

MEDIA RELEASE
February 21, 2017

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**Disability coalition responds to Legislative Auditor report on HCBS
*Action critical to stabilize services, address workforce shortages statewide***

Best Life Alliance, a statewide coalition advocating for community-based services that support Minnesotans with disabilities, responded to today's Home and Community-Based Services Financial Oversight report by the Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor.

"The Best Life Alliance thanks the Legislative Auditor for its report and especially appreciates the attention paid to staff shortages, low wages and demanding work that complicates HCBS providers' ability to hire enough staff," said Best Life Alliance Chair and parent Pam Gonnella. "This underscores even more the need for action now to stabilize these critical services that help people like my daughter and thousands of other individuals across the state."

Current direct care worker wages lag far behind those of other local businesses. This has created a serious workforce shortage and instability in these services that include some of the largest employers in rural Minnesota.

- Direct care workers have demanding, highly-skilled jobs yet earn an average wage of only \$12.32 per hourⁱ. Their pay is directly tied to state reimbursement rates set by lawmakers and that pay has not kept up with rising costs over the past decade.
- Due to these low wages, more than 8,700 unfilled direct care worker and staff jobs exist in Minnesota todayⁱⁱ. This serious staffing shortage creates a huge strain on overworked employees and on service providers struggling to recruit, train, retain and operate with high turnover rates.
- While Gov. Mark Dayton's 2017 budget plan includes a PCA increase, it does not go far enough. It fails to include better wages and benefits for thousands of Minnesota's direct care workers who support people with disabilities in community-based services.
- Failure to maintain Minnesota's community-based disability services will lead to costlier scenarios, including an increase in mental health crises, emergency room visits and hospitalizations, and other dangerous health consequences.

"Consistent, quality direct-care staff are the foundation of community-based services for people with disabilities," Gonnella said. "If we don't address the workforce shortage, the entire system will crumble. Just like maintenance of roads and bridges, we must invest today in order to have a sustainable system. People's lives are really on the line."

Best Life Alliance's 2017 legislation includes two components:

- Consecutive 4 percent wage increases for direct care workers (effective July 1, 2017 and July 1, 2018).
- Improvement of health insurance for direct care workers by increasing provider rates to cover the cost of single employee healthcare coverage by July 1, 2019.

Best Life Alliance is a nonpartisan, statewide coalition of more than 130 organizations, people with disabilities, families and supporters advocating for Home & Community-Based Services. These essential services include training and employment programs, crisis respite services, group homes, Personal Care Assistance (PCA), and other services that allow people with disabilities to stay healthy, active, and independent.

Webpage: bit.ly/BestLifeMN

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ⁱ Calculated using ARRM's 2016 Member Workforce Survey Data.

ⁱⁱ Calculated by CliftonLarsonAllen using DHS data and ARRM member reported vacancy rates as of September 2015.