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BOSTON - The number of jobs in human services in Massachusetts grew by 48 percent between 2003 and 2011, according to a new report examining the economic impact of the human services industry.

In 2011, there were 145,000 human service worker jobs in Massachusetts, accounting for 5 percent of the state's total jobs.

The report, released Wednesday at a Statehouse event, was commissioned by the Providers' Council, an umbrella organization representing human service providers, and done by the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute and the UMass Dartmouth Public Policy Center.

"For the very first time, we now have a sober and hopefully a very balanced assessment as to not only the social impact of the human services sector in Massachusetts, which is fairly well known...but this report also offers an assessment of the economic impact of nonprofits, and that for us, and for the community at large, is critically important," said David Jordan, chairman of the Providers' Council's research committee and president and CEO of the Seven Hills Foundation in Worcester, which supports people with disabilities.

"We hire well over 100,000 people in human services alone," Jordan said. "We're one of the largest employee groups in the commonwealth, far higher than telecommunications and even construction. Yet we're often not thought of as a substantive economic force in the commonwealth."

Human service jobs involve working with people with mental health or substance abuse problems, working with people with disabilities, providing child care or child welfare services, providing emergency housing or food assistance, and providing vocational rehabilitation, elder care or family social services. In 2011, human service workers in Massachusetts earned a total of \$3.4 billion, of which \$2.5 billion was classified as disposable income that could be spent in the Massachusetts economy. (The rest went to taxes or out of state workers.) The report estimates that spending by human service workers generated another approximately \$900 million in additional economic activity in Massachusetts.

"Not only are we providing great social value, we're also providing economic value as well," said Michael Weekes, president and CEO of the Providers' Council.

Jobs in human services grew faster in Massachusetts than they did nationally. They grew faster than the health care sector overall in Massachusetts. By far, the biggest jump was in individual and family services, where employment more than doubled between 2003 and 2011. This was due primarily to an increase in the services

provided to the elderly and people with disabilities. There was also major growth in outpatient mental health and substance abuse treatment centers.

Weekes said people are living longer and therefore requiring more support. There are more people being diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders and more veterans with traumatic brain injuries. "People are needing more care than they had before. There are more caregivers and a greater human services workforce," Weekes said.

Many of these jobs are low-wage or part-time, with one in five human service workers earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level (\$23,540 for an individual). "In many cases, human service workers are only marginally better off financially than the clients they serve," the report wrote. More than 80 percent of human service jobs are held by women. There are higher than average numbers of workers who are foreign-born, do not speak English or have a disability.

There are human service providers statewide, with the biggest concentration in Middlesex County, the Boston area county that is the state's most populous.

Human service workers are likely to use the report to push for additional state funding for their industry. Human services organizations generally rely on a mix of state, federal and private money. Human services accounted for 9.9 percent of the state budget in fiscal year 2011, and 9.8 percent in 2014, down from 11.8 percent in 2003, according to the report. (These numbers do not take into account spending classified as health care, which increased during that time and was likely used to pay for some of these services.) "Years of level funding and budget cuts have curtailed the industry's ability to adequately meet demand for services in a number of its subsectors," the report writes.

State Rep. Jose Tosado, D-Springfield, a social worker who used to run the Springfield office of the state Department of Mental Health, said direct care workers are underpaid for the work they do. "The legislature need to take that into account and make sure funding for crucial services for vulnerable populations are protected," Tosado said.

Joan Kagan, president and CEO of Square One, a Springfield-based childcare agency, said it is important to be able to measure the economic impact human service workers have on the state through employment, local purchasing, payment of rent and other means. Although the providers are not asking the Legislature for anything specific immediately, she said the information will be used to advocate for the human service industry.

"What we're advocating for is continued and increased funding for those types of services that are an important part of the communities' infrastructure," Kagan said.



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