



FLORIDA DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL, INC.

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The Individual Budgeting/Home and Community Based Services Waiver – a lifeline for individuals with developmental disabilities to ensure choice, independence and access to their communities

- **The Council urges the Florida Legislature to ensure that individuals with developmental disabilities and their families who receive the Individual Budgeting/Home and Community Based Services Waiver have stable and qualified service provider staffing for delivering waiver services and a strengthened focus on enabling individuals with developmental disabilities to achieve independence and productive lives in the community through the Individual budgeting Home and Community Based Services waiver.**
- **The Council urges the Florida Legislature to support a meaningful long-term commitment to eliminate the Individual Budgeting/Home and Community Based Services Waiver waitlist and to appropriate funding for a substantial amount of individuals to come off the waiting list in 2015.**

The Individual Budgeting Home and Community Based waiver administered by the Agency for Persons with Disabilities offers supports and services to assist almost 30,000 individuals with developmental disabilities to live in the community by ensuring that their health and safety needs are met, as well as providing services to improve their access to their community and a meaningful life. The reductions in waiver funding that was experienced for several years until 2013 resulted in multiple reductions to services and significant reductions to provider rates. Retaining a qualified workforce is reaching crisis proportion with very large turnover rates. The separate issue of minimum wage for companion and other direct care workers (who are affected by the recent Department of Labor rule) will exacerbate this further. Florida needs to offer providers a rate that will maintain and improve the availability of a qualified workforce that can adequately address the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities.

Florida should also allocate funds to support transportation needs of individuals with developmental disabilities on the waiver. Florida has begun moving toward a major system change with the Employment First initiative to focus on and support the employment potential of individuals with developmental disabilities. Florida will need to strengthen the availability of transportation for individuals with developmental disabilities in order to succeed in improving employment outcomes.

This emphasis on independence and individual choice is reinforced in the new Center for Medicaid and Medicare rule for Home and Community Based Services waivers that defines home and community based settings and requires that individuals with developmental disabilities receiving waiver services have the same choices for participation in community activities as individuals not receiving waiver services.

There are 20,934 individuals on the waitlist for Waiver services as of August 15, 2014. Funding was allocated during the 2014 legislative session to take about 1500 individuals off the waitlist for the second time in eight years. The problem of the Waiver waitlist is a longstanding one. Reducing the number of people on the waitlist will require long-term support for a comprehensive plan that includes a continued financial commitment. The legislature must be encouraged to provide an appropriation to further reduce the number of individuals on the waitlist. Other strategies such as increasing the availability of informal and volunteer services and promoting access to generic or shared services for individuals with developmental disabilities living in their communities can also address the waitlist to meet this growing unmet service need. The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council and many other organizations and families in the state are committed to this goal and are in the process of developing a strategic plan that can be used to partner with the Legislature to continue to significantly reduce the number of people on the Waiver waitlist.