They agreed that better staff retention would lead to better outcomes for the individuals they support.

Service Providers' Collaboration and Communication Challenges

In the meeting, John and Joseph discussed the challenges faced by service providers, particularly in the healthcare sector, in terms of collaboration and communication. They highlighted the difficulties in accessing patient information due to HIPAA laws and the need for a more efficient system. The participants also shared their experiences of working in the sector, with one DSP expressing concerns about the low pay rates and the need for better support. The conversation ended with a call for a more streamlined and effective system for service providers to improve their productivity and serve their clients better.

Comprehensive Medical Records for Individuals With Disabilities

The meeting attendees discussed the importance of comprehensive medical records for individuals with disabilities. They emphasized the need for these records to be accessible to both caregivers and the individuals themselves, enabling better understanding and management of their health. The team also highlighted the significance of building strong relationships with healthcare professionals to ensure the

best possible care. They discussed the need for individuals with disabilities to have a voice in their care and to be able to make their own decisions. The team also touched on the importance of allowing individuals with disabilities to take risks and learn from their mistakes, as this is a crucial part of their development.

Funding Concerns and Managed Care Impact

The group discussed the changing systems and funding for their organizations. One DSP expressed concerns about the lack of funding and the potential loss of positions, which could negatively impact the care provided to their clients. Another DSP discussed the impact of managed care on their organization, stating that it could affect their funding and resources. She emphasized the need for fair wages and recognition for their hard work. The team agreed that the changes could have significant consequences for their organization and the people they support that could be positive or negative. They also emphasized that they always focus on providing the best supports they can regardless of the system they work in.

Meeting summary for Focused Sessions with Direct Support Professionals (2) (04/30/2025)

Quick recap

The meeting attendees discussed the challenges and strategies for engaging Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) in focus groups, the importance of advocacy for DSPs and people with disabilities, and the need for better communication and collaboration among service providers. They also shared their experiences and concerns about their roles as DSPs, particularly in handling emergency situations and medical appointments. The conversation ended with a discussion on the potential positive and negative impact of systemic changes in the funding system on the role of DSPs.

Some of the Recommendations from DSP included:

- Create a system to ensure DSPs who accompany clients to medical appointments have access to complete medical history and relevant information

- Review and improve protocols for emergency medical situations to better support community-based DSPs
 - Develop a more streamlined communication system for sharing medical information between in-house DSPs, community DSPs, and healthcare providers
 - Evaluate current staffing model to ensure appropriate coverage for individuals requiring two-person transfers
 - Create list of agencies and populate focus groups through executive contacts
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- Survey registered DSPs who didn't attend the sessions about their thoughts
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 - Create a more efficient process for reviewing and distributing physician summaries to relevant staff members
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 - Review and update policies regarding acceptance of Medicaid patients at urgent care centers
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- Develop strategies to improve communication and coordination between DSPs and healthcare providers

Engaging DSPs in Focus Groups

The team discussed the challenges of engaging Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) in focus groups. They considered sending anonymous surveys directly to registered participants, especially those who didn't attend, to gather their input. The team also discussed the importance of DSPs receiving information directly, as it often gets lost in the process. They noted that some recurring themes from DSPs, such as teamwork and pay issues, were similar to previous discussions.

Advocacy for DSPs and People With Disabilities

The group discussed the importance of advocacy for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and people with disabilities. One member noted the "Art of Advocacy" program,

where he's helping people with disabilities and their families become better advocates. One of the attendees emphasized the need to frame advocacy messages in terms of client benefits rather than just wage increases when speaking to legislators. The group also discusses the importance of challenging stereotypes about people with disabilities and their capabilities in the workforce and education.

Client Medical Issues and System Effectiveness

In the meeting, A DSP discussed a client who had a medical change and was experiencing issues with his medication. The client was sent to an emergency meeting with his psychiatrist, and Virgena informed her manager about the situation. She also shared an experience where a client had gallstones and was not receiving proper attention. The DSP explained that the system works when everyone in a support group is on the same page.

Emergency Protocols and Work Environment

The meeting focused on discussing the protocols and steps taken in their organization to handle emergency situations. One DSP emphasized the importance of notifying the nurse and calling for additional help if necessary. The group also discussed the need for mental alertness and job satisfaction in their roles. They highlighted the significance of a supportive work environment and the need for respect from their employer. The conversation also touched on the importance of having a good team and a person-centered approach in their organization.

Improving Collaboration for Medical Support

In the meeting, a DSP expressed concerns about her role as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) in the community, particularly when it comes to medical appointments. She highlighted the challenges of not knowing the medical history of the individuals she supports, which can hinder her ability to provide appropriate care. The meeting attendees emphasized the importance of collaboration between different service providers, including physicians, nurses, and DSPs. They also discussed the difficulties faced when dealing with healthcare facilities that do not accept Medicaid, which can be a significant constraint in emergency situations. The team agreed to explore ways to improve communication and collaboration among service providers to better support individuals with disabilities.

Funding System Changes and DSP Roles

the group discussed the potential of changing system for funding services. DSPs, shared their perspectives on their roles and how they meet the needs of the people they support. They emphasized the importance of listening to individuals and providing guidance to help them live their normal lives. The group also discussed the potential challenges and concerns related to systemic changes in the funding system.