



Action Request

Adequately fund Supported Living services in order to serve new individuals waiting for community residential services, stabilize providers, and address the ongoing crisis in employee turnover.

Supporting People to Live Independently

Supported Living helps people with developmental disabilities live as independently as possible by providing the right level of care in their own home. Direct-support professionals teach and assist clients with medical and mental health care, finances, transportation, household, and personal needs. The level of care available is the same as that provided in the state's institutions, Residential Habilitation Centers, with the added benefit that individuals are in the community, near friends and family, living the lives they want and at a much lower cost than in an institution.

Supported Living is by far the most-used residential option for people at risk of institutional placement and who require up to 24 hours of care. Nearly 4,000 people statewide are served by Supported Living.¹ Many people served in Supported Living have previously lived in state institutions. Individuals served may have intensive medical needs, challenging behavior, or specialized communication needs. When living with family caregivers is not an option, and when individuals need more than personal care, then Supported Living may be their **only** option.

A System in Crisis

Supported Living is a system in crisis, with Direct Support Professionals (DSP) paid considerably below a living wage. The turnover in essential DSP positions has averaged about 50 percent for the last four years and increased to 53 percent in 2018². Wages have failed to keep pace with those of comparable service providers who work at state-run facilities or home care agencies.

The turnover is harmful to clients who require consistency and continuity of care and disrupts the relationship building that is essential to serving people with complex behavior support needs. Open positions put individuals at risk if staffing levels cannot meet their needs, and unstable staffing prevents providers from taking on new clients. Because of this, Supported Living is serving 176 fewer people than the state's 2015 service target³, and individuals with significant support needs continue to sit on wait lists. These situations are especially serious when a parent caregiver is elderly and unable to provide even basic care.

A Way to Stabilize

Last session, the Legislature included a 13.5 percent rate increase that will be effective January 1, 2020, when the minimum wage will increase by 12.5 percent. This investment by the Legislature will help stem the turnover and increase capacity to serve people needing up to 24-hour care as well as new individuals waiting for services. However, a rate increase for the January 1, 2021, minimum wage increase was not included in the budget. This increase in Supported Living provider rates is needed to ensure that providers can comply with the state minimum wage and offer a competitive wage. They must pay direct care staff a living wage and give them resources to do their jobs.

Fund a four percent vendor rate increase (\$6.9M GF-S) to stay ahead of the minimum wage increase in January 2021 and keep direct care staff wages above minimum wage.

¹ Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Developmental Disabilities Administration CARE System on 7/1/2019.

² Community Residential Services Association, November 2019.

³ Ibid.