

# News

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FURTHER INFORMATION:  
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## **Direct Support Professionals Honored For Service to People with Disabilities And Advanced Educational Program for Professionals Launched**

TRENTON – Department of Human Services (DHS) Commissioner Jennifer Velez today honored the service of Direct Support Professionals and announced the launch of an advanced internet-based educational program for professionals providing direct care to people receiving services through the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). Held at DDD’s central office in Hamilton, approximately 100 invited guests from human services agencies and advocacy organizations attended the event.

Commissioner Velez presented a proclamation from Governor Chris Christie, designating this week, September 12-18, as Direct Support Professional Recognition Week in New Jersey. The Governor’s Proclamation notes that more than 30,000 people in New Jersey are “providing care to hundreds of thousands of children and adults with disabilities, empowering them and enabling them to live meaningful, productive lives.”

Direct Support Professionals assist people with developmental disabilities with daily tasks, including meal preparation; assistance in taking medications; bathing; dressing; and getting to work and activities. Most are employees of private agencies under contract with DDD; while almost 3,400 are direct support professionals working in DDD’s seven developmental centers.

“Today, we honor the service of Direct Support Professionals and in concert, we recognize the work of the New Jersey Direct Support Professional Workforce Development Coalition, the professional and personal stakeholders in the disabilities community who are dedicating their time to improving the human services workforce,” said Commissioner Velez.

“As a result of the efforts and recommendations of this coalition, we began piloting a Career Path for Direct Support Professionals and today we launch our statewide participation in the College of Direct Support,” said Commissioner Velez.

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Through coordination by The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities at the University of Medicine and Dentistry, and funded by a grant from the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, several private agencies participated in a pilot of the Career Path. The voluntary Career Path program utilizes the College of Direct Support (CDS) in combination with onsite mentors to enhance professional skills and provide quality supports to people with disabilities.

Deborah M. Spitalnik, Ph.D., Professor of Pediatrics and Executive Director of The Boggs Center, serves as the chair of the coalition. “In supporting statewide training through what is now known as the New Jersey Partnership for Direct Support Professional Workforce Development, the Department of Human Services is recognizing the dedication of direct support professionals and the value that trained staff brings to the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families,” said Dr. Spitalnik.

This coalition formed in 2006 with a goal of reducing the turnover of the direct support professionals. The pilot program demonstrated a 33-percent reduction in professional turnover.

Agencies that receive funding through DDD’s Medicaid Home and Community Based Services Waiver will be able to access the CDS free-of-charge to take state-of-the-art courses about Autism, Brain Injury, Communicating with individuals who are non-verbal, Depression, Community Inclusion, Employment and at least twenty additional courses. Participating agencies will be required to use the CDS to track employee hire dates and record employee Pre-Service Training and certifications. It will be optional for agencies to offer the CDS and Career Path to employees. Eventually, the CDS will be offered to families who self-direct their own services, individuals who provide Community Care Residences and to staff of the developmental centers.

The CDS will phase-in over eight-months, beginning in the southern counties in November and ending in the northern counties in the summer of 2011. The Boggs Center will be conducting training on how to administer the CDS for agencies and DDD staff.

The CDS was purchased by DDD for \$724,100 for a two-year period from MC Strategies, a wholly owned subsidiary of Elsevier. New Jersey joins more than 30 states using the program.

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