

Executive Summary

December 2014

Since 2011, the National Direct Service Workforce Resource Center (DSW RC) has researched, developed and validated a set of core competencies for the direct service workforce (DSW) funded by the Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services (CMS). The DSW RC's Road Map of Core Competencies sought to systematically determine if core skills exist across the different human service sectors where direct support comprises a primary component of the long-term services and supports (LTSS) system and, if so, to disseminate this core skill set throughout LTSS systems to guide the development of education and training programs. Education and competency based training programs based on the development of these core skills have the potential to strengthen the quality of the DSW and thereby improve service delivery. The DSW Core Competencies will inform and improve training efforts on multiple levels, including state- and agency-levels and across systems. Service recipients who self-direct their services could also choose to implement the Set of Core Competencies into their own training of direct service workers.

Project activities focused on the four largest LTSS sectors that employ the most direct service workers:

- ▶ Aging and senior services
- ▶ Behavioral health services, including mental health and substance abuse
- ▶ Intellectual/developmental disabilities services
- ▶ Physical disabilities services

From 2011-2013, the DSW RC conducted extensive formative research to inform the development of a Set of Core Competencies for Direct Service Workers:

Phase I	An inventory and overview of competency initiatives developed in the United States to improve training and proficiency of the DSW within and across LTSS sectors.
Phase II	A comparative analysis and systematic review of DSW competency sets identified during Phase I. Results of the analysis indicated that a significant number of common competencies across sectors.
Phase IIIA	Synthesized the results of the competency analysis (Phase II) in collaboration with stakeholders across sectors to reach consensus on an initial set of core competencies for direct service workers.

In 2014, the DSW RC began a validation study (Phase IIIB) of the Set of Core Competencies to determine the applicability of each competency statement included across all four sectors. To do so, it held over 40 focus groups and fielded an online survey reaching over 2,500 key ground-level stakeholders including:

- ▶ Service recipients
- ▶ Family members and guardians of service recipients
- ▶ Direct service workers

- ▶ Front-line supervisors of direct service workers
- ▶ Agency administrators and supervisors

Using data from both the survey and the focus groups, the DSW Resource Center staff found that 60 applicable skill statements within each LTSS sector. These skill statements were organized into twelve broad competency areas:

Competency Area	Number of Statements
1. Communication	3
2. Person-Centered Practices	7
3. Evaluation and Observation	4
4. Crisis Prevention and Intervention	7
5. Safety	5
6. Professionalism and Ethics	6
7. Empowerment and Advocacy	5
8. Health and Wellness	7
9. Community Livings Skills and Supports	4
10. Community Inclusion and Networking	4
11. Cultural Competency	5
12. Education, Training and Self Development	3

Ultimately, the value of the Set of Core Competencies will be measured by its utility across the four LTSS sectors and the translation of the identified skills into a broad range of applications including:

- ▶ Establishment of evidence-based practices for training and employment of direct service workers.
- ▶ Facilitation of interagency collaboration on federal and state levels in activities related to workforce development.
- ▶ Creation of a consistent basis for states and organizations to assess workforce capacity and promote effective training policies in order to meet individuals' service needs.
- ▶ The provision of a foundation for merit based career and wage advancement.
- ▶ The integration of direct service work as an important element of career paths in human services.

With its aim to strengthen the competence of direct service workers, the **Core Competencies for the Direct Service Workforce** makes a vital contribution to the CMS mission of helping people with disabilities and chronic conditions who need the assistance of direct service workers to live at home and participate in community life similar to people without disabilities or chronic conditions.