

18th Annual Legislative Town Hall Talking Points

Full access to Housing, Transportation, Education, and other Services and Supports are regular challenges for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) as well as older adults and seniors or those with mental or behavioral health care and long-term care needs. The people we serve navigate these obstacles every day – these challenges failing to meet their basic needs, impacting quality of life, and in some cases, preventing full participation and inclusion in our community.

The following discussion points are presented with possible solutions or ideas to address them.

Housing

Affordable and accessible housing are barriers to the people we serve:

- People are unable to afford housing because of resource limits and earning caps.
 - Increase resource limits so people can afford to save money for down payments/deposits
 - Increase earning caps so people can earn more money without fear of losing their long-term care Medicaid waivers
 - Exclude a percentage of housing costs when assessing earned income for public benefits
- Affordable housing is not always an accessible/barrier-free housing option.
 - Provide incentives to builders to include accessible/barrier-free units in all new builds
 - Provide incentives to builders willing to retro-fit housing units for accessible/barrier-free housing options
 - Require that all new builds include accessible/barrier-free affordable options in new communities
 - Consider visiting new building sites with a person who has specific accessible needs to fully understand the need for accessible/barrier-free housing
 - Are you familiar with Universal Design concept and how this is different from the ADA requirements when building new housing?
- Affordable housing is often located in high-crime areas/run-down neighborhoods.
 - Require builders to either renovate low-income housing options for every high-end home built, or donate a percentage of money for every high-end home sold
 - Invest money or provide incentives to regentrify run-down neighborhoods without replacing affordable housing with expensive housing options
- Affordable housing is becoming more difficult to find in our community. It impacts all members of our community, including direct support professionals. DSPs do not make a competitive wage that keeps up with the increase demand of the cost of living in our community.

- Rent control will help all members of our community continue to afford the cost of housing
 - Offering zoning options for “tiny home” communities
 - Consider public transit needs when approving new housing developments
 - Units that are considered “affordable housing” should not be allowed to increase rent more than the Social Security Administrations COLA increase
 - Increase housing subsidies
 - *How can you ensure people with disabilities are assisted/prioritized to access the funding available to help combat evictions now that the moratorium is over?*
- Accessible housing is becoming more difficult to find in our community.
 - Currently new community housing is required to have 5% of their living spaces be ADA accessible. Do you feel this is adequate and will accommodate all of the needs of our aging and disability populations? If not, how would you propose the Colorado Springs area improve on their readiness for the upcoming populations?
 - Consider allowing home modifications in all Medicaid waivers
 - Offer incentives for people interested in modifying rental properties to make them accessible
 - Offer incentives for people needing to modify their own homes for accessibility
 - Create additional protections against ageism, ableism, and exploitation in the application process
 - Bridge the gap between increasing rents/mortgages and that of (low) fixed incomes.

Transportation

Transportation continues to be an unmet need for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as those with long-term care needs. The lack of accessible transportation impacts all aspects of a person’s life – access to medical care, work, day programs, social opportunities, grocery shopping, etc.

- Public transit continues to be a barrier because of long transit times, multiple transfers and restrictions.
 - Increase service times so people do not have to wait an hour for a bus (study of the most accessed lines and increase the number of buses on that line)
 - Expand para-transit service area to serve people outside of the current service area
 - With increased buses on most traveled lines, increase the number of wheelchair accessible areas in buses
 - Offer a full-day, single ticket unlimited bus pass
 - Public transit ride sharing option/voucher system for access to shopping and social opportunities
 - Public transit limits the number of grocery bags to two per person, making it impossible for people to use the bus to shop for food/essentials. This is especially concerning for people living in food deserts who have to travel more than a couple of miles to the nearest grocery store
 - Public transit limits the size of stroller a person can use when accessing the bus. For a parent with multiple children, this makes public transportation inaccessible

- “Walk a day in our shoes;” We challenge every panelist to use public transportation for a week to fully understand the challenges your constituents face daily. *Have any panelists accepted the challenge to “walk a day in our shoes”?*
- Affordable transportation options
 - Provide funding to increase the reimbursement rate for transportation services in the Medicaid waiver programs
 - Discontinue the requirement for health care signatures for patient transport related to Non-emergent Medicaid Transport
 - Allow ride sharing services to be reimbursed through Medicaid state plan and Medicaid waiver services
 - Expand transportation services under Medicaid waivers
 - Offer incentives for the non-public transit dependent population to use public transportation to increase the demand and need for a better system in our community
 - Offer Peer Rider Training grants to agencies willing to hire Peer Rider Trainers to encourage more public transit riders
 - Offer/repurpose city, county and state fleet vehicles for families looking for affordable transportation options
 - Offer grant funding to help families modify vehicles
 - PPRTA Planning Process – what support will panelist provide to encourage people with access to affordable and accessible transportation be considered a priority in our community

Services and Supports

Many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities receive support through Medicaid waiver services. These crucial services allow people to live in their communities. There are many gaps in services, as well as people living in the community without appropriate services or no services.

- The waiting list for the Home and Community Based Services - Developmental Disability Medicaid Waiver (HCBS-DD) is extremely long. Resources that were allotted for aging caregivers only scratched the surface.
 - Additional HCBS-DD resources need to be available for aging caregivers and people in need of the services offered through the waiver
 - Reimbursement rates for the waiver need to be ample enough to allow agencies to pay direct support professionals a competitive wage to attract and maintain quality direct support staff – this has reached a crisis level because of the opportunity to make a higher hourly wage in other sectors
 - Often the HCBS-DD waiver is used to support people with housing needs that could otherwise be met with affordable housing – allowing people who need the services access – the proposed changes to SLS may be a good highlight for what HCPF is doing to try to mitigate this issue.
 - Offer incentives/higher reimbursement rates to mental health practitioners willing to work with people with disabilities and specialized care needs such as IDD and older adult populations.

- In addition to rate increases across the board, a focused effort to enhance rates for those service areas struggling the most to find staff
- The outcome of the Olmstead Decision was that people with disabilities have the right to live in the community and states are obligated to provide supports for them to do so. Decades after the decision there are still people on wait lists for services Olmstead says they are entitled to live in the community. What steps need to happen legislatively for Olmstead to be fully realized?
- People with IDD, other disabilities, long-term care needs, older adults, and their families have a difficult time navigating the service delivery system.
 - Develop an outreach program like the ABCD project (offered through Part C of IDEA services) to educate medical providers, first responders, Department of Human/Social Services, and other initial points of contact about services available for people with IDD, so they will provide that information to people who need help finding services
 - Offer incentives to medical professionals who offer a more integrated approach to caring for people with multiple health care needs
 - Support a more open concept to waivers
 - Develop an Ombudsman program for Medicaid waivers like the Ombudsman program for people living in nursing/assisted living facilities
 - Evaluate the process of enrolling in services to ensure barriers are eliminated for timely enrollments
- Behavioral and mental health services (mental health and substance misuse) are crucial to supporting people in their communities – our community has a lack of such services.
 - Offer higher Medicaid reimbursements rates for all aspects of behavioral and mental health support
 - Offer incentives to behavioral and mental health providers willing to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
 - Require behavioral and mental health support in all schools
 - Offer incentives to behavioral and mental health providers willing to take a holistic approach to serving people with IDD and other disabilities or long-term care needs
 - Eliminate the discriminatory practice by behavioral health providers and systems that struggle between Medicaid waiver definitions and who qualifies for service under the respective waivers
 - Please keep in mind that people with disabilities have behavioral health support needs and should be represented at the table when strategies on ways to provide better mental health support in our communities
 - Open additional codes and enhanced rates for non-clinical behavioral health support services

Education

Students with intellectual and developmental disabilities require support at school through an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan (accommodations) both under IDEA.

- Special Education teams need to work together to ensure students receive the supports they need to be successful in school.
 - The expulsion rate for students with IDD continues to grow at an alarming rate across the country – require schools to provide mental health support to curb the number of incidents resulting in expulsion
 - Increase the number of training hours required for “general” education teachers to include training for supporting students of all abilities in their classrooms
 - Increase funding classroom aids so students can receive an education alongside their peers
 - Offer incentives to schools willing to implement a restorative justice model approach to problem solving issues in the school setting (i.e., sit down meetings between parties involved in incidents to work through solutions)

- Higher Education should continue to be an option for all students seeking a post-secondary education.
 - SB 16-196 Pilot Program for Higher Education was a four-year pilot offering higher education opportunities for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This was an excellent opportunity for young adults to enroll in higher education programs at three (3) higher education institutions. Expansion of this program would afford the opportunity for more young adults to seek higher education opportunities.

Staffing/Employment

- Staffing shortages – challenges with hiring and keeping staff for direct care providers and case management agencies.
- Invest more in incentives for companies to hire people with varying abilities to help fill the staffing shortages in all industries.
- Expand affordable work force education for persons with disabilities to stay in the work force longer, and/or re-enter and/or transition to new careers.
- Allow for LSW and LPP and other credentials that are earning clinical hours toward independent practice to be eligible for loan forgiveness programs.
- The Polis administration has increased access and awareness to internships and apprenticeships for people who do not wish to go to college but wish to learn a trade. How can these programs be expanded with specific intent to support individuals with disabilities?