

SECTION III: COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

Introduction: Comprehensive Review and Analysis (CRA)

Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council – 2027–2031 State Plan

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Introduction

The Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC) developed this Comprehensive Review and Analysis (CRA) as part of its 2027–2031 State Plan, in accordance with Section 124(c)(3) of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act). The CRA reflects a thorough and inclusive evaluation of the current landscape of services, supports, and unmet needs for individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) and their families across Washington State.

Inclusive and Culturally Diverse Engagement

The Council's planning process was grounded in the principles of equity, lived experience, and cross-sector collaboration. The Council gathered feedback through regional forums, community conversations, surveys, and targeted focus groups. Special attention was given to the inclusion of historically underserved communities, including tribal communities, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), immigrants, and individuals with limited English proficiency. The Council also worked with self-advocates, families, providers, and advocacy organizations to ensure that the CRA reflected diverse lived experiences.

Throughout 2024 and early 2025, the Council heard directly from hundreds of people with developmental disabilities and their families. Their input shaped the goals and strategies of the State Plan, with a consistent focus on inclusion, autonomy, community belonging, and equitable access to support.

Data-Informed Priorities

The CRA draws from federal and state data sources, including the American Community Survey (ACS), U.S. Census Bureau, the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, and Disability Rights Washington. Key findings include:

- An estimated 123,444 individuals in Washington (1.58% of the total population) meet the federal definition of developmental disability.
- People with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty, with 20.5% of individuals with disabilities living below the federal poverty level—more than double the rate of those without disabilities.

- People with disabilities are less likely to be employed (41.2%) than those without disabilities (80.6%), and they earn significantly less, with nearly 30% earning under \$5,000 annually.
- Disability prevalence is highest among American Indian and Alaska Native residents (19.4%) and older adults (47% of those over age 65).
- The service system struggles to keep up with growing demand, particularly as people with developmental disabilities live longer and increasingly require long-term, individualized supports.

Residential data shows a shift away from institutional settings, with most individuals receiving support while living with family or in their own homes. However, system gaps remain: underfunded services, long waitlists, inadequate direct support workforce capacity, and disparities in access based on geography, race, and income.

Key Themes and Issues Identified

Through the CRA process, the following themes emerged as core priorities and challenges:

- Health and behavioral health access is fragmented and insufficient to meet co-occurring needs.
- Employment opportunities remain limited, especially for individuals with high support needs and those living in poverty.
- Education and early intervention systems often fail to provide appropriate inclusive supports or transition services.
- Housing and transportation barriers limit community integration and independence.
- Family supports are fragmented and under-resourced, leaving many families without meaningful help.
- Abuse and neglect prevention systems remain reactive rather than proactive, despite the work of the DD Ombuds.
- System navigation and coordination are confusing and inconsistent, especially for people with intersectional needs or those not connected to formal services.

Cross-System Collaboration and Innovation

Washington has made notable strides in interagency collaboration. Examples include:

- The Informing Families initiative, a formal interagency agreement between the DDC and the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), provides plain-language information statewide.
- The Dan Thompson Memorial Trust funds community-led innovation in supports and services.
- The DD Endowment Trust Fund allows families to build financial security without losing benefits.
- Cross-agency partnerships with Vocational Rehabilitation, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Developmental Disabilities Ombuds, Disability Rights Washington, the University of Washington's UCEDD, and others enhance impact across health, education, employment, housing, and transportation systems.

Despite these successes, the review revealed that siloed funding streams, outdated policies, and inconsistent implementation continue to create access gaps. In particular, early childhood supports, transition services, and aging supports remain underdeveloped.

Unmet Needs and the Path Forward

Washington's service system is both broad and deeply strained. Many people with DD and their families never receive formal supports at all—particularly people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those living in rural areas. Those who do receive services often face long waitlists, confusing eligibility criteria, and limited choice in how services are delivered.

The goals of the Council's Five-Year State Plan aim to directly address these challenges by focusing on:

- Increasing access to culturally and linguistically appropriate services
- Promoting self-determination, equity, and inclusion across systems
- Strengthening community-based options over institutional or segregated settings
- Advocating for funding, policy, and cultural change rooted in the rights and strengths of people with disabilities

The CRA reflects the Council's deep commitment to listening to community voices, analyzing systemic gaps, and advancing policies and partnerships that create meaningful change.

Describe how the DSA supports the Council

Role of the Department of Commerce as the Designated State Agency (DSA)

In 2011, the Washington State Department of Commerce became the Designated State Agency (DSA) for the Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC), replacing the Department of Health. Under federal law, the DSA cannot provide or fund direct services for people with developmental disabilities. Because the Department of Health does provide direct services, Commerce was selected to ensure compliance.

In 2015, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Commerce and the DDC was updated and signed. It outlines each party's responsibilities, aligning with the **Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act)** and **Executive Order 96-06** (later updated by **Executive Order 16-10** in 2016). The MOU calls for an annual review and emphasizes cooperative procedures for managing contracts and grants, while respecting legal limits on the DSA's role.

Commerce must not interfere with the Council's work in the following areas:

- Advocacy
- Systemic change
- Capacity building
- Budget decisions
- Personnel management
- Development and implementation of the State Plan

Commerce Responsibilities

Financial, Budget, and Accounting Services

Commerce will:

- Receive, track, and spend DDC funds as authorized by the Executive Director or designee
- Maintain fiscal policies, controls, and accounting processes
- Prepare required state and federal financial reports for DDC funds
- Provide payroll services
- Share financial data needed for DDC's reports
- Contribute non-federal matching funds as required
- Assist, upon request, with budget development, strategic planning, performance measures, and appropriations
- Provide materials for any additional required reporting

Human Resources

Commerce will:

- Employ DDC staff as Commerce employees
- Handle recruitment and application processing at DDC's request
- Ensure the DDC Executive Director is hired by the Council and supervised by its Co-Chairs (who also conduct annual evaluations)
- Allow the Executive Director or designee to make all other hiring decisions
- Provide HR guidance, ensure legal compliance (EEO, ADA, state/federal laws), and support related HR needs

Information Technology (IT) Services

Commerce will:

- Provide IT support in line with state policies

- Ensure secure and functional IT operations (hardware, software, email, networking)
- Offer security training for staff and members
- Maintain separate computer systems, the DDC website (www.ddc.wa.gov), and DDC email accounts

Other Administrative Services

Unless agreed otherwise, Commerce will:

- Provide federal compliance assurances for the State Plan
- Work with DDC to ensure the State Plan aligns with state law
- Offer procurement and purchasing services
- Help with leasing office space
- Share relevant resources with DDC contract staff
- Provide access to training and development opportunities
- Manage DDC mail services directly or via another agency
- Include DDC in Commerce's business continuity and recovery plans.

Poverty Rate Percentage

Washington's current poverty rate is approximately **10.3%** as of 2023, According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Income & Poverty Estimates and the Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED).

PART A. State Information

(i) Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the State Population:

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage of Population
White, alone	65.2
Black or African American alone	4.0
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	1.2
Asian alone	10.0
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.7
Some other race alone	5.7
Two or more races:	
Two races including Some other race	6.4
Two races excluding Some other race, and three or more races	6.7
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	14.3

(iii) State Disability Characteristics

a. Prevalence of Developmental Disabilities in the State:

The estimated prevalence of people with developmental disabilities (DD) in Washington State is **1.58% of the total population**, which equals approximately **123,444 individuals** based on the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) population estimate of 7,812,880.

Description of how this estimate was created:

This estimate is based on the nationally recognized prevalence rate developed from the **National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)** and adopted by the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**. The 1.58% rate reflects individuals who meet the federal definition of a developmental disability under the **Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act)**, that is, individuals with severe, chronic disabilities that begin before age 22 and result in substantial limitations in at least three areas of major life activity.

b. Residential Settings:

Using the chart, provide information on the number of people with developmental disabilities living in the different types of residential settings. In terms of the definitions, A. should include foster/host homes and other similar non-family home settings with paid caregivers while C. and D. should not.

Year	Total Served	A. Number Served in Setting of <6 (per 100,000)	B. Number Served in Setting of >7 (per 100,000)	C. Number Served in Family Setting (per 100,000)	D. Number Served in Home of Their Own (per 100,000)
2024	61,277	88,700	3,237	76,624	8,036
2023	54,533	94,385	3,315	77,643	8,945
2022	49,805	93,646	4,221	75,427	9,717

c. Demographic Information about People with Disabilities

Using information collected by the Census Bureau through the American Community Survey, complete the charts below.

People in the State with a disability	Percentage
Population 5 to 17 years	6.4
Population 18 – 64 years	22.6
Population 65 years and over	47.0

Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin of people with a disability	Percentage
White alone	15.6
Black or African American alone	14.1
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	19.4
Asian alone	7.8
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	10.8
Some other race alone	9.7
Two or more races	11.3
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	10.1

Employment Status Population Age 16 and Over	Percentage with a disability	Percentage without a disability
Employed	41.2	80.6
Not in labor force	58.8	19.4

Educational Attainment Population Age 25 and Over	Percentage with a disability	Percentage without a disability
Less than high school graduate	14.2	7.5

Educational Attainment Population Age 25 and Over	Percentage with a disability	Percentage without a disability
High school graduate, GED, or alternative	29.1	20.9
Some college or associate's degree	39.7	33.3
Bachelor's degree or higher	17.1	38.3

Earnings in Past 12 months Population Age 16 and Over with Earnings	Percentage with a disability	Percentage without a disability
\$1 to \$4,999 or less	29.8	19.3
\$5,000 to \$14,999	9.8	7.6
\$15,000 to \$24,999	14.6	14.3
\$25,000 to \$34,999	12.6	19.3

Poverty Status Population Age 16 and Over	Percentage with a disability	Percentage without a disability
Below 100 percent of the poverty level	20.5	9.7
100 to 149 percent of the poverty level	11.3	6.6
At or above 150 percent of the poverty level	68.2	83.7

Health and Healthcare

Health and healthcare are not the same—but both are essential to achieving wellness and personal agency for people with developmental disabilities. Health refers to an individual's overall state of physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being—not simply the absence of illness or disability. Healthcare, by contrast, is the system of services, supports, and resources intended to maintain or improve that health. For people with developmental disabilities (IDD), these concepts are especially intertwined, as both systemic supports and individualized care are critical to ensuring a full, self-directed life.

Understanding Health Beyond Illness

For people with developmental disabilities, good health encompasses more than traditional medical care. It includes:

- Mental and behavioral health support
- Access to dental, vision, and hearing care
- Opportunities for skill-building and self-determination
- A safe, supportive environment that nurtures physical and emotional well-being

Public health strategies must address all these areas of wellness to promote true health equity for people with DD.

Defining Equitable Healthcare

Healthcare should be a system that enables and protects health for all. For people with developmental disabilities, this means:

- Access to qualified providers across physical, behavioral, and dental health fields
- Services that are affordable and comprehensive
- Culturally and linguistically appropriate care
- Coordination across systems to avoid duplication, delays, or denials
- Respect for autonomy, including informed consent and privacy
- Support for people to make their own healthcare decisions, including about therapies, referrals, and preventative care

Importantly, care should not be denied or delayed based on disability, poverty, or life circumstances.

Barriers to Health and Healthcare

Despite longstanding federal mandates like the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**—which prohibit discrimination and mandate accessibility—enforcement gaps and structural inequities continue to block access to care for people with developmental disabilities. Key barriers include:

- **Ableism and bias** among providers and within policy systems
- **Poverty and financial hardship**, which limit access to both public and private insurance
- **Disjointed and inaccessible systems**, with poor coordination and communication
- **Geographic inequities**, particularly in rural areas
- **Cultural and linguistic inaccessibility**
- **Lack of mental health and crisis response supports** tailored to people with DD
- **Limited understanding of consent and decision-making supports**
- **Caregiver fatigue and burnout**, as families navigate complicated systems with minimal support

Caregivers—especially unpaid family members—often guide the coordinating of fragmented care, leading to burnout and emotional exhaustion. Systems must stop assuming families can fill the gaps created by inaccessible or insufficient services.

These challenges were echoed in a 2024 report funded by the **Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council** and conducted by the **National Leadership Consortium**, which focused on the intersection of developmental disabilities and behavioral health needs. The report identified systemic barriers in Washington State that included racism, geographic isolation, high service costs, lack of coordination, and inadequate provider knowledge (National Leadership Consortium, 2024).

Efforts to Address Co-Occurring Needs

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) frequently experience co-occurring mental and behavioral health conditions, a fact

increasingly recognized in state-level initiatives. The **Washington State Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA)**, in collaboration with the legislature and advocacy partners, has focused on building capacity to address this intersection. Reports submitted in 2021 and 2022 outline the need for:

- Integrated care models that unite physical, behavioral, and developmental services
- Training for providers to diagnose and treat co-occurring conditions in people who do not use conventional language
- New facilities and diversion programs that provide alternatives to institutional care or emergency psychiatric hospitalization
- Increased crisis stabilization services to avoid unnecessary institutionalization or emergency room stays

DDA's recommendations also include **residential provider capacity-building, rate enhancements for direct support professionals, and training programs on dual diagnosis care, trauma-informed practices, and positive behavioral supports** (WA DDA, 2022).

Education, Training, and Systems Support

Equipping families, providers, and first responders with tools and knowledge is vital. DDA and its partners have developed:

- Crisis response tools and behavior support strategies
- Online learning portals for on-demand, tracked training
- Directories of trained providers
- Specialized curricula in dual diagnosis and trauma-informed care

Programs like **ECHO Wraparound** and **ECHO Autism** from the **University of Washington** provide statewide virtual training and peer collaboration for care teams, clinicians, and families. Meanwhile, **SEIU**, the union representing individual providers, has released resources tailored to home-based care for clients with cognitive and behavioral health needs.

Building a Future of Inclusive Healthcare

Ultimately, a fair and functional healthcare system for people with developmental disabilities must be:

- **Person-centered:** rooted in the goals and needs of the individual, not just the convenience of caregivers or systems
- **Accessible and affordable:** free of barriers related to cost, location, or language
- **Empowering:** giving individuals the tools and supports to make their own decisions and advocate for their own care
- **Coordinated and connected:** eliminating silos between mental health, developmental disability, and healthcare systems

This vision demands not only **funding and training**, but also a **fundamental shift in values**—from viewing people with developmental disabilities as “cases” to be managed, to **individuals with rights, strengths, and full lives to be lived**. By centering the voices, rights, and lived experiences of people with developmental disabilities, we can build a system that promotes dignity, autonomy, and wellness for all.

Citations

- [National Leadership Consortium. \(2024\). Intersectionality Between Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health: A Report for the WA State DD Council.](#)
- [Washington State Developmental Disabilities Administration \(DDA\). \(2022\). Co-Occurring Developmental Disability and Mental Health Conditions: Best Practices and Recommendations Report.](#)
- [Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council \(WADDC\). \(2022-2026\). State Plan.](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. \(n.d.\). Disability and Health Overview.](#)
- [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12101](#)

Employment for People with Developmental Disabilities in Washington State

Employment is a cornerstone of independence, community inclusion, and economic self-sufficiency. For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), access to meaningful, competitive, and integrated employment remains a fundamental right—yet significant challenges persist in ensuring that right is realized equitably across Washington State.

A Vision for Inclusive Employment

People with developmental disabilities should have access to employment that:

- Reflects **personal interests and career goals**
- Provides **wages and benefits** comparable to those of their peers without disabilities
- Offers **opportunities for advancement**, not just entry-level roles
- Supports **asset building** without risking eligibility for essential public benefits
- Fosters the development of **inclusive relationships** in the workplace
- Includes the opportunity to **start and operate businesses**

Supports must be grounded in best practices that:

- Build relationships with employers
- Accurately identify interests and skills
- Ensure accommodations are appropriate, reasonable, and effective
- Begin during the **school-to-work transition** phase and continue consistently into adulthood

Key Employment Supports and Services in Washington

Washington offers a wide array of employment-related services for people with IDD, including:

- **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR):** Provided by the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), which offers assessment, job placement, intensive training, and short-term supports. DVR prioritizes individuals with the most significant disabilities under its **Order of Selection** process (since 2017).
- **Supported Employment:** A key service model offered jointly by DVR and the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). DVR assists with job placement and training, while DDA provides long-term supports once the individual stabilizes in a position.
- **School-to-Work (S2W) Transition Services:** These services are coordinated among school districts, county agencies, DVR, and DDA to support students with developmental disabilities transitioning from school to adult life. These efforts emphasize early engagement, career exploration, and personalized planning.
- **Worksite Accommodations and Natural Supports:** Employment providers work with employers to implement individualized accommodations and foster peer-based supports in the workplace.
- **Benefits Planning and Incentive Programs:** Washington offers benefits planning services, but access remains limited and inconsistent. Planning is crucial for ensuring that people can work without risking critical health or housing supports.
- **Employment First Policy:** Washington follows an Employment First framework, prioritizing competitive integrated employment (CIE) as the preferred outcome for individuals receiving public services.

Progress and Outcomes

Washington is a national leader in supported employment outcomes for people with developmental disabilities:

- **Approximately 80%** of DDA-supported employment participants who engage with DVR obtain a job.
- **Shared DVR-DDA customers** experience some of the highest job placement rates nationally.

However, **employment quality and earnings remain serious concerns:**

- Only **10% of working individuals** with IDD earn above the federal poverty level.

- Individuals with **high support needs** average just **21 hours of work per month**, and 99% earn below the poverty threshold.
- Those with **lower support needs** work an average of **88 hours per month**, yet only 35% earn above poverty level.

Persistent Barriers

Despite strong infrastructure, Washington still faces significant challenges:

Structural and Systemic Barriers

- **Conflicts between service models**, especially across agencies
- **Inconsistent procedures and coordination** between DVR and DDA in some regions
- **Limited access to benefits planners**, increasing risk of losing essential services
- **Inadequate communication about service options**, especially during transitions
- **Overreliance on segregated or sub-minimum wage work**, though efforts to reduce these practices continue

Cultural and Workforce Challenges

- **Employer bias and stigma** about disability in the workplace
- **Lack of trained employment professionals** who can provide person-centered, customized support
- **Insufficient funding** for job development and long-term supports
- **Limited career exploration** opportunities, especially for transition-age youth
- **Jobs are often assigned rather than chosen**, limiting career ownership

Courses of Action

To improve employment outcomes and advance economic justice for people with IDD in Washington, the following actions are recommended:

1. **Expand access to benefits planning** across all regions to help individuals navigate work and maintain essential supports.

2. **Invest in training and retention** of employment support professionals to meet increasing demand and improve service quality.
3. **Strengthen interagency collaboration** by establishing clearer transition protocols, joint trainings, and shared accountability for outcomes.
4. **Increase funding** for long-term employment supports and eliminate service gaps after DVR services end.
5. **Enforce and enhance Employment First policies**, including phasing out sub-minimum wage employment and supporting providers in making this shift.
6. **Ensure early career exploration** opportunities are available to transition-age youth with IDD through inclusive internships, mentoring, and exposure to multiple fields.
7. **Fund entrepreneurial supports** for people with IDD interested in business ownership.
8. **Center choice and self-direction** in job development and placement efforts.

Data Snapshot (Washington State, 2017)

- **480,828** working-age people with disabilities
 - **40.5%** employed
 - **5.4%** unemployed but seeking work
 - **54%** not in the labor force
- People with disabilities earn **33% less** on average than people without disabilities
- Unemployment rate for people with disabilities is **three times higher** than the general population
- For people with IDD:
 - **80% of DVR-DDA shared customers** obtain jobs
 - **10% earn above poverty level**
 - **99% with high support needs** earn below poverty level
 - Average monthly hours:
 - **21 hours** (high support needs)
 - **88 hours** (low support needs)

Citations

- [American Community Survey \(2017\). Washington State Disability Employment Statistics.](#)
- [Washington State Department of Vocational Rehabilitation \(DVR\). \(2017–2022 Reports\).](#)
- [Washington State Developmental Disabilities Administration \(DDA\).](#)
- [Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council. \(2022–2026\). State Plan.](#)
- [ACL Guidance, DD Act, Section 124\(c\)\(3\)\(A\)\(ii\).](#)
- [Employment First Policy Principles.](#)
- [Data and analysis from the Washington DD Council and DVR-DDA shared outcomes reports.](#)

Informal and Formal Services and Supports for People with Developmental Disabilities in Washington State

People with developmental disabilities (DD) rely on a broad spectrum of formal and informal supports to live full, self-directed lives in the community. These supports span the lifespan—from early intervention and child welfare to adult services, aging supports, behavioral health, and long-term services and supports (LTSS). However, access to these services remains inconsistent, fragmented, and insufficiently funded, leaving many individuals and families without the resources they need.

Aging and Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS)

Advances in healthcare and social inclusion have contributed to longer life expectancies for people with developmental disabilities. As a result, more individuals with IDD are aging alongside the general population—but the support systems have not evolved to meet this growing demand.

Three critical aging-related challenges include:

1. Longevity and changing needs: People with IDD are accessing services for longer and often require supports distinct from those used earlier in life.
2. Aging caregivers: Many individuals with IDD live with family members who are also aging, and who may have increasing health limitations.
3. Lack of aging-specific resources: Most aging services are not designed with the unique needs of older adults with developmental disabilities in mind.

Barriers include:

- Lack of accessible, affordable housing that adapts to age-related needs
- Increased risk of institutionalization in nursing homes or other congregate settings
- Inadequate access to healthcare and behavioral supports tailored to older adults with DD
- Community aging services that lack expertise in developmental disabilities

Behavioral Supports

Historically, people with developmental disabilities have been subjected to inhumane and ineffective aversive treatments to control behaviors. Today, Washington emphasizes positive behavior support strategies rooted in person-centered planning, cultural responsiveness, and environmental analysis.

Best practices include:

- Implementing strategies in the environments where behavior occurs
- Recognizing behavior as a form of communication
- Collecting comprehensive data to guide interventions
- Using informed, trained caregivers and support staff
- Considering social, cultural, and environmental context

Barriers include:

- Lack of trained professionals with experience in dual diagnosis or behavioral support
- Insufficient funding for behavior services or family education
- Inequitable access in rural and underserved communities

Family Support

Families remain the primary support system for most people with developmental disabilities. In Washington, a majority of individuals with IDD live with family members—many of whom provide round-the-clock care with limited formal support.

Family support services include:

- Respite care
- Training and education
- Navigation assistance for accessing services
- Peer support and family networks
- Flexible funding or stipends for caregiving

Challenges and barriers:

- Fragmented, hard-to-navigate service systems
- Lack of culturally appropriate supports
- Underfunded respite and caregiver relief programs
- Shortage of qualified support staff
- Social isolation of caregivers
- Families treated as a substitute for comprehensive long-term supports

To ensure equitable access and outcomes, supports for families must be coordinated, consistent, and culturally responsive across state and local systems.

Individual Supports and Independent Living**Community-based supports are vital to allowing people with developmental disabilities to:**

- Live in homes of their choice
- Avoid unnecessary institutionalization
- Build social networks and participate in community life
- Develop skills for employment and self-advocacy

These include:

- Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) under Medicaid
- In-home caregivers and personal assistants
- Assistive technology to increase independence
- Transportation support
- Supported living and shared living options

Barriers to access:

- Insufficient availability of trained and qualified caregivers
- Lack of funding for training personal assistants
- Inequitable access in rural and tribal areas
- Limited broadband access needed for telehealth and remote supports
- Underutilization or lack of access to assistive technology
- Continued reliance on congregate care as a default rather than person-centered alternatives

Faith-Based and Volunteer Supports

While not universally available, faith-based organizations and community volunteer networks play a meaningful role in some areas of Washington by offering:

- Social connection and inclusion
- Community meals or transportation
- Peer mentorship and outreach
- Spiritual and cultural supports

However, these services often vary widely in quality, availability, and cultural responsiveness.

Peer and Self-Advocate Support

Washington supports several initiatives that elevate the voices and leadership of people with developmental disabilities. Peer support networks and self-advocacy groups provide:

- Emotional support and shared lived experience
- Help navigating systems
- Leadership development
- Guidance on self-determination and rights

Peer support is particularly effective when integrated into formal service systems, yet funding for these efforts remains limited.

Service Utilization and Data (Where Available)

While comprehensive and up-to-date statewide data is limited, the following is known:

- The majority of individuals with developmental disabilities receiving DDA services live at home with family members.
- HCBS waiver enrollment in Washington continues to grow but is capped based on budget constraints.
- Respite services and behavioral support programs are underutilized in many rural and underserved communities.
- A 2022 review by DDA noted rising requests for supports related to aging caregivers, mental health needs, and assistive technology.

Continued investment in data collection and outcome tracking is necessary to inform equitable service delivery and identify emerging needs.

Courses of Action

To strengthen informal and formal services and supports, Washington can:

1. Expand funding for respite, behavior supports, and family caregiver stipends
2. Develop culturally responsive, multilingual family education and navigation resources
3. Improve access to behavioral supports and assistive technology statewide
4. Create aging and developmental disabilities training tracks for professionals in both aging and disability sectors
5. Strengthen peer support networks and self-advocacy opportunities through stable funding and integration into state systems
6. Bridge gaps between aging services and developmental disability systems, especially for families where both caregivers and people with IDD are aging
7. Invest in a well-paid, well-trained direct support workforce to meet increasing demand across all age groups and regions

Citations

- [Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council. \(2022–2026\). State Plan](#)
- [Administration for Community Living \(ACL\). DD Act, Section 124\(c\)\(3\)\(A\)\(iii\)](#)
- [Washington State Developmental Disabilities Administration \(DDA\). Reports on Family Support and HCBS](#)
- [Aging and Disability Resource Centers \(ADRC\) Program Data](#)
- [Family & Individual Needs for Disability Supports \(FINDS\) National Survey, The Arc \(2022\)](#)
- [National Core Indicators \(NCI\) – Washington State Reports](#)
- [Peer support and behavioral health integration literature \(NADD, START Services\)](#)

Interagency Initiatives Supporting People with Developmental Disabilities in Washington State

Interagency initiatives in Washington State bring together government agencies, community organizations, and individuals with developmental disabilities to create more equitable, inclusive, and responsive systems. These collaborations are essential for building individualized supports, strengthening community inclusion, preventing abuse, advancing financial security, and increasing access to trusted information and innovative services.

Guided by the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act), Washington's three DD Act partners—the Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC), the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) at the University of Washington, Disability Rights Washington (DRW) and Washington State Allies in Advocacy—work alongside state agencies and stakeholders to improve service systems and promote self-determination and civil rights.

DD Act Partner Collaboration

University of Washington UCEDD – Center on Human Development and Disability (CHDD)

Washington's UCEDD is housed at the University of Washington's Center on Human Development and Disability (CHDD). As a federally designated center for research, training, and community support, CHDD advances interagency collaboration by:

- Providing interdisciplinary training for professionals and future leaders in developmental disabilities
- Conducting community-based research on education, transition, aging, and health disparities
- Offering technical assistance and professional development to public agencies and providers
- Participating in statewide initiatives like ECHO IDD Wraparound, ECHO Autism, and Psychiatric Care Networks, offering tele-mentoring and case consultations to improve services in rural and underserved communities

- Collaborating with DDA, DVR, DOH, OSPI, and local providers on systems transformation and person-centered practices

The UCEDD is a central partner in Washington's efforts to expand access to evidence-based, culturally responsive, and community-integrated services.

Disability Rights Washington (DRW) – Protection & Advocacy System

As Washington's federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) organization, Disability Rights Washington (DRW) plays a critical role in promoting and protecting the rights of people with developmental disabilities. DRW:

- Investigates and seeks redress for abuse, neglect, and rights violations
- Provides legal representation and systemic advocacy across healthcare, housing, criminal justice, and education
- Played a key role in the creation of the Office of the Developmental Disabilities Ombuds, securing initial funding and supporting legislation
- Collaborates with the DD Council, UCEDD, and state agencies to improve policy and increase accountability

DRW ensures that people with developmental disabilities are empowered to make decisions about their own lives and live free from abuse, discrimination, and unnecessary institutionalization.

Key Interagency Initiatives

Office of the Developmental Disabilities Ombuds

Established by the Washington State Legislature in 2017, the DD Ombuds Office is an independent body created to monitor services, educate the public, and prevent abuse and neglect of people with developmental disabilities living in community settings. The law also provided for enhanced case management by the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) for individuals considered at risk.

The Ombuds program is:

- Community-based and independent from service providers

- A collaborative effort among the Legislature, Disability Rights Washington, DDA, and the Department of Commerce
- Designed to engage people with disabilities, their families, and communities in advocacy and accountability

Developmental Disabilities Endowment Trust Fund (DDETF)

The DD Endowment Trust Fund, a partnership between The Arc of Washington State and the Department of Commerce, allows individuals with developmental disabilities and their families to:

- Establish low-cost special needs trusts
- Save money without losing eligibility for public benefits
- Receive state matching contributions
- Use trust funds for enrichment and quality of life purchases not covered by government programs
- Benefit from conservative investment oversight by the Washington State Investment Board

This initiative exemplifies interagency collaboration aimed at building financial security and asset development for people with disabilities.

Informing Families

Informing Families is a trusted statewide resource created and maintained through an interagency agreement between the DDC and DDA. The Council manages content development, communications, and community outreach, while DDA provides operational and fiscal support. Informing Families:

- Shares plain-language news, tools, and updates for individuals and families
- Supports early planning, person-centered thinking, and access to services
- Distributes materials across platforms and in multiple languages
- Reflects the voices of families and self-advocates to inform systems change

This partnership helps individuals and families make informed choices and stay connected to available supports and opportunities.

Dan Thompson Memorial Community Services Account

Funded, in part, by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in 2022, this initiative received \$55 million to support innovative projects in community-based services for people with developmental disabilities. The Council led public engagement and project evaluations, and DDA handled contracting and implementation.

Between October 2021 and May 2022:

- The Council received over 400 applications
- Diverse stakeholder teams—including individuals with disabilities and family members—evaluated submissions
- Projects selected spanned multiple domains, including:
 - Health clinics
 - Equestrian therapy
 - Special Olympics equipment
 - Innovative housing models
 - Recreation and yoga programs
 - Employment development

This initiative highlights the strength of community-led solutions and will inform future policy and planning through data collection and evaluation.

Participation in Broader Interagency Councils and Committees

Washington's DD Council and DD Act partners participate in and support numerous state-level interagency efforts, including:

State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC)

Required under Part C of IDEA, the SICC advises the Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program. The Council and UCEDD participate to improve early childhood transitions and ensure inclusion.

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

Oversees DVR's implementation of vocational rehabilitation services. Members include people with developmental disabilities, families, and advocates who guide employment priorities and service design.

Workforce Development Councils and the Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board (WTECB)

Coordinate training and employment initiatives. DD Act partners participate in efforts to ensure equitable access to apprenticeships, internships, and career pathways.

Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs)

Collaborate with DDA to bridge services between aging and disability systems, particularly for older adults with DD and aging caregivers.

Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

Provide independent living skills training, advocacy, and peer support. The DD Council and UCEDD coordinate with CILs on housing and community inclusion efforts.

Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC)

Advises the Governor and Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) on early learning. The Council participates to ensure early education policies address the needs of children with disabilities.

Interagency Transition Network and WA Transition Collaborative

Include OSPI, DVR, DDA, local education agencies, and the DD Council. Focused on improving school-to-work transition and supporting postsecondary success.

Elevating the Voices of People with Disabilities and Families

All major interagency initiatives described above intentionally include people with developmental disabilities and their families in:

- Governance boards and advisory panels
- Project design and evaluation
- Grant review processes
- Public forums and stakeholder feedback loops

This reflects a shared commitment to "Nothing About Us Without Us" and ensures that interagency efforts remain grounded in lived experience.

Citations

- [Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council \(2022–2026\). State Plan](#)
- [University of Washington Center on Human Development and Disability \(UCEDD\)](#)
- [Disability Rights Washington \(DRW\) – Annual Reports and Public Policy Briefs](#)
- [Washington State Legislature – RCW 43.382 \(Developmental Disabilities Ombuds\)](#)
- [Washington State Developmental Disabilities Administration \(DDA\)](#)
- [Washington State Department of Commerce – DD Endowment Trust Fund](#)
- [U.S. Administration for Community Living \(ACL\), DD Act, Section 124\(c\)\(3\)\(B\)](#)
- [IDEA Part C – State Interagency Coordinating Council Requirements](#)
- [WTECB and State Rehabilitation Council Annual Reports](#)

Quality Assurance and Protection of Rights for People with Developmental Disabilities in Washington State

A strong quality assurance system is essential to ensuring that people with developmental disabilities live healthy, safe, self-determined lives. In Washington State, quality assurance encompasses monitoring and oversight activities, civil rights protections, interagency coordination, and training initiatives that promote person-centered planning, advocacy, and inclusion.

Per Section 124(c)(3)(C) of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act), quality assurance efforts must focus on:

- Preventing abuse, neglect, sexual or financial exploitation
- Protecting legal and human rights
- Avoiding inappropriate restraint or seclusion
- Expanding access to person-centered planning
- Promoting leadership, self-advocacy, and self-determination
- Advancing systems integration and interagency collaboration

Monitoring for Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation

Washington's quality assurance system includes both internal monitoring and independent oversight to safeguard individuals from harm. The Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) conducts routine service monitoring, incident tracking, and provider oversight. In addition, the Office of the Developmental Disabilities Ombuds (DD Ombuds) and Disability Rights Washington (DRW) provide independent review and advocacy.

Office of the Developmental Disabilities Ombuds

Created by the Legislature in 2017, the DD Ombuds is an independent agency that monitors services for individuals with developmental disabilities. The Ombuds:

- Investigates complaints and incidents of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and rights violations
- Issues public reports and recommendations to improve service quality
- Conducts unannounced visits to community programs and supported living sites

- Provides education on rights and abuse prevention to individuals, families, and providers
- Collaborates with DDA and other state entities to address systemic issues

The Ombuds plays a critical role in preventing harm and amplifying the voices of people with disabilities across all service settings.

Disability Rights Washington (DRW)

As the state's Protection and Advocacy system, DRW monitors for abuse and rights violations and provides legal advocacy when harm or discrimination occurs. DRW is a partner in addressing civil rights violations, including:

- Improper restraint or seclusion
- Failure to provide informed consent
- Barriers to communication, housing, education, or healthcare access

Preventing Inappropriate Use of Restraint or Seclusion

Washington emphasizes the reduction—and in many cases, elimination—of physical or chemical restraint, isolation, or seclusion. Through training and policy guidance, DDA and advocacy partners promote:

- Positive Behavior Support strategies
- Trauma-informed practices
- Use of functional behavior assessments
- Person-centered de-escalation methods

Barriers remain due to workforce limitations, uneven implementation of policies, and lack of behavioral health supports in some settings, particularly for individuals with co-occurring conditions. Continued investment in training and oversight is critical to ensuring humane, respectful practices across all environments.

Interagency Coordination and Systems Integration

Washington's quality assurance efforts are strengthened by collaboration between agencies that support individuals with developmental disabilities. Key interagency initiatives include:

- DD Ombuds coordination with DDA and the Legislature on abuse prevention policy
- DRW collaboration with healthcare, housing, and education systems to promote accessibility and legal compliance
- Interagency Transition Network (involving DDA, DVR, OSPI, and local agencies) to support smooth transitions from school to adult life
- Data sharing and cross-system referrals between behavioral health, DD services, and law enforcement to prevent system failures
- Use of National Core Indicators (NCI) to inform quality improvements and systems change

These partnerships improve identification of risks, strengthen monitoring, and help ensure individuals receive the right services in the least restrictive setting.

Access to Person-Centered Planning

Access to meaningful person-centered planning (PCP) is a cornerstone of quality assurance. DDA and contracted providers are required to use PCP approaches that:

- Reflect the individual's goals, preferences, and values
- Involve chosen family, friends, and support people
- Identify strengths, needs, risks, and needed supports
- Avoid institutional bias or prescriptive placement
- Address health, safety, employment, housing, and relationships

The DD Council and partners also promote tools and training that help individuals and families understand and participate in the PCP process, including plain-language guides, video series, and culturally responsive materials.

Training in Leadership, Self-Advocacy, and Self-Determination

Quality assurance includes preparing individuals to advocate for their rights and direct their own lives. Washington supports several initiatives that build leadership and self-advocacy capacity, including:

- Allies in Advocacy: A statewide leadership training program for self-advocates, supported by the DD Council

- Self-Advocates in Leadership (SAIL): A cross-disability network that engages people with developmental disabilities in legislative advocacy and public policy
- Parent and family leadership trainings offered in partnership with local and culturally specific organizations
- Peer mentoring, including youth-to-youth and family-to-family initiatives
- Training for direct support staff on supporting choice, control, and communication

These programs reinforce the core values of the DD Act by ensuring that people with developmental disabilities are not only protected—but equipped to participate as leaders in shaping the systems that serve them.

Gaps and Recommendations

Despite strong infrastructure, Washington continues to face gaps in quality assurance implementation. These include:

- Limited availability of culturally and linguistically appropriate resources
- Uneven access to behavior and mental health supports across regions
- Ongoing reliance on restraint or restrictive interventions in crisis settings
- Fragmented complaint resolution processes
- Inconsistent knowledge of rights among service recipients and their families

Recommendations:

1. Expand outreach and access to the DD Ombuds, especially in underrepresented communities
2. Strengthen interagency data sharing and follow-up on critical incidents
3. Fund peer-led quality monitoring and feedback programs
4. Increase availability of supported decision-making training and resources
5. Ensure full implementation of person-centered planning across all settings and providers
6. Continue expanding self-advocate leadership training and public participation

Citations

- [Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act \(DD Act\), Section 124\(c\)\(3\)\(C\)](#)
- [Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council \(2022–2026\). State Plan](#)
- [Office of the Developmental Disabilities Ombuds – Annual Reports and Statutory Mandate \(RCW 43.382\)](#)
- [Disability Rights Washington – Protection & Advocacy Reports](#)
- [Washington State Developmental Disabilities Administration \(DDA\) – Policies and Oversight Framework](#)
- [National Core Indicators \(NCI\) – WA Data Briefs](#)

Education and Early Intervention for Children and Youth with Developmental Disabilities in Washington State

Access to inclusive, high-quality education is a fundamental right for all children and youth, including those with developmental disabilities. In Washington State, education and early intervention services are delivered through a network of public and private systems that include early learning, K–12 education, and transition programs. Despite significant progress, persistent gaps in access, equity, discipline practices, and training continue to impact outcomes for children and families.

General and Special Education Services (K–12)

Washington's public education system is administered by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), which oversees general and special education services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Students with developmental disabilities may receive services through:

- Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) under IDEA Part B
- 504 Plans for accommodations and supports

Services may include specialized instruction, related therapies, behavior support plans, assistive technology, and transition planning. However, implementation varies widely, and families often report difficulties with timely evaluations, inconsistent service delivery, and lack of inclusion in general education classrooms.

Inappropriate Use of Restraint and Seclusion in Schools

One of the most pressing quality assurance concerns in Washington's education system is the use of restraint and isolation (seclusion) in school settings, especially involving students with developmental disabilities.

Washington State law permits restraint and isolation only when necessary to prevent serious harm, and mandates:

- Parental notification within 24 hours
- Written incident reports

- Use of trained staff and behavior intervention plans when applicable

Despite these requirements, restraint and seclusion continue to be used disproportionately on students with disabilities, particularly Black, Indigenous, and students of color with developmental disabilities. Concerns include:

- Use as a form of behavior management rather than emergency intervention
- Repeated or prolonged incidents without appropriate de-escalation strategies
- Inadequate oversight, documentation, and follow-up
- Emotional trauma and physical harm caused by these practices

Advocates, including the DD Council, Disability Rights Washington, and self-advocates, continue to call for:

- Stricter limitations or outright bans on isolation rooms
- Greater transparency and accountability in data collection and reporting
- Expansion of trauma-informed and positive behavior support practices
- Training for educators on alternatives to restraint and seclusion

This is a core civil rights issue that intersects with both educational equity and disability justice.

Early Intervention Services (Birth to Age 3)

Early intervention services in Washington are provided through the Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program, under the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). Children from birth to age three with developmental delays or diagnosed conditions are eligible for individualized services delivered in home and community settings.

Each family works with a service coordinator to develop an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Services may include:

- Developmental therapy
- Speech, occupational, and physical therapy
- Family training and counseling
- Assistive technology

Access remains limited in some rural and tribal communities due to workforce shortages, transportation barriers, and a lack of culturally appropriate providers.

Early Childhood Education (Ages 3–5)

Preschool-aged children with developmental disabilities may receive services under IDEA Part B, Section 619, administered by local school districts.

Services may be delivered in:

- Developmental preschool classrooms
- Inclusive settings, such as Head Start or Washington’s ECEAP (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program)
- Community or home settings, when appropriate

Efforts to expand inclusive early learning opportunities are underway, but disparities persist in access to high-quality preschool experiences for children with developmental disabilities, especially in under-resourced regions.

Private School Services

Students with disabilities enrolled in private or parochial schools may receive services through their local public school district based on a proportionate share of IDEA funds. These services are offered through Service Plans (not IEPs), and access depends on district policy and availability.

Families navigating private school services often face confusion, reduced access to supports, and limited transparency about their rights under Child Find and IDEA's equitable services provisions.

Education Supports and Accommodations

Supports available to students with developmental disabilities include:

- One-on-one or shared paraprofessionals
- Modified curricula and instructional supports
- Behavior intervention plans (BIPs)
- Extended school year (ESY) services
- Specialized transportation and health-related supports

However, effective implementation of these supports depends on:

- Availability of trained staff
- Strong school-family collaboration
- Meaningful IEP planning and progress monitoring
- Adequate funding and administrative capacity

Transition from School to Adult Life

Washington State invests in school-to-work and postsecondary transition services through interagency initiatives such as:

- The Interagency Transition Network, which brings together OSPI, DDA, DVR, and county developmental disability programs
- County School-to-Work (S2W) initiatives promoting early job exploration, benefits planning, and customized employment
- Expanded use of person-centered planning in transition IEPs

However, many youth with developmental disabilities still graduate or age out of school without connection to adult services or employment pathways. Improved coordination, earlier planning, and increased family education are key needs.

Teacher and Staff Training

Teacher shortages—especially in special education—present major barriers to quality and inclusion. Ongoing challenges include:

- High turnover among special educators and paraeducators
- Limited pre-service training on disability rights and inclusive practices
- Inadequate training in trauma-informed care and positive behavior supports

Washington has made progress by offering:

- Endorsement programs and professional development through OSPI and Educational Service Districts (ESDs)
- Partnerships with the University of Washington UCEDD to deliver training on inclusion, person-centered practices, and dual diagnosis

- Grants and support for local districts to expand evidence-based interventions and inclusive instruction

To meet the needs of a growing and diverse student population with developmental disabilities, Washington must continue to invest in its workforce and reduce reliance on reactive or exclusionary discipline.

Recommendations

To improve education and early intervention outcomes for children with developmental disabilities, Washington should:

1. Strengthen policies and oversight to prevent inappropriate use of restraint and isolation in schools
2. Expand inclusive early learning options and ensure access across geographic and cultural communities
3. Ensure full and equitable implementation of IEPs, accommodations, and evaluation timelines
4. Build capacity among teachers and staff, especially in inclusive, trauma-informed, and culturally competent practices
5. Improve transition services through earlier planning, interagency coordination, and accountability for post-school outcomes
6. Ensure access to family-friendly resources and advocacy supports, including materials in multiple languages and formats

Citations

- [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\), Parts B and C](#)
- [Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction \(OSPI\) – Special Education Division](#)
- [Department of Children, Youth, and Families – Early Support for Infants and Toddlers \(ESIT\)](#)
- [OSPI Restraint and Isolation Data and Guidance](#)
- [Disability Rights Washington – Restraint and Isolation in Washington Schools Reports](#)
- [Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council \(2022–2026\). State Plan](#)
- [University of Washington Center on Human Development and Disability \(UCEDD\)](#)
- [Interagency Transition Network – OSPI, DDA, DVR](#)
- [Head Start and ECEAP Program Reports](#)

Housing for People with Developmental Disabilities in Washington State

Safe, stable, and affordable housing is a foundational element of community inclusion, self-determination, and quality of life. For people with developmental disabilities (DD), access to appropriate housing is directly tied to the availability of supportive services, public benefits, and policies that promote integration and independence.

In Washington State, people with DD continue to face significant barriers in finding and maintaining affordable, accessible, and integrated housing—particularly in rural areas, communities of color, and among individuals with high support needs.

Affordable, Accessible, and Integrated Housing

The Washington State Housing Trust Fund, administered by the Department of Commerce, is the state's primary investment tool for creating and preserving affordable housing. The fund supports the development of:

- Permanent supportive housing
- Affordable rental housing
- Transitional and emergency housing
- Homeownership programs for low-income individuals, including people with disabilities

Projects funded by the Housing Trust Fund often include accessibility features, such as:

- Zero-step entrances
- Roll-in showers
- Wider doorways
- Universal design elements

While the fund has been instrumental in expanding housing options, the demand for affordable, integrated housing far exceeds current supply—particularly for individuals with developmental disabilities who rely on SSI or other fixed incomes.

Additionally, many housing developments are not fully inclusive of individuals with disabilities, and people with DD may be segregated into group settings or denied access to independent living due to assumptions about their capabilities.

Housing Supports and Related Services

People with developmental disabilities may access housing-related supports through several state and local systems, including:

- Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) – offers supported living, shared living, and in-home services that help individuals live in the community
- Health Care Authority (HCA) – administers Foundational Community Supports (FCS), a Medicaid waiver program that includes housing case management and tenancy support for eligible individuals
- Local Housing Authorities – offer Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8) and Mainstream Vouchers, though waiting lists are long and eligibility criteria can be complex
- Nonprofit service providers and housing collaboratives – provide tailored housing navigation, lease negotiation assistance, roommate matching, and long-term tenancy support

For individuals not connected to DDA or HCA, access to ongoing housing support remains limited. Many fall through the cracks due to service eligibility rules, lack of coordination between systems, or insufficient staff capacity.

Renting, Owning, and Modifying a Residence

Washington offers limited but important supports for individuals with developmental disabilities who seek to:

- Rent independently, including guidance on lease agreements, budgeting, and communication with landlords

- Own a home, through supported homeownership programs available in some counties and down payment assistance from partner organizations
- Modify an existing residence, using resources such as:
 - The Housing Trust Fund’s accessibility provisions
 - Medicaid waiver funds for environmental modifications (e.g., ramps, grab bars)
 - Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds administered by local governments for home repairs and accessibility
 - Rural housing repair loans and grants through USDA programs

However, awareness of and access to these programs is often low—especially among people in rural areas, non-English speaking households, and underserved racial and cultural communities.

Barriers to Stable Housing for People with Developmental Disabilities

Common and ongoing challenges include:

- Cost of housing far exceeds SSI/SSDI income, leaving most individuals severely rent burdened
- Shortage of accessible units, especially in high-demand urban areas and small towns
- Discrimination and stigma, including illegal denials of housing based on disability
- Limited supply of integrated housing options, with continued overreliance on group homes or institutional settings
- Lack of housing navigation services outside of Medicaid-funded programs
- Disruption of services during transitions, such as from family homes, schools, or hospitals
- Limited funding for home modifications, especially for renters

Strategies and Opportunities

Washington is exploring new strategies to increase housing access and stability for people with developmental disabilities, including:

1. Expanding investment in integrated affordable housing through the Housing Trust Fund and supportive housing grants
2. Increasing use of Medicaid programs like Foundational Community Supports for housing case management
3. Promoting cross-system collaboration between DDA, HCA, Department of Commerce, housing authorities, and nonprofit developers
4. Advancing inclusive zoning and accessible design standards at the local level
5. Supporting innovative housing models, such as cooperative housing, micro-homes, and housing-first programs for people with complex needs
6. Increasing training for landlords and housing providers on disability rights and inclusive practices
7. Engaging self-advocates and families in local housing planning processes to ensure that policies reflect lived experience

Citations

- [Washington State Department of Commerce – Housing Trust Fund Overview](#)
- [Washington State Health Care Authority – Foundational Community Supports Program](#)
- [Developmental Disabilities Administration – Supported Living and Individualized Residential Services](#)
- [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\) – Housing Choice Voucher and Mainstream Program Guidelines](#)
- [Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council \(2022–2026\). State Plan](#)
- [Washington Low Income Housing Alliance – Reports on Disability and Housing Access](#)
- [Community Development Block Grant \(CDBG\) and USDA Rural Development Programs](#)

Transportation Access for People with Developmental Disabilities in Washington State

Access to reliable, affordable, and accessible transportation is essential for full participation in community life, including employment, education, healthcare, recreation, and civic engagement. For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Washington State, transportation remains one of the most persistent barriers to independence and inclusion.

Although Washington offers a range of public and specialized transportation options, individuals with developmental disabilities frequently encounter challenges related to physical accessibility, route availability, affordability, and discriminatory practices. These barriers disproportionately impact people in rural and tribal communities, individuals with complex support needs, and people of color with disabilities.

Accessible Public Transportation Services

Washington's public transit systems include fixed-route buses, commuter rail, ferries, and light rail, operated by regional and local transit agencies such as:

- Sound Transit
- King County Metro
- Spokane Transit Authority
- Community Transit
- Dozens of rural and tribal transit programs

Most fixed-route systems offer wheelchair-accessible vehicles, audio announcements, and priority seating, and allow personal care attendants to ride free. However, even in well-served areas, public transit can be:

- Infrequent or unavailable during non-peak hours
- Limited in rural and suburban areas
- Inaccessible for people with cognitive disabilities, due to complexity and lack of support

Despite federal and state mandates, many transit systems lack:

- Accessible bus stops and sidewalks
- Readable signage for blind or low-vision riders

- Real-time updates in plain language or multiple formats
- Staff training on disability etiquette and communication

Paratransit Services

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), public transit agencies must provide complementary paratransit for individuals unable to use fixed-route services due to a disability. These demand-response services (such as Access in King County or Dial-a-Ride in other regions) offer door-to-door or curb-to-curb service.

Challenges with paratransit include:

- Limited service areas and eligibility restrictions
- Long wait times and ride windows
- Booking systems that require advance notice, often 1–3 days in advance
- Inflexibility in scheduling work or medical appointments
- No-show penalties even when transportation is canceled for reasons beyond the rider's control

Advocates continue to raise concerns about paratransit systems being underfunded, inflexible, and not person-centered.

Programs That Promote Community Accessibility

Washington has several efforts to improve transit equity and access for people with disabilities:

1. Disability Rights Washington – Disability Mobility Initiative

Disability Rights Washington (DRW) leads the Disability Mobility Initiative, which documents the experiences of nondrivers and promotes transportation justice. Their work includes:

- The Transportation Access for Everyone (Transportation Access Now) campaign, which highlights how inaccessible and insufficient transportation options isolate people with disabilities
- Publishing "Transportation Access Stories" to elevate the lived experience of people with disabilities across the state

- Advocating for increased investment in pedestrian infrastructure, better ADA compliance, and universal design in transit planning
- Promoting the idea that transportation is a civil right, and fighting for the inclusion of nondrivers in policy decisions

DRW has played a key role in ensuring that transit-dependent individuals with disabilities have a seat at the table during regional transportation planning processes.

2. Washington State Transportation Improvement Board and Safe Routes Programs

Several statewide initiatives aim to improve transportation infrastructure and safety:

- Complete Streets programs prioritize walkability, rollability, and multimodal access
- Safe Routes to School helps ensure children with disabilities can safely get to and from school, though accessibility for students with IDD varies widely by district
- Mobility-on-Demand pilots and micro-transit programs are being explored in some communities but need to include accessibility standards and disability stakeholder input

Barriers and Gaps in Transportation Access

Persistent issues include:

- Lack of transportation in rural and tribal areas
- Lack of coordination between human services transportation and public transit
- Complex and inconsistent eligibility processes
- Limited funding for individualized travel training and transit supports
- Inaccessibility of rideshare services, such as Uber and Lyft, which are often promoted as solutions but remain largely unusable by people with physical and cognitive disabilities
- Lack of flexibility for workers with non-traditional schedules

Many people with developmental disabilities report missing appointments, losing jobs, or being socially isolated due to transportation barriers.

Supports and Training

Some transit agencies and nonprofits offer travel training programs to support people with disabilities in learning how to use public transit independently. These programs:

- Teach route planning, safety, and communication
- Help riders gain confidence navigating systems
- Are often underfunded and not available statewide

Support staff or personal assistants may help individuals with developmental disabilities travel safely, but the cost and availability of support staff can be prohibitive, especially for people living on fixed incomes or outside of urban centers.

Recommendations

To improve transportation access for people with developmental disabilities in Washington State, the following actions are recommended:

1. Increase investment in accessible, flexible transportation options, especially in rural and underserved areas
2. Expand and fund individualized travel training and travel supports
3. Ensure that paratransit services are timely, reliable, and responsive to real-life schedules
4. Prioritize accessibility in all transportation planning and budgeting
5. Support the work of advocacy organizations like Disability Rights Washington in documenting needs and monitoring compliance
6. Require meaningful participation by people with disabilities in regional transportation planning and advisory councils
7. Improve pedestrian infrastructure, including accessible sidewalks, crosswalks, and bus stops
8. Track and report transportation accessibility data, including complaints, service denials, and unmet needs

Citations

- [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\), 42 U.S.C. § 12101](#)
- [Disability Rights Washington – Disability Mobility Initiative Reports and Access Stories](#)

- [Washington State Department of Transportation \(WSDOT\) – Human Services Transportation Plan](#)
- [Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction \(OSPI\) – Safe Routes to School Program](#)
- [Washington State Transportation Improvement Board – Complete Streets Program](#)
- [Local Transit Agency Policies \(e.g., King County Metro Access, Spokane Transit Authority, Sound Transit\)](#)
- [Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council \(2022–2026\). State Plan](#)