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FAMILY



Safe



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS BOOK

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the Family-Run Organization Movement (FROM)!

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FROM will provide a wide range of supports and services, including leadership training, governance enhancement, program support, monthly collaborative forums, a program newsletter, and other resources to help organizations attain new levels of participation in the system of care.

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To join and get more information please see the FROM link at www.familycafe.net or call 850-224-4670

FROM
Family Run Organization Movement
"Moving families forward. From our family to yours."



Welcome to The Family Café Questions & Answers Book for 2022!

Navigating the service delivery system and finding resources has always been a challenge for people with disabilities and their families. For nearly twenty-five years, The Family Café has been here to help! Since 1998, our mission has been to connect Florida's disability community with information, training, support, and opportunities to network with other families, professionals, and public policy makers.

The primary place where that mission has been realized is at our signature event, The Annual Family Café. After hosting a virtual event in 2020, followed by a virtual-friendly "hybrid" event in 2021, we were thrilled to return to Orlando for a full in-person event in 2022. It was great to be able to bring back all of the special events, self-advocate performances, and family-friendly add-ons to the agenda that make the event fun and engaging. And of course, it was also fantastic to see the organic face-to-face networking that makes The Annual Family Café so meaningful for attendees happening again!

Even though this year's Annual Family Café looked a lot like the last pre-pandemic event we hosted in 2019, we did learn some important lessons that we were able to apply in 2022. Based on positive feedback about our live streaming efforts, we continued our practice of sharing live video feeds of all three keynote speakers and The Annual Governor's Summit on Disabilities on our Facebook page. Online viewers were able to join us for comments from Executive Director of the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, Retired Marine Corps Major General James Scott "Hammer" Hartsell, and his wife Melisa Hartsell, as they shared the story of their son Evin's disability journey; a conversation with three actors from the Amazon Prime show *As We See It* discussing the on-screen disability world, the representation of people with disabilities in film and TV, and the experience of being actors with autism playing characters with autism; and self-advocate Zion Clark sharing about his foster care experience and the role athletics have played in his life. We also doubled our efforts to capture more video content, to add to our virtual training library available at familycafe.net/videos/ and on our YouTube page.

Of course, The Family Café recognizes that no matter how informative The Annual Family Café is, it can't answer every question! That's why we collect questions and comments from families like yours and put together the responses we get from State Agencies to create ***The Family Café Questions & Answers Book***. Although every situation is unique, *The Family Café Questions & Answers Book* can serve as a quick reference guide and a starting point for anyone seeking information. If you need to know more than you can find here, we encourage you to contact the relevant state agency, and to make your needs known, and your voice heard!

We hope you will join us as we celebrate a major milestone at The 25th Anniversary Family Café on June 9-11, 2023, at the Hyatt Regency Orlando. Online registration opens on Tuesday, February 14th. Until then, feed your need for information with *The Family Café Questions & Answers Book*! And remember, we are always available online at FamilyCafe.net, on Facebook at Facebook.com/TheFamilyCafeFL, on Twitter [@TheFamilyCafe](https://twitter.com/TheFamilyCafe), and on Instagram [@thefamilycafefl](https://www.instagram.com/thefamilycafefl)!

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The Family Café

For those who drive a distance for the Women’s Summit, please make rooms available at the Café rate Wednesday night. I tried but was told it was over \$250 plus parking and resort fee—yikes! (Obviously, I couldn’t afford that.) Thank you.

Thanks for pointing that out. The Family Café negotiates multi-year contracts with the host hotel, and that contract dictates what nights the special event rate is available. We will revisit that contract to see if the rate can be extended to the Wednesday evening. In the meantime, the special rate will be available for Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings at The Annual Family Café.

Please allow more time for Douglas Vogel from Mass Mutual. He shared more information on various topics that were useful to everyone. Given more time he could cover more in detail in his session rather than attending several different classes.

Thanks for that suggestion. It’s great to hear that you found that particular session valuable. In order to maintain our agenda and provide as many breakout sessions addressing different topics as we do, it’s necessary to limit those sessions to one hour. That said, if you would like to know more about a topic or discuss a topic further with the presenter, we encourage you to reach out to them directly. Contact information for all presenters is available in the event program. Last year’s is online at https://familycafe.net/new/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/24th_FamCafe_2022_WEB.pdf.

Can The Family Café be extended for one more day to allow opportunity to attend more sessions?

It’s great to hear that you enjoyed The Annual Family Café enough to want a whole extra day of it! Unfortunately we do not have the resources we would need to add an extra day to the event. If there was a session that you would have liked to have attended but weren’t able to, we would encourage you to contact the presenter directly.

Allow people that win door prizes on Sunday to draw the next winning ticket instead of having one person drawing them all!

Thanks for that suggestion! We always have a lot of door prizes to give away on Sunday, so keeping the process moving is important. Of course, we also love audience participation too. We’ll consider having attendees pull a few door prize tickets next year.

Why do you all not pay for the meals at The Family Café?

The main reason we do not provide meals at The Annual Family Café is cost. Banquet services at hotels are expensive, and our event attracts thousands of attendees. Providing meals for everyone would quickly erode our budget. Our priority is providing an event with no registration fee and making financial assistance available to as many families as possible. To help make meals more affordable, The Hyatt Regency provides discounts for their on-site shops and restaurants. There are also several less expensive options within walking distance of the hotel.

Why were there a few booths that were empty and the company didn't check in and have an exhibit?

The Family Café does its best to bring worthwhile organizations to our Exhibit Hall. Those include both traditional exhibitors and micro-enterprises that are owned and operated by people with disabilities. As exhibitors are independent entities, it's not possible for The Family Café to require them to arrive or depart at particular times, or man their booth throughout the course of the event. We do make a note of exhibitors that fail to appear without notifying us, and make sure not to invite them back in future.

We have been coming to the Family Cafe since 2015. I have 2 beautiful Daughters with Autism and I am a Certified Occupational Therapist who has worked with pediatric patients. The information that I get from here impacts both my family and my career. Navigating the politics of having a special needs child is tough and we are very thankful for this conference every year. I would love to teach a class at some point to share the knowledge I have gained from here and in life.

Thank you for that positive feedback! It's great to hear that our event makes a difference for you. The Family Café is very much based in our belief in the value of families learning from each other, and it's likely that other families would benefit from you sharing your knowledge. Visit our website for details on how you can become a presenter at next year's event.

Is respite care an option for the event?

Several years ago, The Family Café offered respite care at our event for a limited number of families. Unfortunately, that service was quite expensive, and the required ratios of staff to respite recipients resulted in very few families receiving the service. Ultimately we determined that it was better to dedicate our available resources to serving the greatest number of families possible, so we ceased offering respite at that time.

Thank you for a weekend filled with kindness, comfort, and inspiration!

You're welcome! We do our best to create a friendly environment and focus on all the great things people with disabilities can do. It's great to hear we succeeded for you!

Will the sessions be available to view/listen to online? Some sessions I wanted to take overlapped.

In 2020 and 2021, in which we held virtual and hybrid events, respectively, much of the event content was available online. With our return to a full in-person format in 2022, the amount of online content was not as significant. That said, we did live stream all three keynotes and the Governor's Summit on Disabilities, and multiple sessions were recorded for online viewing. You can find those sessions on our website at <https://familycafe.net/videos/>. If there were sessions you would have liked to attend, but weren't able to due to scheduling conflicts, we would encourage you to contact the presenter directly. Contact information for all presenters is available in the event program. Last year's is online at [https://familycafe.net/new/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/24th FamCafe 2022 WEB.pdf](https://familycafe.net/new/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/24th_FamCafe_2022_WEB.pdf).

Needed information that I still can't get as couldn't find the help.

We're sorry to hear that you weren't able to find all of the information you needed at The Annual Family Café. Our advice would depend on the specific help you need, but we would encourage you to reach out to the Florida agencies that serve people with disabilities if your issue relates to public services. You can also find the event program online at [https://familycafe.net/new/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/24th FamCafe 2022 WEB.pdf](https://familycafe.net/new/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/24th_FamCafe_2022_WEB.pdf) and find the contact information for all of our presenters and exhibitors, one of which may be able to help you. You can also reach out to our office for help at info@familycafe.net or 888-309-CAFÉ (2233).

Can The Family Café, instead of being a Friday-Sunday event, be extended one more day?

We're happy to hear that you would enjoy an additional day of The Annual Family Café. Unfortunately we do not have the necessary resources to extend the event for an additional day, and the schedule for the event is limited by our existing contract with the host hotel.

Thank you for everything.

You're welcome! It's our pleasure to connect Floridians with disabilities and their families with information, resources, and networking opportunities at The Annual Family Café!

Why don't you offer an online format and in-person? I would prefer an online format even with reduced content.

In 2020 we hosted a virtual event, and in 2021 we hosted a hybrid event that included live streams of the reduced agenda of breakout sessions. In 2022, we returned to a full in-person format, but hosted live streams of all three keynotes and the Governor's Summit on Disabilities on our Facebook page. Many attendees appreciated having an online format, and we made an effort to provide online content to the degree we could. Given our limited resources, it's difficult to provide both online and in-person options at scale. That said, we will definitely make an effort to provide online content in 2023. We also have a wealth of online content available in the Videos section of our website at <https://familycafe.net/videos/> and on our YouTube channel.

Would Family Café be able to make videos of some presentations?

Yes! The Family Café records a number of presentations at The Annual Family Café every year. With our virtual event in 2020 and hybrid event in 2021, we created a large library of video content. We also recorded multiple sessions at our in-person event in 2022. You can find video recordings on our website at <https://familycafe.net/videos/> and on our YouTube channel.

Can you all add an extra day to The Family Café or offer repetitive courses because my pet peeve this year is that there were so many courses that I wanted to attend but they were all being offered at the same time. I would have gone to way more sessions if they were offered over the course of more days or if the conference was extended and things were accessible that way. I'm disappointed that I couldn't attend all of the courses that I needed to attend. I spent \$1000.00 on hotel fees and lodging and gas and I just wish I could have gotten a chance to attend more courses and learn more valuable information.

We understand your frustration with not being able to attend as many of the sessions at The Annual Family Café as you would have liked to. With each of our seven time slots including as many as 30 sessions to choose from, it can be challenging to decide which to attend. While extending the event over additional days and increasing the number of breakout session time slots would reduce the number of sessions in each one, the agenda and duration of the event is determined by budgetary constraints and our contract with the hotel. One strategy to obtain information from sessions that interested you that you could not attend is to contact the presenters of those sessions directly. All presenter contact information is printed in the program, which can be found online at https://familycafe.net/new/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/24th_FamCafe_2022_WEB.pdf. We would certainly encourage you to reach out to those presenters to find out what you missed!

I love how well organized The Family Café event is. I like how this event meets the needs of all people with disabilities.

Thanks very much! Our event is unique in being a truly cross-disability endeavor, and we do our best to make The Annual Family Café relevant to people with different types of disability experiences.

It was very informative. I gained a lot of knowledge.

That's great to hear! We strive to put together an informative event, and it's always nice to know when our attendees think we've succeeded.

I would have preferred the Friday evening Summit to be at 7:00 rather than 6:00 so we could have supper without missing any of The Summit.

Thanks for that suggestion. We recognize that the break between Friday's final breakout session and the Governor's Summit is relatively brief. It can be a challenge to fit all of the program content into the agenda while accommodating the needs of the Governor's Office and State Agency officials. We will share your observation with our Planning Committee.

We love the sensory room but in the future I would love to see a game room for older kids. Maybe a few game systems, some board games, coloring sheets for younger kids, and maybe some donated toys for kids to play with. Chairs for the adults to sit and relax for a bit while their children unwind between sessions.

Thanks for that suggestion. In recent years we have hosted a Sensory Room specifically for attendees with unique sensory needs. We will consider adding some type of game room, although space limitations, staffing requirements, and sourcing the necessary equipment would be important factors.

How can we use the app for break out sessions for those that went during Covid or signed up during Covid and use the app?

Each year we provide a smartphone app for attendees to use that includes all of the information in the printed program, as well as additional features including maps, messaging, and photo sharing functions. The app is also updated in real time, so it always reflects changes and additions to the agenda. Due to Covid, The Family Café hosted a virtual event in 2020 and a hybrid event in 2021, with live streamed content on our Facebook page. We also live streamed all three keynotes and the Governor's Summit on Disabilities in 2022. While the app can give you an idea of what's happening at the event if you're not able to attend in person, the place to go for live video content is our Facebook page. You can also find recorded video on our website at <https://familycafe.net/videos/> and on our YouTube channel.

Great keynote line-up this year. We especially loved the cast from *As We See It*. So inspirational!

Thanks very much! We do our best to bring engaging, relevant keynote speakers to the event each year. It's great to hear that you enjoyed our 2022 lineup!

I am so glad SportsAbility was able to return to the Exhibit Hall. Such a wonderful event!

We were very happy to once again have SportsAbility on hand too! They are wonderful partners that bring a lot of value to our attendees by exposing them to adaptive recreation options. We're looking forward to hosting them again in 2023!

Can you make the sensory room bigger? It's wonderful to have a place for our kids to unwind, but it gets crowded, as there are a lot of kids and young-at-heart at the event. A bigger sensory room would be so helpful.

We're glad to hear that you enjoyed our Sensory Room. One of the challenges in putting together a large event like The Annual Family Café is finding sufficient, appropriate space for all of the activities. We try to find appropriate spaces for every activity, but with a large event like ours things can sometimes get cramped. We will do our best to find the right space for the sensory room next year.

I would love to see more sessions on Cerebral Palsy in the future. Thanks for a great event!

Thanks for that feedback. As a cross-disability event, we try to make space to address as many disability-related topics as possible. We will share your request for additional content about cerebral palsy with our Planning Committee.

How do I invite companies to exhibit? I know of some companies that would fit in so well here.

Awesome! Information about how to be a part of our Exhibit Hall is available on our website. Please direct any interested organizations to <https://familycafe.net/be-a-part-of-the-exhibit-hall-at-the-25th-anniversary-family-cafe/>, or have them contact our office at 850-224-4670 or info@familycafe.net.

I saw that some sessions were still recorded this year. Is there a way to access these? Can we video record more sessions next year so we have access to more sessions than the seven time slots?

All of the recorded content from 2022 is posted to our website at <https://familycafe.net/videos/> and on our YouTube channel. We do our best to record as many sessions as possible given our limited resources and the expense of videography

services. This year, we recorded two sessions in each breakout session time slot, and streamed all three keynote addresses and the Governor's Summit on Disabilities live on our Facebook page.

Please bring a community bulletin board in a central location where people can share flyers, QR codes, etc. for programs that would benefit many but can't afford a booth or don't really make sense as an exhibit table.

Each year at The Annual Family Café we place a large cork board in the foyer area where attendees can post flyers. Attendees are also welcome to use the message board function in our smartphone app to share information.

We would like to see a session for parents to speak to other parents about the challenges, struggles, successes of our children to tell them that a disability won't stop your child from being a productive person in our society.

Thanks very much for that suggestion. Attendees at The Annual Family Café would definitely benefit from hearing about the experiences of fellow parents. We encourage you to submit a presentation proposal. You can find the presentation proposal form at <https://familycafe.net/present-at-the-25th-anniversary-family-cafe/>.

Could you, by any chance, do more animé-themed events please?

Thanks for that suggestion! We've had a few sessions on animé and disability representation in recent years. Hopefully the presenter that submitted those sessions will do so again in 2023.

Can we have more fun activities for kids?

We work to provide a range of activities for younger attendees, including arts & crafts, adaptive recreation demonstrations, character appearances, and live performances. We will do our best to provide a range of fun, engaging activities for kids in 2023.

How do you get on The Youth Council?

The Florida Youth Council is made up of young people with disabilities between the ages of 15 and 30 that are invested in youth disability leadership and making Florida more inclusive and accessible for the next generation. You can learn more about the FYC and find their membership application on their website at <https://floridayouthcouncil.org/>.

We were so happy to see Pyramid Players and other entertainment return this year. Felt like the good old days!

We agree! It was fantastic to have the Pyramid Players back at the event for the first time since 2019, and we were really happy to have self-advocate performances for the first time since the pandemic. We're looking forward to hosting them again next year!

Where will we be next year?

The 25th Anniversary Family Café will be held at the Hyatt Regency Orlando on June 9-11, 2023. That's the same location as 2022.

The dance was amazing! I'm so glad we were able to do the dance again. We so missed it during Covid.

Agreed! The Saturday Night Dance Party is always a highlight of the event, and we have definitely missed it since 2019. We're glad you enjoyed it as much as we did!

How do I become a presenter?

The Family Café and our Planning Committee are always looking great presentations to include in our agenda. We are open to proposals through December 15, 2022. You can find more details and a link to the presentation proposal form on our website at <https://familycafe.net/present-at-the-25th-anniversary-family-cafe/>.

What are the qualifications for a micro-enterprise booth?

Each year at The Annual Family Café we feature a number of micro-enterprises in the Exhibit Hall. To qualify as a micro-enterprise, an entity must be owned and operated by a self-advocate, employ fewer than five people, and have annual revenue not exceeding \$35,000.

Who should I contact if I have a great suggestion for a keynote?

We are always looking for suggestions for keynote speakers! If you have someone in mind, let us know by sending us an email at info@familycafe.net or giving us a call at 850-224-4670.

Are there any options available for sponsorships besides the Exhibit Hall?

Yes! There are a range of sponsorship opportunities available, with benefits including advertising in our event program, direct email to our extensive list of contacts, social media promotion, and more. We are happy to tailor a sponsorship package that meets

your organization's budget and needs. To start the conversation, send us an email at info@familycafe.net or give us a call at 850-224-4670.



The Agency for Health Care Administration

What services and financial support services are available for middle-class elderly people with disabilities? Medicare? Medicaid? I am over 60 years old, and need to be on a medical program/insurance program! Are there age minimums/maximums for Medicaid? What type of Medicaid or Medicare is offered to veterans?

If you would like to speak to someone about general Medicaid eligibility requirements and whether you qualify, please contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) at 1-866-762-2237. You may also apply online at www.myflfamilies.com.

The Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) also offers programs and services to Florida's seniors, their families, and caregivers. For more information about the services and programs, you may call the statewide, toll-free Elder Helpline at 1-800-963-5337 or visit their website at www.elderaffairs.org.

What's the difference between Medicaid and Medicare? Who is eligible?

Medicare is a federal program that provides health care coverage to people who have worked for a certain number of years and have reached age 65 or have certain disabilities. For questions relating to eligibility or services covered by Medicare, please contact Medicare by calling 1-800-633-4227.

Medicaid is a subsidized health care program for low-income children, families, and the disabled that is jointly run by the federal and state governments. If you would like to speak to someone about general Medicaid eligibility requirements and whether you qualify, please contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) at 1-866-762-2237. You may also apply online at www.myflfamilies.com.

Why does Medicaid place liens on property of homeowners that get services, after they die? Many are unaware when they die that if anyone uses the services, the property may be owned by the federal or state government, but the family doesn't have the money and many lose their family property.

Federal and State (Florida Statute 409.9101) laws require that State Medicaid programs must recover certain Medicaid benefits paid on behalf of a Medicaid enrollee. The acceptance of public medical assistance (Medicaid), as defined by Title XIX of the Social Security Act, shall create a debt to the agency in the total amount paid to or for the benefit of the recipient for medical assistance after the recipient reached 55 years of age.

However, Florida Statute sets forth exceptions to Florida Medicaid's Estate Recovery. Please see the Florida Statute 409.9101 at <http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfmto> learn more.

I'm wondering what independent group living options there are in Florida where adults with significant physical disabilities (not just cognitive disabilities) can live on their own where the necessary physical supports are provided? I am referring to places like Noah's Ark, and others, but where the client can have 24-hour care but still live as independently as possible? Do Medicare or Medicaid support some options like these?

We may need more information to provide assistance. Please email details about your situation to APD.info@apdcares.org and your message will be forwarded to the agency's ombudsman.

Are there any particular life insurance policies specifically geared towards children who are neurodiverse and on the spectrum? Will Medicaid be an option? Or Medicare?

The Florida Office of Insurance Regulation serves Floridians through its responsibilities for regulation, compliance, and enforcement of statutes related to the business of insurance. Their office monitors the statewide industry markets and their website has more information about life insurance at <https://www.floir.com/sections/landh/life/default.aspx>. You can also contact their Florida Insurance Consumer Helpline at 1-877-693-5236. Florida Medicaid does not offer life insurance policies.

What happens to an ABLÉ account when the beneficiary passes and she is the one handling the account? She passed without a will. Will they have to pay the state back from medicaid supports that they have used in the past?

The Florida legislature passed the Florida Achieving a Better Life Experience Act, which was signed into law on May 21, 2015. This state law establishes ABLÉ United, to oversee the state of Florida's qualified ABLÉ program, which is called ABLÉ United. For more information about ABLÉ accounts please visit <https://www.ableunited.com/>.

Would it be possible for government health insurance to pay for more alternative health care approaches? There are alternative treatments for mental health and also for cancer, but they are very expensive without insurance.

Medicaid coverage determinations are made when all criteria of medical necessity are met. Florida Medicaid must determine if a diagnostic test, therapeutic procedure, or medical device or technology is experimental or investigational, as one of the components of the medical necessity criteria.

The guidelines that Florida Medicaid will use when determining the circumstances under which a health service is consistent with generally accepted professional medical standards (GAPMS) and not experimental or investigational are described in 59G-1.035 F.A.C., "Determining Generally Accepted Professional Medical Standards." This rule also includes the types of information to be considered in the decision-making process and names the person(s) qualified to make the final determination.

Many of the Medicaid Managed Care plans offer expanded benefits that include additional services such as doula services, acupuncture services, art therapy, chiropractic services, equine therapy, massage therapy, nutritional counseling, pet therapy, and more. You can compare the plans and the different expanded benefits offered at anytime on our website <https://flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/>.

What does AHCA do?

Our Agency was statutorily created by Chapter 20, Florida Statutes as the chief health policy and planning entity for the state. We are primarily responsible for the state's estimated \$38 billion Medicaid program that will serve over 5 million Floridians in SFY 2022-23, the licensure of the state's 48,500 health care facilities, and the sharing of health care data through the Florida Center for Health Information and Policy Analysis.

What is the Division of Health Quality Assurance? Does AHCA regulate nursing facilities and group homes?

Health Quality Assurance (HQA) is responsible for health facility licensure and inspection for over 48,500 health care facilities and providers. HQA conducts inspections of health care facilities and providers related to quality of care and regulatory requirements. Additionally, HQA monitors federal certification of 33 types of health facilities and services that are funded by Medicaid or Medicare, including Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities (ALFs).

Does Medicaid pay for dental? How do I find a Medicaid dentist if so?

Dental services are available under Florida Medicaid through one of the three dental plans. Florida Medicaid currently offers one of the richest dental benefit packages for children (under age 21). Adults (21 and over) may also receive additional expanded benefits through their dental plan. To find a dental plan, please visit

www.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com or call 1-877-711-3662 to talk to a Florida Medicaid Choice Counselor.

Please work to get more money for staff at \$15.00 an hour. How do we get more people (legislators) to add funds to AHCA services/Medicaid Programs?

On June 2, 2022, Governor Ron DeSantis signed the Freedom First budget for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2022-2023. The Freedom First Budget provided over \$600 million in funding to AHCA for the sole purpose of increasing the minimum wage for employees of Medicaid providers to at least \$15.00 an hour.

Will Medicaid cover a wheelchair?

Florida Medicaid will reimburse for a wheelchair when it is medically documented that a wheelchair is necessary to meet a recipient's physical needs. Certain wheelchairs such as customized wheelchairs, power wheelchairs, and motorized scooters do require prior authorization.

In Florida, most Medicaid recipients are required to enroll in a Managed Medical Assistance (MMA) plan. Recipients may contact their MMA plan directly to request assistance obtaining Medicaid covered services, including wheelchairs. Recipients can also contact the Medicaid Help Line at 1-877-254-1055 for assistance.

Will Medicaid cover the cost of a hearing aid?

Florida Medicaid reimburses for hearing services that are designed to provide screening, assessment, and testing services, and appropriate hearing devices in order to detect and mitigate the impact of hearing loss.

In Florida, most Medicaid recipients are required to enroll in a Managed Medical Assistance (MMA) plan. Recipients may contact their MMA plan directly to request assistance with obtaining Medicaid covered services, including hearing aids. Recipients can also contact the Medicaid Help Line at 1-877-254-1055 if they need assistance.

My son needs short-term rehab. Florida Blue and Medicaid do not cover this. Why?

Florida Medicaid is committed to ensuring all medically necessary services, devices, and items are covered for children under the age of 21. If you are having difficulty, please call the Florida Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055 or request help on the Agency's website at www.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/complaint.

Does Medicare provide service animals? Why don't they pay for or provide health care options for service animals?

Medicare is a federal program that provides health care coverage to people who have worked for a certain number of years and have reached age 65 or have certain disabilities. For questions relating to eligibility or services covered by Medicare, please contact Medicare by calling 1-800-633-4227.

Why is Florida ranked so low in taking care of children with special needs? What is being done to make it better? I know other states don't have a wait list for a waiver. We have CMS for our son and it's based on income. These services for children with special needs should not be income based. Private insurance will not cover most of what our son needs. People who are on the edge of income are not taken care of.

On June 2, 2022, Governor Ron DeSantis signed the Freedom First budget for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2022-2023 which included \$38 billion for the Florida Medicaid program. Florida Medicaid has focused its resources on coverage for low-income children, families, the elderly, and the disabled population.

Florida KidCare has a subsidized option for uninsured children who meet income and eligibility requirements up to 200% of the federal poverty level as well as a full-pay program. More information about Florida KidCare may be found on their website at www.floridakidcare.org.

We are thinking about moving to another state. Will we need to apply for all the benefits my son has here in Florida (SSI, Medicaid, Medicaid Waiver)?

Yes, each state runs their own program with their own eligibility requirements.

Can I be paid as a caregiver to my family member on Medicaid?

Florida Medicaid offers the Participant Direction Option (PDO) to Medicaid recipients who are enrolled in a long-term care (LTC) plan under the Statewide Medicaid Managed Care (SMMC) program. The PDO program is a service delivery model under the LTC program in which participants (the recipient) hire, train, supervise, and dismiss their direct service worker (DSW). For more information about the PDO program please visit our webpage at https://ahca.myflorida.com/medicaid/statewide_mc/ltcplans_pdo.shtml.

Another option is the Consumer-Directed Care Plus (CDC+) which is a long-term care program alternative to the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS)

Medicaid waiver. The program provides the opportunity for individuals to improve the quality of their lives by being empowered to make choices about the supports and services that will meet their long-term care needs and to help them reach their goals. For more information about the CDC+ program, please contact the APD CDC+ helpline at 1-866-761-7043.

Does Medicaid cover therapies for individuals with disabilities? Those of us not on the APD list.

Florida Medicaid does provide medically necessary therapy. In Florida, most Medicaid recipients are required to enroll in a Managed Medical Assistance (MMA) plan. Recipients may contact their MMA plan directly to request assistance with obtaining Medicaid covered services, including therapy. Recipients can also contact the Medicaid Help Line at 1-877-254-1055 if they need assistance.

How can I appeal a Medicaid denial? I should qualify.

Medicaid denial appeals may be submitted to DCF via the methods below:

1. Online at the DCF website: Florida Department of Children and Families - Office of Inspector General, Fair Hearing Request Form (myflfamilies.com)
2. Request via telephone contact with the Customer Call Center at 850-300-4323 or
3. Fax request for an appeal to 1-866-886-4342

When you do not agree with a medical ruling with Medicaid, is there a complaint line or a manager to discuss the situation with? It is always easier to talk about the issues you have than to write them down and hope someone understands the problem or the program.

If you are enrolled with a Statewide Medicaid Managed Care Plan, you should first contact your plan for help. The phone number is printed on your Plan ID Card. If you are not enrolled in a plan or were unable to get help from your plan, you can submit a complaint to the Agency for Health Care Administration (Agency) using one of the following methods:

1. You may submit a complaint using your Member Portal account at <https://members.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/login>. The Member Portal also allows you to select and change your plan, check on the status of a complaint, and receive important updates. If you do not have an account, we encourage you to create one.

2. To submit a complaint online without a Member Portal account you may use the Florida Medicaid Complaint Form at <https://www.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/complaint/#/>.
3. To submit a complaint by phone, please call the Medicaid helpline at 1-877-254-1055 (TDD 1-866-467-4970). Staff are available Monday through Friday 8am-5pm EST.

Does AHCA pay for the usage of medical marijuana for people with disabilities?

No, due to federal regulations, Florida Medicaid cannot pay for medical marijuana. The Food and Drug Administration has not approved marijuana for any medical use. The Drug Enforcement Agency classifies marijuana as a Schedule I drug, which means that it has no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse.

Does Medicaid support equine therapy?

The Florida Medicaid Managed Care Plans offer expanded benefits as approved by the Agency for Health Care Administration. Equine Therapy is one of the many options available. For more information on expanded benefits please contact your managed care plan or you can compare the plans and the different expanded benefits offered at any time on our website <https://flmedicaidmanagedcare.com>.

If your child gets accepted for Social Security Disability, can you still keep them on Medicaid? Is there an age limit?

If the individual is a child or tax dependent in the household and the amount of Social Security benefits does not exceed the unearned income-tax filing threshold, the child or tax dependent may continue to receive coverage under Medicaid. There is no age limit to receive coverage under Medicaid. More information about Medicaid eligibility coverage is located on the Department's website at: ACCESS Florida—Florida Department of Children and Families (myflfamilies.com).

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities

Why doesn't Florida have social programs for individuals with disabilities for services like other states? My friends and I would like to know.

There are several government agencies in Florida that provide assistance to individuals with disabilities. The Florida Navigator is an online tool designed to empower and inform individuals with developmental disabilities, caregivers, and professionals about specific State of Florida services. Please visit the APD Florida Navigator here: <https://navigator.apd.myflorida.com/>. Information about applying for APD services is here: <https://apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/>.

Why isn't there any more information on adults with disabilities? I have an adult child who became disabled after 17 years old and finding help and information on navigating adulthood with a disability is difficult.

APD can assist in connecting you with information and resources. Please email APD.info@apdcares.org, and we can provide more information.

The APD Resource Directory is an informational tool to help individuals with disabilities learn about free and low cost programs available in their respective areas. Please visit the APD Resource Directory at the following link: <https://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>.

The Florida Navigator is an online tool designed to empower and inform individuals with developmental disabilities, caregivers, and professionals about specific State of Florida services. Please visit the APD Florida Navigator here: <https://navigator.apd.myflorida.com/>.

I belong to the Family Care Council in Area 9, Palm Beach County. The FCC has been so helpful to me, and now as a member, I try to do the same for other families. As you know, our members are appointed by the Governor. One issue we are having, as well as the other Councils throughout Florida, is our pending members are waiting years to be appointed, and in some cases we are having trouble getting pending members to stick around due to this. We completely understand that with everything that has gone on in the last few years, appointments to Councils like ours has not been a priority. We do hope, though, with things getting back to normal, our pending members can be appointed soon. Thank you so much.

Thank you for your input.

We need a breakout session that covers transportation for the disabled that covers what to expect from local transport companies. Since they can be paid with our CDC+ programs/medicaid too!

Thank you for this feedback. The Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD) has a contact for each county. The county contacts can be found online at [https://ctd.fdot.gov/docs/RiderDocs/CTC Directory by County.pdf](https://ctd.fdot.gov/docs/RiderDocs/CTC_Directory_by_County.pdf). The CTD provides transportation disadvantaged transportation, ADA transportation (this is transportation for disabled individuals within 1.5 miles outside of the fixed-route corridor), para-transit (door-to-door), and non-emergency medical transportation for Medicaid recipients.

APD made my supported living coach quit due to no help with their pay and no help with gas. I need supported living coach asap.

Your Waiver Support Coordinator can assist you in locating a Supported Living Coach. If you need assistance, please contact the APD Regional office by calling (407) 245-0440.

Medicaid Waiver received more money but the families that are now on the waiver are seeing and getting cuts from their budgets! Why? We shouldn't have to lose money from CDC+ or waiver for more people to come on the waiver. Put more money in the waiver to help families.

Services are based on individualized needs. There were no budgetary reductions related to enrolling individuals onto the iBudget Waiver. If you need assistance in accessing medically necessary services, the Waiver Support Coordinator or CDC+ Consultant can assist in locating services within waiver coverage and limitations.

Why doesn't LARC or even the Tallahassee program office return phone calls? Especially when you are inquiring about their services and for assistance.

We are sorry you are having trouble reaching someone. Please email details about your situation to APD.info@apdcares.org and your message will be forwarded to the agency's ombudsman.

In general, how are Medicaid Waiver Support Coordinators collaborating with school districts and IEP teams to ensure that students are college, career, and life ready?

Through the person-centered planning process, Waiver Support Coordinators are required to work with consumers to identify the goals and outcomes that are most important to the person and identify supports and services to help the consumer achieve those goals. Conversations during the person-centered planning process can include planning for school, work, career, and education transitions and goals. iBudget waiver rule requirements place an emphasis on WSCs working with consumers and families to locate and develop natural and community supports. Waiver Support Coordinators can assist consumers in accessing supports to meet their needs, regardless of the funding source of the supports.

Is there a Pro-Bono lawyer that will help with CDC+ hearings? They should provide a listing of these lawyers with the plans when being developed.

The Florida Bar Association provides a list of options that can be found at: <https://www.floridabar.org/public/probono/>.

Why does my child lose his APD services when he turns 21 years old? I still have to work to take care of him.

APD services do not stop at age 21. However, service coverage may change based on age. For clients receiving iBudget waiver services, the Waiver Support Coordinator can assist in planning for age changes and service needs in advance through all available resources and programs. Sometimes a service may no longer be available when an individual turns 21, but a comparable service can be authorized in its place.

What is the process for people being taken off the waitlist? How do the phases work?

APD customers are prioritized on the waiting list based on their current needs. The APD prioritization criteria can be found online here: <https://apd.myflorida.com/customers/waitlist/docs/WAITING%20LIST%20PRIORITY%20CATEGORIES.pdf>. If you are on the waiting list and have experienced a change that may impact your waiting list priority category, please contact the APD Regional office at one of these locations: <https://apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

Is there a way to check your status on the MedWaiver list online?

Please contact your Regional APD Office: <https://apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

I would like to see more funding for the supported living programs.

APD's budget is appropriated by the Florida Legislature.

Are there any resources available within the waiver programs to help fund a wheelchair accessible van? The price tag is extremely high.

The iBudget waiver covers van modifications, but does not cover the cost to purchase a van. Please see below for a list of other resources that may be able to help provide funding for a mobility van.

- You may be able to obtain assistance through Magic Mobility's van assistance program. Requests can be made for adults or children. <https://www.specialkidsfund.org/wheelchair/>
- The National Organization for Vehicle Accessibility may be able to provide a grant for an accessible van. <https://novafunding.org/>
- The National Mobility and Equipment Dealers Association may be able to assist you in locating funding for an accessible van. <http://nmeda.com>
- Your local Center for Independent Living (CIL) may have resources or information to assist. You can find contact information at <https://www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory-results/FL>
- The Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST) may be able to provide information, recommendations, or referrals. Toll-free: 1-844-FL-FAAST
- The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation may be able to help alleviate the cost if the van is needed in order to work. <http://www.rehabworks.org/>
- Inquire with your insurance carrier as they may cover adaptations to vehicles if determined medically necessary.

If you have any additional questions about resources available in your area, please contact your APD Regional Office. Contact information for the Regional Office that serves your area can be found at the following link: <https://apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

The approved pay for Supported Living Coaches and Personal Support persons needs to be increased. These people are in charge of helping PEOPLE with disabilities and yet their pay is comparable to someone flipping hamburgers. Changing coordinators from independent to having to form companies took away personal knowledge and interaction. Coaches make almost no more than the support staff. You have ruined the system. If we can fund the manatees we can fund our services and support for PEOPLE with disabilities appropriately.

Governor DeSantis signed Florida's Freedom First Budget to continue his commitment to helping individuals with developmental disabilities. For the first time ever, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) will have a record high budget totaling over \$2 billion for Fiscal Year 2022-23, providing record provider rate increases to give Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) the raises they have earned.

Where can someone find a resource that gives information for special needs 101? Meaning where can someone go to find the information to sign up for APD help, like a one-stop, not search all over?

Information about applying for APD services is here:

<https://apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/>

Additional resources may be found at the following sites:

- Resource Directory
<https://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>
- Florida Navigator: <https://navigator.apd.myflorida.com/>

We apologize for not able to attend this year, but I would like to know if there are APD funded summer camps for adults with disabilities. We did not find any affordable ones in Broward county.

APD maintains a resource directory as an informational tool to help individuals with disabilities learn about free and low cost programs available in their respective areas. For more information, please visit: <https://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/>.

Will there be a cost-of-living increase for APD budgets? What other services will be cut due to the waiver not paying for them?

A cost-of-living increase for individual iBudget amounts is not planned at this time. Please work with the Waiver Support Coordinator or CDC+ Consultant if you need assistance in accessing medically necessary services covered by this program.

What is APD's policy for reporting abuse?

Any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a person with a developmental disability is being abused, neglected, or exploited by a relative, caregiver, or household member or, in the case of self-neglect, by themselves, is required to report such knowledge or suspicion to the Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE (or 1-800-962-2873). Failure to report known or suspected cases of abuse, neglect, or exploitation is a crime.

Does APD recognize military families? Many military families need services but don't know about APD.

APD supports military families by allowing increased portability with home and community-based services. To learn more about Supporting Active Duty Military Families, visit: <https://apd.myflorida.com/docs/military-ad.pdf>.

What does APD offer as far as respite services?

APD provides respite services to eligible individuals under the age of 21 through the iBudget waiver program. Individuals over the age of 21 may receive respite through a service called Personal Supports.

Does APD provide services to those with epilepsy?

In order to be eligible for services from APD, an individual must have a developmental disability (as defined in section 393.063(12), Florida Statutes), which occurs prior to age 18 and constitutes a substantial handicap that can reasonably be expected to continue indefinitely. APD does not provide services to individuals with a primary diagnosis of epilepsy. However, some APD clients who have one of the developmental disabilities identified in the statute also have epilepsy. Disabilities served by APD include:

- Intellectual disabilities (Full Scale IQ of 70 or below)
- Severe forms of autism
- Spina bifida cystica or myelomeningocele
- Cerebral palsy
- Prader-Willi syndrome
- Down syndrome
- Phelan-McDermid syndrome or
- Individuals between the ages of 3-5 at high risk for a developmental disability

Why not have a list of businesses started by Autistics/families/caregivers/guardians of Autistics in Florida? These can be called BAFA businesses—By Autistics For Autistics. Second: Why not have a list of social and counseling for Autistic adults in Florida?

Thank you for sharing this suggestion. The APD Resource Directory is tool to help individuals with disabilities learn about free and low cost programs available in their respective areas. If you have resources for individuals with autism that you would like

included, we encourage you to search for and submit resources at this link:
<https://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/>.

Where do I find information to follow along with the legislative process and APD allowable legislative session?

The 2023 session begins March 7, for specific information about activities during legislative session you may wish to view the Florida House of Representative website at <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/> or the Florida Senate website at <https://www.flsenate.gov/>. The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council provides information regarding their legislative platform through their capitol updates. For information, please visit <https://www.fddc.org/legislative-platforms/>.

How do you get a working relationship to get supports and services authorized instead of shelved and not reviewed after hearing and complaints? CDC specific.

Thank you for your input. If you have specific questions, please call CDC+ Customer Service at (866) 761-7043.

Is there some way that we can get the rules for Medicaid waiver? Everything I ask my support coordinator she says "I will have to ask my boss and get back to you." BTW, she never gets back with me

The rules that govern the iBudget Waiver program can be found online by visiting: <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/ibudget/rules-regs.htm>. If you have concerns about your Waiver Support Coordinator, please contact the APD Regional Office nearest you. The phone numbers are listed here: <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>. The Medicaid handbook can be found here: <https://apd.myflorida.com/ibudget/rules-regs.htm>.

Is there a website with all resources for disabilities? Explaining the services available for APD clients

The APD Guide to Services Brochure provides a brief summary of the services covered through the iBudget waiver and can be found here:
<https://www.apd.myflorida.com/publications/brochures.htm>.

The APD Resource Directory informational tool to help individuals with disabilities learn about free and low cost programs available in their respective areas Please visit the APD Resource Directory at the following link:
<https://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>.

The Florida Navigator is an online tool designed to empower and inform individuals with developmental disabilities, caregivers, and professionals about specific State of Florida services. Please visit the APD Florida Navigator here:
<https://navigator.apd.myflorida.com/>.

What services are available for middle class elderly people on the APD service plan?

APD provides a variety of social, medical, behavioral, residential, and therapeutic supports to assist individuals with developmental disabilities. Services must be medically necessary and individualized. Information about applying for APD services is online here:
<https://apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/>.

How can I access my APD support coordinators survey online?

Please visit the following link to access APD's Waiver Support Coordinator Scorecard:
<https://scorecard.apd.myflorida.com/>.

How many people are currently on a wait list for APD services? How long is the wait approximately?

There are approximately 22,500 individuals on the waiting list for iBudget waiver services. Enrollment onto the iBudget waiver is determined based upon funding provided by the Florida Legislature and the individual's level of need. Additional information about the waiting list for iBudget waiver services can be found online at
<https://www.apd.myflorida.com/customers/waitlist/>.

Who qualifies for APD services? How do we apply? Is there an age limit? Is there a resource directory to find out what services are available?

In order to be eligible for services from APD, an individual must have a developmental disability (as defined in section 393.063(12), Florida Statutes), which occurs prior to age 18 and constitutes a substantial handicap that can reasonably be expected to continue indefinitely. Disabilities served by APD include:

- Intellectual disabilities (Full Scale IQ of 70 or below)
- Severe forms of autism
- Spina bifida cystica or myelomeningocele
- Cerebral palsy
- Prader-Willi syndrome

- Down syndrome
- Phelan-McDermid syndrome
- Individuals between the ages of 3-5 at high risk for a developmental disability

The APD Resource Directory informational tool to help individuals with disabilities learn about free and low cost programs available in their respective areas Please visit the APD Resource Directory at the following link:
<https://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>.

The Florida Navigator is an online tool designed to empower and inform individuals with developmental disabilities, caregivers, and professionals about specific State of Florida services. Please visit the APD Florida Navigator here:
<https://navigator.apd.myflorida.com/>.

Clients need access to attorneys that will fight APD for necessary medical services of supports. The present system of due process does not support clients, but APD. Go figure.

The Florida Bar Association provides a list of options that can be found at:
<https://www.floridabar.org/public/probono/>.

How do you move up on the waiting list with the Agency for Persons with Disabilities?

Enrollment onto the iBudget Waiver is determined based upon funding provided by the Florida Legislature. Additional information about waiting list prioritization for iBudget Waiver services can be found online at
<https://www.apd.myflorida.com/customers/waitlist/>.

We need 24-hour train and bus services including Sundays, Saturdays, and holidays. Every 1/2 hour for all cities in Florida. How can we get more APD supported transportation options for people with disabilities throughout Florida?

Thank you for sharing this suggestion. For more information about transportation in Florida, please visit the Department of Transportation website at <https://www.fdot.gov/>. You may also contact the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged at (800) 983-2435 to discuss your transportation needs for individuals with disabilities.

I have no doubt that those who work for APD are hard working and dedicated to their mission. However, the 'wait list' for getting services for the IDD population

is horrifying. And, finding great direct care workers is evidently a huge issue for many reasons—low wages being one of them. Has APD considered a different organizational and/or delivery system that could better use its scant resources to better address the growing unmet needs of the IDD citizens of Florida? If more funding isn't available, it's time to think differently. And soon. Surely it's time for a 'think tank' type of strategy that could involve a team of outside-the-box creative thinkers, budget-minded practical implementors, seasoned experts from the industry, politicians who hold the purse strings, people who need the services (and their guardians), and those who actually do the direct care work. Florida is perfectly positioned to be the nation's leader in rethinking its support structure for those with IDD. And, Florida has the most to gain by acting to solve this growing crisis. Let's do this.

Thank you for your input. We appreciate your support.

Is there a website or list of service providers in Florida, especially for group homes and villages and adult day training?

For a listing of iBudget waiver providers, please visit:

<https://fiddresources.qlarant.com/ProviderSearch.aspx>. Additional resources may be found at the following sites:

- Resource Directory <https://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>
- Florida Navigator <https://navigator.apd.myflorida.com/>
- Family Care Councils <https://www.fccflorida.org/local-councils.html>

Can APD help me with housing? I need affordable housing to live an independent life.

Please contact the Florida Housing Corporation or the Florida Housing Search:

<https://www.floridahousingsearch.org/>.

Can we add more focus on adult disabilities after childhood? There are so few resources for adults who become or are disabled. Can APD provide more services for aging adults?

APD provides a variety of social, medical, behavioral, therapeutic, and residential services for adults with developmental disabilities. For information on applying for services, please visit the APD website at <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/>.

The APD Resource Directory informational tool to help individuals with disabilities learn about free and low cost programs available in their respective areas. Please visit the APD Resource Directory at the following link:

<https://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>.

The Florida Navigator is an online tool designed to empower and inform individuals with developmental disabilities, caregivers, and professionals about specific State of Florida services. Please visit the APD Florida Navigator here:

<https://navigator.apd.myflorida.com/>.

Does APD have plans to help improve transportation options for individuals with disabilities? We need more options.

Please contact the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD) at 1 (800) 983-2435 and discuss your needs. The CTD has a contact for each county. The county contacts can be found online at

https://ctd.fdot.gov/docs/RiderDocs/CTC_Directory_by_County.pdf.

Is there any financial assistance to get service animal training for a dog to help with seizures or anxiety episodes? Can this activity be funded on the med waiver or CDC+ plan?

APD does not fund service animals. The APD Resource Directory may be helpful:

<https://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>.

Requirements and costs for service animals may vary, depending on the organization. The Autism Speaks website provides some information on several service dog organizations at: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/familyservices/resource-library/assistance-dog-resources>.

What options are there for young disabled adults to socialize with others? I mean those younger folks who receive APD services. Entertainment options should be offered to all. Loneliness is not an option.

There are resources in Florida to connect individuals with disabilities with others. Florida Self-Advocates Network'D (FL SAND) is Florida's statewide network of self-advocacy groups. Go to <https://www.flsand.org> to learn more about FLSAND and to find a group near you. The APD Resource Directory informational tool to help individuals with disabilities learn about free and low cost programs available in their respective areas.

Please visit the APD Resource Directory at the following link:

<https://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>. The Family Care Council Florida has local groups of parents, individuals with developmental disabilities, and other

family members meet regularly. Information can be found online at <https://www.fccflorida.org/>. Individuals receiving iBudget Waiver services or enrolled in the Consumer Directed Care Plus (CDC+) program may also contact their Waiver Support Coordinator or CDC+ Consultant for assistance in accessing activities.

Who/what are Family Care Councils?

Information about the Family Care Councils can be found here: <https://apd.myflorida.com/fcc/>.

What services does APD provide for individuals with Autism?

APD provides a variety of social, medical, behavioral, residential, and therapeutic supports to assist individuals with developmental disabilities. Services must be medically necessary and individualized. For more information on the services, please view the Guide to Service Brochure here: <https://apd.myflorida.com/publications/brochures.htm>. Information about applying for APD services is online here: <https://apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/>.

Does APD offer training or education on any voting accommodations for anyone with disabilities?

The state of Florida does offer accommodations. Contact your local Supervisor of Elections. If you need assistance in registering to vote, contact one of the APD Regional Offices listed here: <https://apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

What is the difference between APD's Human Rights and Disability Rights? What are ways to advocate for access rights?

APD supports the rights of individuals with disabilities. Florida Statutes, Chapter 393.13 requires that services for individuals with developmental disabilities be designed to meet the individual's needs and protect the integrity of legal and human rights. The Bill of Rights for Persons with Developmental Disabilities provides a description of those personal rights. The intent is to guarantee individual dignity, liberty, pursuit of happiness, and protection of the civil and legal rights of persons with developmental disabilities. To view the Bill of Rights for Persons with Disabilities, please visit <https://apd.myflorida.com/waiver/support-coordination/forms.htm>.

How do providers get approved, reviewed, etc.?

Please visit APD's Medicaid waiver provider enrollment page at <https://apd.myflorida.com/providers/enrollment/>. This will show you the applications and the step-by-step process.

If we seek a Guardianship Advocacy, can court instead give plenary Guardianship? We want our daughter to retain as many rights as possible (like right to vote, choose where she lives, getting a job, where to get services).

One cannot say how a judge will decide; however, section 744.3085, Florida Statutes states: "In accordance with the legislative intent of this chapter, courts are encouraged to consider appointing a guardian advocate, when appropriate, as a less restrictive form of guardianship."

What happens if an APD adult child needs a guardian advocate, but they are against it?

The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council has publications related to guardianship and guardianship alternatives. Please visit <https://www.fddc.org/publications>. Disability Rights Florida has information on their website regarding supported-decision making. For information, please visit https://disabilityrightsflorida.org/disability-topics/disability-topic-info/what-is-supported-decision-making?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIo4rT4NXq-gIVCxXUAR0adgQHEAAYAAAEgKenvD_BwE.

What should we be looking out for in the next legislative session with regards to APD and Floridians with disabilities?

APD's budget is determined by the Florida Legislature. The 2023 session begins March 7, and APD will have more information early next year.

We need more options for APD activities for people with disabilities that are visible and invisible.

There are resources in Florida to connect individuals with disabilities with various activities. Florida Self-Advocates Network'D (FL SAND) is Florida's statewide network of self-advocacy groups. Go to <https://www.flsand.org> to learn more about FLSAND and to find a group near you. Sports Ability is an organization that promotes active living for individuals with disabilities. More information can be found at <https://www.fdoa.org/sportsability>. The APD Resource Directory informational tool to help individuals with disabilities learn about free and low cost programs available in their

respective areas. Please visit the APD Resource Directory at the following link: <https://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>. Individuals receiving iBudget Waiver services or enrolled in the Consumer Directed Care Plus (CDC+) program may also contact their Waiver Support Coordinator or CDC+ Consultant for assistance in accessing activities.

Why is it hard for fathers to accept that their children have a disability? What can APD do to support the fathers to help them understand and possibly help them be involved in the child's treatment?

Sometimes support organizations are helpful for parents with disabilities and enable collaboration with others with shared experiences. The Family Care Council Florida has local groups of parents, individuals with developmental disabilities, and other family members that mentors families and engages in other advocacy initiatives. Information can be found online at <https://www.fccflorida.org/>. Hope Florida Hope Florida - A Pathway to Prosperity is another initiative that strives to unite communities through 'Hope Navigators' to guide Floridians on an individualized path to prosperity, economic self-sufficiency and hope. More information can be found at <https://www.myflfamilies.com/APathwaytoProsperity/>.

My child is 19 years old. I know they will be aging out of their insurance. How do we transition to APD?

Information about applying for APD services is here: <https://apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/>.

APD needs more day programs available for adults over the age of 22 years old. More healths insurance options. More dental programs for adults individuals with disabilities.

For a list of APD iBudget Florida Adult Day Training providers, please visit the provider search page at <https://fiddresources.qlarant.com/ProviderSearch.aspx>. Adults with Medicaid can access dental care through the Statewide Dental Managed Care Program. For information, please visit <https://www.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/dental/dentalplaninformation>. Additional resources can be found through the APD Resource Directory at <https://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/> and the APD Florida Navigator at <https://navigator.apd.myflorida.com/>.

What APD supports are there for people transitioning into adulthood?

Through the iBudget Waiver program, APD provides a wide array of social, medical, behavioral, therapeutic, and residential supports for clients. Individuals receiving iBudget Waiver services have a Waiver Support Coordinator that can assist in planning for life transitions through the person-centered planning process. This includes the identification of needs and planning for services and supports. Information about applying for APD services is here: <https://apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/>.

What types of APD public transportation are available for persons with disabilities? Are there ways to get APD to provide reimbursements or stipends for transportation?

The Florida Commission for the Transportation for the Disadvantaged (CTD) has a contact for each county. The county contacts can be found online at https://ctd.fdot.gov/docs/RiderDocs/CTC_Directory_by_County.pdf. The CTD provides transportation disadvantaged transportation, ADA transportation (this is transportation for disabled individuals within 1.5 miles outside of the fixed-route corridor), para-transit (door-to-door), and non-emergency medical transportation for Medicaid recipients.

Does APD have a website or database with information on every different disability? With information about the disability, resources for supports and services specific to that disability.

APD does not have a website with information by disability type. However, the APD Resource Directory is as an informational tool to help individuals with disabilities learn about free and low cost programs available in their respective areas. Please visit the link below for more information:
<https://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>.

The Florida Navigator is an online tool designed to empower and inform individuals with developmental disabilities, caregivers, and professionals about specific State of Florida services. Please visit the APD Florida Navigator here:
<https://navigator.apd.myflorida.com/>.

The Department of Children and Families

My son is 30 years old. He has CP, ADHD, ADD, Delusions, & Schizophrenia. He was sent to a mental health facility and was taken to the ER for failure to thrive, because the mental health facility does not provide medical services. Does Florida have any place that provides both medical and health services on a long term basis that is affordable?

Many insurance plans and Florida Medicaid cover behavioral health services. If your son is enrolled in Florida Medicaid, contact your Medicaid health plan for more information on mental health services. If you need help finding contact information for your plan, or if you are not enrolled in a health plan, call the Medicaid Helpline at: 1-877-254-1055 or visit www.ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid. Your health plan may also be able to help you locate places that provide both medical and behavioral health services on a long-term basis.

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) works with local organizations and providers to identify the needs of and support for individuals with special needs. Individuals may receive social, medical, behavioral, residential, and/or therapeutic services. To write or call the local APD office, visit <https://apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

The Department of Children and Families contracts with seven Managing Entities around the state to manage the behavioral health system of care in their contracted area for individuals who are uninsured or underinsured. Managing Entities provide behavioral health services and supports to eligible individuals through a network of contracted providers. They may also provide training to the community. Peer Support services may be available in some areas. The Managing Entities are listed below, along with their help line numbers for each and the counties they serve.

NWF Health Network –

850-747-5755, <https://www.nwfhealth.org/>

Serving Bay, Calhoun, Escambia, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Taylor, Wakulla, Walton, and Washington Counties.

Broward Behavioral Health Coalition –

877-698-7794, <https://bbhcflorida.org/>

Serving Broward County.

Central Florida Behavioral Health Network, Inc. –

813-740-4811, <https://www.cfbhn.org/>

Serving Charlotte, Collier, DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Highlands, Hendry, Hillsborough, Lee, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Sarasota Counties.

Central Florida Cares Health System –

407-985-3560, <http://centralfloridacares.org/>
Serving Brevard, Orange, Osceola, and Seminole Counties.

Lutheran Services Florida –

877-229-9098, <https://www.lsfnet.org/>

Serving Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Citrus, Clay, Columbia, Dixie, Duval, Flagler, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Hernando, Lake, Lafayette, Levy, Marion, Nassau, Putnam, St. Johns, Sumter, Suwannee, Union, and Volusia Counties.

South Florida Behavioral Health Network, Inc. dba Thriving Mind –

888-248-3111, <https://www.thrivingmind.org/>

Serving Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties.

Southeast Florida Behavioral Health Network –

561-203-2485, <https://sefbhn.org/>

Serving Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, Palm Beach, and St. Lucie Counties.

What services and resources are available for foster parents?

Foster parents in the state receive foster care board payments to provide for the needs of the child or children placed in their homes. The foster care board payments are intended to cover the basic needs of the child for whom the payments are made, which includes, clothing, food, childcare, extracurricular activities, etc. Many of the community-based care lead agencies provide an enhanced board payment for foster parents that foster newborns and infants to help with their essential needs and childcare. Many community-based care lead agencies also provide additional supports to families, including, but not limited to, monthly allowances, transportation reimbursement, and clothing vouchers.

Prospective and Foster Parents can connect with the center 24 hours a day, seven days a week through myfloridamyfamily.com and clicking "I Want to Foster," or by calling the toll-free number, 1-833-678-3735 (1-83 Foster FL) directly from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. (ET), Monday through Friday.

- The Florida's Foster Information Center (FFIC) was initiated in September 2020 and uses the Department's model of "no wrong door," anyone who calls receives a warm welcome and connection to services or next steps for any need.
- As a team of foster parents, FFIC can talk with families about what fostering means, help them understand the joys and challenges and provide a safe place to ask questions. FFIC is for anyone who has fostering on their heart, regardless of where they are on the journey.
- Staffed entirely by current or former foster parents called Foster Ambassadors. As a team the Foster Ambassadors, we have personally fostered 37 children ages 4 days to 17 years old.
- To date, there have been 10,500 inquires fielded through the FFIC. More than half of families connected to local community experts. Of the inquiries received, 5,433 have been referred to their local community-based care lead agency organizations for the next steps, including licensure, where applicable.
- Calls placed to Florida's Foster Information Center are answered by an Ambassador.

How does DCF assist with the opioid crisis?

The Department funds networks of community providers that provide a comprehensive array of prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery support services. Treatment services are tailored to the individual's needs, and may involve case management, outpatient counseling, and residential services, for example. The Department's Overdose Prevention Program also distributes the life-saving overdose antidote called "Naloxone." Naloxone kits are provided by the Department to reverse 800 opioid overdoses per month, on average. Each of these rescues provides another opportunity for individuals to choose a new path of hope and recovery.

Drugs are killing our families, what does the DCF do to ensure that drugs are not being given to those who are dependent upon services from the state?

The Department funds a variety of primary drug prevention services and programs, some of which are designed to reduce inappropriate access to alcohol, tobacco, and other substances, including prescription drugs, which are targeted through campaigns that encourage safe prescribing, use, storage, and disposal of medications. Individuals receiving Department-funded drug treatment services may be routinely drug tested to monitor progress in recovery and inform the development of individualized treatment plans.

What services are there for caregivers that are caring for people with mental health disabilities?

The National Alliance on Mental Illness provides resources, trainings, and linkages to include a helpline. Visit the NAMI website to locate the closest NAMI Family Support Group: nami.org/support-education/support-groups.

How can I find a mental health therapist in my area?

Many insurance plans and Florida Medicaid cover mental health therapy and other behavioral health services. Please contact your health plan to discuss available services.

For individuals who are uninsured or underinsured, the Department of Children and Families contracts with seven Managing Entities around the state to manage the behavioral health system of care in their contracted area. Managing Entities provide services and supports through a network of contracted providers for eligible individuals. The Managing Entities are listed below, along with their help line numbers for each and the counties they serve.

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Serving Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, Palm Beach, and St. Lucie Counties.

What exactly does DCF do? I mean besides take kids away? I do not see any interventions prior to the taking and breaking up of families.

The Department of Children and Families is responsible for investigating allegations of abuse, abandonment, and neglect, and will offer in-home services based on the outcome of the investigation and the needs of the family. The Department works to collaborate and implement primary prevention services at the state and community level to facilitate the identification and appropriate referral services for vulnerable families to prevent removal from their family of origin. Prevention services that the Office of Child and Family Well-Being and community-based care lead agencies utilize include, but are not limited to:

- The home-visiting prevention program that is focused on serving at-risk pregnant women and infants who are prenatally affected by controlled substances.
- Parent Peer Support through assistance from the Ounce of Prevention. The Ounce provides training and technical assistance to local providers throughout Florida who

agree to host and facilitate a local meeting using the Circle of Parents® model. Families receive resource information through the informal family-friendly group meeting format. Parents improve communication and problem-solving skills through their discussions of the frustrations and successes involved in challenging family circumstances. Currently, there are nearly 50 Circle of Parents® programs throughout Florida.

- Healthy Families Florida provides specialized screening and assessments to identify families at risk of future maltreatment, home visiting services, and routine screening for child development and maternal depression. Families may receive in-home visitation during pregnancy and up to the time a child turns five years of age.
- Universal Newborn Screening through the Healthy Start program. All pregnant women are offered the Healthy Start Prenatal Risk Screening at their first or consequent prenatal visit and the Healthy Infant (Postnatal) Risk Screening is offered to parents or guardians of all infants born before leaving the delivery facility.

Why does DCF/Medicaid place liens on property of homeowners that get services from them, after they die. Many are unaware when they die that if anyone uses the services the property may owe the federal or state government but the family doesn't have the money and many lose their family property. Why is rent so high in area in St. Lucie County? It's gone from \$509 to \$1,200 dollars and more for rent and people get about \$900 to \$1,290 a month from SSI or Social Security. A cap needs to be placed or increase in these services because people are moving in together into a 2 bedroom home with 6 people because food stamps and income are not enough so rent goes up so high.

Rental market prices have increased nationally over the last several years. While the Department does not regulate rent increases, it works through its partnerships to assist households that may face homelessness. The local Continuum of Care (CoC) that serves the St. Lucie County area is Treasure Coast Homeless Services Council, and its Resource Center may be contacted at 727-567-7790 or <https://tchelpspot.org>.

The Department does not place liens on property for Medicaid, but the Agency for Healthcare Administration is required by Section 1917 of the federal Social Security Act to recover medical assistance payments from the assets of a deceased recipient in certain circumstances. For more information on this subject, please visit www.flmedicaidplrecovery.com.

Is WIC the same program as SNAP benefits? How can I apply for these?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) are both federally funded health and nutrition programs. Both programs assist low-income families and their children, but they are separate entities and require separate applications. Florida WIC is administered

by the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) and Florida SNAP is administered by Florida Department of Children and Families.

Additionally, SNAP provides nutritional support for low-income seniors, people with disabilities living on fixed incomes, and other individuals and families with low incomes. There are different ways a customer can apply for SNAP benefits. Customers can apply online at <https://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/> or in person at one of our community partner sites. To locate the nearest community partner site, please visit: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access/map.shtml>. You may also complete a paper application that can be mailed, faxed, or returned to your local Customer Service Center.

Eligibility for WIC is limited to pregnant and breastfeeding women, women who have recently been pregnant, and infants and children under the age of 5 who have a low or moderate income and are at nutrition risk. To apply for WIC through FDOH, contact your local WIC office or call 1-800-342-3556 to find your local WIC office. The local WIC office will schedule you an appointment to determine your eligibility at your scheduled WIC visit.

What does “Adult Protective Services” do? Is this who I should contact if I am worried about an adult with a disability being mistreated?

The Adult Protective Services Program is responsible for preventing further harm to vulnerable adults who are victims of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or self-neglect. These adults may experience abuse, neglect, or exploitation by second parties or may fail to take care of themselves adequately.

Florida Statutes require any person who knows or who has reasonable cause to suspect any abuse of vulnerable adults to report that information to the Florida Abuse Hotline (1-800-962-2873) or Abuse Hotline - Florida Department of Children and Families (myflfamilies.com/service-programs/abuse-hotline/report-online.shtml).

I am considering becoming a foster parent. How does DCF support foster parents? What is the process like?

Potential foster parents can call Florida’s Foster Information Center (FFIC) toll-free at 1-833-678-3735 (1-83-FosterFL) to speak with an ambassador. All FFIC Ambassadors are current or former foster parents who are available to provide potential foster parents with information and support on their journey to becoming a foster parent. Foster parents also have access to the Florida Foster & Adoptive Parent Association (FAPA), an organization comprised of foster and adoptive parents with lived experience. The Florida FAPA is a resource to assist families with navigating the child welfare system that provides training opportunities and support. Foster parents may also call Florida’s Foster Information Center toll-free at 1-833-678-3735 (1-83-FosterFL) for support and assistance navigating the child welfare system.

Every child is supported by a dedicated, local, community-based care team committed to their well-being and success. As a foster parent, you are an important and valued member of that child's team. If a need or barrier to success arises, your child's team is the first line of defense and can work together to ensure that you have the tools needed to care for them.

Additionally, our system of care is based on the needs of the local community, so it can vary depending on where you live; however, the process will include a licensing class, background checks, finger printing and a home study. Training classes cover an array of topics including protecting and nurturing children, child development, supporting relationships with birth families, permanency, and working with child welfare professionals. These trainings are a great opportunity to learn more about fostering, meet prospective foster parents on the same journey and to begin learning trauma-informed parenting skills.

Furthermore, each local community-based care lead agency partners with agencies in their area to provide ongoing support through community resources to include, but not limited to, the statewide Foster and Adoptive Parent Association and local Florida and Adoptive Parent Associations (where available).

Foster parents may also be eligible for financial assistance to provide support for children in their care.

How can I apply for public benefits?

The Department is responsible for determining eligibility and administering Florida's public assistance programs, including food assistance, cash assistance, Medicaid, homelessness and refugee services, for individuals and families on the road to economic recovery. There are different ways that a customer can apply for benefits. Customers can apply online at <https://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/> or in person at one of our community partner sites. To locate the nearest community partner site, please visit: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access/map.shtml>. You may also complete a paper application that can be mailed, faxed, or returned to your local Customer Service Center. More information on how to apply can be found at <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access/assistance-application-information.shtml>.

What is the age limit required for guardianship?

The permanency option of permanent guardianship can apply to children ages 0-17. Caregivers must be at least 18 years of age to be considered a guardian for children in out-of-home care. To receive benefits under the guardianship assistance program, the caregiver must be at least 21 years of age.

What is the “system of care”? What does this mean?

The System of Care (SOC) is a model of behavioral health care. The intent of the SOC is to provide a framework that guides service systems to improve the lives of children with mental health challenges and their families. It is not intended to refer to a single program, but rather to a coordinated network of services and supports across state agencies and providers to meet the multiple and complex needs of any given population. The Department’s Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health has been encouraging all Florida communities who serve children with behavioral health needs to embrace this philosophy and build the necessary partnerships to create their unique system of care.

Core values of SOC are:

- Family-Driven and Youth-Guided, with the strengths and needs of the child and family determining the types and mix of services and supports provided.
- Community-Based, with the locus of services as well as system management resting within a supportive, adaptive infrastructure of processes, and relationships at the community level.
- Culturally and Linguistically Competent, with agencies, programs, and services that reflect the cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic differences of the populations they serve to facilitate access to and utilization of appropriate services and supports to eliminate disparities in care.

For more information, please visit Florida’s System of Care website at <http://socflorida.com/>.

We need more mental health services.

Many insurance plans and Florida Medicaid cover behavioral health services. Please contact your health plan to discuss available services.

For individuals who are uninsured or underinsured the Department of Children and Families contracts with seven Managing Entities around the state to manage the behavioral health system of care in their contracted area. Managing Entities provide services and supports through a network of contracted providers for eligible individuals.

Need to find emergency housing assistance for persons with disabilities who are homeless.

The Department’s Office on Homelessness provides funding to 27 local Continuums of Care (CoCs) throughout the state. Those CoCs provide housing assistance to individuals who are eligible for their funding. To find available emergency housing assistance for a person with disabilities who is homeless, please contact the local CoC. A list of the CoCs may be found at: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/homelessness/local-providers.shtml>.

What is the impact if a parent becomes disabled and goes on SSDI and has a disabled child on SSI?

The Department cannot respond to program or eligibility issues for the SSDI or SSI programs, which is administered by the Social Security Administration. If the question relates to the impact of the receipt SSI or SSDI income on eligibility for SNAP or TANF programs, each family's circumstance will be evaluated individually. It is possible that receipt of income from other programs could lead to a reduction in benefits or ineligibility for benefits.

Are there any resources available to help cover the cost of childcare?

Non-licensed and licensed foster home caregivers receive a referral to the Early Learning Coalition. The referral provides tuition assistance and connects families to quality childcare options and supports them in choosing a program that best meets the child's needs. The Department also provides a \$200 monthly childcare subsidy to assist with the cost of childcare to any foster parent and relative or non-relative caregivers. For additional information regarding child services in a specific area, contact the local community-based care lead agency in your area.

What is peer support and how do I access it?

Peer support services are services designed and delivered by individuals who have experienced a mental or substance use disorder and are in recovery. They also include services designed and delivered by family members of those in recovery. Peer specialists foster hope and promote a belief in the possibility of recovery. Peer-support services are provided in a variety of settings and across different models of care. They may be provided in consumer and peer-run settings and in agency or facility-based programs. Services can be divided into three categories: crisis and respite services; level-of-care transition services; and community-based services, including outreach, engagement, and ongoing recovery supports.

Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs) are peer-run organizations who provide support to individuals who identify with **substance use disorder** or co-occurring and their family members. Information on how to locate an RCO can be found at <https://floridiansforrecovery.org/>.

Peer Support Networks are peer-run organizations who provide support to individuals who identify with a **mental health disorder** or co-occurring and their family members. Information on how to locate a Peer Support Network can be found at <https://www.peersupportfl.org>.

What housing options are there offered to assist? What is HUD doing to collaborate with renters? Landlords?

The Department's Office on Homelessness provides funding to 27 local Continuums of Care (CoCs) throughout the state. Those CoCs provide housing assistance to individuals who are eligible for their funding. Services offered through CoCs and their providers include operation and maintenance of emergency shelters, outreach to individuals who are homeless, rental assistance to prevent individuals from becoming homeless, and rapid rehousing of individuals from shelters or homelessness. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has recognized the challenges with rehousing individuals in the current rental markets. To assist with landlord engagement, HUD has provided certain incentives to landlords to encourage collaboration with CoCs and housing of individuals experiencing homelessness. Additionally, HUD encourages collaboration between CoCs and their local community including landlords, community partners, and those interested in addressing homelessness in their local community. Additional information about landlord incentives and housing options can be discussed with the local CoC. A list of the CoCs may be found at: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/homelessness/local-providers.shtml>.

How can I better advocate for my family member with mental health concerns?

Contact your local National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). Call 1-800-950-NAMI or visit <https://www.nami.org/Home>.

I need help with my son, who is over 18, who has self-injurious behaviors. Is there any help available for this?

There are resources available for individuals who are looking to keep those they care about safe. Mobile Response Teams assist youth and individuals 25 and under who are experiencing a behavioral health crisis. These teams are trained to help respond during a behavioral health crisis, or in an event that might become a crisis if unaddressed. There are other community-based programs such as Community Action Treatment (CAT) Teams that offer comprehensive, community-based services to individuals ages 11 to 21 with a mental health diagnosis. CAT Teams were designed to strengthen family and support systems for youth and young adults to improve their quality of life, improve school related outcomes such as attendance and grades, and decrease psychiatric hospitalizations, among other needs.

Information on how to contact the Mobile Response Teams and CAT Teams in your area can be found at <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/get-help.shtml> under 'Find Local Services By County'.

How can we better prepare law enforcement officers for interactions with individuals having mental health crises? Does DCF train the police?

Law enforcement officers in Florida are completing mental health Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training using a curriculum developed by a national organization with expertise in

mental health crisis intervention. The training aids in improving officers' knowledge and skills as first responders to incidents involving individuals with emotional disturbance or mental illness, including de-escalation skills to ensure consumer and officer safety. If law enforcement must be called for assistance, request a crisis trained officer.

Please give information on help for reactive attachment disorder.

Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) is a clinical diagnosis by a child's practitioner who has extensive knowledge in and around this subject. To obtain additional information regarding RAD and treatment options available for this condition, consult with your local practitioner. If you need assistance in identifying a licensed therapist or practitioner in your area, please contact Hope Florida at 850-300-HOPE.

What is the state of Florida doing to combat the problem of homelessness, especially where it concerns children?

The Department's Office on Homelessness provides funding to 27 local Continuums of Care (CoCs) throughout the state. Those CoCs provide housing assistance to families who are eligible for their funding. Although there has been a reduction of homeless students since the 2019-2020 school year, the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) reports that there are still students who experienced homelessness in the 2020-2021 school year. Though most of these youth are not living in emergency shelters, any type of housing insecurity may cause a disruption to a youth's academic pursuits. To assist these vulnerable families with children, the Department provides emergency financial assistance to families facing the loss of their housing due to a financial or other crisis. The intent of the program is to provide case management and financial assistance for overdue rent or mortgage payments and overdue utility bills to enable families to remain housed after receiving the assistance. To find available emergency housing assistance for a family, please contact the local CoC. A list of the CoCs may be found at: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/homelessness/local-providers.shtml>.

Are there any community groups or programs for potential foster parents where we can meet with others to get real-life advice and support so we can be better foster parents?

Potential foster parents can call Florida's Foster Information Center (FFIC) toll-free at 1-833-678-3735 (1-83-FosterFL) to speak with an Ambassador. All FFIC Ambassadors are current or former foster parents who are available to provide potential foster parents with information and support on their journey to becoming a foster parent. Foster parents also have access to the Florida Foster & Adoptive Parent Association (FAPA), an organization comprised of foster and adoptive parents with lived experience. The Florida FAPA is a resource to assist families with navigating the child welfare system that provides training opportunities and support. Foster parents may also call Florida's Foster Information

Center toll-free at 1-833-678-3735 (1-83-FosterFL) for support and assistance navigating the child welfare system.

What type of social work services does the DCF offer to us? Or do they just intervene when families need to be separated for the betterment of the children?

The Department offers services based on the needs of the family which may include counseling, assessments to evaluate the physical, emotional and over all well-being of the child. Florida residents may also contact the Department for assistance through Hope Florida – A Pathway to Prosperity. Hope Florida utilizes 'Hope Navigators' to guide Floridians on an individualized path to prosperity, economic self-sufficiency, and hope by focusing on community collaboration between the private sector, faith-based community, nonprofits and government entities to break down traditional community silos, in an effort to maximize resources and uncover opportunities. If you need to connect with a Hope Navigator, call 850-300-HOPE.

So glad to be back at event after COVID. When can we expect the department to go back to providing home style services for our family? I have not seen or heard from our DCF caseworker since early 2021. How are they checking up on us?

Even during the pandemic, the Department requires local, community-based care lead agencies to make contact with families and children open to dependency every 30 days.

Families who have an open case with the Department may be receiving services directly from the Department or from one of our contracted local community-based care lead agencies. Families with an open case who need to connect with their local agency should contact 1-833-678-3735 to get connected to your local resource.



The Department of Education

Looking for more homeschool options for child with ASD within the DOE.

Home Education is a parent-directed educational option that satisfies the requirement for regular school attendance. Florida laws protecting home education became effective in 1985. Parents have the freedom to determine their child's educational path and the plan for reaching their goals. Students have the opportunity to explore and learn at their own pace, in any location or at any time. For more information, please visit <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/other-school-choice-options/home-edu/>.

Additionally, the Center for Autism & Related Disabilities (CARD) provides support and assistance with the goal of optimizing the potential of people with autism spectrum disorder and related disabilities. More information can be found at <https://florida-card.org/>.

In the three years we have lived in Florida, I have not heard of an organization near me that provides training for parents on a regular basis. Similar to what other states offer: CPAC in Connecticut, PACER in Minnesota. I have noticed parents don't have support navigating the school system and many struggle getting services for their children. Doesn't Florida have a training program?

The Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS) is a discretionary project of the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEES), that provides information, training, and support to families in order to promote effective parent participation in the education of children who are exceptional and/or have special needs. Services include assistance in the development of family-friendly programs, training and support for services for children with disabilities, and the support of partnerships between schools and parents to support student achievement.

There are 18 FDLRS Regional Associate Centers across the state, each with a local Parent & Family Services Specialist who can assist in the development of family-friendly programs, training and support for services for children with disabilities, and the support of partnerships between schools and parents to support student achievement. For more information, please visit <https://www.fdlrs.org/parent-services>.

One particular resource that may be of interest is Special Ed Connection®, which houses the latest news and developments in the special education community, including tools that can help families learn how to be more actively involved in meeting the special education needs of their family member. The Florida Department of Education is proud to provide access to Special Ed Connection® at no cost to families of individuals with disabilities who are enrolled in special education programs. For more information, please visit <https://www.fdlrs.org/parent-services/special-ed-connection>.

I think disability services of Florida should be more involved and allowed to deeply investigate special needs students' abuse in public schools! My son was a victim of public school physical and mental abuse by school staff, starting in 2009 in many schools and occasions, and I was never able to have any help!

The State Educational Agency (SEA) is required to resolve any complaint filed that meets the requirements of Title 34, section 300.153, Code of Federal Regulation. The Department views the state complaint procedures as an important tool for a state to use to fulfill its general supervision responsibilities to monitor implementation of the requirements in Part B of the IDEA by local educational agencies (LEAs) in the State.

Additionally, the FDOE Office of Professional Practices Services (PPS), administers a state-level grievance process and plays an integral part in ensuring that appropriate disciplinary actions are taken against the certificate of an educator certified to teach in Florida. PPS investigates alleged misconduct by educators in Florida who hold an educator's certificate. For more information, please visit <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/professional-practices/>.

Why are we subjected to being guinea pigs in receiving medical attention? Not able to see real doctors, only students, etc. How are schools and afterschool programs able to send field trip permission slips home that exonerates faculty/transportation, etc. from any responsibility for all students, especially the disabled, while on field trips/summer camps etc.? Is the legal world aware this is happening? Do our children's lives matter? Why would anyone sign their child's safety responsibilities off? With all the safety issues, HOW IS THIS HAPPENING????!!

The Commissioner of Education has made the health, safety, and welfare of Florida students and parental rights his top priority.

On August 17, 2022, the State Board of Education adopted Rule 6A- 10.085, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.), which requires that any policies adopted by a school district for field trips, extracurricular activities, and supplemental programs must be consistent with the Parental Bill of Rights created under Chapter 1014, Florida Statutes, protect the privacy of educational records, and protect the privacy interests of all students and parents.

In addition, the rule requires school districts to adopt procedures to fully inform parents of the details of field trips, extracurricular activities and supplemental programs. These procedures must require signed parent or guardian permission forms for field trips that include, at a minimum, the nature of the field trip, the date(s) and time(s) of the field trip, the specific location(s) and type(s) of establishment(s) to be visited, the mode(s) of transportation, the method of student supervision provided, such as anticipated number of chaperones, and whether room assignments for overnight lodging are not separated by biological sex at birth.

District procedures for overnight lodging must include accommodations or modifications in order to ensure that all eligible students have the opportunity to participate in the field trip.

For more information, please see the memorandum issued on September 9, 2022, at <https://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-9664/dps-2022-152.pdf>.

Is Florida done with the FSA? What does this mean for Florida’s students? What will replace this standardized test?

Beginning with the 2022–23 school year, Florida’s statewide, standardized assessments in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics will be aligned with the Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.). The Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST), which includes VPK through grade 10 Reading and VPK through grade 8 Mathematics assessments, will be administered as a progress monitoring assessment, which students will participate in three times per year. B.E.S.T. assessments that are not part of the FAST progress monitoring program include grades 4–10 Writing and end-of-course (EOC) assessments in Algebra 1, Geometry, Biology, Civics, and U.S. History. For additional information, please visit <https://flfast.org/fast.html>.

Do the local schools work with Vocational Rehabilitation? It seems that I learned how a VR counselor should be working with transitioning youth, but our school-based teachers and administrators do not work with the VR program. They do not even know what VR is. Why not? VR is a program of the school system.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a federal-state program that helps people who have disabilities get or keep a job. VR is committed to helping people with disabilities find meaningful careers. Passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act further supports VR efforts to prepare students and out-of-school youth with disabilities for success in the 21st century workforce through our Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and Transition Youth Programs. For more information, please visit <https://www.rehabworks.org/student-youth/student-youth.html>.

Does DOE have a service animal policy for children in schools?

The use of a service animal is governed by the Americans with Disabilities Act and the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division has provided extensive guidance at <https://beta.ada.gov/topics/service-animals/>. School districts have autonomy concerning local policies on the use of service animals in the school setting, so long as all federal and state regulations are adhered to. For additional information, please contact your local school district.

Can students receive music therapy through the school if it benefits them?

This is an IEP team decision and should be addressed during the applicable meeting. For additional information, please contact your local school district.

Can a parent choose who they want to help them in a due process hearing without the approval of the Administrative Law Judge and school attorney deciding to deny the parent choice?

Rule 6A-6.03311(9)(v)(1)-(3), Florida Administrative Code, states the following:

Hearing rights. Any party to a due process hearing has the right:

- To be represented by counsel or to be represented by a qualified representative under the qualifications and standards set forth in Rules 28-106.106 and 28-106.107, F.A.C., or to be accompanied and advised by individuals with special knowledge or training with respect to the problems of students with disabilities, or any combination of the above;
- To present evidence, and to confront, cross-examine, and compel the attendance of witnesses;
- To prohibit the introduction of any evidence at the hearing that has not been disclosed to that party at least five (5) business days before the hearing;
- To obtain written, or, at the option of the parents, electronic verbatim record of the hearing at no cost to the parents; and,
- To obtain written, or, at the option of the parents, electronic findings of fact and decisions at no cost to the parents.

Additional disclosure of information.

- At least five (5) business days prior to a hearing conducted pursuant to this rule, each party shall disclose to all other parties all evaluations completed by that date and recommendations based on the offering party's evaluations that the party intends to use at the hearing.
- An ALJ may bar any party that fails to comply with sub- subparagraph (9)(v)2.a. of this rule, from introducing the relevant evaluation or recommendation at the hearing without the consent of the other party.

If you have not already reached a resolution and would still like to speak to someone about your concerns, please feel free to contact the FDOE at 850-245-0475 or via email at BEESSComplaints@fldoe.org.

To find out more about the bureau's dispute resolution options, please visit <http://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/dispute-resolution>.

When should a child start attending their IEP meetings?

Pursuant to Rule 6A-6.03028(3)(b)4.-5., Florida Administrative Code,

"4. No later than the first IEP to be in effect during the student's seventh grade year or when the student attains the age of twelve (12), whichever occurs first, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team, the [IEP meeting notice must also indicate that a purpose of the meeting will be identifying transition services needs of the student and that the district will invite the student.

“5. No later than the first IEP to be in effect when the student enters high school, attains the age of fourteen (14), or when determined appropriate by the parent and the IEP team, whichever occurs first, the notice must also indicate that a purpose of the meeting will be consideration of the postsecondary and career goals and transition services for the student, that the district will invite the student, and identify any other agency that will be invited to send a representative to the meeting.”

Why isn't there more funding available for dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia? What programs are out there?

Programs available for students with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia are available through the BEESS discretionary projects. The Learning Ally project (<https://learningally.org/Solutions-for-School/school-grants/Florida>) facilitates support services and training to administrators, teachers, parents and students on the use of digital audio books provided by Learning Ally. Learning Ally is an accessible media producer and is registered with the National Instructional Materials Access Center. The project coordinates with Florida's appointed National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standards authorized user to provide digital audio textbooks and equipment to eligible students with print disabilities. Equipment and software is provided at no cost to students or school districts.

Another project that supports students with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia is Learning Ally Dyslexia Screener with Florida State University. This project is developing a literacy screener guaranteed to be a valid measure of early literacy readiness for students in grades K-1. Following the screening, and in future years, Florida educators will receive supporting instructional programs that will allow them to adjust their instruction based on results. To measure results, Learning Ally and Florida State University will conduct localized validation of the Dyslexia Screener. For more information, please contact BEESS at 850-245-0475.

What supports are available for students with disabilities to attend college? Is there funding available for my child to get help with daily living activities?

Project 10: Transition Education Network, a discretionary project of BEESS, provides supports to prepare students for postsecondary transitions. The Planning for Postsecondary Section of the Project 10 website provides information and resources for school professionals, students and families to support them in planning and understanding postsecondary options for students with disabilities. This information can be found at <http://project10.info/DPage.php?ID=327>.

What's the difference between a 504 Plan and an IEP? Who qualifies for each?

Both IDEA and Section 504 guarantee students with disabilities access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

A person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities is eligible for a Section 504 Plan. To be eligible for an IEP, a student aged three through 21, inclusive, must meet certain criteria under one of 13 federal categories and must need special education and related services.

Both a 504 Plan and an IEP provide for accommodations. However, a Section 504 Plan's focus is on how to ensure the student has equal access to FAPE – whether that be through either general education or special education and related services. An IEP provides for the provision of special education and related services that are reasonably calculated to enable the student to educationally benefit.

For more information, please contact BEESS at 850-245-0475.

How can I get my child the assistive technology they need to be successful academically? Is there funding available? They need AT in the school setting and at home.

The Problem Solving and Response to Intervention Technology and Learning Connections (PS/RtI TLC) team is a part of Florida's Multi-tiered System of Supports through the PS/RtI project at the University of South Florida. The TLC services support the local development of highly effective classrooms for all students based on the Florida Standards through an MTSS in a universal education system.

The TLC team provides guidelines and resources to support the implementation of the following:

- Florida's Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) Standards;
- Assistive and instructional technology;
- Accessible educational materials; and
- Universal design for learning.

The TLC staff includes five regional technology coordinators and regional technology specialists housed at the Regional Assistive Technology and Universal Design for Learning Centers. The team also supports the regional local assistive technology specialists and their activities. For more information, please visit <https://www.tlc-mtss.com/> or contact your district ESE director (<https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.shtml>).

We need more programs for socialization through school for our children with special needs to meet others and make friends.

PEERs as Partners in Learning (PPL) is a program sponsored by the Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) that provides reciprocal academic, social, and interpersonal benefits to students with and without disabilities, in an inclusive setting. Information about this program can be accessed here: <https://www.floridainclusionnetwork.com/peers-as-partners-in-learning/>. As an IEP team member, parents are entitled to provide input on

the provision of FAPE for their child. Addressing socialization and social goals can be addressed in the IEP, as incorporated in the IEP goals.

Can we have schools teach daily sensory diet programs in school to help children with ADD/ADHD and autism learn to be focused during class?

This is an IEP team decision and should be addressed on an individual basis in the IEP. For more information, please contact your local school district.

I'm thinking about homeschooling my child to better meet their needs. Are there resources to help me get started? Are there any scholarships for materials?

Home Education is a parent-directed educational option that satisfies the requirement for regular school attendance. Florida laws protecting home education became effective in 1985. Parents have the freedom to determine their child's educational path and the plan for reaching their goals. Students have the opportunity to explore and learn at their own pace, in any location or at any time. Home education students are able to enter institutions of higher learning and are eligible to participate in the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program. For more information, please visit <https://www.fl DOE.org/schools/school-choice/other-school-choice-options/home-edu/>. Additionally, for more information on scholarship programs available through the Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice, please visit <https://www.fl DOE.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/>.

Why don't public school children automatically receive free lunch at a place they are legally required to be each day? If a student doesn't have lunch money, they are given a different meal than other students. Why go out of the way for inclusion in the classroom then single out students because of something they have zero control over? Everyone should be given the same lunch. If you don't have money for lunch, you probably need the enhanced lunch like everyone else, less stigma. Come on!

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential childcare institutions. Recent pandemic-related provisions allowing schools to provide free meals to all students ended beginning with the 2022-23 school year, and the program now operates under pre-pandemic provisions. Schools take applications and use family income to qualify kids for free, reduced-price, or paid meals. Some schools are eligible for the "Community Eligibility Provision" program that assists in serving free meals to all students.

To determine if your school is participating in this program, please contact your local school district office. For more information on the NSLP, please visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/2022-23-parent-faqs>.

How can the state increase funding toward adults living with disabilities for education?

The State of Florida aims to create a world-class education system that fosters highest student achievement for all students (including students with disabilities), seamless articulation and maximum access, a skilled workforce supporting economic development, and quality efficient services.

A variety of State agencies exist with the purpose of supporting individuals with disabilities in pursuing their college and career goals, including the FDOE's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Division of Blind Services, as well as the Agency for Persons with Disabilities.

Additionally, students with disabilities are welcome at all Florida colleges and college students with documented disabilities are eligible to receive auxiliary aids and services which may include services such as extended time on exams, texts in an alternative format, note-takers, and sign language interpreters. For more information, please visit <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/higher-ed/fl-college-system/academic-student-affairs/disability-support-services.stml>.

I would love to see more school-based information provided for students who are blind and/or deaf.

The Florida Department of Education is committed to the education of all students, including our students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing or who have a visual impairment. Several resources that are available are listed below:

FDOE Division of Blind Services (DBS): The mission of DBS is to ensure blind and visually impaired Floridians have the tools, support and opportunity to achieve success. DBS helps blind and visually impaired individuals achieve their goals and live their lives with as much independence and self-direction as possible. More information can be found at <https://dbs.fldoe.org/Information/index.html>.

Florida Instructional Materials Center for the Visually Impaired (FIMC-VI): FIMC-VI is a statewide resource center designed to assist schools in obtaining specialized materials for students with visual impairments. FIMC-VI provides services at no cost to students with visual impairments enrolled in Florida's public and private schools as well as those students that are home schooled as long as they are participating in a "formally organized educational program." FIMC-VI also supports all teachers, school administrators, and agency personnel working with Florida's K-12 students with visual impairments. More information can be found at <https://www.fimcvi.org/>.

Resource Materials and Technology Center for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing (RMTC-DHH): RMTC-DHH works collaboratively with all Florida stakeholders to positively influence outcomes of students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing (DHH) in preparation for college, career, and life. RMTC-D/HH supports families and school personnel by researching current national and state initiatives, by procuring interventions, curricula, and

assessments, and by utilizing data to assist stakeholders in implementing instructional practices. More information can be found at <https://www.rmtcdhh.org/>.

Additional information can be found on the BEESS website at <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/ese-eligibility/>.

How can parents form a separate PTO/PTA for special education?

While the formation of these organizations is governed at the local level, FDLRS is a discretionary project of BEESS that provides information, training, and support to families in order to promote effective parent participation in the education of children who are exceptional and/or have special needs. Services include assistance in the development of family-friendly programs, training and support for services for children with disabilities, and the support of partnerships between schools and parents to support student achievement.

There are 18 FDLRS Regional Associate Centers across the state, each with a local Parent & Family Services Specialist who can assist in the development of family-friendly programs, training and support for services for children with disabilities, and the support of partnerships between schools and parents to support student achievement. For more information, please visit <https://www.fdlrs.org/parent-services>.

Are schools providing any kind of mental health training or screenings to help prevent tragedies? A lot of us are terrified of sending our children back to school after recent events.

The mental health of Florida's students and families is a top priority of the Florida Department of Education. Thanks to the leadership of Governor Ron DeSantis and First Lady Casey DeSantis, Florida is on the forefront of mental health outreach to ensure all our students have the necessary tools to see them through life's successes and challenges.

Section 1012.584, Florida Statutes, requires that no later than July 1, 2023, and annually thereafter by July 1, each school district shall certify to the department, in a format determined by the department, at least 80 percent of school personnel in elementary, middle and high schools have received the training required under this section. FDOE has identified an evidence-based, nationally recognized youth mental health awareness and assistance training program to help school personnel identify and understand the signs of mental health concerns and substance use disorders, and provide such personnel with the next steps to find help for a person who is developing or experiencing mental health concerns or a substance use disorder. Effective November 22, 2022, [Rule 6A-1.094120, F.A.C., Youth Mental Health Awareness Training \(YMHAT\) and Reporting](#) outlines the program and the process of certification.

For more information, please visit <https://www.fldoe.org/mental-health/index.stml>.

What kind of services, assistance, or benefits are available for young adults that want to pursue a college education? Is there any assistance for college graduated students to find jobs/or get the volunteer hours needed for college admissions?

A variety of State agencies exist with the purpose of supporting individuals with disabilities in pursuing their college and career goals, including the FDOE's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Division of Blind Services, as well as the Agency for Persons with Disabilities.

What happens when a school says a child doesn't need a 504 or IEP but his doctor/therapists/etc. says he does need one? Any recourse?

If a parent feels that the appropriate supports, services, and/or placement have not been instituted for their child, it is recommended that the parent contact the local district's ESE department for information on how the district can provide support in this situation. It is usually to everyone's advantage to try to resolve differences or correct any noncompliance concerns in the least adversarial manner and closest to the school level. This saves time, preserves relationships, and can result in better outcomes for the student as well as their family. The contact information for the school district ESE directors can be found at <https://www.fl DOE.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.stml>.

Additionally, when disagreements occur or when you believe that the school is not meeting its legal obligations, there are various options made available at the state level to resolve these disputes:

State Facilitated IEP (SFIEP) Meetings: Facilitation is a voluntary process through which a trained and impartial third party helps establish a common agenda and keeps a meeting focused and moving forward. Generally, facilitation is typically requested when parents and school personnel are experiencing challenges in communicating or if a meeting is expected to be highly complex or possibly difficult. Any meeting related to the IDEA may be facilitated and can be requested by a parent, guardian, or a school district representative.

Mediation: A trained and impartial third party (mediator) provides an environment conducive to creating an agreement between all parties, which centers the student's best interests and is legally binding.

Due Process Complaints: A due process complaint is a document used to request a due process hearing related to allegations that a public agency has violated state or federal requirements regarding the education of students with disabilities. Due process complaints start a process that may lead to a formal hearing where a hearing officer decides the outcome.

State Complaints: Parents may file a state complaint alleging that a school, school district, or other public agency has violated state or federal requirements regarding the education of students with disabilities.

For more information, please visit <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/dispute-resolution/>.

My son is bullied because of his disability and the school looks the other way. Their policy is to ignore it. But it greatly affects my son’s ability to focus and do his work, and it often leads to outbursts from him. What can I do if the administration is no help?

Bullying in schools is of increasing focus for Florida schools, districts, and for the Florida Department of Education. Section 1006.147, Florida Statutes, also known as The Jeffrey Johnston Stand Up for All Students Act, requires school districts to adopt an official policy prohibiting bullying and harassment of students and staff on school grounds, at school-sponsored events, and through school computer networks. For more information, please visit <https://www.fldoe.org/safe-schools/bullying-prevention.shtml>.

Additionally, the Hope Scholarship is for students in grades kindergarten through 12 who are enrolled in a Florida public school and have been bullied, harassed, assaulted, threatened and or other violent acts to transfer to another public school or enroll in an approved private school. For more information, please visit <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/hope/>.

Will students in Florida receive free lunch at public schools this year? That was such a help last year and we could really use it again.

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential childcare institutions. Recent pandemic-related provisions allowing schools to provide free meals to all students have expired as of the 2022-23 school year, and the program now operates under pre-pandemic provisions. Schools take applications and use family income to qualify kids for free, reduced-price, or paid meals.

Some schools are eligible for the “Community Eligibility Provision” program that assists in serving free meals to all students. To determine if your school is participating in this program, please contact your local school district office. For more information on the NSLP, please visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/2022-23-parent-faqs>.

How and when should I talk to my child about their IEP?

Pursuant to [Rule 6A-6.03028\(3\)\(b\)4.](#), Florida Administrative Code, a student must be invited to the IEP meeting beginning at the student’s seventh grade year or when the student attains the age of twelve (12), whichever occurs first, or younger if determined

appropriate by the IEP Team. However, how and when to discuss the IEP with your student will depend on a number of different factors that are specific to the needs of the student.

Can my child participate in the gifted program if he has an IEP?

Yes. The eligibility requirements for a student who is gifted can be found in Rule 6A-6.03019, Florida Administrative Code. Additional information can be found at <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/standards/gifted.shtml>.

We need help with tutoring. Is there funding available to assist with tutoring?

Effective July 1, 2022, the New Worlds Reading Scholarship Accounts expanded eligibility to include public school students enrolled in kindergarten through grade 5, who have a substantial reading deficiency identified under section 1008.25(5)(a), Florida Statutes, or who scored below a Level 3 on the statewide, standardized English Language Arts (ELA) assessment in the prior school year. For the 2022-2023 school year, the amount of the scholarship is \$500 per eligible student. To apply for funding, a parent must submit an application to an eligible scholarship funding organization directly. For the 2022-23 school year, Step Up For Students will be the only Scholarship Funding Organization administering this scholarship program. See <https://www.stepupforstudents.org/scholarships/reading/>.

How do I know if my child needs an IEP? Does the school determine this, or do I need to see a doctor?

Either a parent of a student or a school district may initiate a request for initial evaluation to determine if the student is a student with a disability, and parental consent must be obtained to conduct the initial evaluation pursuant to Title 34, section 300.300, Code of Federal Regulations. Please contact your local school district's ESE director for more information on beginning this process for your student: <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ease-directors.shtml>.

Can students with disabilities who are homeschooled still receive services? Can they get a plan such as an IEP or 504?

The school district is obligated to "identify, locate, and evaluate" all children with disabilities, including those attending private schools and home education programs, in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This evaluation must be at no cost to the parent. If the parent chooses to take advantage of these evaluation services in order to obtain an IEP, the parent should contact the exceptional student education administrator in the school district in which they reside.

What is the legal definition of school-based inclusion?

Pursuant to section 1003.57, Florida Statutes, "a school district shall use the term 'inclusion' to mean that a student is receiving education in a general education regular class setting, reflecting natural proportions and age-appropriate heterogeneous groups in core academic and elective or special areas within the school community; a student with a disability is a valued member of the classroom and school community; the teachers and administrators support universal education and have knowledge and support available to enable them to effectively teach all children; and a teacher is provided access to technical assistance in best practices, instructional methods, and supports tailored to the student's needs based on current research."

What is ESY? Is it available at all schools?

ESY stands for extended school year services. ESY services refer to special education and related services that are provided to a student with a disability beyond the normal school year of the school district, in accordance with the student's IEP and at no cost to the parents of the student, and meet the standards of the Florida Department of Education. Local educational agencies determine the sites where ESY services are provided and an IEP team determines if ESY is appropriate. For more information, please contact your local school district.

Where are we with Covid these days? It disrupted our lives for two years, should we expect any more disruptions to the schools?

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) has collaborated with the Florida Department of Health and the Florida Legislature to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of Florida's 2.9 million students. Thanks to Governor Ron DeSantis, Florida's schools were the first in the nation to open for in-person instruction and remained open to ensure all students have access to world-class education options.

The FDOE maintains a web page with information related to federal funding, guidance, and resources related to Florida's response to the pandemic at <https://www.fldoe.org/covid-19/index.shtml>. The information includes guidance, tools, and resources that were and continue to be provided to school districts, educators, families, and the community to ensure the health and safety of students and educators.

How can we get cameras placed in special education classrooms to ensure the safety and appropriate treatment of our children with disabilities?

Pursuant to section 1003.574, F.S., beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, the Video Cameras in Public School Classrooms Pilot Program was created for a period of three school years in Broward County. This is the only public school district in Florida under the purview of this program.

What is RTI? Is this something I can be involved in with my child?

RTI stands for Response to Intervention and opportunities for parents to be involved in a data-based problem-solving process to address the student's areas of concern must be made available. In addition, there must be discussion with the parent regarding the data used to identify the problem and monitor student progress, the student's response to instruction and interventions, modification of the interventions, and anticipated future action to address the student's learning and/or behavioral needs. Pursuant to Rule 6A-6.0331, F.A.C., documentation of parental involvement and communication must be maintained.

Does a speech disorder qualify my child for an IEP?

Pursuant to Rule 6A-6.03012, F.A.C., "Speech impairments are disorders of speech sounds, fluency, or voice that interfere with communication, adversely affect performance and/or functioning in the educational environment, and result in the need for exceptional student education." For more information, please visit <https://www.fl DOE.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/ese-eligibility/speech-impairment-si.stml>.

What are the Gardiner Scholarship and McKay Scholarship? Who qualifies for these?

Florida provides a variety of school choice options, including six scholarship programs. These programs allow parents unprecedented choice among public and private schools.

On May 11, 2021, Governor DeSantis signed House Bill 7045 into law, resulting in several changes to the state's K-12 scholarship programs, including an extensive expansion of the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program to include two branches of eligibility, the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Options (FES EO) and the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES UA).

As of July 1, 2021, students eligible under the repealed Gardiner Scholarship Program are now eligible under the expanded Family Empowerment Scholarship Program.

Effective July 1, 2022, the McKay Scholarship Program joined the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program under the Unique Abilities category (FES UA). More information on the transition from McKay to the FES UA can be found at <https://www.fl DOE.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/mckay/fes-faq.stml>.

Is it true that a military veteran can obtain a five-year teaching certificate without having a bachelor's degree or teaching experience?

Effective July 1, 2022, Florida issues a 5-year Temporary Certificate for military veterans who have not yet earned their bachelor's degrees and meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Minimum of 48 months of active-duty military service with an honorable/medical discharge on DD214;
- Minimum of 60 college credits with a 2.5 grade point average on an official transcript;
- Passing score on a Florida subject area examination for bachelor's level subjects which demonstrates mastery of subject area knowledge;
- Employment in a Florida school district, including charter schools, with an assigned mentor; and
- Cleared background screening.

The online application for the Temporary Military Veterans Certificate is open:

<https://flcertify.fldoe.org/datamart/login.do>.

It should be noted that military spouses and families are not eligible for this certification pathway. For more information, please visit

<https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/military/>.

What can I do if my child is being pulled out of class to go to the ESE resource room and it is a waste of time? They play computer games more than anything else and my child misses out on instruction in his homeroom class. Does he have to go to the ESE class? Can I, as a parent, request that he stays fully included in his regular classroom all day? Even if he cannot accomplish all the work, he can learn . . . and who knows, maybe he will be able to accomplish the work!

Pursuant to Title 34, section 300.114, Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.), students with disabilities must be educated with children without disabilities to the maximum extent possible. "Special classes, separate schooling, or other removals of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily."

Further, pursuant to 34 C.F.R. § 300.116 and Rule 6A-6.03028, F.A.C., school districts must ensure student placement decisions are made by a group of persons, including the parents and other persons knowledgeable about the student, who have considered relevant evaluation data, placement options, and least restrictive environment (LRE) considerations.

If a parent feels that the appropriate supports, services, and/or placement have not been instituted for their child, it is recommended that the parent contact the local district's ESE department for information on how the district can provide support in this situation. The contact information for the school district ESE directors can be found at

<https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.stml>.

How can I get an ADHD diagnosis? My son is struggling in school and the teacher is overwhelmed with his behavior. Could an ADHD diagnosis help him?

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders of childhood. It is usually first diagnosed in childhood and often lasts into adulthood. Children with ADHD may have trouble paying attention, controlling impulsive behaviors (may act without thinking about what the result will be), or be overly active.

Deciding if a child has ADHD is a process with several steps. There is no single test to diagnose ADHD, and many other problems, like anxiety, depression, sleep problems, and certain types of learning disabilities, can have similar symptoms. One step of the process involves having a medical exam, including hearing and vision tests, to rule out other problems with symptoms like ADHD. Diagnosing ADHD usually includes a checklist for rating ADHD symptoms and taking a history of the child from parents, teachers, and sometimes, the child. For more information, please consult with your child's primary care physician.

Does dyslexia qualify my daughter for an IEP? I paid a lot of money for an evaluation after the school took a full year to "evaluate" her and then said she was fine, but she struggles immensely and spends a lot of time at home working hard to barely pass. The independent evaluation through Florida State University confirmed dyslexia as the diagnosis but the school is unsupportive. What can I do?

Pursuant to Rule 6A-6.03018, F.A.C., "a specific learning disability is defined as a disorder in one or more of the basic learning processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest in significant difficulties affecting the ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematics. Associated conditions may include dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, or developmental aphasia. A specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of a visual, hearing, motor, intellectual, or emotional/behavioral disability limited English proficiency or environmental, cultural, or economic factors." For more information, please visit <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/ese-eligibility/specific-learning-disabilities-sld/index.shtml>.

Additionally, when disagreements occur or when you believe that the school is not meeting its legal obligations, there are various options available to resolve these disputes. Information about these options can be found at <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/dispute-resolution/>.

We need summer programs, year-round school services. There are not enough providers or therapists in the summer months. Our child falls behind in the summer and it takes months to bring his progress back to where he left off. Why can't the schools have summer school?

Extended school year (ESY) programs can be provided to students with disabilities if the IEP team determines it is appropriate. Reaching out to organizations like The Family Cafe or your local school district can provide families with resources and contacts for summer programs.

How can I find an advocate to attend my child’s IEP meetings? Does the school provide them? Is there somewhere I can go to find one? It’s all so overwhelming and I often feel like the IEP team doesn’t listen to me.

If you require additional support during IEP meetings, FDOE has made available state-facilitated IEP (SFIEP) meetings. Facilitation is a voluntary process through which a trained and impartial third party helps establish a common agenda and keeps a meeting focused and moving forward. While most ESE meetings do not need the services of a facilitator, facilitation is typically requested when parents and school personnel are experiencing challenges in communicating or if a meeting is expected to be highly complex or possibly difficult. Any meeting related to the IDEA may be facilitated and can be requested by a parent, guardian or a school district representative. For more information on SFIEP, please visit <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/dispute-resolution/>.

Another support is the Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resource System (FDLRS) discretionary project, which serves to provide information, training, and support to districts and families in order to promote effective parent participation in the education of children with disabilities or exceptionalities. (See <https://www.fdlrs.org/parent-services/>.)

One particular resource that may be of interest is Special Ed Connection®, which houses the latest news and developments in the special education community, including tools that can help families learn how to be more actively involved in meeting the special education needs of their family member. The Florida Department of Education is proud to provide access to Special Ed Connection® at no cost to families of individuals with disabilities who are enrolled in special education programs. For more information, please visit <https://www.fdlrs.org/parent-services/special-ed-connection>.

Finally, reaching out to organizations like The Family Cafe can also provide families with resources and contacts that provide such services.

What safety measures are in place for students with disabilities if a horrible situation were to occur? My child can’t move quickly or hide easily, and I fear for their safety and the safety of their teachers and aides.

A safety plan can be established at any time and incorporated into each individual student’s IEP. For more information, please contact your local school district. For more information regarding district obligations relating to school safety, please view section 1006.07, F.S., and [Rule 6A-1.0018, F.A.C.](#)

What do I do if I feel like my child being pulled out for resource class is taking away from other important subjects or special areas? Are there options for afterschool tutoring or help? Are there funds available through the school system to hire private tutors? I don't want my child to miss their special areas where they thrive. They might never be fully proficient in math and English, but they do so well in Art and Music and get enjoyment from it.

Pursuant to Title 34, section 300.114, Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.), students with disabilities must be educated with children without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate. "Special classes, separate schooling, or other removals of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily."

Further, pursuant to 34 C.F.R. § 300.116 and Rule 6A-6.03028, F.A.C., school districts must ensure student placement decisions are made by a group of persons, including the parents and other persons knowledgeable about the student, who have considered relevant evaluation data, placement options, and least restrictive environment (LRE) considerations.

If a parent feels that the appropriate supports, services, and/or placement have not been instituted for their child, it is recommended that the parent contact the local district's ESE department for information on how the district can provide support in this situation. The contact information for the school district ESE directors can be found at <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.shtml>.

There is a lot of conversation on Facebook about the McKay and Gardiner scholarship programs. Are there two programs or one? What are the differences between the programs now? Why is everyone upset?

Florida provides a variety of school choice options, including six scholarship programs. These programs allow parents unprecedented choice among public and private schools.

On May 11, 2021, Governor DeSantis signed House Bill 7045 into law, resulting in several changes to the state's K-12 scholarship programs, including an extensive expansion of the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program to include two branches of eligibility, the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Options (FES EO) and the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES UA).

As of July 1, 2021, students eligible under the repealed Gardiner Scholarship Program are now eligible under the expanded Family Empowerment Scholarship Program.

Effective July 1, 2022, the McKay Scholarship Program joined the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program under the Unique Abilities category (FES UA). More information on the transition from McKay to the FES UA can be found at <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/mckay/fes-fags.shtml>.

The Department of Health

I really liked the Early Steps/Early Wishes playgroup sessions. Thank you. Would like to be able to share this program with others in our community. I am confused though about one thing, is there an income requirement for Early Steps? Someone said yes, because it is a CMS program, but others say no because it is funded with federal dollars. The person at the playgroup could not explain it to me. Can you? If there is a cost component, please let me know and is there a sliding scale fee? I always thought that the programs by the state were free. What agency represents the Early Steps program? How can I get more information about this program?

The Florida Department of Health is the Lead Agency that oversees the Early Steps Program, and there are 15 Local Early Steps (LES) offices throughout the state that provide services. Early Steps serves families with children ages birth to thirty-six months with certain levels of developmental delay and established conditions. In addition, children with certain documented physical or mental at-risk conditions also qualify for a limited scope of services. Services are offered at no cost to all families whose child qualifies. Anyone can refer a child (birth to three years old) to Florida's Early Steps Program.

To find your local program, make a referral, or request additional information, please visit <https://floridaearlysteps.com/> or call 800-218-0001.

What is Early Steps? How can I qualify?

Early Steps is Florida's early intervention program designed for families who have infants and toddlers, up to the age of three, with delays, disabilities, and/or at-risk conditions. The Program is offered at no cost to all families whose child qualifies, regardless of income.

The Early Steps Program is family-centered, which means services are focused around the needs of the individual child and family. A research-based coaching model is used to help caregiver(s) learn how to easily and effectively incorporate strategies into their regular everyday routines. Applying meaningful and practical strategies into family routines not only builds the caregiver's confidence and competence in meeting their child's unique needs, but also gives the child more opportunity to grow and develop everyday where they live, learn, and play. Routines-based and family-centeredness is what sets Early Steps apart from a clinical-based model of therapy.

To determine if your child is eligible for the Program, an evaluation would be performed by a team of qualified professionals. Eligibility is based on current development and/or the potential risks of delays due to a known disability or other qualifying condition. To find your local program, submit a referral for your child for an evaluation, or request additional information, please visit <https://floridaearlysteps.com/> or call 800-218-0001.

I really appreciated the Early Wishes Playgroup room and the Sensory Room for our babies. Very nice ladies who helped me with the services our family could qualify for. Very nice!

Thank you and the Early Steps Program looks forward to seeing you and your family next year!

What is the newborn screening? Are all babies screened?

Newborn screening is a state public health program that reaches nearly 4 million babies born in the United States each year. Approximately a quarter of a million of those babies are in born Florida. Newborns are screened for certain genetic, immunology, and metabolic conditions. Screenings for hearing loss and critical congenital heart defects (CCHDs) are completed prior to discharge from a hospital or birth facility. Florida screens for more than 55 conditions, including those recommended by the United States Department of Health and Human Services' Recommended Uniform Screening Panel (RUSP). If a baby's newborn screen is out of range, parents will be notified, and the Newborn Screening Follow-up Program will ensure access to diagnostic testing to confirm results.

Florida's Newborn Screening Program is an opt-out program, meaning it is part of the standard of care for all newborns born in the state. As with any medical procedure, parents have the right to refuse.

For more information, please visit: <https://floridanewbornscreening.com/>.

Why was my CMS office closed? So do we all need to just work with Sunshine Health now for services? Please let us know about the changes in the system. We are always the last to know. Why are we going to be placed with a provider? Don't we have choices of providers?

The Children's Medical Services Health Plan (CMS Health Plan) is operated by Sunshine Health on behalf of the Florida Department of Health. This means the member will coordinate their needs and services through the vendor and the network of providers. There are no changes to the services CMS Health Plan members will receive.

CMS Health Plan members have a choice of providers. Members can contact their Care Manager for assistance in finding a provider in their area. Care Managers help to arrange any service that is needed. Members can also use CMS Health Plan's Find a Provider tool at <https://www.sunshinehealth.com/members/cms/find-a-doctor.html>.

What are we doing to ease the care for the young people who need to be medicated for mental health needs. There are no psychiatrists or psychologists in our community who are available or willing to accept new patients. Care is

essential. How about trying telehealth services? Then you can work with anyone from anywhere.

The need to improve access to mental health services for youth is a top priority for the Children’s Medical Services (CMS) Title V Program. The Program has established the Florida Pediatric Mental Health Collaborate (FPMHC), which includes a network of regional behavioral health hubs throughout the state. This network works with primary care providers to build their skills and confidence to identify and treat some mental health conditions, as well as provide medication management. The overall purpose of the FPMHC is to provide more opportunities for families to obtain the needed assistance.

If your primary care provider is interested in learning more about working with a Behavioral Health Hub, they can find information about the Hubs on at <https://www.CMS/TitleVProgram/Behavioral-Health-Services/>. In addition, the FPMHC has a statewide consultation line (866-487-9507) for any primary care provider to call for support. More information about the hotline can be found at <https://floridabhcenter.org/>.

The CMS Health Plan continuously evaluates the network of mental health providers and adds providers as needed. Telehealth services are widely available and can be utilized when appropriate. Members can contact their Care Manager for assistance in finding a provider in their area and helping to arrange any services that are required.

Transition care for young people with special health care needs to be addressed prior to leaving CMS services.

Health Care Transition is a statewide priority for the Children’s Medical Services (CMS) Health Plan and Title V Program. CMS nurses, social workers, and family leaders work with stakeholders in their community to initiate a transition process in their organization or enhance existing transition processes.

The statewide managed care organization, which insures most of Florida’s children with special health care needs, is conducting a pilot project to enhance and improve the transition process. The statewide website for Health Care Transition is being updated with current and relevant resources. Additionally, CMS staff participate in Statewide and National Organizations that focus on improving Health Care Transition. For more information on the Title V Transition Program, please contact CMSTitleVInformation@flhealth.gov.

Does CMS cover children with cancer?

The Children’s Medical Services (CMS) Health Plan, a Medicaid and KidCare insurance program designed for children under the age of 21 with special health care needs, provides services for children diagnosed with cancer. CMS Health Plan members must be clinically eligible, and this eligibility must be redetermined every three years.

Screening Process

- The Florida Department of Health Clinical Eligibility Unit (CEU) conducts the initial and redetermination screening through a parent-based screening to determine CMS Health Plan clinical eligibility.
- The parent-based screening has five main questions that assess the child’s health. There may be additional clarifying questions to assess unmet needs and hospital/emergency department utilization.
- No documentation or paperwork is required.
- Alternatively, providers can use a standardized attestation, which must be completed, signed, and returned to the Department. The form and process are located at <http://www.cmsplanflorida.gov/eligibility-and-services>.

Resources

- Families can request a clinical eligibility screening or rescreening by calling our toll-free hotline at 1-855-901-5390 (TTY/TTD 711), Monday through Friday between 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Eastern Standard Time.
- Free assistance is available through language services to people whose primary language is not English, such as qualified interpreters and information written in other languages.
- More information about CMS Health Plan clinical eligibility, including the physician attestation form and flowchart of the eligibility process, can be found at <http://www.cmsplanflorida.gov/eligibility-and-services>.

What are the differences between KidCare and Children’s Medical Services? How does one qualify for each?

Children’s Medical Services (CMS) Health Plan is one of the four programs that make up Florida KidCare. The CMS Health Plan is designed specifically for children with special health care needs. The three other Florida KidCare programs are: Medicaid for Children, MediKids and Florida Healthy Kids.

To qualify for Florida KidCare, children must:

- Be under age 19.
- Be a Florida resident.
- Be uninsured – Does not apply to Medicaid.
- Be a U.S. citizen or lawfully residing immigrant.
- Not reside in a public institution.
- Live in a household that meets income eligibility requirements.

Eligibility for Florida KidCare depends on the household size, household income and the age of the child.

Enrollment is open year-round. Applications can be completed online at floridakidcare.org. Paper applications can be mailed by request through calling the 1-888-540-KIDS number. Paper applications come in English, Spanish, and Creole and can be submitted by mail or fax.

We need more support for hospitals in regard to implementing transition programs from pediatric to adult care. It is a difficult problem for those living with disabilities.

Transition from pediatric to adult care is an important step in maintaining health. The Children’s Medical Services (CMS) Title V Program reaches out to hospitals statewide to offer resources and technical assistance on transition, including presentations to different specialists within the hospital. Technical assistance is also provided to those within the hospital that have current transition programs or are thinking about creating a transition program. Hospitals are invited to participate in one of the CMS Statewide Networks for Access and Quality (SNAQs) that focus on different quality improvement projects which have included transition. For more information on the Title V Transition Program, please contact CMSTitleVInformation@flhealth.gov.

The CMS Health Plan has a dedicated Transition Specialist whose primary focus is to support Care Managers as they work with members and their families, beginning at age 12 years old, on the development and implementation of a transition plan that helps to support the members transition through adulthood. Transition planning includes not only the member and their family, but also pediatric and adult providers, including hospitals. When the member is 14 years old, member/family readiness assessments are incorporated. Transition planning is addressed in the member’s annual care plan process.

In addition, the CMS Health Plan is actively participating in a Youth Age Transition Pilot with targeted pediatric and adult providers to create a streamlined and more efficient process to appropriately transition members to adult providers. If a CMS Health Plan member has questions, they can reach out to their Care Manager.

What are the requirements for Florida KidCare? How do I apply? What if I don’t qualify?

Florida KidCare is the umbrella brand for the four government-sponsored health insurance programs Medicaid for Children, MediKids, Florida Healthy Kids and Children’s Medical Services (CMS) Health Plan.

To qualify for Florida KidCare, children must:

- Be under age 19.
- Be a Florida resident.
- Be uninsured – Does not apply to Medicaid.
- Be a U.S. citizen or lawfully residing immigrant.
- Not reside in a public institution.
- Live in a household that meets income eligibility requirements.

Eligibility for Florida KidCare depends on the household size, household income, and the age of the child.

Enrollment is open year-round. Applications can be completed online at floridakidcare.org. Paper applications can be mailed out by request through calling the 1-888-540-KIDS number. Paper applications come in English, Spanish and Creole and can be submitted by mail or fax.

How can we better inform people who are new to the process for services of the definitions of the numerous cross-agency terms used for newest families of small children in the system of care? Is there a glossary of terms/acronyms?

Thank you for your questions. Terms and acronyms can be difficult to follow from agency to agency. There is not a collection of multi-agency terms and acronyms at this time. It is best to follow up with each program office to get the applicable definition for terms specific to the program with which you are applying.

How can we get dental services for our child with a disability? We do not have dental insurance.

The Florida Department of Health website provides a link to find dental providers. You can type in your address into the mapping application using the link below to find providers who may offer reduced fees for dental services or provide additional referral services in your area. These providers include county health departments (CHD), dental hygiene and dental assistant schools, residency programs (dental schools), Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC), and other volunteer or community centers. You can also filter your search by county, type of dental provider, the population the provider serves, and which providers accept Medicaid.

<https://www.floridahealth.gov/Community-health/dental-health/resources/>

Helpful resources for families without dental insurance include:

- **Florida Medicaid** If you qualify for Medicaid, you may have the option to enroll in a Dental Managed Care Plan. For more information visit: <https://www.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/>
- **Florida Dental Association (FDA) Charitable Programs List** <https://www.floridadental.org/foundation/programs>
- **The Arc of Florida** has a dental program to assist with payment for preventive and acute dental services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. For more information visit: <https://www.arcflorida.org/dental>.
- **Dental Lifeline Donated Dental Services List Florida** www.dentallifeline.org/florida/
- **Find Help** The Find Help website offers information on services available for free or reduced-cost based on your zip code visit: <https://www.findhelp.org/>
- **The Safety Net Program** can offer a benefit for eligible children who meet financial and clinical criteria. Email CMSClinicalEligibilityUnit@flhealth.gov for more information.

Dental care services are lacking. We do not have enough dentists in our area to provide care, or that want to provide dental care. Most dentists are not taking Medicaid or are just not seeing our kids.

The Florida Department of Health Website provides a link to find dental providers. Please type in your address or the name of the dental provider in the mapping application below to find providers who may offer reduced fees for dental services or provide additional referral services in your area. These providers include county health departments (CHD), dental hygiene and dental assistant schools, residency programs (dental schools), Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC), and other volunteer or community centers. You can also filter your search by county, type of dental provider, the population the provider serves, and which providers accept Medicaid. See <https://www.floridahealth.gov/Community-health/dental-health/resources/>.

Children’s Medical Services Health Plan is continuously evaluating the dental providers network and adding providers as needed. Members should contact their Care Manager for assistance in finding a dental provider in their area and helping to arrange any required services.

What is available for children with epilepsy?

Each year, the Florida Legislature appropriates General Revenue funds to support the Florida Epilepsy Services Program (ESP) administered by the Florida Department of Health. Section 385.207, Florida Statutes, provides authorization for the development and implementation of a comprehensive epilepsy services program and allows the Department to contract out case management, diagnosis, care, and treatment services for persons with epilepsy and prevention and education for persons with epilepsy and their families, physicians, hospitals, county health departments and the public. Currently, the Department contracts with six epilepsy providers throughout the State of Florida to implement the ESP.

Although the ESP’s focus is on helping adults because uninsured children in Florida generally have other state-provided health care options, the ESP can and has treated children when other options are not available. The ESP offers prevention and education presentations to parents of children with epilepsy and to school staff, medical staff, and camp counselors etc., who work with children with epilepsy.

The ESP often refers parents who have children with epilepsy to other community resources that may assist them with associated needs. Helping the whole family understand and support their child with epilepsy is important to the well-being of that child. The ESP’s goal is to assist, educate, and empower all families when dealing with the challenges of epilepsy.

Epilepsy Services Program Providers Contact Information

Epilepsy Agency of the Big Bend

Bette Iacino, Executive Director

1302 E. Sixth Ave.
Tallahassee, FL 32303
Email: bj@eabb.org
Phone: 850-222-1777
FAX: 850-222-7440

Counties served: Bay, Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Taylor, Wakulla, and Washington

Epilepsy Association of Central Florida

Chuck Carmen, Executive Director
109 North Kirkman Road
Orlando, FL 32811
Email: chuck@epilepsyassociation.com
Phone: 407-422-1416
FAX: 407-423-0417

Counties served: Brevard, Orange, Osceola, and Seminole

Epilepsy Florida

Karen Basha Egozi, Chief Executive Officer
7300 North Kendall Drive, Suite 760
Miami, FL 33156
Email: kegozi@efof.org
Phone: 305-670-4949
FAX: 305-670-0904

Counties served: Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Broward, Citrus, Clay, Columbia, Dade, Dixie, Duval, Escambia, Flagler, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Hernando, Indian River, Lafayette, Lake, Levy, Marion, Martin, Monroe, Nassau, Okaloosa, Okeechobee, Palm Beach, Putman, Santa Rosa, St. Lucie, St. Johns, Sumter, Suwannee, Union, Volusia, and Walton

Epilepsy Services of Southwest Florida

Kevin Linberg, Executive Director
1750 17th Street, Building I-2
Sarasota, FL 34234
Email: Klinberg@esswfl.org
Phone: 941-953-5988
FAX: 941-366-5890

Counties served: Charlotte, Collier, Desoto, Glades, Hendry, Lee, Manatee, and Sarasota

Epilepsy Services of West Central Florida

Michael Brown, Executive Director
3811 West Sligh Avenue
Tampa, FL 33614
Email: mbrown@epilepsyservices.com
Website: www.epilepsyservices.com
Phone: 813-870-3414
FAX: 813-870-1321

Counties served: Hardee, Highlands, Hillsborough, and Polk

Suncoast Epilepsy Association

Patricia Anderson, Executive Director

2454 McMullen Booth Rd. Ste. #709

Clearwater, Florida, 33759

Email: panderson@suncoastepilepsy.org

Phone: 727-546-2856

FAX: 727-544-5912

Counties served: Pasco and Pinellas

Additionally, care for children with epilepsy is available through the CMS Health Plan. The child's physician will work with caregivers to educate and guide families about ways to prevent episodes. Specialized team members support the family as a whole through counseling, parent support groups, and referrals to further assist. CMS Health Plan members can contact their Care Manager for resources and guidance.

What is the process to obtain a medical marijuana card?

1. A qualified physician must first diagnose a patient with a qualifying medical condition. If the patient is younger than 18 or terminal, a second physician must concur, and this determination must be reflected in the patient's medical records.
2. The qualified physician enters the patient's information and order(s) into the Medical Marijuana Use Registry (MMUR), to start the patient application process. If the patient has a caregiver who will assist with the administration of medical marijuana, they must also be added in the MMUR, to start the patient application process.
3. The patient and their caregiver must then apply for a Medical Marijuana Use Registry Identification Card (ID card) at www.mmuregistry.flhealth.gov www.MMURegistry.FLHealth.gov. Visit www.KnowTheFactsMMJ.com and select "Registry Identification Cards" under the Patients tab for information on how to apply for an ID card. Please note that it can take up to 10 business days for an application to be fully approved.
4. Once the ID card application is approved, the patient and/or caregiver may fill the qualified physician's order(s) at any approved Medical Marijuana Treatment Center.

Are there special doctors I need to go through?

Yes. These special doctors are called qualified physicians. Qualified physicians must have a clear/active license under Chapter 458, or 459, Florida Statutes, and must complete the required course and examination provided by the Florida Medical Association and the Florida Osteopathic Medical Association. For more information about qualified physicians and how to locate one, visit www.KnowTheFactsMMJ.com and select the "Physicians" tab.

How can I get more information about medical marijuana?

The Office of Medical Marijuana Use's (OMMU) website, www.KnowTheFactsMMJ.com, is the official source for information about medical marijuana and the Medical Marijuana Program in the State of Florida. Select the "[Resources](#)" tab to view a list of useful materials about medical marijuana. The OMMU can also be reached by phone at 800-808-9580 or by email at MedicalMarijuanaUse@flhealth.gov.

Does the Department of Health have any programs to help someone quit smoking?

The Department of Health's Tobacco Free Florida Program offers a variety of evidence-based and free resources to all Florida residents. Resources include nicotine replacement therapy as well as phone, online and in-person group services. Tobacco users can access services by calling 1-877-U-CAN-NOW or visiting www.tobaccofreeflorida.com.

What is the latest information on Covid? Should I wear a mask in public? Some of my local health facilities say Covid risk is low and masks are optional, while others state the risk is high and masks are again mandatory. I'm not sure what to think when different doctors' offices are sharing opposing information.

There is no statewide mandatory mask requirement in Florida. Section 1002.20, Florida Statutes, K-12 student and parent rights addresses COVID-19 vaccine mandates and facial covering mandates for public school students. However, there are no other Florida laws in place that prohibit businesses from requiring employees or patrons to wear a face mask while on property. Many health care providers do require face masks for patients and visitors within their facilities.

Covid has altered our lives for so long, that sometimes I do not remember the normal that our family created prior to the pandemic. What does CMS/Sunshine Health do to ensure that after the pandemic our providers will return to care for our young ones? Our providers have chosen not to return to providing services, so we wait. No services being provided for over a year now, as everyone is afraid of covid and getting sick.

Children's Medical Services (CMS) Health Plan is continuously evaluating our provider network. The network team conducts research and competitor analysis to find potential providers that can be added. There are currently over 43,000 providers in the CMS Health Plan Network.

To address the impact of COVID, CMS Health Plan has utilized telehealth as a viable solution to provide services to our members. In 2021 4,000 more providers offered telehealth than in 2020. Telehealth usage increased 2000% during the pandemic, ensuring that CMS Health Plan members continued to receive services. CMS Health Plan expects to continue to expand and build upon this tool to help lessen COVID challenges regarding access to care.

We need more resources for individuals with disabilities to help with dental, vision, and hearing issues.

Local county health departments have contracts with the local school districts, as well as charter and private schools, to provide mandated health screenings. Please contact your local county health department regarding the coordination of these screenings in your district. For more information, please visit the Florida School Health Program website: <https://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/childrens-health/school-health/school-health-program.html>.

I would like to see telehealth options continue to be available in the future and expanded into more areas. It makes it much easier for me to speak to a doctor without having to leave my house and find transportation.

There are many benefits to telehealth. Please direct comments or concerns regarding availability of telemedicine services to your insurance provider. Medicaid recipients should direct comments or concerns regarding telemedicine services to the Agency for Health Care Administration at 888-419-3456 or 800-955-8771 for the Florida Relay Service (TDD number).

How do I request genetic screening if I know that I have a genetic marker within my family? I would like to be screened before and while pregnant for any conditions.

Thank you for your question. Please contact your health care provider to learn more about genetic screening options in your local area.



The Division of Emergency Management

Please share information on special needs shelters.

A special needs shelter is a place to stay when you have no other option and provides more care and supervision than a general population shelter. Special needs shelters are not medical facilities, but can provide backup electricity for light and essential medical equipment along with space for you and your caregiver.

You may be eligible to utilize a special needs shelter if:

- You are a person with special needs
- Your care exceeds basic first aid provided at a General Population Shelter
- Your impairments or disabilities are stable
- Your impairments or disabilities do not exceed the capacity, staffing and equipment of the Special Needs Shelter
- You are electricity dependent

Apply for the Special Needs Registry at <https://snr.flhealthresponse.com/> or contact your local health department or emergency management office for additional information.

Are tornados something we need to worry about in Florida?

Yes. Tornados pose a year-round threat to Florida and usually accompany other weather events, like severe thunderstorm watches/warnings and hurricanes. Make sure that you have multiple ways to receive alerts and warnings (local news, local text alerts, weather radio, etc.). Tornados can also happen at night, so make sure your volume is turned up and you are tuned into local news and warnings.

What should you do if your house begins to flood?

Before a flood occurs, make sure you are aware of any evacuation orders that have been issued – “know your zone, know your home” (<https://www.floridadisaster.org/planprepare/know-your-zone-know-your-home/>). If flooding does occur, find higher ground. Limit your contact with flood water, it may be contaminated. If you feel unsafe, call 9-1-1. Do not attempt to drive through flood waters. Before a flood occurs, make sure that your critical documents are stored in waterproof containers.

Are there any resources for making a plan in the case of a house fire when you have family members with physical or mental disabilities?

The American Red Cross has additional information on preparing for a house fire at <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/fire/home-fire-preparedness.html>. The Agency for Persons with Disabilities also has a navigation tool to connect individuals to state resources at <https://navigator.apd.myflorida.com/>. You can also connect with your local fire department or emergency management agency.

What else do we need to worry about besides weather emergencies?

Weather is just one type of hazard that has the potential to impact Florida. Some less common weather threats can include extreme heat and cold, erosion, wildfires, and seismic events. Technological hazards such as chemical spills, terrorism, and cyber-attacks also can impact daily operations. Florida requires that both the state and counties identify the hazards that may impact your area and have comprehensive plans in place to address and mitigate against these threats. For more information, contact your local emergency management agency.

What category does a hurricane need to be classified as to warrant evacuation?

Evacuations are not dependent on the category of a storm. Many factors go into the decision-making process, including time and other weather threats (flooding, storm surge, etc.). Evacuation orders are issued at a local level for each specific storm. Make sure you “know your zone, know your home” (<https://www.floridadisaster.org/planprepare/know-your-zone-know-your-home/>) and have a plan to evacuate. Contact your local emergency management agency for additional information on shelter locations and evacuation best practices.

Are there any preventative measures I can take to prepare my house in case of a hurricane to minimize damage?

There are some steps that can be taken before a storm to help protect your home from damage. Make sure that you have removed any loose yard debris and secured any outside furniture/toys—this can be picked up by the wind and cause damage to your home. If possible, make sure trees are trimmed around your home and board up windows. Always keep your gas tank at least half full during hurricane season and make sure that you have your disaster supply kit ready for 72-96 hours. More disaster supply kit resources can be found at <https://www.floridadisaster.org/globalassets/plan--prepare/2022-disaster-supply-kit-checklist---final-1.pdf>.

What are the most important items to keep on-hand in case of a hurricane if we have to shelter in place?

When preparing your disaster supply kit, make sure you have all critical medications, important documents (insurance, birth certificates, banking information, etc.), and emergency phone numbers/locations printed out (shelter locations, doctors, schools, and out-of-town contacts). Food, water, and pet care supplies should be stocked for at least **72-96 hours after landfall**. Other important supplies can include flashlights, batteries, toiletries, and a NOAA weather radio.

For a full disaster supply checklist, see <https://www.floridadisaster.org/globalassets/plan--prepare/2022-disaster-supply-kit-checklist---final-1.pdf>.

If we are hit by a big hurricane again, how long should we expect to be without power? How long should we be prepared to shelter in place for?

It is hard to predict how long power will be out after a storm. You should plan for supplies to last for **72 to 96 hours after a storm makes landfall**. If impacts are widespread, it will take time for resources to begin re-entering your area.

Florida hasn't been hit with any major hurricanes in a few years. Does this mean anything for the future? Should we expect a big one after a few calmer seasons?

Past hurricanes are not an indication of what is coming next—there is the potential for large storms every year. Category also does not necessarily indicate damages. Tropical Storms and Category 1 events are still capable of producing significant wind and flooding damage and can be accompanied by tornados. Make sure that you are following local orders and recommendations if there is a tropical system coming your way.

What if you want to evacuate but you are not in an evacuation zone? I am alone with my special needs daughter and I am afraid to be home if it is a 2 or above.

Register with the special needs registry at <https://snr.flhealthresponse.com/>. This can connect you with additional resources in your area when it comes to disaster planning. If you are uncomfortable or concerned for your safety, you can make the decision to stay with family or friends if a shelter has not been opened. Try to evacuate 10s of miles away, rather than 100s of miles away. Contact your local emergency management agency for additional guidance and “know your zone, know your home” (<https://www.floridadisaster.org/planprepare/know-your-zone-know-your-home/>).

How can you have virtual assistance if there is no power?

Landline and mobile phones may still be available if the power is out. Before a disaster, make sure you know what services you are dependent on and what agencies provide those services. Having the phone numbers for local emergency management and other local response partners (including volunteer organizations) may be helpful if there is no power. If necessary, apply for the special needs registry at <https://snr.flhealthresponse.com/> to be connected with additional resources and services before a disaster occurs.

If Florida is hit by another big hurricane and we must shelter in place, are there resources to help us obtain supplies/medications we need but can't stock up on?

Yes. In some circumstances, you may be able to get an additional 14-day supply of medication pre-landfall. Stay tuned to your local news and emergency management messaging for this information. Additionally, if an area is severely impacted and pharmacies are not operational, mobile pharmacies will enter the area to continue providing critical services.

Make sure you know who to call if you are running out of supplies. Your local health department, Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD), Department of Elder Affairs (DEA), or emergency management agency may be able to help.

Can I bring my service dog with me to a special needs shelter?

Yes. Trained service animals (dogs and miniature horses) are allowed at special needs shelters. The care for the animals is the sole responsibility of the owner. You will be asked to identify them as a service animal and explain the tasks the animal performs. This information can also be provided ahead of time when applying for the special needs registry (<https://snr.flhealthresponse.com/>).

I don't drive, neither do my parents. What happens to us if a strong hurricane hits and we cannot leave our house? Does the sheriff know to come to our house and pick us up? Or to do a check on us? Should we move?

Register for the special needs registry at <https://snr.flhealthresponse.com/>, which can connect you with transportation resources for both general population and special needs shelters. This registry will notify local resources (before an event) that you may need

additional assistance in the event of a disaster. Law enforcement will not come out to check on you unless 9-1-1 has been called for a life-safety emergency.

I want to learn more about FEMA’s Strategic Plan (2022-2026). Where can I get a copy? I do not have access to a working computer desktop.

FEMA Region 4 (in Atlanta) is the nearest office to Florida. The phone number is 770-220-5200. You can also call your local emergency management agency and they should be able to help. An online copy of FEMA’s Strategic Plan can be found at https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_2022-2026-strategic-plan.pdf.

I would like to get copies of the checklist for families to know what to have ready in case of a disaster or emergency situation. How can I get more copies?

A printer-friendly copy of a disaster supply checklist can be found at <https://www.floridadisaster.org/globalassets/plan--prepare/2022-disaster-supply-kit-checklist---final-1.pdf>. You can also reach out to your local emergency management agency for additional resources for preparing before an event.

We think we are prepared for any emergency situation. We really are not! Oh, how do you plan for an emergency such as an attack on our cyberspace, our homeland, our country? We need to be vigilant and prepare ourselves, our family, our community. Things move fast and we are alone.

Being prepared for anything is important and thankfully, we are not alone! Emergency Management takes an “All-Hazards” approach to preparing for and responding to disasters, both natural and man-made. While each event may be different, the process for managing the disaster, ordering supplies, and working with community partners doesn’t change. Training and working together through common events, like hurricanes, helps all local, state, federal, and non-profit partners build relationships that are essential for a large-scale response.

If a hurricane damages my home, how can I get help to fix the damage?

- If you have homeowners’ or renters’ insurance, contact your insurance company and file a claim to repair the damages.
- Look to see if your county has been declared for Individual Assistance by FEMA. You can find this by entering your city and zip code on <https://www.disasterassistance.gov/> or by calling 1-800-621-3362. If your county is eligible, complete an application for federal disaster assistance on the same website or over the phone at the same number.

- You can also visit a Disaster Recovery Center (DRCs) if one is open in your area. You can find a list of open DRCs on <https://www.disasterassistance.gov/> or on the Division's website, <https://www.floridadisaster.org/>
- In addition to FEMA, many non-profit and non-governmental organizations provide temporary emergency repairs to homes following a disaster. Contact your local emergency management office to learn what programs are active in your community. The Division maintains a list of known programs on <https://www.floridadisaster.org/>



The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

What is our best option for dealing with VR counselors on a local level? Is there a statewide guide we can access so when a counselor does or says something we are told at Family Café is not right we can refer them or ourselves to the correct information so services can flow the way it should? We find services vary from area to area depending on who trained them, so many have wrong info or are just trying to turn people away or seem to think their job is to get as many people off or deny services.

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Policy Manual is available to the public and located on our website at www.rehabworks.org. Individuals should work with their respective counselor to find solutions that match their needs. If individuals need assistance with understanding the application of policy, we are happy to provide guidance. Please contact our Ombudsman Office by email at Ombudsman@vr.fl.gov or call toll-free at 866-515-3692. TTY users may dial 711 to connect with the telecommunications relay service (TRS). Videophone users may call through the video relay service (VRS).

What services are available for adult persons with disabilities for housing, training, higher education, master's degree, business ownership, grants to start a business, etc.? Are there legal work-from-home employers who hire persons with physical movement disabilities? Does VR help with any of these?

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) works with each customer to help them find employment opportunities that match their unique skills, interests, abilities, and preferences. VR offers a wide variety of services in order to help individuals with disabilities prepare for, find, advance in, and maintain a job. Services offered consist of Career Counseling and Guidance, Diagnostics and Evaluation (e.g., vocational, psychological, intellectual, and work-site evaluations), Vocational Training, Discovery, Work Readiness Training, job-seeking assistance, job placement assistance (e.g., interviewing skills and resume development), and job retention services.

VR may sponsor any vocational training, bachelor's degree level, or higher education based upon an identified employment goal that is suitable to the customer's skills, abilities, and interest. If a customer is unable to reach the desired employment goal without additional training and education, the VR counselor and the customer will work together to obtain additional information from an employer or other credentialed professional in the field for which the customer is seeking an advanced degree.

How does vocational rehabilitation choose their vendors?

A vendor is a person or business that provides services to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) customers. All vendors must complete the required application process and pass background screening requirements in accordance with 413.208, Florida Statutes. VR provides a wide array of services to many Floridians with disabilities each year. All services provided to Customers have the same purpose, to get the Customer ready for and to maintain employment. These services may include, but are not limited to, medical services, job coaching, career counseling, on the job training opportunities, and/or specialized equipment. Any business or person who wishes to provide services to VR customers must first register with the Division. For more information, contact 850-245-3401 or toll-free 866-580-7438. Vendor applications, background screening requirements, and the Vendor Qualification Manual can be found at Rehabworks.org.

What kind of services, assistance, or benefits are available for young adults that want to pursue a college education? Is there any assistance for college graduated students to find jobs?

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has many opportunities for students with disabilities as they transition out of high school. Students with disabilities are able to learn about work and training opportunities to include services such as Job Exploration Counseling, Vocational Assessment, Work Readiness Training, Work-Based Learning Experience and Discovery. For college graduates with disabilities who need help finding work, VR offers counseling and guidance as well as job search and placement services. The best way for individuals to begin working with VR is by contacting the local VR office in their area. To get started on the journey to employment, individuals can find an office in their area by visiting our website at Rehabworks.org.

Is it harder to find a job now after COVID for a person with a disability? Can VR help?

While the pandemic has brought many challenges for individuals with disabilities seeking employment, it has also provided Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) with opportunities to implement strategies and services to help meet the demand of our customers who are seeking employment opportunities. Opportunities include expanding services in rural and underserved areas through virtual approaches and adaptive services that meet the needs and preferences of our customers. VR continues to work with individuals with disabilities to ensure they achieve competitive, integrated employment.

I really need some information about transitioning into becoming an adult and changes to the services that I will be using. What can VR do for a 20-year-old who is still in school?

All students, ages 14-21, with disabilities should be encouraged to apply for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services. VR Transition Youth Services help students with disabilities train for a job, continue their education, or find a job after high school. Under this program, every youth will have the opportunity to participate in sponsored career counseling, work readiness training, and fully integrated work experiences in the community. These services are delivered while youth are still in high school and establish the foundation for a seamless transition to individualized training, education, and employment. After graduating high school, VR customers still have access to the services that align with their job goals.

What can I do if my VR counselor is not keeping in contact with me or returning my phone calls? Can I be assigned a new counselor?

We are sorry to hear that you have experienced issues with contacting your counselor. VR continues to work diligently to serve our customers. You can speak with your counselor's supervisor at the local office to request a new counselor or contact our Ombudsman Office, so we may help you resolve your concerns.

You can contact our Ombudsman Office by email at Ombudsman@vr.fl DOE.org or call toll free at 866-515-3692. TTY users dial 711 to connect with the telecommunications relay service (TRS). Videophone users can call through the video relay service (VRS).

How does VR coordinate with the Social Security systems?

Vocational Rehabilitation is connected to the Social Security Administration system via the State Verification and Exchange System (SVES). We use this system to verify social security numbers, disability benefits such as Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and other federally funded income. If you receive SSI and/or SSDI, Benefits Specialists are on hand to counsel you on work incentives and other benefits of working, while educating you on the effects of earnings as you plan for employment. With regard to the Ticket to Work Program specifically, SSA issues tickets to Floridians who qualify for social security disability benefits and want to work. These Tickets may be used at any employment network (EN) participant, such as VR. If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact Willette Bowers, Ticket to Work Program Administrator, directly by email at Willette.Bowers@vr.fl DOE.org or calling (850) 245-3271.

Does VR help with writing my resume and cover letter, and with job searches?

Yes. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) offers job-related services including job placement assistance (e.g., interviewing skills development and resume writing), job-retention skills and job search assistance to help individuals find, obtain, or maintain employment.

If someone is placed in a job through VR and it is not the right fit, how do we go about finding a better opportunity?

VR encourages customers to contact their VR counselor and discuss options to move forward. VR's Ombudsman Team is also available to assist customers with addressing their concerns by calling 800-451-4327 or 866-515-3692 or emailing Ombudsman@vr.fl DOE.org. TTY users dial 711 to connect with the telecommunications relay service (TRS). Video phone users can call through the video relay service (VRS).

Will VR help pay my bills while I look for employment? And when I get a job, can they help with car insurance and gas?

Generally, no. In rare instances, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) may provide limited monetary support to an individual for necessary expenses related to maintaining or obtaining employment. All VR services are individualized based on the customer's need and available resources. To start the referral process, please visit our website at Rehabworks.org, so we can determine if you would be eligible for VR services.

Can VR help me get a service animal?

Service animal requests are considered a reasonable accommodation under Title II and III of the ADA. The appropriateness of this accommodation varies from person to person. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) can provide guidance, counseling, and assist customers with research about service animals. If the service is determined to be necessary to obtain or maintain employment, VR can aid the customer in navigating the process to obtain a service animal. All VR services are individualized based on the customer's need and available resources. To start the referral process, please visit our website at Rehabworks.org, so we can determine if you would be eligible for VR services.

Does VR help with trade school?

Yes, if necessary to achieve an agreed-upon employment outcome. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) offers a variety of services to include personal and vocational adjustment services, vocational training, on-the-job training, tuition, books and tools, and other training materials. VR services are individualized to meet the needs of the customer.

VR staff will be available to help guide you along the way. If you are interested in learning more, contact your local VR office or visit our website, Rehabworks.org.

Does VR provide services for students while they are still in high school?

Yes. All students, ages 14-21, with disabilities should be encouraged to apply for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services. VR Transition Youth Services help students with disabilities train for a job, continue their education, or find a job after high school. Under this program, every youth will have the opportunity to participate in sponsored career counseling, work readiness training, and fully integrated work experiences in the community. These services are delivered while youth are still in high school and establish the foundation for a seamless transition to individualized training, education, and employment. You can learn more about available services and programs by visiting our website, Rehabworks.org.

Can VR help me if I already have a college degree but am struggling to find employment?

Yes. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is committed to helping people with disabilities find meaningful careers. VR works with customers to determine their skills and interests then charts a course to identify and secure the right job. The services available include, but are not limited to, job search and placement. To learn more about what is available and to complete a referral to begin the process, please visit our website, Rehabworks.org.

Can VR help with transportation so I can go to work?

All Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services are individualized based on the customer's need and available resources. Please visit our website at Rehabworks.org to begin the referral process, so we can determine if you would be eligible for services.

Where can I find contact info for my local VR office?

The contact information for all of our offices statewide is listed on our website, Rehabworks.org.

What kind of assistive technology/equipment does VR provide to enable employment?

There are many different types of assistive technology/equipment that may be available. To determine which would be right for overcoming the barriers to employment a person is experiencing, VR customers participate in an Initial Technology Assessment. A qualified rehabilitation engineer then makes recommendations for the customer and counselor to review. If you are interested in participating in this process, start by completing a VR referral. You can find it on our website, Rehabworks.org.

If we live in a county that doesn't offer apprentice positions for Ticket to Work or youth programs, can we work with a different county nearby?

Yes. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) permits customers to work across county lines in order to participate in work or youth programs. Customer-informed choice guides are available for all of our services. VR works with our customers to determine their preferences and needs for program participation.

What is the difference between Vocational Rehabilitation and CareerSource? Do they work together?

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and CareerSource are both wonderful resources for job seekers in Florida. VR and CareerSource are core partners and work to assist job seekers with obtaining employment. While both agencies can serve student and adult populations, VR specializes in employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Where can I find pre-employment skills training for my child, such as soft skills and testing?

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) offer students with disabilities an early start at career exploration and preparation for adult life. Services include:

- Job-exploration counseling;
- Work readiness training;
- Work-based learning experience;
- Postsecondary educational counseling; and
- Self-advocacy training and peer mentoring.

Students with disabilities may participate in Pre-ETS without having to apply to VR or be determined eligible for services. The focus is to develop work skills, practice social skills and acquire a network of community supports while the student is still in high school. Students or their parents can find the contact information for their local office on our website Rehabworks.org or request a referral from their school.

How do you get a VR referral?

You can be referred for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services by anyone—including yourself!

Are there any work-from-home opportunities for individuals with disabilities? Does VR help with this?

One of the positive outcomes from the COVID-19 pandemic has been the increased availability of work-from-home (telework) jobs. When you work with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), your VR counselor or employment specialist will help you identify work-from-home opportunities, and also assist you with deciphering employment postings to ensure the job matches your skills, abilities, preferences, and is an opportunity that is available in the local labor market.

How can I find a job coach?

All Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services are individualized based on the customer's need and available resources. To start the referral process, please visit our website, [Rehabworks.org](https://rehabworks.org).

Does VR hire people with disabilities?

Yes. Job vacancy information for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is available through the People First Job Center at <https://jobs.myflorida.com/>. From this website, candidates may review vacancies, create a candidate profile, sign up to receive vacancy notices and apply for state job vacancies online. Job titles we most often hire are VR technician, VR counselor and VR consultant.

Can I receive services from APD and VR at the same time?

Yes. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) offers services to assist customers with finding, obtaining, and maintaining employment. VR works with the Agency for Persons with Disabilities in order to serve mutual customers.

Would love to see a job fair and career coaching offered at The Annual Family Café in the future.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) actively participates in the planning of The Annual Family Café conference and will consider how we might be able to contribute to the event's offerings in the near future.

I would like some information about the WIOA please.

The latest amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are incorporated in Public Law 113-108, enacted on July 22, 2014, as Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA is designed to give job seekers easier access to employment, education, training, and support services needed to succeed in the labor market, and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. Since the adoption of WIOA, Florida continues to seek opportunities to improve outcomes, grow partnerships, and enhance customer service. Florida's workforce investment system built on momentum gained through expanded business engagement and improved alignment with regional economies and stakeholders. Florida's strong focus on performance was sharpened by increasing the emphasis on achievement of results for job seekers, workers looking to grow in their careers, and businesses looking to hire and enhance competitiveness.

Do you have to receive SSDI or SSI to participate in the Ticket to Work program?

Ticket to Work is a Social Security Administration program available to Floridians who qualify for social security benefits. Tickets will be issued and may be taken to Employment Network participants, such as VR, who offer access to employment and rehabilitation services necessary to help a person secure and retain employment. You can find more information about this and other programs on our website, Rehabworks.org.

Can VR help me with my college expenses?

All Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services are individualized based on the customer's need and available resources. To start the referral process, please visit our website, Rehabworks.org.

What can VR do to help me work from home? Does VR help us get a job so we can work from home? I cannot drive but am very well versed with the computer and can do many support-type jobs from home. Can you help me?

One of the positive outcomes from the COVID-19 pandemic has been the increased availability of work-from-home (telework) jobs. When you work with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), your VR counselor or employment specialist will help you identify

work-from-home opportunities, and also assist you with deciphering employment postings to ensure the job matches your skills, abilities, preferences, and is an opportunity that is available in the local labor market.

What age does the school have to start talking to my son about transition services and VR services? He is a senior and no one has talked with him about the next steps. He wants to go to college, but his counselor advised him against it. This is so irritating, to think that because he is disabled that he could not go to college. She says his mental health will not be provided for in a collegiate setting. I say, if he wants to go, he should have the supports and resources to go. We have been talking about college and he wants to go to the local community college at first before a university. Yes, he has concerns, learning disability, mental health, depression, and dyslexia, but if he wants to go to school, why should the high school counselor deprive him of wanting an education. Does he need a referral to VR? Can VR provide some supports or guidance with the college process? His father and I never went to college, he would be the first in the family to go to college. I wish someone would provide him some positive thoughts. I want someone to help him with his dream. He wants to become a veterinarian. Why should he not try?

VR Services can begin at age 14 for any individual with a disability. We encourage you to reach out to your local VR office. You can find the listing of VR offices on our website here: <https://www.rehabworks.org/contact/area-offices.html>.

I would like to work! I want a job! I need some assistive technology to help me work. I cannot get to any jobs without transportation. In an office setting I would need specialized chair settings for my wheelchair. A specialized table or office space for the higher table setting. Most companies see me coming and remove the help wanted signs. I am very smart, just need accommodations to move around. Can VR help me get a job?

There are many different types of assistive technology/equipment that may be available to you. To determine which would be right for overcoming the barriers to employment you may be experiencing, VR customers participate in an Initial Technology Assessment. A qualified rehabilitation engineer then makes recommendations for the customer and counselor to review. If you are interested in participating in this process, start by completing a VR referral, so that we may determine if you are eligible for services. For more information, visit our website at [Rehabworks.org](https://www.rehabworks.org).

What type of transition student programs or supports does VR have for youth? Or emerging adults? How about if we are out of high school?

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) offer students with disabilities an early start at career exploration and preparation for adult life. Services include:

- Job-exploration counseling,
- Work readiness training,
- Work-based learning experience,
- Postsecondary educational counseling, and
- Self-advocacy training and peer mentoring.

Students with disabilities may participate in Pre-ETS without having to apply to VR or be determined eligible for services. The focus is to develop work skills, practice social skills and acquire a network of community supports while the student is still in high school. Students or their parents can find the contact information for their local office on our website Rehabworks.org or request a referral from their school.





The 24th Annual Family Café Report Card 2022

Attendees of The 24th Annual Family Café were given the opportunity to grade their experience on the following scale:

A = Excellent **B** = Very Good **C** = OK **D** = Not So Good **E** = Poor

The table below displays the average grades for 2017-2019, and 2021-2022. The subsequent table displays the average grades for 2020, which included different prompts due to the virtual nature of the event.

	2022	2021	2019	2018	2017
I would give the Annual Family Café location a . . .	A	A	A	A	A
I would rate the hotel's accessibility a . . .	A	A	A	A	A-
I would give the organization of The Annual Family Café a . . .	A	A	A	A	A
I would rate the choices for breakout sessions and their ability to meet the needs of different interests a . . .	A-	A-	A	A-	A
Overall, I would give The Annual Family Café a . . .	A-	A	A	A	A

The 22nd Annual Family Café Virtual Event	2020
I would give the overall quality of the virtual event a . . .	B
I would rate the accessibility of the virtual event a . . .	A
I would give the organization of The Annual Family Café a . . .	A
I would rate the choices for breakout sessions and their ability to meet the needs of different interests a . . .	B
Overall, I would give The 22 nd Annual Family Café a . . .	A

Attendees also had the opportunity to respond to a series of subjective questions about the event:

1. As a result of attending The 24th Annual Family Café, I am able/will be able to . . .

2. In general, the most helpful to me was . . .
3. I thought we could have had more of . . .
4. I thought we could have had less of . . .
5. I am interested in finding out more about . . .
6. For future Annual Family Café events, I would like to suggest. . .

Here is a sample of their responses:

As a result of attending the 24th Annual Family Café, I am able/will be able to . . .

- I am able to update my list of contacts. I was able to learn of new resources available to assist with my son
- Connect with and make friends
- Learn and grow
- Share resources with others
- Find what concerns me most
- This was my first time going and I will be encouraging others to go in the future
- Learn more about the CAN network
- Sharing our experience with others
- I am a better advocate
- Reach more people eligible for our organization's free services
- Network with other agencies which serve persons with disabilities
- More easily locate and navigate programs and resources available to my child
- It was very helpful for my family
- I am able to help my children to the fullest
- Help friends and families in my community with resources
- Help my children with a lot of new services
- Find things that help me with my future
- Inspired for more advocacy and volunteering
- Stay inspired and strong to continue to teach my daughter joy and life skills and working to be independent
- Work with you to help
- To help one other staff
- To help other people out
- Work with you all to help
- Connect with other family members who are resourceful with information for me and my family member
- Contact local police authorities about programs used by other counties
- Learn about many resources available that I had no clue existed
- Help my older daughter (10 years old) better understand having a sibling with special needs and how to cope with that.
- Spread information to others who may need information about different abilities.
- I will be able to work on the mental health of my girls with autism with more direction.
- Help my daughter reach her full potential

In general, the most helpful to me was . . .

- Workshops
- The outstanding staff members
- The staff were very friendly
- Meeting the Governor
- All the presentations from parents with children with disabilities—they all shared such great tips and encouragement
- Siblings—Mom There is More Than One of Us—answered a lot of questions for me and gave me the opportunity to share some events with my brother
- The vendors
- The vendors and their information
- Everything
- All of the vendors and their information
- Receiving financial aid for the hotel. Without that, I would not have been able to attend
- Engaging with people experiencing the same thing or similar life experience
- The Women’s Summit
- The F.R.O.M pre-con meeting
- My friend
- The exhibitors were most helpful. I was able to ask direct questions and receive personalized responses based on my son’s needs
- All of the volunteers
- Sessions about Autism
- The session from the APD director
- Sign language interpreters and closed captioning
- Door prizes!
- The sensory room. My kids loved it and it was a great way to entertain them between sessions
- The As We See It keynote
- SportsAbility in the Exhibit Hall
- Police interaction
- All the information available
- Sibling sessions, exhibition hall
- The breakout session with the police talking about Autism procedures
- The McKay updates
- Information and inspiration
- A sense of belonging for my family
- Breakout sessions

I thought we could have had more of . . .

- Breakout sessions—many sessions overlapped. Maybe participants can sign up for sessions
- The Family Café could have been a little Family Café and start on a Wednesday and Sunday

- Definitely more times for sessions. It wasn't easy to choose sessions because too many were happening at the same time I was interested in.
- More information for the Deaf community
- Information for people with Type 2 Diabetes
- On caregiving for aging parents. As a person with a disability I have done this.
- A list of other exhibitors by table number so we could find the ones appropriate for our services
- Time. I wish the sessions were spread out over more time so I could have attended more.
- Children's activities
- Events for the children
- Vendors closer to my age
- Interactive presentations on cooking and drama/acting for teens and adults
- Outcome service
- Events in South Florida—Miami
- Activities
- N/A
- More sessions on Social Security—SSI and SSDI. Too many conflicts during that time for me.
- More information on Autism
- More activities for kids
- Local reps for respite breakout
- Child care options/food, snacks
- Elementary aged sessions for children in public schools
- Mental Health with Autism
- I wish the breakout sessions started earlier in the day on Friday. There are always so many that you want to go to but unfortunately you can't be in more than one place at a time
- Food choices
- Not sure
- Foster care resources, Special Olympics sessions

I thought we could have had less of . . .

- Breakout sessions
- Fake service animals. People put vests on their emotional support animals to bring them into public places.
- Kids information. We need more info for adults too.
- Focus on individuals of all ages. The program is geared toward families
- Noisy music right outside the Exhibit Hall. It was hard enough to talk and hear people without that racket
- Vendors packing up and leaving the Exhibit Hall early. Sunday was the only chance I had to go to the Exhibit Hall and most were gone.
- The noise was very hard for my autistic sons.
- Latex balloons
- Things for sale, or put all in one area

- High school to adult transition sessions
- Can't think of anything
- Confusion
- Not sure

I am interested in finding out more about . . .

- Family Care Council
- The choir performance group
- Helping others find their way—becoming involved
- Voting information
- Information for the Deaf community
- Interactive sessions and life play
- Theater for individuals with disabilities
- Volunteering next year
- Vendors that are closer to me in Gainesville, Lake City, Chiefland
- CDC+. Mindy Whitehead's presentations were very good! Much improved over the previous years.
- Helping young adults develop more life skills and relationship skills
- Family Café
- The Everts
- N/A
- Information
- Great sessions
- Resources being offered in Florida for a NY family
- Information and resources for individuals/children who use wheel chairs
- Information for caregivers
- Guardianship and guardian advocacy
- Military families
- Becoming and actor
- Volunteering for Family Café
- Access points for elementary aged daughter
- Marijuana research, scholarship opportunities
- Alternative educational and post educational options for kiddos
- Mental health issues
- Special Olympics
- Free programs my family can benefit from
- Homeschool with special needs child with ASD
- Autistic and disabled people
- What each organization does
- Self advocacy resources
- Someone from the armed forces to discuss the benefits for the disabled that they can receive
- How to get involved (I'm a soon to be author and am a public speaker)
- Free services for families

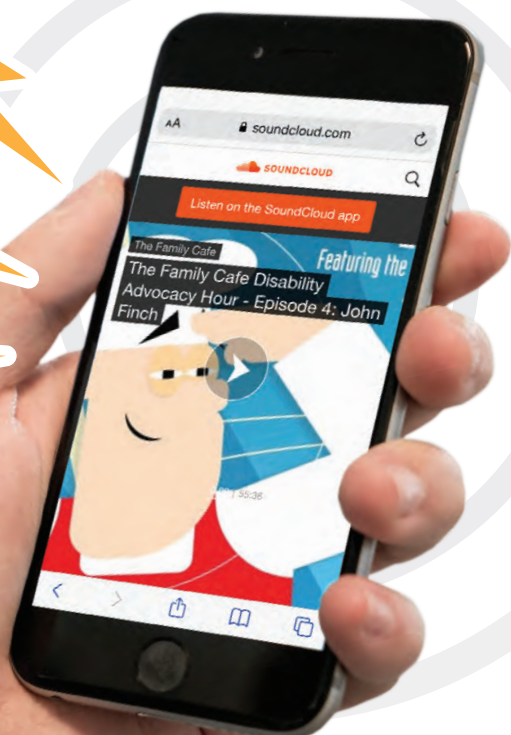
For future Annual Family Café events, I would like to suggest . . .

- Avoid the Memorial Day weekend
- Please consider making the conference latex free. Many individuals with disabilities have latex allergies and the balloons and whoopie cushions in wrappers with latex dust are very dangerous.
- Crack down on people bringing emotional support animals
- Ask interpreters to sit at the entrance of the room they are in so people can actually find them. When they are all in the back of the room, it's hard for anyone to find them.
- Information for Type 2 Diabetes and for adults in general
- Something on self advocates' journeys in caring for their aging loved ones and how that has led to a level of independence
- More interactive activities for kids. The sensory room was great!
- Please: some childcare so parents can concentrate on finding and signing up for resources and services
- Audio recordings of sessions so I could listen to the ones I can't attend.
- Would love to see the Exhibit Hall open later in the evening
- To have childcare so parents can attend classes
- A childcare room
- More life skills classes for teens/young adults with disabilities
- The staff to come to Miami in the near future
- To come to Miami
- N/A
- To have people from South Florida to grow into The Family Café
- Learned so much that my head hurts
- This was great!
- Alphabetizing vendors; some were hard to find
- Discounts at The Market for Family Café attendees. It's very convenient with grab and go items from The Market but it is very expensive.
- I wish we could use some of these classes to get CEUs for my OT license
- That all breakout sessions be recorded and have a link so that you can view it later because there were some that I could not attend because I was going to a different one at that time.
- Signs of classes outside the rooms on digital signs for a visual
- More information on medical resources/financial assistance available for getting adaptive tricycles etc.
- Time to talk and ask questions to the public agency heads

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