

# Executive Summary: RCPA Workforce Survey

## Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Pennsylvania Social Service Agencies

### **December 20, 2021**

In an effort to quantify the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Pennsylvania's social service agencies, the Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association (RCPA) undertook a survey of Pennsylvania social service agencies in September 2021. This survey addressed the number of consumers served during the pandemic, staffing challenges, and operational impacts across four major service areas: Intellectual Disability/Autism; Mental Health; Drug & Alcohol; and Brain Injury. The survey respondents represented more than 100 human services agencies, serving nearly 100,000 vulnerable Pennsylvanians, and employing almost 20,000 professional and direct support staff.

### **Key Findings**

- Nearly 50% of responding IDD providers reduced service capacity due to staffing shortages for residential and community-based programs, reducing access to critical services for vulnerable Pennsylvanians.
- Despite experiencing growth in outpatient service delivery, close to 50% of the responding mental health providers reduced their caseloads due to staffing shortages. The need for mental health care is far exceeding providers' ability to staff these programs.
- The number of professional staff and Direct Support Professionals employed within the industry declined by nearly 10%, with many leaving the field altogether due to burnout and unsatisfactory working conditions.
- Despite the overwhelming need for Direct Support Professionals, these individuals separated from their positions within three months of hire at an annual turnover rate of more than 130%.
- While the mean hourly wage for Direct Support Professionals was \$14.98, it was still well below starting wages for Sheetz, McDonald's, Amazon, and other entry-level jobs.
- The vacancy rate for Direct Support Professional positions was 24%, resulting in the need to pay an enhanced (overtime) rate for a third of all work hours.
- Direct Support Professional staff shortages resulted in nearly 75% of responding agencies' management staff having to provide direct care services.
- In a three-month period, only 10% of the 26,000 applicants were hired. Many cited the low pay, difficult work, uncertain schedules, and a high no-show rate for job interviews.
- At the conclusion of the survey, respondents reported that 72.3% of their employees had been vaccinated against COVID-19.

### **Summary Recommendations**

Payers and government officials are also quick to say that "money does not solve everything." While perhaps true, it does solve some things. With federal funds available (e.g., increased FMAP, the American Rescue Plan), there needs to be a heightened sense of urgency from legislators and the administration. If ever there was a time to get dollars out to providers to stabilize the system, it is now. An influx of funds would allow providers to:

- Offer retention bonuses;
- Potentially increase wages; and
- Have access to monies to stabilize program staffing and ensure consumers have access to care.

The time to act is now, and the funds need to quickly reach providers without directives, hurdles, and/or strings attached. In the short term, providing the funds with flexibility would allow organizations to target the money as best helps their situation, while longer-term strategies of revised rate development methodologies could aid in creating more sustainable service funding platforms in the future.