

Summary of OPWDD's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan

OVERVIEW

On November 1st, the New York State (NYS) Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) released the final 2023-2027 Strategic Plan following a public comment period. Based on stakeholder feedback and a review of state data and policy, the Plan outlines the following three strategic goals for 2023-2027:

- Strengthen the workforce, technology, and collaboration;
- Transform the system through innovation and change; and
- Enhance person-centered supports and services.

Top priorities identified during the stakeholder feedback process included:

- Addressing the workforce crisis;
- Improving self-direction;
- Better supporting people with complex needs;
- Strengthening housing services;
- Recognizing the need for long-term planning as families and caregivers age;
- Improving access to services for underserved communities; and
- Recognizing the need to use data to measure the agency's success on meeting strategy goals and objectives, and being more transparent with data and information.

The Strategic Plan is available [here](#). Key aspects of the plan are summarized below.

GOAL 1: STRENGTHEN THE WORKFORCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND COLLABORATION

Direct Support Workforce

Given the widespread staff shortages among state and voluntary providers, OPWDD is committed to improving the recruitment, retention, and quality of the direct support workforce. In addition to recently implemented short-term investments from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and NYS Enacted Budget, such as increased wages and workforce bonuses, OPWDD has outlined multiple initiatives that aim to expand recruitment and retention of Direct Services Professionals (DSPs) in the long-term. These initiatives include:

- Statewide recruitment and marketing campaign;
- Advertising for state positions through local advertising, social media, and recruitment events;
- National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) credentialing program access;
- High school DSP training and certification;
- Partnership with the State University of New York (SUNY) for training and recruitment; and
- Relationship with the Department of Labor (DOL) and regional One Stop Career Centers to increase the DSP candidate pool and support recruitment.

Data Access and Technology

Using both ARPA funds and \$20 million in investments from the State, OPWDD intends to complete the following as part of a digital transformation:

- Transitioning from manual and paper-based approaches to more automated systems;
- Improving eligibility and program management IT applications;
- Advancing health information technology infrastructure;
- Refining systems used for service authorization;
- Developing modernized solutions for the self-direction model;
- Implementing the Coordinated Assessment System (CAS) and Child Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tools; and
- Establishing self-service portals for individuals served, their families, and their providers.

OPWDD has also begun implementing a multi-year project that would streamline business processes and workflows, allowing more information to be located in one place with data being updated continuously. Improved platforms as part of this project would allow people to access real-time information, for example viewing their status in the enrollment process, what services they currently have access to, and how much funding they have for self-direction services left in their budgets.

Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

OPWDD intends to promote additional opportunities during this five-year period that increase transparency and access to information. The agency is currently exploring a variety of different options to organize and establish a more effective, efficient, and inclusive agencywide stakeholder engagement plan. In addition to engaging with stakeholders, the agency is also committed to cross-system collaborations, including a commitment to working with the Office of Mental Health (OMH) and Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) to reinvigorate the Inter-Office Coordinating Council. This council aims to ensure that information about planning and systems change efforts are shared across the three agencies to help reduce gaps in supports for those who may access services from multiple sectors.

GOAL 2: TRANSFORM THE SYSTEM THROUGH INNOVATION AND CHANGE

Supports and Services

OPWDD intends to use a small portion of funding from ARPA to engage a consultant to make recommendations for addressing barriers to self-direction services and other program concerns raised by stakeholders. Additional ongoing or planned activities to improve the **self-direction model** include:

- Implementing enhanced Support Broker oversight to maintain the flexibility of an independent broker option;
- Reducing Support Broker face-to-face requirements;
- Shifting Support Broker trainings to a web-based format;
- Establishing a Support Broker mentorship program;
- Allowing telehealth type services, including for required Support Broker meetings;
- Increasing housing payment standards;

- Adjusting Fiscal Intermediary (FI) administrative fees;
- Updating policies and Administrative Memoranda (ADM)s); and
- Furthering internal analysis on utilization.

OPWDD will examine potential Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waiver reforms that would help improve the self-direction model, including evaluating the Personal Resource Account (PRA) levels, simplifying the current billing structure for Individual Directed Goods and Services (IDGS), and potentially creating a self-hired, staff-specific service for community-based supports.

For **employment and day programs**, OPWDD intends to:

- Dedicate \$10 million annually by 2025 to fund investments that improve access, including operational funding and technical assistance for providers;
- Examine the potential to incorporate outcomes-based payment models in employment services and to incentivize day program providers to provide a full continuum of services; and
- Explore rate changes to differentiate between site-based and remote service provision.

For **housing supports and residential services**, OPWDD is:

- Exploring waiver options that expand choice in housing supports and reform the current residential reimbursement methodology to pay residential habilitation providers based on acuity;
- Seeking reforms that promote alternatives to 24/7 Supervised Individual Residential Alternatives (IRAs);
- Evaluating the criteria used to ensure fair access to residential services, including for individuals who have aged out;
- Developing transitional and longer-term state-operated group homes and crisis support units;
- Expanding Intensive Treatment Opportunities (ITOs);
- Creating and operating new “step-down” model programs; and
- Developing targeted residential programs rather than individual beds in pre-existing adult programs for young adults transitioning from children’s residential programs.

OPWDD is using a portion of ARPA funding to promote the use of **supported decision-making** for people with developmental disabilities. This project will develop and test a facilitation model that will further support people in making their own decisions, educate stakeholders on the model, and strengthen supported decision-making principles.

Regulatory and Policy Changes

OPWDD intends to convene a workgroup composed of people with developmental disabilities, parents, providers, and advocates that will focus on identifying potential flexibilities in staff training, creating a more efficient process for background checks, and how to use technology and innovative services to support people in less restrictive settings. OPWDD expects preliminary recommendations to be available for consideration as part of next year’s annual update to the Strategic Plan. Regarding the New York Health Equity Reform 1115 waiver, OPWDD intends to continue to advocate for individuals with disabilities and their ability to benefit from the reforms included in the waiver, including from the improvements in transitional housing services and housing access.

The plan also addresses the proposed transition to managed care, indicating that OPWDD has reviewed stakeholder feedback and is investing a portion of ARPA funding to studying and exploring the potential

effectiveness and sustainability of current delivery models and managed care options “to determine what model would be most appropriate for our state and the people we support.” The evaluation will also make design recommendations for specialized care options based on managed care experiences in New York and other states.

GOAL 3: ENHANCE PERSON-CENTERED SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

Children, Youth, and Young Adults

With the increasing number of young people receiving services within OPWDD’s HCBS waiver and state-funded programs, OPWDD will examine the types of services children and youth are accessing to determine whether such services are child-centered, home and community-based, developmentally and age appropriate, and designed and delivered within the context of the family. This review may lead to opportunities for innovation and improvements in service design, including through future waiver reform. OPWDD also intends to review care management services for children and expand children’s crisis services.

Complex Needs

OPWDD will make permanent through an emergency waiver amendment the rate increase for Intensive Behavioral (IB) services that was included in the ARPA plan. OPWDD also intends to develop Technical Support Teams that will support provider agencies that serve people with complex needs. The teams will link providers within and across systems, collaborate with and educate local crisis resources, and provide training and consultations on best practices related to serving those with specialized needs who may have frequently accessed institutions or more restrictive settings.