

A good life in Washington

A short review of services and needs for people with developmental disabilities

Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council | 2027–2031 State Plan

What is this review?

The Council looked at services across Washington. It asked what works, what is missing, and what needs to change. This work is called the Comprehensive Review and Analysis, or CRA.

A developmental disability starts early in life and lasts a long time. A person may need help with learning, moving, speaking, or daily tasks. People have different strengths and support needs.

The main finding: Washington has many useful programs. But too many people cannot get the right help at the right time.

What should a good life include?

My choices I help make decisions about my life.	My health I get care that meets my needs.
My home I choose a safe place I can afford.	My learning and work I learn, use my skills, and earn fair pay.
My community I can get around and spend time with others.	My support I get help as my needs change.

How did the Council learn?

The Council used reports, data, surveys, and community input. It heard from people with disabilities, families, and others. It worked to hear from groups that are often left out.

No one source tells the whole story. Some data covers all disabilities, not just developmental disabilities. Service records can miss people who never got help.

Getting help should be easier

What is working?

More services support people in their homes and communities. Washington has programs that help people find work, plan for the future, learn about services, and protect their rights.

People with disabilities and families help shape this work. State agencies, local groups, and disability groups also work together.

What gets in the way?

- Forms and program rules can be hard to understand.
- People may wait a long time for services or a worker.
- One agency may send a person to another without helping them connect.
- A person may qualify for help but still have no provider nearby.
- Some people do not qualify, do not know where to ask, or cannot finish the forms.

Help must be real. Being approved for a service does not mean a person can use it.

Access is not equal

People in rural areas and Tribal communities may have fewer choices and longer trips. Race, language, culture, and unfair treatment can also affect access. Families need clear information in the language and format they use.

What needs to change?

- Give people one clear place to start. Help with forms and follow up.
- Make agencies share the work so people do not have to explain their needs over and over.
- Pay, train, and support workers so they stay in these jobs.
- Reach people who are waiting, were turned away, or are outside service programs.

The Council's role

The Council works to change systems and build community skills. Commerce helps with tasks such as payroll and purchasing. The Council keeps its own voice and sets its own plan and priorities.

Health, learning, and work

Health: care that fits the person

People need medical, dental, and mental health care. Some offices are hard to use. Some providers do not understand disability or how a person communicates. Care can cost too much or be too far away.

People who need both disability and mental health support may be sent between programs. Families often must arrange the care themselves. Help may not arrive until there is a crisis.

Needed change: Train care teams. Connect services. Offer help in the community before a crisis grows.

Learning: support from the start

Early services can help young children learn and grow. Schools can provide teaching, therapy, tools, and other support. But services differ by school district and location. Staff shortages can delay help.

Students need safe schools and chances to learn with other students. Holding students so they cannot move, or keeping them alone in a room, can cause harm. Schools need better ways to prevent and respond to distress.

Students and families also need a plan before school ends. Too many students leave without work, adult services, rides, or a clear next step.

Needed change: Start planning early. Bring schools and adult services together. Make sure each student's support plan is carried out.

Work: more than getting a job

Washington has strong programs that help people find and keep jobs. Still, many people work too few hours or earn too little. People need jobs that fit their interests, fair pay, and chances to grow.

Some people fear losing health care or other benefits if they work. They need clear advice about wages and benefits. Job support must continue when a person moves from one program to another.

Needed change: Track pay, hours, choice, and job stability—not just whether someone got a job.

Home, rides, and support as we age

Home: a place to live and the help to stay

Many people cannot afford rent. Homes that fit a person's needs are hard to find. Housing lists can be long, and rules can be confusing. Unfair treatment can limit choices.

A home may need ramps, wider doors, or other changes. Some people also need daily help at home. Housing and support programs must work together so a person can use the home they choose.

Rides: a link to daily life

People need rides to work, school, health care, shopping, and friends. Bus routes may not reach them or run when needed. Stops, sidewalks, schedules, and apps may be hard to use.

Special transit for people with disabilities may need booking far ahead. Late pickups and limited hours can make a ride hard to use. Travel training can help people learn routes, but it is not offered everywhere.

A home and a ride work together. Without both, a person may miss work, care, and time with friends.

Families need support, too

Families often provide daily care and help people find services. They need breaks from caregiving, trusted advice, and trained workers. Family help cannot fill every gap.

Plan before a major change

People with disabilities and their caregivers are growing older. Planning should include:

- Who will help when a parent or caregiver can no longer do so.
- Changes in health, memory, movement, or daily support.
- Retirement, friends, and meaningful things to do each day.
- A home that can meet new needs and trusted help with decisions.
- End-of-life wishes and support after someone dies.

Aging and disability programs need to plan together before illness, a death, or a lost home becomes a crisis.

Rights, choice, and what comes next

Nothing About Us Without Us: People with disabilities must have a real say in decisions that affect their lives.

People should lead their own lives

Support should start with a person’s goals and choices. People have the right to respect, privacy, safety, and life in the community. They should be able to choose trusted people to help them make decisions. People need safe ways to report harm or unfair treatment. They may need help to communicate or make a complaint. Reports must lead to action. Independent groups can help protect rights and check services.

Who works together?

The Council works with Disability Rights Washington and the University of Washington Center on Human Development and Disability. Allies in Advocacy is a key self-advocacy partner. These groups work with people, families, agencies, and communities to improve support and protect rights.

Six changes the review calls for

1. Clear help Use plain words. Help with forms. Follow up.	2. Workers who stay Improve pay, training, and support.
3. Plans for life changes Prepare for school ending, aging, and changes in care.	4. Choice and rights Listen to each person. Prevent harm. Act on complaints.
5. Fair access Reach people across places, cultures, and languages.	6. Better checks Use data and community input to see what changed.

How will we know things are better?

Ask people: Can you get help when you need it? Do you have more choices? Are you safe and heard? Can you work, see friends, and take part in your community?

The review helps guide the 2027–2031 State Plan. People with disabilities and families should help design projects and check results. The Council should review needs as new information comes in.

About this summary: Based on the September 2026 Plain Language Comprehensive Review and Analysis. The full CRA has detailed data and sources. This summary describes findings and needed changes. It does not create services, funding, or new rights. Prepared October 2026.