



Transition Truths: Developmental Disabilities

The Developmental Disabilities system provides supports and services for individuals who have severe chronic conditions or significant mental or physical disabilities such as Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, autism, or intellectual disabilities. The primary goal of these supports and services is to allow people with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD) to direct their own lives and be included in their communities.

How the System Works

The developmental disabilities system consists of the people, places, policies, and programs that work to ensure that people with I/DD and their families receive the supports and services they need to participate in the planning and design of additional services in the following areas:

- Employment,
- Education,
- Childcare,
- Health,
- Housing,
- Transportation,
- Recreation, and
- Quality assurance.

People and Places

The people in this system are individuals with disabilities, educators, and counselors who teach or provide counseling, case managers who help them coordinate the services they need, family members, and federal and state policymakers who make the rules about how services will be provided. These people work in places like community centers, schools, employment settings, and homes to accomplish their goals. At the federal level, the **Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities** within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services works to ensure that individuals with I/DD and their families can fully participate in their communities.

Policies and Programs

The **Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (DD Act)** builds upon earlier versions of the law to lay out rights for people with developmental disabilities. These include the right to make choices for oneself, the right to be protected from abuse or neglect in service delivery, the right to engage in productive work, and the right to receive services in integrated, community-based settings. An important priority of the DD Act is employment for people with disabilities, including supported employment and self-employment, in integrated settings alongside other people both with and without disabilities.

In addition to focusing on rights, the DD Act creates and improves programs supporting people with I/DD. State- and territory-based developmental disabilities councils perform advocacy and promote person-centered services with self-determination by people with I/DD and their families. University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Services train students, provide community services, and conduct research and dissemination of resources. Protection and Advocacy systems in states are tasked with defending the rights of people with I/DD through promoting community living and educational rights for students with I/DD, among other things.

Rosa's Law changed the language in all federal health, education, and labor laws to remove the phrase “mental retardation” and instead refer to Americans living with an intellectual disability.

Eligibility

Services are provided to people who have an intellectual or developmental disability. To be considered a person with I/DD, an individual must have a severe, chronic disability that:

1. Is caused by a mental or physical impairment or combination of mental and physical impairments;
2. Occurs before the age of 22;
3. Is likely to continue for a long time;
4. Results in substantial functional limitations in **three or more** of the following areas of major life activities:
 - a. Self-care,
 - b. Receptive and expressive language,
 - c. Learning,
 - d. Mobility,
 - e. Self-direction,
 - f. Capacity for independent living, or
 - g. Economic self-sufficiency;
5. Reflects the individual's need for a combination and sequence of special, interdisciplinary, or generic services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that are lifelong or extended duration and are individually planned and coordinated.

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