
Competency Models in Action:

Credentialing Direct Support Professionals

February 2014

Introduction

The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP), one of the original champions of the Long-term Care, Supports, and Services (LTCSS) Competency Model, primarily serves the intellectual and developmental disabilities sector. In 1996, NADSP's ideological founder, John F. Kennedy Jr., wrote, "Quality is defined at the point of interaction between the staff member and the individual with a disability." Guided by this insight, the organization's mission is to enhance the quality of support provided to people with disabilities through the provision of products, services and certifications which elevate the status of direct support workers, improve practice standards, promote systems reform and, most importantly, advance the knowledge, skills and values of direct support workers.*

The Workforce Need

Direct Support (home care) workers include workers classified under two occupational classifications within the home care and personal assistance industry: Personal Care Aides and Home Health Aides.† Employment of Personal Care Aides and Home Health Aides is projected to grow 49 and 48 percent respectively from 2012 to 2022, much faster than the average for all occupations. As the baby-boom population ages and the elderly population grows, the demand for Personal Care Aides and Home Health Aides to provide assistance and companionship will continue to increase. Elderly and disabled clients increasingly rely on home care as a less expensive alternative to nursing homes or hospitals. From 2012-2022, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that employment of Personal Care Aides will increase by 580,800 and employment of Home Health Aides will increase by 424,200.‡

Approach

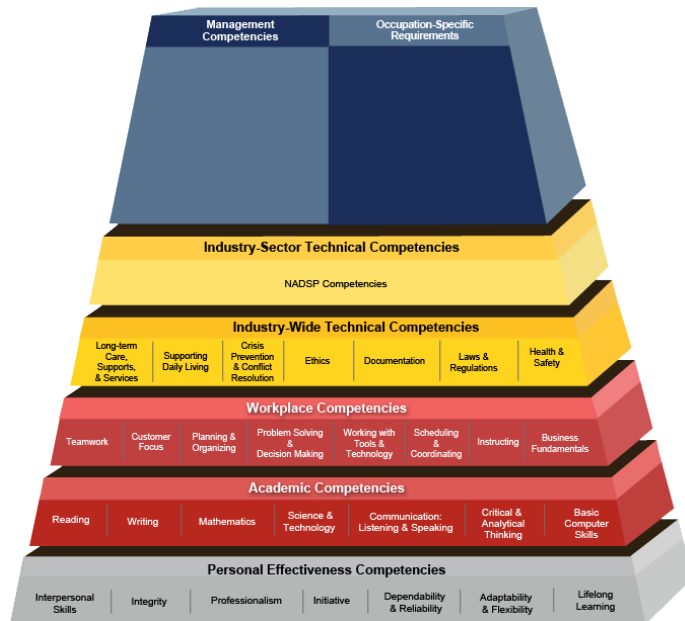
"We're trying to develop a highly valued and professional workforce by advancing knowledge that stems from sound research and demonstrating that quality can be achieved by performing skills (i.e., competencies) and manifesting ethics (i.e., values) on the job," says Joseph Macbeth, Executive Director, NADSP. "Prior to the mid-1990s, there was a void of validated skill standards for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). For example, in New York there were more than 400 non-profit provider organizations supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and approximately 75,000 DSPs working in them. All of these organizations were training people differently. If a DSP moved from one provider organization to another, they would have to be retrained regardless of the amount of experience they had.

* NADSP Guiding Principles

† PHI Facts, February 2014

‡ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2014-15 Edition, Home Health Aides, Personal Care Aides

This approach is not how other professions develop their workforce and clearly doesn't value the worker. Now there's been a paradigm shift, that being the recognition that there is a need for some sort of universal competency-based training for DSPs. The New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities used NADSP's competency set as its foundation in developing their own DSP core competencies.”



In 2007, NADSP formalized and approved 15 competencies that are common across the direct support profession. These competencies constitute the fifth tier of the LTCSS Competency Model [<https://www.nadsp.org/2011-09-22-14-00-06.html>]. They are complemented by the nine principles in NADSP's Code of Ethics [<https://www.nadsp.org/library/code-of-ethics/10-library/72-code-of-ethics-full-text.html>] which are consistent with the Ethics component of the Industry-Wide Technical Competencies tier of the LTCSS Competency Model.

NADSP has developed a four-tiered national credentialing program that is grounded in their competency areas and Code of Ethics. The DSP career path begins with the DSP-Registered Level which is a prerequisite for training to reach the two DSP-Certified Levels (Initial and Advanced). The fourth level of NADSP credentialing, DSP-Specialist, recognizes DSPs who have obtained specialized training and have demonstrated competence in providing specialized support to individuals with disabilities in any of the six specialty areas: Inclusion, Health Supports, Positive Behavior Supports, Employment Supports, Aging, and Mentoring & Supervision.[§]

Currently, NADSP has approved the curricula of eight entities for the provision of training for the DSP-Certified and DSP-Specialist credentials: College of Direct Support; U.S. Department of Labor's Certified Apprenticeship Program for Direct Support Specialist; Relias Learning; Georgia Direct Support Professional Certificate Program; Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals' PATHS Program; North Dakota Community Staff Training Program; ARC Broward PATHS Certificate Program; and Texas A&M University's Direct Support Professional Academy.

Next Steps

“In the past two and a half years, NADSP has been asked to present at national and state-wide conferences, collaborating provider agencies and individual provider agencies in 30 states,” says

[§] <https://www.nadsp.org>

Mr. Macbeth. “We’ve interacted with nearly 10,000 DSPs, agency administrators and policy makers about the need to embrace and improve the knowledge, skills and values of the direct support workforce. By adopting the Code of Ethics and using the competency set on the job that leads to a bona-fide career ladder, we can begin to adequately build this workforce as a true profession.”

Related Links

National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals

<https://www.nadsp.org>

New York State Office for People with Disabilities, DSP Core Competencies

http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/opwdd_careers_training/training_opportunities/core_competencies