

2024 REPORT

Stability of the Direct Support Professional Workforce Providing Residential Supports to Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Oregon in 2022



Executive Summary

High turnover among Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) that provide care to Oregon adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) impacts the quality of care and contributes to high service costs. This report is the fourth in a series that uses data from the National Core Indicators State of the Workforce Surveys (formerly named the Staff Stability Surveys) to examine trends in wages and turnover among DSPs employed by Oregon agencies that provide 24-hour residential services to adults with I/DD living in group homes, and to assess factors that are associated with higher turnover ratios. Survey data from 2018–2022 was used in this report.

In 2022, 253 out of 295 eligible I/DD residential service provider agencies in Oregon participated in the NCI State of the Workforce Survey. These agencies employed a total of 8,342 DSPs, who were primarily full-time employees. During 2018–2022 the median DSP wage increased from \$13.20 to \$18.00, due in part to COVID-19 related pay enhancements. In the same time period, the overall turnover ratio (percent of DSPs who left their position) decreased from 50.2% to 33.3%. This indicates that Oregon is making progress towards the goal of maintaining a stable DSP workforce that can support Oregon adults with I/DD.

However, wages for DSPs were still considerably lower than those for the Oregon workforce as a whole. As in previous years, the median DSP wage was not sufficient to be considered a living wage for one adult in Oregon in 2022. In addition, DSPs often do not receive adequate or affordable workplace benefits. At the time of this report, COVID-19 related pay enhancements are no longer in effect, which may result in decreased pay and increased turnover in the future.

Based on the findings of our analyses, we conclude that increasing wages is an important tool for reducing DSP turnover and vacancy rates. We further conclude that permanent pay increases are a more reliable mechanism for maintaining a stable DSP workforce than one-time bonuses. Additionally, we recommend the following strategies to help further reduce turnover:

- Provide key benefits and career growth opportunities for DSPs.
- Build on ongoing efforts to recognize the value of DSPs and the importance of their work.
- Ensure pay equity within the DSP workforce and with other types of skilled labor in the state.



Introduction

Many adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) rely on Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) to provide quality support on a daily basis. The support of DSPs is crucial for helping adults with I/DD live in community settings, maintain their health and well-being, have successful work and social lives, and develop and maintain independent living skills. Successfully providing these supports requires DSPs to be interdisciplinary professionals and bring a wide range of skills and knowledge to their job.¹ However, DSP positions are challenging and often come with low pay, limited benefits, and little social status or recognition of the importance of the DSP role.² High turnover and large numbers of vacant positions are common, costly, and dangerous.

High turnover and vacancies impact the continuity and quality of care available to adults with I/DD and increase burdens on remaining staff.² These issues may amplify risk for medication errors, injuries, and abuse and neglect of adults with I/DD.³ High turnover also has substantial budget implications for agencies that must continually recruit and train new staff. Estimates of the cost of replacing a single DSP range from \$2,413 to \$5,200.² With large numbers of DSP positions needing to be refilled the cumulative cost is massive, reaching an estimated \$2,338,716,600 per year nationally.² As such, DSP turnover and vacancies are centrally important issues to understand and address.

This is the fourth report on Oregon DSP staffing stability. Since the first report, which used data from 2018, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an already challenging situation and highlighted the important role that DSPs play in our society. In addition to making staffing more difficult, the pandemic increased the stress, expectations, and risk for both DSPs and the adults with whom they work.⁴ The purpose of this updated report is to examine DSP turnover in Oregon as the COVID-19 pandemic eased, analyze factors associated with higher facility turnover and staffing vacancies, and propose strategies to create a more stable workforce. Contextual information was gathered from other sources for the compilation of this document (see references).

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Survey Information

The National Core Indicators Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (NCI-IDD) State of the Workforce Survey has been conducted in Oregon since 2016 and has been statutorily mandated since 2018.⁵ ODDS began enforcing completion of the survey in 2021 (representing the 2020 workforce) resulting in higher rates of participation.

This report only includes facilities that provide residential services to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). However, some facilities may also provide in-home or non-residential services and this report is unable to distinguish between DSPs that provide each type of service. A national report that analyzes all facilities that provide services to adults with I/DD⁶ is published by NCI-IDD. Neither report includes information about support workers hired as independent contractors, who are not included in the survey data.

Statistical tests and terms used in this report are explained in the appendix.

DSP Workforce Description

DSP Roles and Tasks

On average, Oregon group homes have capacity for 3–4 residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). DSPs in group homes provide 24-hour wrap-around care to these residents, who have a wide range of needs.

DSP tasks can vary extensively and often include assisting with personal care, assisting in the development of independent living skills, dispensing medications, monitoring individual behaviors and safety, setting up appointments, and transporting individuals to locations outside the home.

Size of the Oregon DSP Workforce

In 2022, 253 out of 295 (85.8%) eligible I/DD residential service provider agencies in Oregon completed the NCI State of the Workforce Survey. These agencies employed a total of 8,342 DSPs who provided residential, in-home, or non-residential care to 6,165 adults with I/DD. The type of care DSPs provide was captured in past surveys^{7,8} but was not included in the 2022 survey.

While the size of the DSP workforce represented by this survey has remained relatively stable since 2020, the number of group homes has rapidly increased, from 159 in 2020 to 295 in 2022 (Table 1).

In 2022 the number of DSPs employed per agency ranged from 1 to 998. Most agencies, especially new agencies, are small and employ between 1 and 10 DSPs (Figure 1).

Full vs. Part-time

Of the DSPs at agencies in the 2022 survey, 21.9% were part-time workers and 59.4% were full-time; the remaining 18.7% worked at agencies that did not distinguish between full-time and part-time DSP positions. While the majority of DSPs are full-time, between 2018 and 2022 there was a steady increase in the proportion of part-time DSPs at agencies that completed the survey (Figure 2). The median proportion of part-time DSPs is higher at agencies that employ 1–10 DSPs (21.3%) compared to those that employ 11–50 (20.5%) or more than 50 DSPs (12.2%).

TABLE 1

Oregon residential agencies and survey participation by year, 2020–2022

	2020	2021	2022
Eligible residential agencies	159	212	295
Agencies that completed the survey	155	204	253
Total number of DSPs represented	8,732	8,369	8,342

FIGURE 1

Size of Oregon agencies providing residential services to adults with I/DD, 2020–2022

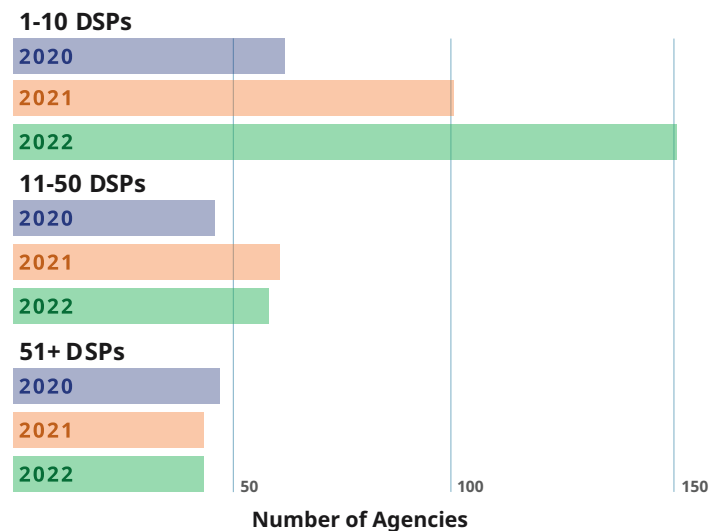
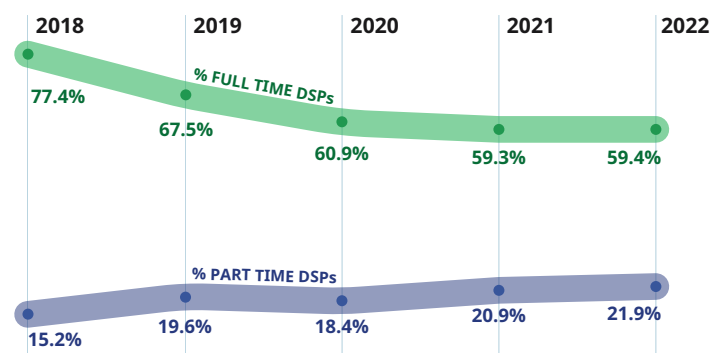


FIGURE 2

Trend in part-time and full-time employment among Oregon DSPs, 2018–2022





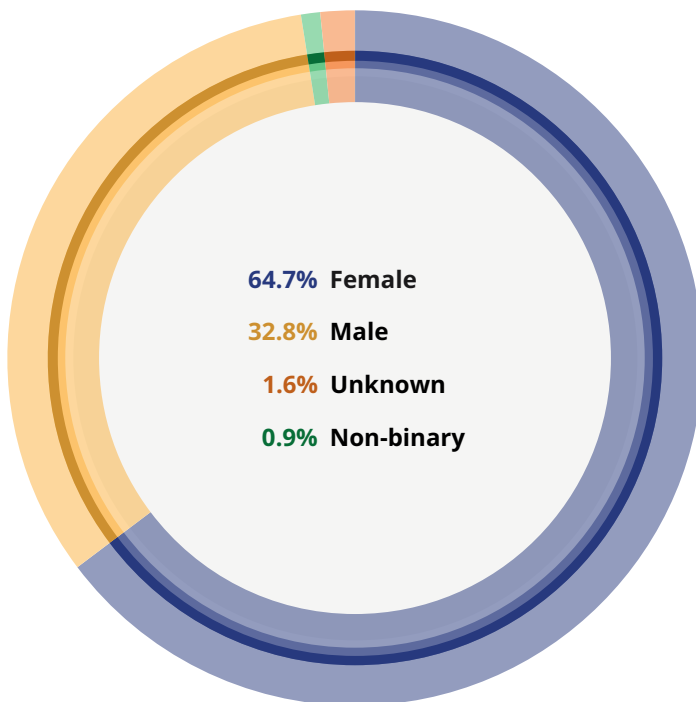
Demographic Characteristics of the DSP Workforce

Demographic information collected in the NCI State of the Workforce Survey is limited to gender and race and ethnicity.

Gender

Of the 253 agencies that completed the survey, 235 agencies that employed a total of 7,660 staff reported on DSP gender. Among DSPs employed at those agencies, 64.7% identified as female, 32.8% as male, 0.9% as gender non-binary, and the gender identity of the remaining 1.6% was unknown (Figure 3).

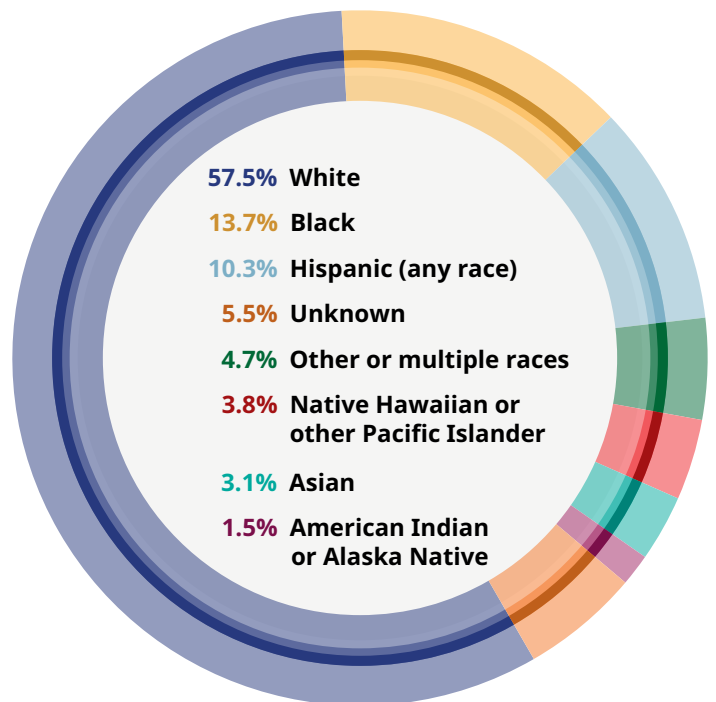
FIGURE 3
Gender of Oregon DSP Workforce, 2022



Race and Ethnicity

Data on DSP race and ethnicity were reported by 216 agencies that employed a total of 7,365 DSPs. Among DSPs employed at those agencies, 57.5% were White, 13.7% were Black, 10.3% were Hispanic, 13.1% were any other or multiple races, and race and ethnicity of the remaining 5.5% was unknown (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4
Race and Ethnicity of Oregon DSP Workforce, 2022



DSP Workforce Stability: Turnover, Tenure, and Vacancy Rates

Stability of the DSP workforce impacts both the quality of services that agencies provide, as well as their ability to provide services.

In 2022, 74 (29.3%) of agencies reported that they had to turn away or stop accepting new service referrals due to DSP staffing issues.

The three measures used to assess the stability of the DSP workforce in Oregon are the **turnover ratio**,* **average staff tenure**, and **vacancy rate**.⁶ While this report represents only agencies that provide residential services, these measures cannot distinguish between residential DSPs or DSPs employed in another capacity for agencies that provide multiple types of support.

OVERALL TURNOVER RATIO

$$\text{Overall Turnover Ratio} = \frac{\text{\# DSPs who left the agency during 2022}}{\text{\# DSPs on agency payroll as of Dec. 31, 2022}}$$

Turnover Ratio

In 2022, the median overall DSP turnover ratio among facilities in Oregon that provide residential services was 33.3%. This means that at a facility with an average turnover ratio, 1 out of every 3 DSPs left during the year. While turnover ratios have been decreasing in recent years (Figure 5), the high level of DSP turnover is still a concern.

Turnover ratios varied widely by agency in 2022 (Figure 6) and ranged from 0% (which indicates that no DSPs left during the year) to 250% (for every 2 DSPs employed in December, 5 DSPs left the agency during the year). The median turnover ratio was higher at agencies that employ more than 50 DSPs (58.7%) compared to those who employ 11–50 (39.7%; P=0.05) or 1–10 DSPs (28.6%; P <0.001).

FIGURE 5
Overall DSP turnover ratio by year, 2018–2022

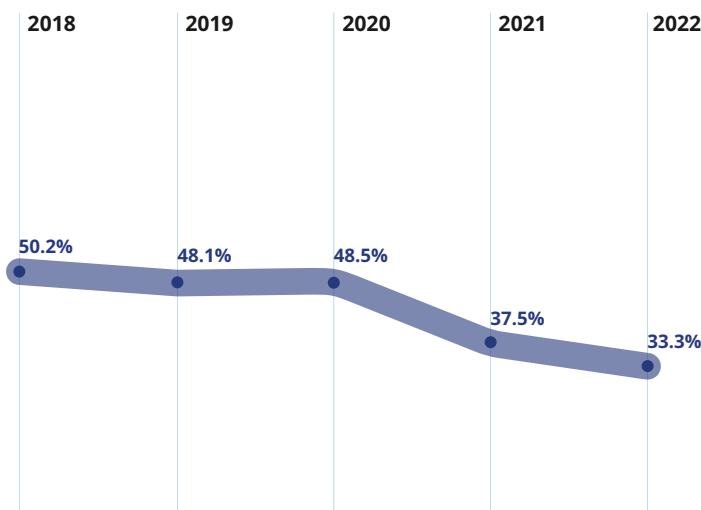
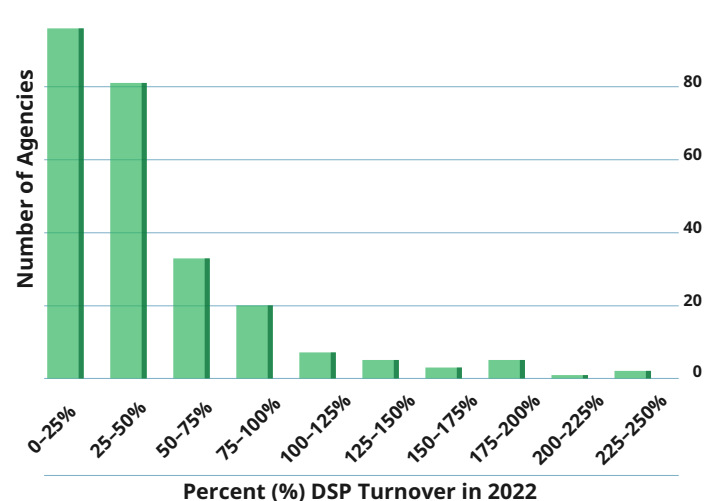


FIGURE 6
DSP turnover ratios, 2022



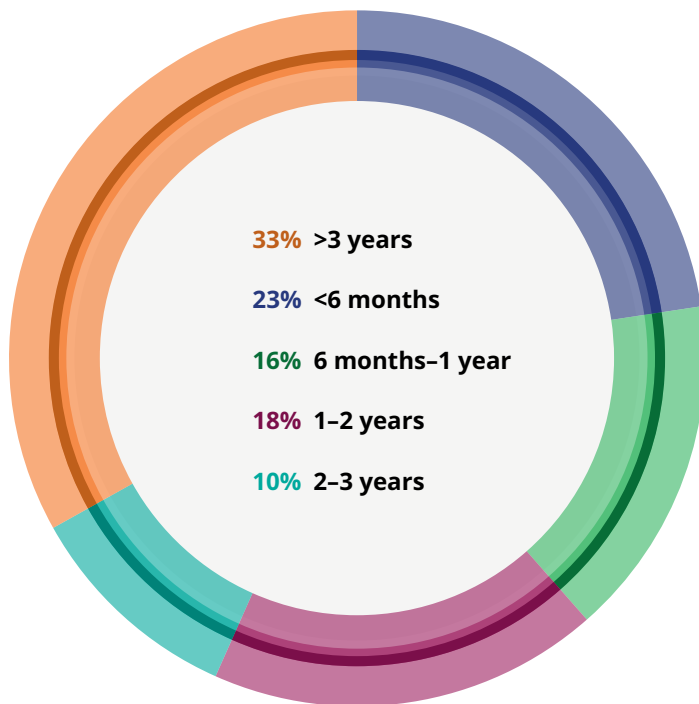
* Prior to this report, “turnover ratio” was called “turnover rate”. Language was updated to match national standards. The two are equivalent.

DSP Workforce Stability: Turnover, Tenure, and Vacancy Rates

Tenure of Current Staff

High turnover ratios mean that relatively few DSPs have a long tenure working at a single agency. Consequently, a substantial proportion of the DSP workforce consists of less experienced personnel. In 2022, fewer than half of DSPs had been on the job longer than two years, and only about one third had been on the job for more than 3 years. One third had less than one year of experience (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7
Tenure of current DSPs, 2022



As noted earlier, many new agencies were eligible to participate in the State of the Workforce survey in 2022, and DSPs at these agencies would not have had opportunity to gain much tenure yet. However, there have been no significant changes in the distribution of DSP tenure during 2018-2022. While the addition of new agencies does not fully explain the overall lack of long-term tenure, the addition of new agencies may make it more likely that DSPs transition from one agency to another.

Turnover Ratio by Staff Tenure

Traditionally, DSP turnover ratios decrease the longer a DSP is employed with an agency. We calculated turnover ratio separately for DSPs employed less than 6 months, between 6 and 12 months, between 12 and 24 months, between 24 and 36 months, and more than 36 months. The highest turnover was among those with a job tenure of less than 6 months. Turnover decreased as staff tenure increased. However, the mean and median turnover ratios were both 50% or higher in all tenure groups except those who had been employed as DSPs for longer than 2 years (Table 2). Compared to 2021, the median turnover ratio decreased for all tenure groups except those employed for < 6 months.⁸

TABLE 2
Turnover by duration of DSP Tenure Category, 2022

Tenure Category	Range in Turnover ratios	Median Turnover ratio	Mean Turnover ratio
Overall	0-250%	33.3%	45.9%
<6 months	0-2,300%	100%	149.5%
6-12 months	0-600%	51.6%	78.9%
1-2 years	0-700%	50.0%	70.1%
2-3 years	0-300%	32.1%	43.2%
>3 years	0-200%	17.6%	25.0%

DSP Workforce Stability: Turnover, Tenure, and Vacancy Rates

VACANCY RATE

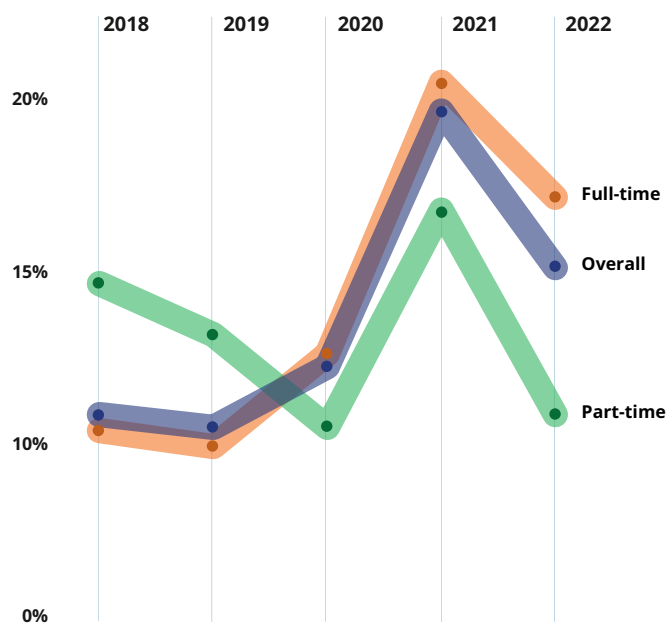
$$\text{Vacancy Rate} = \frac{\# \text{ Vacant DSP Positions as of Dec. 31, 2022}}{\# \text{ DSP positions as of Dec. 31, 2022}}$$

Vacancy rate, or the percentage of DSP positions that are vacant, is another metric that can be used to assess stability of the DSP workforce in Oregon.

Overall, 15.2% of DSP positions were vacant statewide, including 17.3% of full-time DSP positions and 11.0% of part-time DSP positions (Figure 8). While vacancy rates are still a concern for agencies, they have decreased significantly since 2021 (p=0.05), which had the highest vacancy rates since the inception of this annual report.

FIGURE 8

Proportion of DSP positions that were vacant in Oregon, 2018-2022



As of December 2022, there were 914 vacant full-time DSP positions and 216 vacant part-time DSP positions in Oregon among agencies that completed the survey. There are fewer vacancies now than in December 2021, when there were 1,290 vacant full-time DSP positions and 356 vacant part-time DSP positions.

Reasons for Departure

In 2022, 4,833 DSPs departed their jobs, compared to 5,178 in 2021 and 5,438 in 2020. Similar to prior years, the majority (77.9%) of DSPs who departed their jobs left voluntarily (Table 3). However, compared to 2021, a larger proportion of DSPs were terminated (18.7% vs. 15.0%) and a smaller proportion of positions were eliminated (0.1% vs. 2.6%; Table 3).

TABLE 3

Number of DSPs who departed jobs by reason and year, 2020-2022

	2020 (%)	2021 (%)	2022 (%)
Voluntary	3,937 (72.4%)	4,051 (78.2%)	3,766 (77.9%)
Terminated	969 (17.8%)	776 (15.0%)	905 (18.7%)
Position Eliminated	247 (4.5%)	137 (2.6%)	6 (0.1%)
Unknown	285 (5.2%)	214 (4.1%)	156 (3.2%)
Total	5,438	5,178	4,833

The NCI State of the Workforce Survey collects data at the agency level rather than from individual staff. Thus, we do not have specific information about why DSPs who left voluntarily chose to leave. Anecdotally, DSPs have reported that the work is challenging, and the pay is lower than they could receive elsewhere for easier work.

DSP Workforce Stability: Turnover, Tenure, and Vacancy Rates



DSP Agency Structure and Association with Staff Stability

Agency Size

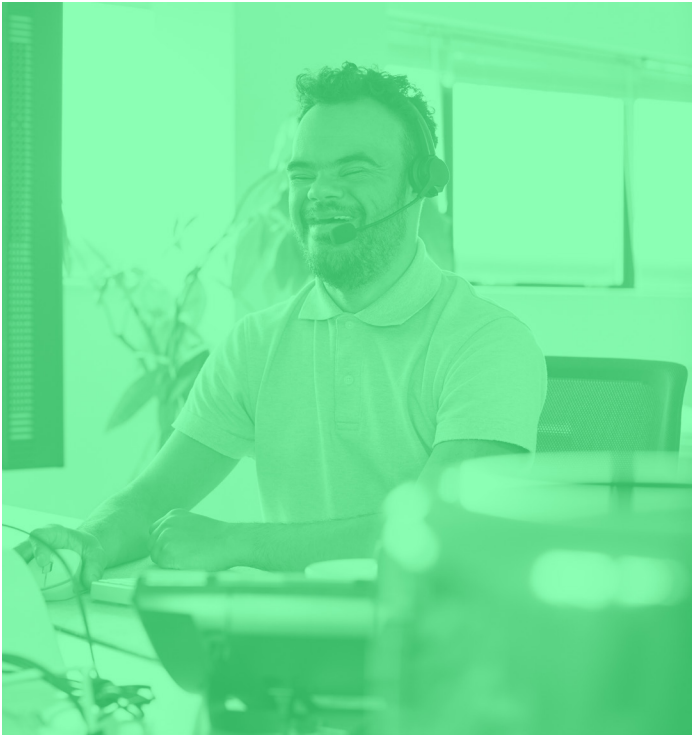
Agency size is the strongest predictor of turnover ratios, and turnover ratios are significantly higher at larger agencies ($p < 0.001$). The median turnover ratio was 38.8% (range 0–250%) at agencies that employed 1–10 DSPs, 50.4% (range 6–200%) at medium agencies, and 58.7% (range 5–184%) at large agencies. Vacancy rates did not vary by agency size ($p=0.65$).

Supervisory Support

Frontline supervisors are the first line of management in human service organizations. These are staff who supervise DSPs working with adults with I/DD and often also engage in direct support as part of their duties. Other responsibilities include overseeing implementation of Individual Support Plans (ISPs) and ensuring safety and

medical protocols are followed. ISPs are the annual support service plan that each individual with I/DD must have in order to receive funded services. Supervisors provide training to DSPs on services and supports identified in the ISP and are also responsible for coordination of care for those they support. DSP stability is often directly impacted by the quality of oversight, training, and supervision they receive from a frontline supervisor.

While the total number of supervisors increases with agency size, one key metric is the ratio of DSPs to frontline supervisors. In 2022, the mean ratio was 4 DSPs to 1 supervisor at agencies with 1–10 DSPs, 7 to 1 at agencies with 11–50 DSPs, and 19 to 1 at agencies with 51 or more DSPs. After adjusting for agency size, the ratio of supervisors to DSPs was not associated with either turnover ratio or vacancy rate.



DSP Wages

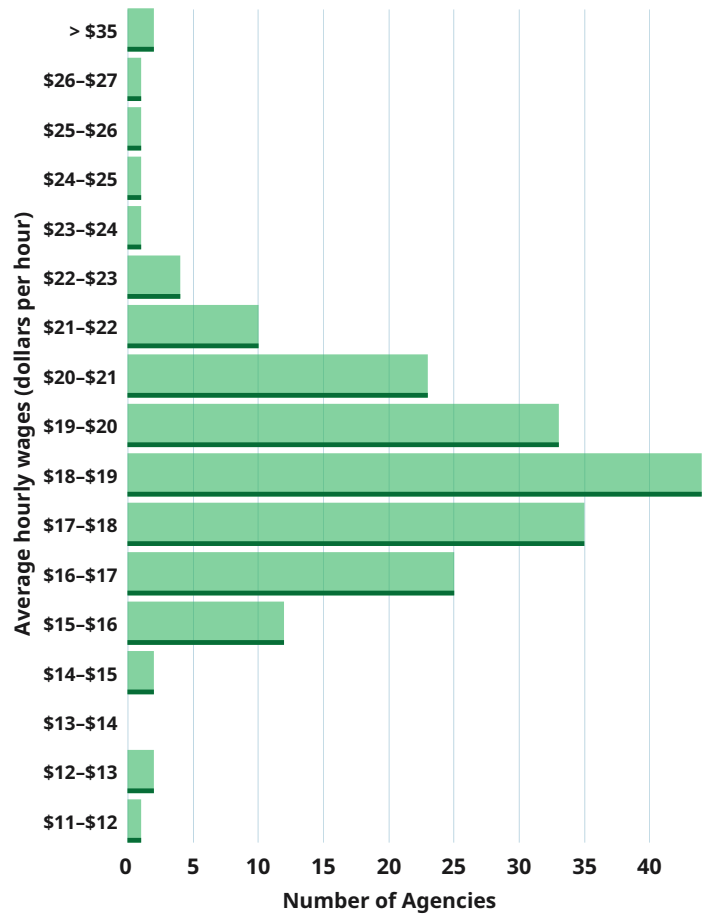
Starting Wages and Average Wages

In 2022, the median reported starting pay for residential DSPs in Oregon was \$17.00 per hour and ranged from \$11.92** to \$25.00. Median starting pay was higher at agencies that employ more than 50 DSPs (\$17.50) compared to those that employed 1–10 (\$17.00; $p=0.05$) or 11–50 DSPs (\$16.81; $p=0.04$).

Median average wages across all tenure groups were only slightly higher than starting wages and ranged from \$11.92 to \$40.00 per hour (Figure 9). The state-wide median pay was \$18.00 per hour. Median average pay was higher at agencies that employ more than 50 DSPs (\$19.02) compared to those that employed 1–10 (\$18.00) and those that employ 11–50 (\$18.33).

FIGURE 9

Average wages for Oregon DSPs providing residential care, 2022



Only 212 (83.8%) of eligible agencies that responded to the survey provided information about starting pay for DSPs providing residential care, and 196 (77.4%) provided information about average pay. Agencies that did not provide information about wages were more likely to be small (employing 1–10 DSPs).

** Starting pay may be lower than the Oregon Standard Minimum wage⁹ for 2022 in non-urban areas that use the Oregon Non-urban Minimum Wage⁹ and/or because agencies reported starting pay based on the most recent year a new DSP was hired.

DSP Wages and Benefits



Change in Wages

During the 2022 reporting period there were temporary COVID-19 rate enhancements of 5–8.2% which helped to increase wages. These increases ended as of July 1, 2023.

The median starting pay increased by \$5.00 per hour between 2018 and 2022 ($p < 0.001$), and the median average pay increased by \$3.20 per hour ($p < 0.001$). Improvements have also been made in comparison to the Oregon Standard Minimum Wage (OSMW; Table 4). In 2018, the OSMW was \$10.75, and the median starting salary was only \$1.25 higher (\$12.00). In 2022, the OSMW was \$13.50 and the median starting salary was \$3.50 higher (\$17.00).

While some progress has been made, wages for DSPs were still considerably lower than those for the Oregon workforce as a whole. According to 2022 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the mean hourly wage for the overall Oregon workforce in 2021 was \$30.14 and the median was \$22.97.¹⁰ Nationally, wages for DSPs are also consistently lower than for other direct care professionals, such as Home Health Aids, Personal Care attendants, Nursing Assistants, and Residential Advisors.¹

TABLE 4

Median DSP wages and Oregon standard minimum wage (OSMW) by year, 2018–2022

	Oregon Standard Minimum Wage	DSP Median Salary	DSP Median Starting Salary
2018	\$10.75	\$13.20	\$12.00
2019	\$11.25	\$13.90	\$13.00
2020	\$12.00	\$15.00	\$13.75
2021	\$12.75	\$16.04	\$15.07
2022	\$13.50	\$18.00	\$17.00

While the median DSP wage in Oregon was above the minimum wage for all regions of Oregon in 2022, it was not sufficient to be considered a living wage for one adult in Oregon in 2022. The median wage of \$18.00 per hour was well below the estimated \$43.36 per hour that would be needed to support one adult and one child, or the estimated \$30.93 to support a household with two adults and two children even if the other adult was also working.¹¹ The lower end of the DSP wage range (\$11.92) was lower than both Oregon’s standard hourly minimum wage of \$13.50 per hour for the July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022 fiscal year and non-urban minimum wage of \$12.00 per hour.⁹

Bonuses

Overall, 161 agencies (63.6%) reported that they gave a wage bonus to DSPs in 2022. This included all one-time COVID-19 bonuses (including those for working during the pandemic and vaccination incentives).

DSP Wages and Benefits



Starting Wages

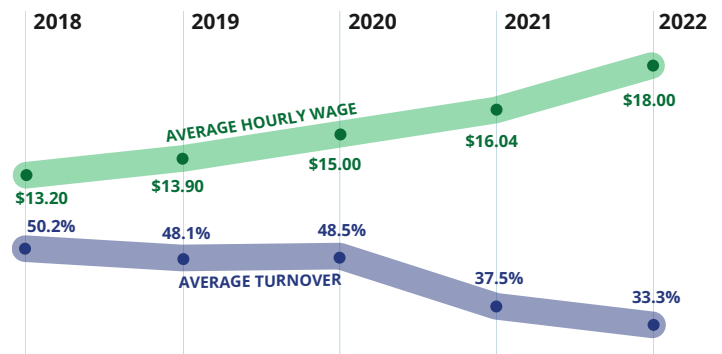
During 2018–2021, average starting wages appeared to be correlated with overall turnover ratio, meaning that as hourly starting wages increased, turnover decreased.⁸ However, we did not see this correlation in 2022 ($R=0.004$; $p=0.36$), which may be consistent with the facts that starting wages have increased and turnover ratios have decreased. As in prior years, we also did not find a significant association between starting wages and the percentage of positions that were vacant ($R=0.0004$; $p=0.31$).

Average Wages

In 2022, we did not find a significant negative correlation between average hourly wages of DSPs working in residential settings and overall turnover ratio ($R=0.007$; $p=0.26$). This finding is consistent with 2021, but in contrast to 2018–2020, where we observed a strong negative correlation between average hourly wages and staff turnover. There was also no association between average hourly wages and overall vacancy rates ($R=-0.006$; $p=0.58$). This may be due to the fact that average wages have increased overall and become more consistent between agencies in recent years. However, overtime there is a clear indication that as wages have increased, turnover has decreased (Figure 10).

FIGURE 10

Comparison between average hourly wages and staff turnover by year, 2018–2022



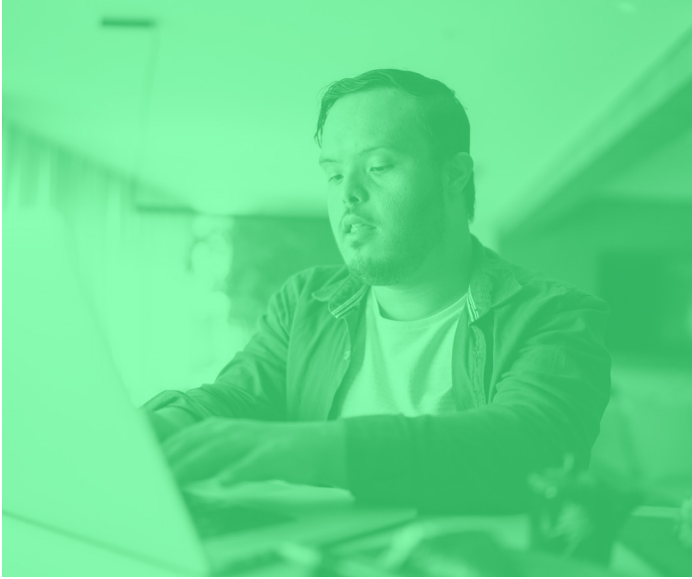
Bonuses

Agencies that provided bonuses to DSPs had a slightly lower overall turnover ratio compared to those that did not (39.2% vs. 49.5%; $p=0.09$).

DSP Workplace Benefits

The NCI State of the Workforce Survey asked agencies whether or not they provided a range of benefits that may increase retention or attract DSPs to their agency. We found that in addition to low wages, many DSPs do not receive adequate or affordable workplace benefits.

DSP Wages and Benefits



Insurance

Overall, 102 (40.3%) of reporting agencies offered health insurance coverage, 94 (37.2%) offered dental insurance, and 83 (32.8%) offered vision insurance. Among the agencies that offered health insurance coverage, only 7 (6.9%) offered insurance to all DSPs, with no eligibility criteria. Other agencies had one or more of the following requirements in place: 65 (63.7%) required that DSPs be full-time, 44 (43.1%) required that DSPs must work a minimum amount of time within a defined time period, and 61 (59.8%) required that DSPs must have been employed at the agency for a certain length of time. Even when benefits are provided and DSPs are eligible, associated out-of-pocket costs may not be affordable for all DSPs. In 2021, only 69% of eligible DSPs were enrolled in the health insurance benefit when it was offered by their agency⁸ (these data were not collected in 2022).

Oregon requires that employers with 50 or more employees offer health insurance. In 2022, 100% of the 44 agencies that employed 50 or more DSPs offered health and dental insurance and 43 (97.7%) offered vision insurance. Of the 209 agencies that employed fewer than 50 DSPs,^{***} 58 (27.8%) offered health insurance, 50 (23.9%) offered dental insurance, and 40 (19.1%) offered vision insurance.

^{***} Some organizations with fewer than 50 DSPs may have more than 50 overall employees, but this survey does not collect information on all residential home positions.

Paid Time Off

Overall, 149 (58.9%) of agencies offered some type of paid time off (PTO) to DSPs. This included 67 agencies that offered both paid vacation and paid sick time, and 25 agencies that offered pooled PTO, which is not distinguishable by category (vacation, sick, or other time off). Among the agencies that offer any type of paid leave, only 55 (37.7%) offered PTO to all DSPs, with no eligibility criteria. The other 62.3% of agencies had one or more of the following requirements in place: 43 (29.5%) required that DSPs be full-time, 37 (25.3%) required that DSPs must work a minimum amount of time within a defined time period, and 74 (50.7%) required that DSPs must have been employed at the agency for a certain length of time.

Retirement Plan

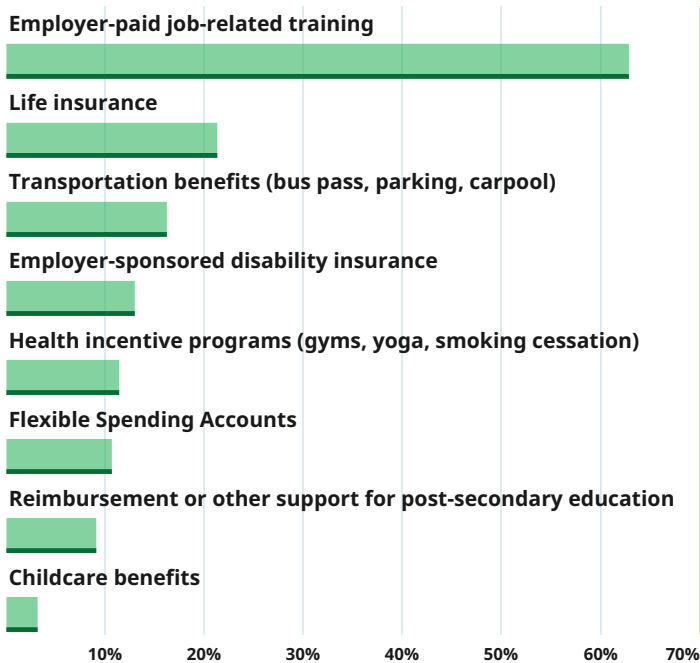
Overall, 96 (37.9%) reporting agencies offered an employer-sponsored retirement plan (401k, 403b, or other plan) to some or all DSPs. Eligibility criteria varied between agencies and only 27 (28.1%) offered insurance to all DSPs with no eligibility criteria. The other 69 (71.9%) had one of the following requirements in place: 29 (30.2%) required that DSPs be full-time, 24 (25.0%) required that DSPs must work a minimum amount of time within a defined time period, and 54 (56.3%) required that DSPs must have been employed at the agency for a certain length of time. In 2021, 37 (8.1%) large agencies that employed 50 or more DSPs offered a retirement plan to some or all DSPs, compared to only 50 (28.2%) agencies that employed fewer than 50 DSPs (this information was not collected in the 2022 survey).

DSP Wages and Benefits

Other Benefits

There was a lot of variability in what additional benefits were provided by agencies in 2022. Additional benefits ranged from childcare benefits provided by only 8 (3.2%) agencies, to employer-paid job-related training, provided by 159 (62.9%) agencies (Figure 11).

FIGURE 11
Proportion of agencies that provided other benefits to DSPs, 2022



Compared to agencies that employ fewer than 50 DSPs, large agencies were more likely to provide all benefits captured in Figure 11 ($p < 0.05$) with the exception of transportation ($p=0.95$).

Association Between Benefits and Workforce Stability

Because agencies that employ more than 50 DSPs are more likely to provide most types of benefits, we assessed the association between benefits and workforce stability separately for agencies that employed 1–10, 11–50, and more than 50 DSPs. (All large agencies offered PTO and health insurance, so we were unable to assess the association between these benefits and turnover at large agencies.)

Overall, we found limited associations between provision of benefits and turnover and retention. However, there was some indication among agencies that did offer benefits, that additional eligibility criteria may be associated with increased turnover and vacancy rates:

- Agencies that provided PTO but had eligibility criteria had mean vacancy rates that were significantly higher than those with no requirements for PTO (48.7% vs. 35.4% vacancy; $p=0.02$).
- Agencies that provided health insurance but had eligibility criteria had vacancy rates that were slightly higher than those with no requirements (36.3% vs. 22.3% vacancy; $p=0.18$).
- Agencies that provided a retirement plan but required that employees be employed for a certain period of time before they were eligible to participate had turnover ratios that were slightly higher than those with no requirements or other eligibility requirements (53.0% vs. 42.7%; $p=0.07$).

DSP Wages and Benefits

Staff Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Beyond wages and benefits, agencies utilize an array of additional strategies to recruit and retain DSPs. In the 2022 NCI State of the Workforce Survey, agencies were asked if they utilized the following 12 staff retention strategies:

- Incentive or referral bonus for current DSPs to bring in new staff (28.5% said yes)
- Realistic job preview (70.8%)
- Engage with high schools and/or local colleges/ universities (16.6%)
- Offer or participate in apprenticeship programs (5.5%)
- Provide DSPs with code of ethics training (59.3%)
- Use a DSP career ladder to retain highly skilled workers (37.6%)
- Support staff to acquire credentials through a state or nationally recognized professional organization (20.2%)
- Provide DSPs with bonuses, stipends, or raises at key stages or completion of credentialing process (30.0%)
- Implement employee engagement surveys or other efforts aimed at assessing DSP satisfaction and experience working for the agency (28.1%)
- Employee recognition programs such as initiatives to reward DSPs for achievement, anniversaries, or other milestones (50.6%)
- Include DSPs in agency governance such as serving on advisory boards or playing a role in hiring (12.3%)
- Require trainings above and beyond those required by State of Oregon regulations (45.1%)

Compared to 2021, a smaller proportion of agencies offered each retention strategy with the exception of requiring trainings above and beyond those required by State of Oregon regulations.⁸



Association Between Retention Strategies and Workforce Stability

As with benefits, large agencies were more likely to implement retention strategies, so all analyses between retention strategies and turnover and vacancy rates were stratified by agency size. While most retention strategies were not associated with either DSP turnover or vacancy rates in 2022, we found a few associations that are worth noting:

- Agencies that employed 1–10 DSPs had slightly lower vacancy rates when they provided DSPs with bonuses, stipends, or raises at key stages or completion of the credentialing process (11.6% vs. 20.1%; $p=0.08$); or when they required additional trainings above and beyond those required by State of Oregon regulations (12.3% vs. 21.1%; $p=0.06$).
- Agencies that employed more than 50 DSPs had significantly lower vacancy rates if they provided support with credentialing (8.5% vs. 18.9%; $p=0.02$)
- Agencies that employed 11–50 DSPs had significantly higher turnover ratios if they had a clear career ladder for DSPs (69.8% vs. 40.2%; $p < 0.01$).

Summary and Recommendations

The state of the Oregon DSP workforce in agencies providing residential services improved significantly in 2022: average hourly wages increased, and DSP turnover ratios decreased. However, when turnover is examined among all agencies that support adults with I/DD, the nationwide average turnover ratio is 40.9%, compared to 45.4% in Oregon.⁶ Turnover and vacancy rates have decreased in the past year, but agencies are still struggling to recruit and retain DSPs. This has resulted in agencies not accepting referrals due to staffing capacity.

Summary and Recommendations

Based on the findings of our analyses, we recommend the following strategies to reduce turnover and improve continuity of care for adults with I/DD:

1. Continue to increase hourly wages. In our previous analyses, higher starting wages were associated with lower turnover.⁷ These findings were supported by national data as well.¹² While this association was not found in 2022, overall wages have increased compared to prior years. Oregon agencies implemented moderate pay increases in 2021 and 2022 and these increases corresponded with a decrease in turnover both years (compared to earlier years), as well as a decrease in vacancy rates in 2022. However, these pandemic-related increases have been discontinued and turnover and vacancy rates still remain high. Continuing to increase wages across the DSP workforce will likely contribute to further declines in turnover and vacancy rates and increase the stability of the workforce.
2. Enhance reporting through additional data sources. This includes incorporating data on DSPs that serve children and families when those data become available. In addition, it would be valuable to collect additional data on reasons for DSP departure. This may also include conducting exit interviews with DSPs to understand the actual reasons that they are leaving, specifically in the first few months of employment.
3. Estimate the economic costs of turnover for Oregon. The State of the Workforce is a valuable resource but does not address the overall economic costs to the State of Oregon. These costs should be examined, potentially through collaborations with provider associations.
4. Provide key benefits and career growth opportunities. Provision of paid time off, health insurance (especially coverage beyond what is included in the Oregon Health Plan), and other benefits can help with reducing turnover. We specifically found that providing benefits to all staff, without restricting them to only full-time employees, was associated with lower turnover and vacancy rates. We also recommend instituting a way for agencies to share successful strategies for addressing employee turnover with each other.
5. Build on ongoing efforts to recognize the value of DSPs. The work of DSPs is generally considered low status, yet it is crucially important to the health, safety, and well-being of adults with I/DD.² The DSP role requires considerable effort, skill, and dedication; these qualities should be recognized and rewarded. ODDS has been addressing the workforce crisis by building partnerships with case management entities and employment agencies throughout Oregon and the country; disseminating recruitment and retention grants; and supporting innovation in service equity. While these and other efforts of ODDS have been helpful, the shortage of DSPs continues. Future long-term strategies, actions and funds are needed. As a matter of health equity, Oregon must prioritize the well-being of our citizens with I/DD and the professionals who support them.
6. Ensure pay equity. The low value currently placed on DSP work goes hand-in-hand with the demographic characteristics of the DSP workforce. The majority of DSPs are women and many of them are people of color—demographic groups that consistently earn lower pay in the United States. As one report stated, DSPs receive gendered pay for gendered work,¹³ highlighting the inherent inequity in a pay structure that values caregiving roles less than other forms of work. Oregon has an opportunity to take the lead not only in ensuring pay equity within the DSP workforce but also in elevating DSP pay scales to a level that is equitable in the context of pay levels for other types of skilled labor in the state.

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Appendix: Statistical Terms

There are several statistical terms included in this report. Brief explanations of these terms are provided below.

Mean

The mean (sometimes called an average) is the sum of a set of data points divided by the number of data points. For example, to calculate the mean daily rainfall during a given month, we add up the rainfall from all of the days in that month and then divide by the number of days in the month.

Median

The median is the “middle” value between the upper and lower halves of a set of data. Unlike the mean, the median is less likely to be influenced by extreme values that differ dramatically from the rest of the data.

Correlation

Correlation measures the extent to which two variables are related. If the variables are positively correlated, when one variable increases the other one does too. If the variables are negatively correlated, when one variable increases the other one decreases.

T-test

A t-test is a statistical test used to compare the means of two groups to determine if they are similar or different.

Test for trend

A trend test is used to determine if a set of values is increasing or decreasing over time, or if the set of values has remained constant over time.

P-value

When conducting a statistical test, the p-value is the probability of obtaining test results at least as extreme as the results actually observed, purely by chance. A commonly used p-value cutoff is 0.05, meaning there is only a 5% probability that the observed association was due to random chance.

Significant

Statistical significance means that the observed relationship between variables is most likely caused by something other than chance. For this report, when the p-value for a statistical test is less than 0.05, we describe the result of the test as statistically significant. If the p-value is between 0.05 and 0.10, we note that there is a trend toward a significant association.

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