

Tuesday, April 3, 2018

State Plans Pay Increase For Some Staff Serving People With Disabilities

People who provide services for those with disabilities could receive a raise starting July 1 under a new program overseen by the Department of Developmental Disabilities.

The biennial budget (HB 49) included a pair of add-ons to rates for direct service professionals under different conditions, including for those who have worked in the field for two years and complete 60 hours of training.

Providers who meet the requirements for the **training and longevity** program will earn an extra \$1 per hour starting July 1, a change DODD Director John Martin said is designed to encourage people to stay in the field.



John Martin

The other addition, which was implemented in September, provides an increase for people serving individuals with complex needs, such as those who need help dressing and eating, he said.

The department anticipates the training and longevity add-on will cost a total of about \$25.8 million and the complex care add-on will cost \$12.9 million.

DODD opted for the two add-ons to address specific needs in the care system, Director Martin said. In the previous budget, the department gave providers a 6% increase across the board.

"We could've probably taken the approach of a modest increase, a 2% increase, for example, for everybody," he said in an interview. "We thought, instead of doing 25 cents an hour, 30 cents an hour for everybody, let's target the longevity and the training."

The focus on training and providing more of an increase for experienced and well-trained workers is designed to keep employees around longer in a field that experiences a high burnout rate, the director said.

The training required for the add-on is available for free online from DODD, and the department will also recognize other training programs accredited by the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals.

DODD is already offering more than 130 hours of training and adding more, said Maryjo Mace Woodburn, the department's training academy program director.

Having a variety of courses available means providers can focus on courses that relate to the people they care for, Director Martin said. Providers can take courses on working with people with complex behaviors, seizures, cerebral palsy and more.

"We kind of directed it this way, hoping to increase the retention, to say 'You've worked two years, you have more value to the system,'" Director Martin said.

The other add-on, for those caring for people with complex needs, mirrored an existing boost to professionals caring for people with complex behaviors. The increase is \$2.52 per hour.

"We felt it was important to recognize that with additional money, because a stable workforce there for folks with those complex issues is really important," the director said.

Mark Davis, president of the Ohio Provider Resource Association, said the add-ons will help reduce turnover and job vacancies among support staff.

"We think anything we can do to better compensate our direct support professionals, the better for us and the people we serve," he said in an interview.

The longevity and training add-on will encourage people to stay in the field longer, helping a system that faces an average staff vacancy rate of 20-30%, he said.

Mr. Davis said he hoped the complex care add-on would make it easier for families to find someone to provide care for children most in need of help.

"I think it'll put a dent in it," he said. "It'll make a difference in the people's ability to get folks to serve their sons or daughters."