

Core Training Needs for Direct Service Workers: Key Considerations for Health Plans

As your health plan expands its capacity to provide long-term services and supports (LTSS), it will need to consider contracting with provider agencies that utilize core competency training for the direct service workers (DSW) who provide services to your members. Training in these core competencies helps to ensure that your members are served by an informed workforce, capable of delivering industry-accepted best practices in community-based services and supports. Core competencies are the foundation for career lattices and ladders and provide guidance for initial and ongoing training to promote DSWs' continuing competency development.

Key Considerations

- **Core Competencies for the Direct Service Workforce.** CMS developed set of core competencies for DSWs, creating a coordinated effort across LTSS fields, allowing essential content for all DSW curricula to be embedded in training standards. Training around a core competency set allows workers to move between fields in the home and community-based services (HCBS) industry and work for different employers without requiring extensive retraining, as training practices are standardized.
- **Basic skills for all DSW.** The CMS Core Competency set is designed as a baseline for all DSWs. It is not a substitute for specialized and ongoing training. Each specialization within the DSW's sector will require training specific to the tasks required.
- **Effective use of core competencies is not yet widespread.** Because many states do not require that all DSWs receive best practice training, your health plan should identify providers in their network that either already incorporate core competencies into their training or partner with the state to support competency-based training. Doing so will increase the likelihood that your members will receive the most competent care possible from knowledgeable and skilled DSWs.
- **Core competencies have many potential applications.** Core competencies help promote consistency in the quality of service provided to clients while creating a more secure investment for employers. They also ensure that workers do not have to be retrained every time they switch employers (a cost that is passed on to

What is the Direct Service Workforce?

The direct service workforce represents a broad category of employees in the health and human service industry that provides hands-on support to individuals based on personal care needs. The range of supports and services delivered by DSWs varies widely, depending on members' needs and the type of setting in which services are delivered. Some of the roles and responsibilities that DSWs are generally expected to fulfill involve: assisting with home skills such as meal planning and preparation, housekeeping, and budgeting; assisting with personal care and hygiene; providing employment supports; implementing positive behavior support and crisis intervention; teaching new skills; providing opportunities for community integration; conducting assessments and community referrals; and working with family members.

managed care organizations and ultimately, to the state).

- **Differing roles within the LTSS field determine specialized training requirements.** For instance, a home health aide will likely need special training to assist members with their personal hygiene needs and to ensure that those members' nutritional needs are met, whereas a behavioral health DSW may not be required to fulfill those duties but instead may be expected to promote a member's educational goals.
- **Specialized training requirements should be evidence-based.** There is evidence that specialized training helps prepare workers to support people with specific disabilities or chronic conditions, and to work in unique service environments. For instance, for those workers assisting members with dementia, effective communication training has been shown to both reduce the likelihood of conflict and improve the member's behavioral symptoms.
- **You may want to review the CMS DSW Core Competency set,** available online at <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/ltss/workforce/index.html>.

The CMS Core Competency Set for the Direct Service Workforce

The CMS Core Competency Set was developed through a multi-phased study, featuring input from DSW experts from around the country. The process has resulted in a series of competencies that apply to each of the LTSS fields that DSWs are employed in. Each competency has passed a minimum threshold test and therefore applies across all sectors, leaving many specialized competencies off of the core list. The Core Competency Road Map can be found through links at the bottom of this brief.

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