

2020 Wrap Up/2021 Line Up January 2021

2020 has proven to be one for the record books the likes of which we'll hopefully never see again. While all things COVID-related took precedence for I/DD provider organizations, there were other important developments that will continue to shape the Illinois I/DD landscape into 2021 and beyond. As the Institute has done for the past several years, below we take stock of key events from the past year and forecast how they may impact the coming year.

COVID19

COVID19 had a deep, costly and indelible impact on I/DD provider organizations and the people they support. Cumulatively, 1,577 people supported in CILA settings contracted COVID19 with 47 fatalities. The state did not track staff infections or mortalities, but I/DD organizations reported widespread contraction though thankfully, not widespread mortality. The 1,577 figure reflects an approximate 13% positivity rate. Conversely, 890 residents in state operated developmental centers (SODC) contracted COVID19 with 11 fatalities, reflecting a 54% positivity rate.

Among Institute members, a key strategy that was instrumental in deflating the positivity rate was embedding staff in residences for extended durations, in some cases 8+ weeks, to avoid exposure to potentially infected staff. While this was an extremely costly endeavor, with extensive overtime expenses, enhanced wages and other stipends, it proved to be successful in maintaining residents' health and preventing the rapid spread in community settings that we experienced in larger congregate settings.

Beyond staffing, organizations experienced unexpected and costly expenses associated with the acquisition of PPE and household cleaning items, the purchase and maintenance of technology to facilitate communication and reduce social isolation, program supplies to maintain activity levels in homes, increased food inventory and costs associated with unemployment and COVID-related PTO. While many organizations accessed PPP and federal relief funds, there's widespread trepidation and pessimism regarding the final balance sheet for calendar year 2020 and fiscal year 2021.

Looking ahead to the coming year, we will likely see the continued impact of COVID19 on provider organizations in several of the following ways:

- Contraction of Community Day Services (CDS) revenues and possibly provider organizations due to continued reduced census resulting from COVID restrictions including transportation limitations as well as apprehension on the part of participants and their families, as well as residential providers.
- Haphazard access to vaccine access among I/DD provider organizations. While IDPH and IDHD have confirmed that I/DD residential organizations fall with the 1a classification, I/DD organizations report a variety of experiences in accessing the vaccination. These range from vaccinations already scheduled and/or begun to being informed by their local health department that they (I/DD organizations) don't fall in the 1a category.
- Reluctance among I/DD staff and families of I/DD residents to receive the vaccine in the early stages. While some organizations are reporting a higher take-up rate, many are finding interest hovering around 50% for both staff and residents.
- Higher co-morbidity rates and the age of I/DD CILA residents (30%+ are age 60+) will continue to disproportionately put residents of CILA settings at risk for contracting COVID19, particularly in light of organization's access to vaccine priority reported above.
- Many I/DD executives expect inflated expenses associated with COVID19 to continue well into calendar year 2021. While IDHS and HFS provided retention payments for day services through August 2020 and enhanced rates that continue into early 2021, there is grave concern regarding the final fiscal impact of COVID on I/DD organizations' budgets. This concern is amplified by the 1/1/21 minimum wage increase which further strains organizations fiscal resources.

I/DD Rates Study

2020 saw completion of the I/DD system rate study that began in 2018 under agreement between the federal court and parties involved in the Ligas Consent Decree. The extensive study concluded that the infusion of significant fiscal resources was warranted to properly fund I/DD community services in Illinois. The net impact of rate increases necessary to implement the body of recommendations in FY22 was \$158+ million, with Illinois recouping approximately ½ of that amount through federal matching dollars. The fiscal impact grows over the following 4 years largely attributable to wage adjustments tied to increases in the minimum wage. A central (and indeed the first) recommendation in the rate study was to tie Direct Support Personnel (DSP) staff wages to a 1.5 factor over minimum wage. The Institute chaired the Staffing Committee that contributed recommendations to Guidehouse, the consultant firm that conducted the rate study. We were able to show that at its' origin, DSP wages were established at 1.5 x minimum wage, and had lost that premium over time as minimum wage increased and DSP reimbursement remained stagnant.

We expect the effort to achieve full implementation (and funding) of the recommendations outlined in the comprehensive report will require extensive education, advocacy and collaboration among I/DD stakeholders. The Institute looks forward to our continued leadership role in this effort and partnership with others as we work toward the mutual goal of assuring the stability, quality and future of the I/DD community system in Illinois.

Minimum Wage Increase

Illinois has seen 3 increases in the statewide minimum wage over the past 18-month period, along with 2 increases each in Chicago and Cook County. Below highlights a comparison of state reimbursement for *average* (not minimum) DSP hourly wages compared to current minimum wage. Also shown is the current differential between DHS reimbursement and varying minimum wages is highlighted below as well as the recommended 1.5 differential based on actual minimum wages.

DHS Reimbursement	Illinois Minimum Wage	Cook County Minimum Wage	Chicago Minimum Wage
\$14.50	\$11.00	\$13.00	\$14.00
Present Differential	24%	10%	3%
50%+ Differential	\$16.50	\$19.50	\$21.00

Clearly, I/DD organizations are seriously challenged to attract and retain a qualified and committed workforce when the differential between minimum wage and reimbursement levels for the average (not minimum) DSP wage are so narrow. While there's little comparison between the actual work involved in being a direct support professional and typical minimum wage positions, the latter remains the benchmark for indexing the former.

The ongoing workforce shortage impacting I/DD organizations and the people they support will undoubtedly continue into 2021 and beyond as a growing number of industries compete for a shrinking labor pool, with I/DD organizations unable to offer competitive wages that reflect the social value and importance that direct support work warrants.

Community Day Services

2020 was a demanding year for Community Day Service (CDS) participants and providers. In mid-March, all CDS programs were closed due to COVID19. What was originally expected to be a short-term closure extended through the Summer with a "soft-opening" option available in August and full resumption of services pending compliance with state reporting requirements, available in September. IDHS instituted Retention payments through 6/30/20 which continued as Reinvention payments in July and August. Retention payments were intended to preserve CDS capacity and Reinvention payments were intended to assist CDS providers in adapting to the new realities of service provision. Despite the opportunity to resume full services in September, many CDS providers chose not to resume services at that time and those that did, saw dramatically reduced census'.

Organizations that provide both CDS and residential services have been able to continue both service lines, albeit in an altered manner, through the relaxation of restrictions surrounding approval for “at-home” CDS programming. Organizations that provide CDS-only however, have experienced significant negative impact with many experiencing little or no revenue streams since the conclusion of Reinvestment payments in August 2020. Many have gone to great and expensive lengths to promote the safety of participants who choose to attend on-site CDS programming, though most are finding a continuing hesitancy to return among families, individuals and residential providers. Of the nearly 150 CDS providers, approximately 30% are “CDS-only” which are the organizations disproportionately affected by the continued impact of COVID19. Barring further intervention, particularly for CDS-only providers, we may see CDS capacity significantly diminished as we emerge from the COVID crisis which will have a corresponding significant negative impact on the people who depend on and hope to return to those programs.

Prior to COVID, there has been growing interest and corresponding action in adding to the array of options for daytime activity and supports available to people with I/DD. The name change from Developmental Training to Community Day Services (CDS) signals the intent of evolving traditional site-based congregate settings to a model that includes and embraces community settings as a preferred location for service delivery. While there is presently no corresponding rate increase associated with delivering services in smaller community settings, this along with other structural changes are highlighted in the Guidehouse rate recommendations. Looking to 2021, we can expect continued demand for the expansion of community-based day service models.

Technology Demands

2020 highlighted the demand for access to technology among people with I/DD and the organizations that support them as they, like much of society coped with remote working/learning, social isolation and in-home recreation. In 2020, the state was able to assist a limited number of people with I/DD in acquiring technology through a federal grant. One of the less widely understood challenges in using technology is a provision in Illinois that classifies residential group home settings as a “business” and disallows provider organizations from paying typical rates for internet service that we are accustomed to in our own homes. Oddly, people with the least resources to pay for essential internet service are among those with the highest rates. The Institute plans on working to raise awareness and a solution to this challenge as we move forward in 2021

Growing Interest in Non-Congregate Settings

Partly in response to the devastating impact COVID19 had in large congregate settings but largely as a continuing and growing trend, people with I/DD and their families are showing continued interest in receiving supports outside of congregate settings. In late 2020 the Institute partnered with IFF, a Chicago-based company with national recognition in the affordable housing development arena, to begin exploring opportunities for bringing together affordable housing and I/DD supports in individually controlled settings. We’ve held exploratory discussions with state leaders and will broaden those in 2021 to bring in other stakeholders and further develop concepts that could expand the array of support options available to people with I/DD in Illinois. In addition to addressing a demand for non-congregate support options, this approach also assists Illinois in addressing other key policy goals, including

- ✓ Ligas Compliance
- ✓ HCBS Settings Rule
- ✓ Olmstead
- ✓ Cost Savings
- ✓ Promotion of Choice

Looking ahead to 2021 we see challenges, opportunities and most importantly the responsibility to assure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the necessary services and supports to lead meaningful and valued lives in their communities. Institute member I/DD organizations are more committed than ever to working in partnership with state and legislative leaders, and stakeholders across Illinois to fulfill that vision.

For a quick review of Institute 2020 highlights, check out: [Institute 2020 Wrap Up](#)