



Alliance for the Betterment of
Citizens with Disabilities

Empowering People: Providers Shaping Policies

Expand Medicaid Coverage to Include Virtual Services on a Limited Basis in Day Habilitation

Day Habilitation services play a critical role in supporting adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) by providing structured activities that promote independence, socialization, and community engagement. In New Jersey, these services are typically delivered in person through center-based or community-based programs. These programs focus on building life skills, social skills, cognitive skills, and personal independence consistent with an individual's service plan.

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, the state temporarily allowed providers to offer Day Habilitation services remotely or virtually. Many participants benefited from online social groups, virtual learning sessions, and remote skill-building activities. However, many of these flexibilities were discontinued for Day Habilitation providers after the emergency period ended in November 2023. Several Goods & Services providers continue to offer virtual music, gaming, art, and fitness classes.

While in-person programming should remain the primary service model, the pandemic demonstrated that virtual habilitation services can be effective and beneficial under certain circumstances. This paper recommends that New Jersey authorizes the use of virtual Day Habilitation services during inclement or extreme weather or emergency closures to ensure continuity of services for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Emergency Closures

New Jersey frequently experiences snowstorms, hurricanes, and flooding. In 2025 and 2026, providers reported multiple closures due to these types of weather events.

Extreme Weather

The intensifying climate crisis meant that in 2025 NJ experienced roughly 25 to 30 days exceeding 90°F overall. In response to the higher risk for heat related distress, individuals and families are consulting their physicians/pharmacies about heat risks that could be a side-effect of certain prescribed medications and are recommending self-protective actions which include staying at home to reduce their risk from heat or cold.

While closures and self-protective actions protect individuals and staff, they create several challenges:

- Loss of structured programming for individuals who rely on routine
- Increased stress for families and caregivers
- Disruption of skill development
- Loss of billable service hours for providers
- Reduced engagement and socialization opportunities for participants

Benefits of Allowing Virtual Day Habilitation During Inclement Weather

Continuity of Services

Allowing virtual programming during weather-related closures and self-protective actions would ensure that participants maintain access to services outlined in their person-centered service plans. Maintaining this continuity helps individuals continue building skills and working toward their goals.

Virtual programming would allow participants to continue engaging in activities such as social skill development, educational activities, life skills instruction (i.e. cooking classes), group discussions and peer interaction, and wellness and exercise activities.

Increased Safety During Hazardous Conditions

Inclement weather can make transportation dangerous for both staff and program participants. Many individuals served by Day Habilitation programs rely on specialized transportation or paratransit services, which may be delayed or cancelled during storms.

People with IDD are at a higher risk from extreme weather events often because their medications can disrupt the body's natural ability to regulate temperature. When combined with challenges in recognizing and responding to heat stress, this can create potentially life-threatening situations.^{1 2 3}

Virtual services eliminate the need for travel during hazardous conditions, reducing the risk of accidents and health risks while still providing meaningful programming.

Cost-Effective Service Continuation

Allowing virtual services during closures and self-protective actions can also help stabilize service providers financially. Providers depend on consistent service delivery to maintain staffing and operational sustainability.

¹ SAMSHA. Tips for People who take Medication. Coping with Hote Weather. info@samhsa.hhs.gov

² The Impacts of Extreme Weather Events on People with Disabilities, NCD

Virtual programming during closures would allow providers to continue delivering billable services, maintain staff engagement and productivity, and reduce revenue loss caused by weather-related cancellations. Billable hours would be funded through Day Habilitation units already within participant's annual budgets and not require additional resources.

Policy Recommendations

The New Jersey Department of Human Services and the Division of Developmental Disabilities should implement a policy allowing virtual Day Habilitation services when in-person programming is cancelled due to inclement weather or emergency closures.

Recommended policy guidelines include:

1. Virtual services may only be used when programs close due to weather or emergency conditions.
2. Virtual programming must follow the participant's individualized service plan and habilitation goals.
3. Providers must document attendance, participation, and activities delivered.
4. Virtual services should supplement, not replace, in-person Day Habilitation programming and be optional, based on the individual's choice.

The New Jersey Department of Human Services and the Division of Developmental Disabilities should also implement a policy allowing virtual Day Habilitation services for pre-approved individuals during environmental disruptions/extreme weather events.

Recommended policy guidelines include:

1. Virtual services may only be used during extreme heat or cold.
2. The use of virtual services during extreme weather events is integrated into their individualized service plan.
3. Providers must document attendance, participation, and activities delivered.
4. Virtual services should supplement, not replace, in-person Day Habilitation programming and be optional, based on the individual's choice.

These guidelines would create flexibility while maintaining the integrity of in-person habilitation services.

June 24, 2026