

# THE NADD COMPETENCY-BASED DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is estimated that more than a million people in the US have a dual diagnosis of Intellectual or Development Disability and Mental Illness (IDD/MI). Many people with IDD/MI are supported in our communities by direct support professionals (DSPs). People with IDD/MI who live in institutions are also supported by DSPs. DSPs support people at home. They may also support people in school and at work.

Very often people with IDD/MI have complex needs. They may have difficulty with their behavior. They may have difficulty communicating with staff and others. Describing and managing the symptoms of their mental illness may be very challenging for them. As a

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result, people with this dual diagnosis are at increased risk of being given unnecessary medication. They are more likely to have their rights restricted and to experience restraints. They may struggle to have good relationships. They are at increased risk for abuse and neglect. Helping a person with these needs successfully

learn to manage their behavior or achieve a personal goal can be among the most rewarding activities a DSP will ever experience.

In general, DSPs spend more time with the person with IDD/MI than any other professional. The competence of the DSP can make a big difference in the quality of life for people. DSPs are often the ones charged with supporting skill building. They help the person engage in recommended therapies on a day-to-day basis. This work requires an advanced level of skill and knowledge to do well. However, there is little available to guide DSPs and others in identifying the specific competencies a DSP should have for this work. As a result, many DSPs are under-qualified. Too often, they lack the support and training to do well. This lack of standards can make finding, hiring, training, and retaining qualified DSPs difficult. As a result, many people with IDD/MI do not have adequate daily support.

NADD has developed a program to certify the competency of DSPs who support people with a dual diagnosis. DSP competency-based certification validates and provides assurance to individuals served, colleagues, and employers that a direct support professional has met the standards established by NADD for providing services to individuals with IDD/MI. In addition to the prestige this certification provides, it may benefit the DSP through greater employment opportunities, job security, pay raises, and promotions. The certification is portable; DSPs moving to a different region bring their certifications with them and do not have to demonstrate or re-document their competence simply because they have moved.

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The goal of DSP certification through the NADD Competency-Based Certification Program is to improve the quality and effectiveness of services provided to individuals with a dual diagnosis through the development of competency-based standards for Direct Support Professionals and through promoting their ongoing professional development.

In order to be considered for certification, the applicant must meet the following prerequisites: (1) must have worked as a DSP in the developmental disability or mental health field for at least one calendar year and must have completed 1000 hours of direct support work; (2) must be an employee in good standing; and (3) must sign Code of Ethics.

The application will be completed on line. Applicants will be required to list their experience and formal education. Applicants are required to submit two completed recommendation forms. The form is designed to elicit accounts of work done with individuals with dual diagnoses that illustrate: (1) values, (2) knowledge, and (3) skills in the identified competency areas.

Once the application has been reviewed, the applicant will be given instructions about taking the certification test. The test is completed on line and is in the form of a multiple choice test. Applicants will be provided with scenarios involving working with individuals with a dual diagnosis and will be asked questions that will show their skills, knowledge, and values involving caring for individuals with a dual diagnosis. Applicants must demonstrate competency in the required competency areas.

The DSP applicant will need to demonstrate competency in the following five competency areas:

1. Assessment and Observation
2. Behavior Support

3. Crisis Prevention and Intervention
4. Health and Wellness
5. Community Collaboration and Teamwork

An overall score of 80% is required for passing, as well as a minimum score of 60% in each of the five competency areas.

Direct Support Professionals who receive NADD DSP certification will be entitled to use "NADD-DSP" as a credential.