



Alliance for the Betterment of
Citizens with Disabilities

Empowering People: Providers Shaping Policies

Department of Human Services FY 2025 Budget Listening Session

November 29, 2023

Good day, Commissioner Adelman, and members of the Department of Human Services. On behalf of ABCD, thank you for this opportunity to share our thoughts as you begin deliberations on the proposed FY '25 Budget. It means a lot to us to be a part of your process.

Continue to Invest in People and Agencies

Over the last number of years, The Murphy Administration broke with tradition by repairing day service rates to include costs that were not in the original formula, upgrading wages paid to DSPs and supervisors, increasing housing rental rates, and for the first time in a decade and a half providing an across the board increase¹ - proving that “things do not have to be the way they are.”²

6.5% Across the Board Increase for DDD Community Providers. Let Executives Lead

We request consideration of a 6.5% across the board increase for DDD Community Providers. In comparison to the generous targeted wage pass through of years past, this policy is the next step to better enable agency executives to provide strategic and operational leadership, manage services and support and guide employees. We believe that this policy will better allow them to:

- Retain all staff. Targeting only DSPs and their supervisors excludes other essential direct service workers like clinical staff, drivers, and the supervisors' supervisors without whom our system would collapse. To prevent possible discord, many agencies had to tap existing funds for staff who were not earmarked. These unfunded wage increases were particularly difficult for smaller agencies which have less of a cushion in which to offset additional costs.
- Reward high performers. Spending all additional funds on a wage pass through for targeted employee groups reinforced minimal effort, rather than talent, motivation, and efficiency.
- Ensure adequate resources for safe and appropriate physical environments. Aging infrastructure abounds in both residential and day; roofs need to be repaired, sewer lines and vehicles replaced.

When the government irregularly increases investments and is too prescriptive, a leader's ability to do their job is constrained. Let them lead.

¹ Euphemistically referred to as the Cost of Providing Care, DDD providers had not obtained a COLA since FY'08 at which time they received an increase of 1.5% and in FY'07, 1%. From FY '04 -FY'08, DDD providers received a cumulative increase of 7.5%; within that time frame the CPI rose more than three times that amount.)

² Grant Neufeld medium.com

Transportation to and From Day Hab

ABCD's FY23 membership transportation survey found:³

- An average of 24% of day hab revenue was spent on transportation compared to 24, 22 and 17% for FedEx, UPS, and Amazon whose primary function is transport and delivery.
- The idea that catchment would account for time spent in vehicles has not been borne out. The survey found that ABCD members in cities/densely populated areas had catchments that were not only equal to but 2 and 3 times larger than agencies located in suburban and rural areas.
- Despite the original rate setter's effort to distill the formula, by failing to account for all variables, they distorted it. When transport included at least 58% of people in wheelchairs living in densely populated areas, over 52% of day hab revenue was spent on transportation.

DHS/DDD inherited rates that were backed into and had no new money. Today we need reform. An agency providing transportation should be paid for either the total number of miles or amount of time with a wheelchair add on; calculated and budgeted in advance at the individual's planning meeting.

Ensure the Provision of Habilitative Therapies in Day Programs through a 50% Rate Increase

An ABCD petition signed by 1048 individuals, parents and guardians supports an increase in the day service rates for physical, occupational and speech language and hearing therapies, to help individuals attain, keep, and improve skills and functioning for daily living and full community participation. Based on a survey of our day hubs, though 75% report habilitative therapies are desired and needed, only 12.5% can offer them. ⁴ A majority of ABCD's day programs are unable to sustain these services because rates have become meaningless in today's economy. Access requires that reimbursement rates be based on existing standards. Otherwise, the rates are just a bunch of numbers, with a code on a rate list, inadvertently perpetuating IDD's marginalization.

Ensure Stable Homes for the People we Serve. Increase the Rental Rate to 75% of the Current FMR

Housing is the foundation for a life in the community. Please help providers continue to find and maintain licensed housing sites by considering an increase to the housing rental rate to 75% of the FMR for 2024. Modest annual increases will help keep pace with the market.

³ ABCD Position Paper, *Transportation in Day Habilitation*. Updated September 2023. www.abcdnj.org

⁴ ABCD White Paper. *Clinical Services and Day Habilitation*. August 2023. www.abcdnj.org

Ensure a Full Continuum of Mental Health Services for our Heterogeneous Population.
Enable Licensed Qualified Professionals to Provide Behavioral Support Plan and Supervision

DHS is to be commended for ramping up the mental health service system for individuals with IDD. What you have done and are in the process of doing is tremendous. Not only is the NJCAT undergoing review which we hope will better identify individuals at risk, but START mobile response is gearing up to provide immediate in-home support to stabilize individuals in crisis. But people remain at risk. This is a flow issue. To stop the bleeding, we must continue to focus on prevention. Forgive me for using this hearing to advocate for a non-budget item. Mental illness is far too heterogenous for any single discipline to describe it and for any single tool to prevent and manage it. To this end, regarding behavior support, please improve our ability to hire qualified professionals that are right for our diverse population.

Finally, thank you for your partnership to broaden the social bargain, by helping to bring this previously excluded class to full citizenship.