

The 22nd Annual

# FamilyCAFE

Questions & Answers Book



*2020 Visions for our Future*

# Join the momentum!

Take part in The Family Café's newest program,  
the Family-Run Organization Movement (FROM)!

**The Mission of FROM is to engage, support, empower and advocate for family, youth and peer-run organizations.**

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.

Local family-run organizations are a critical part of the service delivery system, bringing families and youth together, connecting them with information, resources, and each other. FROM is here to help them thrive!

To join and get more information please see the FROM link at [www.familycafe.net](http://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 2020!

Navigating the service delivery system and finding resources has always been a challenge for persons with disabilities and their families. For over twenty years, The Family Café has been here to help. Since 1998, our mission has been to provide persons with disabilities and their families 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. Of course, in the remarkable year that has been 2020, that signature event looked a little different. When it became clear that hosting The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Family Café in person would be impossible, The Family Café transitioned to a virtual platform to bring Floridians with disabilities and their families the information and resources they have come to expect.

The idea behind The Virtual 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Family Café was to recreate as much of the experience of an in-person event as possible. This year's Annual Family Café still included a series of engaging keynotes, featuring Zack Gottsagen, star of the 2019 film *The Peanut Butter Falcon*, former Chief Counsel of the Senate Subcommittee on Disability Policy and key player in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Bobby Silverstein, and comedian, writer, and disability advocate, Maysoon Zayid. Virtual attendees also heard remarks from Senate President Bill Galvano and Governor Ron DeSantis at The Annual Governor's Summit on Disabilities.

The Family Café also made an effort to bring essential content to attendees virtually. Over two weeks in June, we shared twenty-two live stream sessions through Facebook Live. We also collected videos, presentation slides, and other materials from all of the originally scheduled presenters, and made them available through an Interactive Program on The Family Café's new website. All of that content is online at [familycafe.net/videos/](https://familycafe.net/videos/).

Of course, The Family Café recognizes that no matter how informative The Annual Family Café is, it can't answer every family's questions. 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 for The 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Family Café, June 11-13, 2021, at the Hyatt Regency Orlando. Online registration opens on Monday, February 15<sup>th</sup>. Until then, feed your need for information with *The Family Café Questions & Answers Book*! And remember, we are always available online at [FamilyCafe.net](https://FamilyCafe.net), on Facebook at [Facebook.com/TheFamilyCafeFL](https://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 Cafe

## **Can someone tell me if there are going to be materials available for the different sessions since they are not happening this year?**

In a typical year, The Annual Family Café includes well over 200 individual breakout sessions across seven time slots. This year, with the event moving to a virtual platform due the coronavirus pandemic, only a limited number of sessions could be included in the live stream. Nonetheless, we have done our best to make the content from all sessions, including both those included in the live streamed event and those on the original agenda that could not be presented live, available to you. Videos from the live stream sessions, including The Governor’s Summit on Disabilities and all three keynotes, can be found in the Videos section of our website at <https://familycafe.net/videos/>. Additionally, we have created an interactive version of the event program with links to materials provided by presenters for those sessions that weren’t part of the live agenda. To find it, go to the Videos page at <https://familycafe.net/videos/> and click “View the Interactive Program.” That will take you to an interactive pdf with links to videos, presentation slides, and documents related to the full slate of presentations. As always, we encourage you to reach out to presenters directly if there’s a session or topic you’d like to know more about.

## **What are some activities The Youth Council get to do?**

The FYC is all about getting youth and emerging leaders involved in self-advocacy, peer mentoring and other activities that will improve the quality life for youth and emerging leaders with disabilities in Florida. The program empowers youth and emerging leaders to decide what issues are important to their generation, to express those issues in their state and local communities, and to develop strategies to solve them.

Members of The Florida Youth Council engage in a number of activities throughout the year. FYC members meet monthly and come together quarterly for face-to-face interaction and leadership training. They publish a monthly newsletter called *The Noodle*, with FYC members sharing their reflections on their experiences. The group also regularly posts video blogs to their YouTube channel. The FYC hosts a youth-driven leadership event, the Annual Youth Summit, that brings together more than 200 young people each August. FYC members also coordinate and present in a Youth Track at The Annual Family Café. Finally, the group works to highlight the contributions and abilities of people with disabilities during Disability History and Awareness Weeks each October. This has been an FYC priority since

the group helped to pass legislation encouraging Florida school districts to address disability history and awareness in 2007.

The Florida Youth Council is always seeking young leaders with disabilities from across the state to join its ranks. You can find the application online at <https://floridayouthcouncil.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/FYC-Application-2018.pdf>.

### **Where can I find the FYC IEP Guide?**

The Florida Youth Council's IEP guide, which was written entirely by and for youth with disabilities, is available on the FYC website at <https://floridayouthcouncil.org/>. Here's a direct link to the guide: [https://www.familycafe.net/images/stories/pdffiles/iep\\_guidebook.pdf](https://www.familycafe.net/images/stories/pdffiles/iep_guidebook.pdf).

### **How do I become a presenter?**

You can find information about presenting at The 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Family Café and a link to the Presentation Proposal form at <https://familycafe.net/present-at-the-23rd-annual-family-cafe/>. The deadline to submit a proposal for 2021 is Friday, January 8<sup>th</sup>.

### **How do I become an exhibitor?**

Becoming an Exhibitor is easy! Just visit <https://familycafe.net/exhibit-hall/> to find the Exhibitor Agreement, complete it, and send it in with payment. The cost includes two professional registrations, a \$200 value, and if you make payment before February 14, 2021, you'll also receive a \$50 discount.

The Family Café also promotes entrepreneurship among self-advocates through our Micro-Enterprise program. Qualifying Micro-Enterprises that are owned and operated by a person with a disability, employ fewer than five people, and have annual revenue of \$35,000 or less can apply for a free Exhibit Hall booth. To learn more about this program and find the Micro-Enterprise Application, visit <https://familycafe.net/micro-enterprise/>.

### **What sponsorship opportunities are available at the annual conference?**

If you are a business or organization that wants to build trust and increase name recognition among Floridians with disabilities, sponsoring The Annual Family Café is an ideal way to make that happen!

The Family Café is always seeking sponsors for its signature event. There are a range of benefits available at various levels of support, including signage in the main ballroom at the event, complimentary Exhibit Hall space, and access to thousands of households through The Family Café's list serve and social media presence.

To discuss specific sponsorship options for your business or organization, contact our office at [info@familycafe.net](mailto:info@familycafe.net) or 850/224-4670.

### **How can I find out what assistive devices are available?**

The Family Café offers access to assistive technology and devices to people with disabilities in Gulf, Holmes, Washington, Bay, Jackson, Calhoun, Gadsden, Liberty, Franklin, Leon, Wakulla, Jefferson, Madison, and Taylor counties through the FFAST Northwest Regional Demonstration Center, which is funded through the Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology. To learn more about our FFAST RDC, visit <https://familycafe.net/faast-nw-rdc/>, or contact RDC Coordinator Jesse Hansen at [jhansen@familycafe.net](mailto:jhansen@familycafe.net).

All 67 counties are served by a FFAST Regional Demonstration Center. If you don't reside in one of the counties we serve, find your local RDC at <https://faast.org/locate-center/>.

### **I think there should be more accessible equipment in store chains and public buses.**

We definitely agree with that! The Family Café exists to promote the ideals of universal accessibility and inclusive communities. If you would like to get more involved in advocating for the kinds of changes you'd like to see, we encourage you to join our email list or follow us on social media to stay connected with the advocacy activities we make available throughout the year. You may be particularly interested in our "Let's Talk!" Legislative Conference Call Series, which offers weekly recaps of issues impacting Floridians with disabilities every Friday afternoon during the state's regular legislative session. You can also find advocacy resources in the Family-Run Organization Movement (FROM) section of our website at <https://familycafe.net/from/>. We absolutely encourage you to let your

needs to be known to private businesses and local governments. If there's anything we can do to support your advocacy, let us know!

### **What virtual services are available at The Family Café?**

The Family Café's signature event is The Annual Family Café, which takes place each June in Orlando. Since 1998 it has brought together thousands of Floridians with disabilities for three days of education, information, and networking.

In 2020, the coronavirus forced The Family Café to host The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Family Café as a virtual event. While it was difficult to lose the face-to-face human connection that brings people to the event again and again, a positive side effect of the new format was the generation of so much virtual content. In addition to the 26 live stream sessions that we hosted in June, we also collected content from many of the presenters originally scheduled to appear at the live event and made it available through a virtual program. You can find that program by visiting <https://familycafe.net/videos/> and clicking on the Interactive Program button.

In addition to video from this year, you can find numerous videos of breakout sessions and keynotes from previous years on our YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYHTfJCM4IjyWaVT7e5ExCA>.

### **I am submitting this for my son who his 19. I am his guardian. He cannot speak. He has autism. We do not know what it's available for him.**

Thank you for contacting us. There are many resources related to autism available, and what works best for you will depend on your individual situation. One place to start would be to view the Interactive Program from The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Family Café on our website at <https://familycafe.net/videos/>. There were several sessions related to autism, and you can find links to videos and other materials for those sessions in the online program.

You may also want to consider contacting the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD). They operate centers throughout Florida. Find yours at <http://florida-card.org/map.htm>.

### **The disability workshop was helpful. It would be great to have more transportation information in the future.**



Thanks! Transportation is certainly an issue that many attendees have identified as a priority. We will be sure to include more sessions on transportation in next year's Annual Family Café.

**Can more discussion be included for families of children with ADHD/Anxiety or similar cognitive and behavioral issues?**

Thanks for that suggestion. Many families are in need of resources on ADHD and other mental health and cognitive issues for children. We will certainly include a Mental Health track as part of The 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Family Café, and we will share your specific suggestion on addressing ADHD with our Planning Committee.

**I had a blast, was not able to listen to all live but the opportunity to do it later in a time that I could really give my total attention—it was priceless! Thank you to all! Yes I would have loved more seminars for visually impaired, about therapies that are in practice in the state of Florida. I had my son with APD. He has full plan Medicaid but no person can come home with the experience to teach an adult with Down Syndrome that is losing his sight completely soon. He, according to the best surgeons is not a candidate for a cornea transplant so we have to prepare him to be blind the rest of his life. So he can do things again or that he understand or knows how not to be scared. I can imagine he is not the only one that had gone through an experience like this. We just need more detailed information for Broward County.**

Thanks for the feedback! The Family Café includes vision loss in the broad spectrum of disability that we address, and we have been fortunate to have Florida's Division of Blind Services on hand at multiple Annual Family Café events. If you haven't already contacted them, you can find the Division of Blind Services online at <http://dbs.myflorida.com/>.

Another organization that may be helpful would be Lighthouse of Broward, which serves the vision loss community in your area. They are online at <https://lhob.org/>.

**Outings. People with disabilities are mostly secluded. Are there any opportunities for disabled citizens to join to go on an outing with other disabled citizens. The zoo, a museum, a park on the water! Not sure what is available but the problem is transportation must also be arranged. Very difficult with different disabilities. Is there an organization or can there be one to address this?**

Thanks for your inquiry. We agree that fun outings and an active lifestyle are important for everyone, including people with disabilities. One of our partner organizations that encourages that is the Florida Disabled Outdoors Association (FDOA). They host a variety of programs and events for people with disabilities, including Sportsability. You can find them online at <https://www.fdoa.org/>.

We agree that transportation is a challenge for people with disabilities, with each of Florida's 67 counties having its own unique approach and set of challenges. For information on transportation, we encourage you to reach out to the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged at <https://ctd.fdot.gov/>.

### **How can I get involved with The Family Café?**

The Family Café is always looking for volunteers that want to be more involved in our work! The easiest way to pitch in is to sign up as a volunteer for The Annual Family Café when you register for the event. There are opportunities to help prepare materials before the event opens at Bag Stuffing, welcome attendees and provide materials at the Registration Desk, and guide attendees to breakout sessions as a Room Monitor.

There are also a number of ways to stay involved beyond The Annual Family Café. The first step is to stay connected with us, by joining our mailing list at <https://familycafe.net/ mailing-list/> and following us on Twitter ([@TheFamilyCafe](https://twitter.com/TheFamilyCafe)), Facebook ([facebook.com/TheFamilyCafeFL](https://facebook.com/TheFamilyCafeFL)), and Instagram ([@thefamilycafefl](https://instagram.com/thefamilycafefl)). Whatever's happening at The Family Café, we will always share it through email and social media.

One of The Family Café's options to get more involved is through our Family-Run Organization Movement (FROM) program. FROM is there to support leaders in the disability community and their grassroots organizations. You can learn more about FROM and the advocacy and organizational development resources it provides at <https://familycafe.net/from/>.

**Will the same vendors be at the convention next year? Some people don't have social media to watch the sessions. Is there another way you can see the sessions? I'm interested in Autism, Behavior, Art & Music, and other agencies.**

While many vendors return to the Exhibit Hall at The Annual Family Café each year, the list always changes somewhat from year to year. We hope to have a full

Exhibit Hall with a wide range of exhibitors on hand at The 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Family Café in June.

In terms of watching the sessions from this year's event, the good news is that you don't need social media. All you need is computer access. While the live virtual event was hosted through our Facebook page, all of the videos, presentation slides, and materials from the event are available on our website. Visit <https://familycafe.net/videos/> to find videos from the live sessions in The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Family Café. Click on the Interactive Program button to open a special online version of the event program with links to materials for every session for which we received submissions, including those that could not be included in the live virtual event.

**This was my first time being able to join The Annual Family Café because of the online aspect. Not sure if you do but would like to see this stay along with the in-person Annual Family Café. We have a lot at home that stops us from coming in person. This was perfect for us. We are hoping to do it in person someday too! Thank you!**

It's great to hear that the need to make The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Family Café a virtual event actually made it more accessible for your family! Given the positive reaction to the virtual event, we are looking into ways to bring more online content to the families we serve. Remember, you can view all of our recordings from multiple events over the years on our YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYHTfJCM4llyWaVT7e5ExCA>. While we love to hear that you liked the virtual event, we still very much look forward to seeing you in person one day!

**How long will the YouTube presentations be allowed to stay up and running? (I'm way behind.)**

Permanently! All of the sessions from this year's event, along with plenty of content from previous years, can be found on our YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYHTfJCM4llyWaVT7e5ExCA>. No need to worry about falling behind!

**I would like to learn more about supported decision making.**

Supported decision making is absolutely an important topic for self-advocates and their families. We will share your desire for more attention to this issue with our

Planning Committee so they can take it into account in planning the agenda for next year.

**Thanks for holding The Annual Family Café virtually this year instead of cancelling!**

Our pleasure! Despite the difficult circumstances, our commitment to connecting people with disabilities and their families with information and resources will always remain in place. Canceling was never an option!

**How do we access all the breakout sessions?**

Videos from all of the live stream sessions are posted to the Videos section of our website at <https://familycafe.net/videos/>. To access videos and materials related to the sessions that were not included in the virtual event, open the Interactive Program by clicking on the Interactive Program button on the Videos page. That will take you to an online version of the program with links to the materials we've collected.

**The Basics on ABLE Accounts was excellent! Very clear and easy to follow. Under the circumstances I am very impressed with how well The Family Café organized to present so many of the topics. The virtual platform allows such widespread access for those who can't travel or participate in person. The in-person experience is one-of-a-kind, but I hope that when that happens again virtual options will also remain.**

It's great to hear that you got so much out of The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Family Café, despite it being a virtual event! Given the positive reaction to the virtual event, we are looking into ways to bring more online content to the families we serve. Remember, you can view all of our recordings from multiple events over the years on our YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYHTfJCM4llyWaVT7e5ExCA>. While we love to hear that you liked the virtual event, we still very much look forward to seeing you in person one day!

**Are there special needs financial planners that can provide planning without the end goal of selling insurance or wanting to take over the accounting for the person with the disability?**

Finding a financial advisor you can trust is always a challenge, and that can be especially true for people in the disability community. Each year at The Annual Family Café we include a Smart Money track to help attendees learn some of the most important basics about financial planning. When it comes time to find one in your community, it's worth shopping around and finding someone you trust that fits your needs.

**Can we implement more information on newly disabled adults?  
Individuals are just as scared, confused, and overwhelmed as parents.**

Thanks for that suggestion. Disability advocates often point out that everyone lives life a moment away from disability through illness or accident, although most people never think about it until it impacts them personally. There are many agencies and organizations on hand at The Annual Family Café that can help individuals become oriented to a new disability experience. That said, we agree that a session specifically intended for newly disabled adults would be a good addition to our agenda. If you or someone you know would be a good presenter for such a session, please see the Presenter Proposal form that can be found at <https://familycafe.net/present-at-the-23rd-annual-family-cafe/>.

**Is there a resource for information throughout Florida for parents with disabilities?**

The Family Café exists to bring disability resources together in a single place where families can access them, so a great place to start your search for information is at The Annual Family Café. We are not aware of a single disability information clearinghouse, and the best source of information for you will depend on your individual circumstance. A few good places to start would include the Agency for Persons with Disabilities Family Care Council in your area (<https://apd.myflorida.com/fcc/>), the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (<https://www.fddc.org/>), or your local Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resource Center (<https://www.fdlrs.org/>).

**Are we having The Annual Family Cafe next year in 2021?**

Yes! At this time we are planning on hosting The 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Family Café at the Hyatt Regency Orlando on June 11-13, 2021. We are hopeful that conditions will be safe enough for in-person gatherings by then. If the coronavirus pandemic prevents us from hosting an in-person event, we will once again meet virtually.

**The Virtual Conference was a wonderful way to share the information that The Family Café staff worked so hard to bring about this year. Although this was my very first time to participate in the annual event, I found some sessions to be enlightening, others entertaining, and even others relevant to what the community has to deal with in our daily living. Something that I would very much like to see The Family Café address more of are individuals who have found their way to live self-determined lifestyles in all different walks of life.**

Thanks so much for your positive feedback! We did our best to include engaging, relevant presentations in our agenda. The Family Café is a strong supporter of self-determination and self-advocacy for people with disabilities, which is why we include a Self-Advocacy track in our agenda and make space for self-advocate owned and operated Micro-Enterprises in our Exhibit Hall. We hope you will be able to join us in 2021 so you can connect with more self-advocates and get their perspectives on independent living.

**I would like to see more information and trainings in Spanish.**

Thanks for your feedback. We will share it with our Planning Committee. In the meantime, if you know of any interested Spanish language presenters that would be a good fit for The Annual Family Café, please let them know that we are looking for proposals!

**Do you having a training program that gives certificates?**

The Family Café does not offer any type of certification or credits at this time.

**We would like to know if you have plans to include any vendors next year to address the adult disability housing options for high functioning autistic young adults.**

Every year we do our best to attract a wide array of vendors to our Exhibit Hall, including those that provide information and services on housing. We have had several such vendors in past years, and you may be able to find some by browsing through event programs from previous years. You can find them all on our website at <https://familycafe.net/programsqa/>. We will do our best to bring vendors with housing resources to the event this coming year.

**I am a teenager who wants to make friends. How do I do that?**

Creating positive peer relationships can be tough for youth with disabilities, and we definitely sympathize with your desire to create a quality social life. One suggestion would be to connect with the young leaders of the Florida Youth Council. They are always on hand to present Youth track sessions at The Annual Family Café, and also host their own Annual Youth Summit where they talk about how to make friends and other important issues for young people with disabilities. You can find them online at <https://floridayouthcouncil.org/>.

**The flexibility from at home attendance was very helpful for me as a mother of children with special needs and weakened immune system. Will next year, if possible, be partly virtual if it becomes a regular event?**

With the positive feedback we have received about the virtual Annual Family Café, it's become clear that there is a demand for the kind of remote resource sharing that a virtual event can provide. You are certainly not the only person to express interest in adding some kind of virtual component to The Annual Family Café. While hosting an in-person event and a virtual event simultaneously would present a lot of challenges for us, we will continue to look for ways to make more of our event available virtually in future.

**The presentations by video were very helpful from what we've seen so far. We'd like to see more focus on deaf/blindness.**

Thanks for your positive feedback. We will share your desire for more information on hearing and visual impairments with our Planning Committee.

**Thank you for putting on an amazing conference in spite of all that is happening! It was our first year and I was sad it may have been cancelled. Thank you!**

Our pleasure! We did our best to put together an informative, engaging event despite the challenges of going virtual. Hopefully we will be able to come together in person in June of 2021.

# **The Agency for Health Care Administration**

**I am looking for a good local occupational therapist that could take United Healthcare Medicaid and help my child with sensory chewing, spatial awareness, and other needs. For an 11-year-old. Also looking for someone who might take this insurance who could test for possible dyslexia, dysgraphia, etc. and recommend treatment options. Thank you.**

Florida Medicaid recipients may contact their health plan directly to request assistance obtaining Medicaid covered services, including assistance locating providers. Recipients can also contact the Medicaid Help Line at 1-877-254-1055 if they need assistance.

**Don't understand why they changed the dental program. Before my brother was able to go to Tampa to get dental work done but when they changed it they say he can't go because the program is now just for those in group homes. Since he lives at home and has dental through his Medicare supplement it doesn't cover the specialty dentist he needs.**

The Florida Legislature changed the law so that Medicaid recipients now get their dental services from a dental plan rather than through their MMA plan. However, all the same services should be available.

If you or someone you know is having difficulty accessing services through Medicaid, including dental services, please contact the Florida Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055 or file a complaint on the Agency's website at [www.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/complaint](http://www.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/complaint).

Medicare is a federal program that is different than state Medicaid programs. For questions relating to services covered by Medicare, please contact Medicare by calling 1-800-633-4227.

**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). Why does Medicaid take forever to approve services?**

Not all states offer the same Medicaid coverage. States are allowed to set their own rules regarding Medicaid coverage as long as they stay within federal



guidelines. You will need to contact the state you are moving to in order to find out how to apply for benefits in their state.

In addition, if your son receives Supplemental Security Income (SSI) you will need to contact the Social Security Administration (SSA) to advise them that you are moving out of Florida. Their toll-free number is 1-800-772-1213. The SSA can answer specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday.

**What assistance can I get for my son? He needs speech therapy, Occupational Therapy, and each time there's a roadblock, very frustrating. He does have Medicaid, which he just got when he turned 18. He's 19 now and turns 20 in August. There are no activities for him that we could afford.**

We are sorry to hear about your experience. Florida Medicaid is committed to ensuring children have access to all medically necessary services. 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](http://www.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/complaint).

**Why does Medicaid stop covering supplies for wound care at the age of 21. Do you think the wound is over? No, my daughter has had a wound that will not heal for a year now. I have paid for her supplies because Medicaid will not cover it.**

We are sorry to hear about your experience. Florida Medicaid covers medically necessary wound care services. While some wound codes are limited to children Medicaid does also cover a number of wound care codes for adults. Additionally, Florida Medicaid health plans offer expanded benefits. Expanded benefits are more than what is offered through straight Medicaid. Expanded benefits include services for adults, like wound care services. Recipients in a health plan should contact their health plan directly regarding wound care services and expanded benefits.

If you are having difficulty accessing services through Medicaid, please contact the Florida Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055 or file a complaint on the Agency's website at [www.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/complaint](http://www.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/complaint).

**Why doesn't Healthy Kids cover ABA services for children when parents pay all or part of the premium?**

The Florida Healthy Kids program offers comprehensive medical benefits, including behavioral health services. However, the law governing the Florida Healthy Kids program does not include coverage of Applied Behavior Analysis service in the behavioral health benefit.

The Children's Medical Services Health Plan, a Florida KidCare program providing comprehensive health care services to children with special health care needs offers behavioral health care services that are inclusive of ABA services to CHIP and Medicaid children. Children eligible for these services will no longer be enrolled in the Healthy Kids program if they qualify for coverage under CMS Health Plan. For questions about eligibility for the Children's Medical Services plan, or to request a CMS eligibility screening, please contact the Department of Health's Toll-Free Clinical Eligibility Hotline at 1-855-901-5390.

**Why can't KidCare be a secondary insurance for children with special needs? Many of us have insurance through our employers but the copays and deductibles can be a barrier to getting services.**

Florida KidCare is the state's children's health insurance program for children meeting federal and state income and eligibility requirements. To qualify for coverage under the Florida KidCare Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), a child is required to be uninsured and not eligible for Medicaid coverage prior to enrollment.

Unlike the Medicaid and Medicare programs, federal law does not allow CHIP coverage to be a secondary insurance.

**I need resources to get a much better understanding of the various services available for my adult son through Medicaid, including dental services, speech pathology, transportation, etc.**

Medicaid recipients can contact the Medicaid Help Line at 1-877-254-1055, or visit the AHCA website at <https://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/index.shtml> for information on Medicaid covered services. Recipients may also contact their Managed Medical Assistance (MMA) or dental plan directly to discuss and request assistance obtaining Medicaid covered services. If your son is on the iBudget Medicaid waiver, you can talk with his waiver support coordinator, whose job it is to help you access all needed services.

**Is there any agency in our state that provides assistance with getting a home with wheelchair accessibility regardless of credit score and income?**

Florida Medicaid ensures all medically necessary services, devices, and items are covered for children under the age of 21, and, should it be determined to be medically necessary, Florida Medicaid would cover home modifications for children, including wheelchair ramps. In the fee-for-service delivery system, these type of prior authorization reviews are completed by eQ Health Solutions. In the managed care delivery system, health plans have their own prior authorization processes. Providers or recipients may contact their health plan directly.

Certain home modifications are also covered under the Developmental Disabilities Individual Budgeting (iBudget) and Florida Model Home and Community-Based Services Waiver Programs, and the Statewide Medicaid Managed Care Long-Term Care program. People in those programs should discuss home modifications with their case manager or support coordinator.

For help outside of the Medicaid program, check with these organizations:

- Agency for Person with Disabilities (APD) - <https://apd.myflorida.com/>
- Department of Economic Opportunity - Community Development Block Grants - [Sherri.martin@deo.myflorida.com](mailto:Sherri.martin@deo.myflorida.com)
- Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) - [MDA@mdausa.org](mailto:MDA@mdausa.org)
- Easter Seal Society - <https://www.easterseals.com/florida/>
- Rebuilding Together - <https://rebuildingtogether.org/alllocalaffiliates/florida>
- Florida Housing Finance Agency - [www.floridahousing.org/contact-us](http://www.floridahousing.org/contact-us)

**Why is it that I can't get a scooter? I need to get fresh air and go to the store for food. Medicare or Medicaid will not purchase.**

Medicare is a federal program that is different than state Medicaid programs. For questions relating to services covered by Medicare, please contact Medicare by calling 1-800-633-4227.

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 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. Additionally, wheelchairs are covered service, in the service category of durable medical equipment, for eligible recipients in the following Medicaid programs: Familial Dysautonomia Waiver, DD Individual Budgeting Waiver (iBudget), and Long-Term

Care Waiver. Recipients can also contact the Medicaid Help Line at 1-877-254-1055 for assistance.

**How can we get more Medicare Adult Day Programs funded in our area? It seems like we are always on a waitlist so that tells me that there is a need.**

Adult Day Training is a covered service under the Developmental Disabilities Individual Budgeting (iBudget) Waiver Services Coverage and Limitations Handbook. You can contact the Agency for Persons with Disabilities for assistance in locating a provider by calling 1-866-APD-CARES (1-866-273-2273) or using the online provider search at <https://flddresources.qlarant.com/>.

Adult Day Care is a covered service under the Florida Medicaid Long-Term Care (LTC) program. To apply to receive home and community-based services through the LTC program, individuals must contact their local Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). Contact information for ADRCs is available on the Department of Elder Affairs' Website at <http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/doea/arc.php>.

If you or someone you know is having difficulty accessing services through Medicaid, please contact the Florida Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055 or file a complaint on the Agency's website at [www.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/complaint](http://www.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/complaint).

Medicare is a federal program that is different than state Medicaid programs. For questions relating to services covered by Medicare, please contact Medicare by calling 1-800-633-4227.

**I had a very bad experience with my son's caregiver because he is already an adult with autism and now he doesn't trust anybody. My question is why I cannot be paid as a caregiver if I do the best for him and in another state they do?**

There are two ways in Medicaid that a person can be paid to care for a family member. For people on the iBudget waiver, it is called Consumer Directed Care Plus (CDC+). For people on the Long-Term Care managed care waiver, it is called Participant Direction Option. In either option, the person enrolled on the waiver must live in their own home, family home.

People on iBudget waiver can talk to their waiver support coordinator about Consumer Directed Care Plus or contact your local APD office by visiting

<http://apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/> or calling 1-866-273-2273.

People on the Long-Term Care managed care waiver can talk to their case manager about Participant Direction Option or contact your LTC plan. The contact information for the LTC plans can be found through the following link: Plan

Contacts for Recipients

[https://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/statewide\\_mc/pdf/SMMC\\_Plan\\_Contact\\_Information\\_External.pdf](https://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/statewide_mc/pdf/SMMC_Plan_Contact_Information_External.pdf).

**I have a minor child who has a rare form of cancer that qualifies her for disability. She receives her benefits. Is there any assistance out there for a parent as full-time caregiver? And if so, how would I apply? Thanks.**

There are two ways in Medicaid that a person can be paid to care for a family member. For people on the iBudget waiver, it is called Consumer Directed Care Plus (CDC+). For people on the Long-Term Care managed care waiver, it is called Participant Direction Option. In either option, the person enrolled on the waiver must live in their own home, or family home.

People on iBudget waiver can talk to their waiver support coordinator about Consumer Directed Care Plus or contact your local APD office by visiting <http://apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/> or calling 1-866-273-2273.

People on the Long-Term Care managed care waiver can talk to their case manager about Participant Direction Option or contact your LTC plan. The contact information for the LTC plans can be found through the following link: Plan

Contacts for Recipients:

[https://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/statewide\\_mc/pdf/SMMC\\_Plan\\_Contact\\_Information\\_External.pdf](https://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/statewide_mc/pdf/SMMC_Plan_Contact_Information_External.pdf).

**Do you know any updates about Med Waiver? Is it going to be cut or phase out?**

The iBudget waiver is not being phased out and there are no proposed cuts to the services. APD operates the iBudget Waiver and can provide additional information. You can find the phone number of your local APD office by visiting

<http://apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/> or by calling 1-866-273-2273.

**In the past I have been told if Med Waiver funds are not used, the client will lose some funds. This year, 2020, is so different. Many clients of day programs are not attending due to the COVID Crisis. Even though some**

**programs have reopened with extra measures, families may decide to have their family member remain home and not attend any programs for a longer period of time. There could be so many reasons related to the needs of that family. In the end, the reasons could be for safety (to remain COVID-free). Would funds be removed for the clients under these reasons? They should not see a penalty. Also, each area of Florida has different issues with COVID so each area has a different response. Thank you for receiving questions.**

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) operates the Developmental Disabilities Individual Budgeting (iBudget) Waiver and their office would be best suited to discuss your individual situation. You can find the phone number of your local APD office by visiting <http://apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/> or by calling 1-866-273-2273.

**Is there any type of list available with training centers available in Pasco and Hillsborough County as well as companion services?**

Adult Day Training and Companion services are covered under the Developmental Disabilities Individual Budgeting (iBudget) Waiver. The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) operates the iBudget Waiver and can provide additional information on providers located in a specific area. You can find the phone number of your local APD office by visiting <http://apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/> or by calling 1-866-273-2273.

**Are companions required to have special insurance above and beyond normal insurance, to carry consumers? Is insurance (both for auto and for group home) required and how often is it checked? How often are driving records screened? If so, whose responsibility is it to be screened?**

The Developmental Disabilities Individual Budgeting (iBudget) Waiver Program covers companion services when provided through a licensed home health agency or as a solo provider. For information on qualifications for solo providers of companion care services, please visit the Agency for Persons with Disabilities' Web page at <https://apd.myflorida.com/>. For information on home health agency licensure requirements, visit the Agency for Health Care Administration Web site at [http://ahca.myflorida.com/MCHQ/Health\\_Facility\\_Regulation/Lab\\_HomeServ/HHA/index.shtml](http://ahca.myflorida.com/MCHQ/Health_Facility_Regulation/Lab_HomeServ/HHA/index.shtml).

**Why are there so few extended care services for kids with profound disabilities? In my area the only PPEC or extended care service for**

**disabled children is Medicaid only, which we don't have. After school care is also not offered due to my daughters disability and developmental issues. As a result either my wife or I will have to quit our job in the near future. There should be insurance covered or free state funded prescribed pediatric extended care offered throughout the state.**

Please contact your private insurance company to discuss the possibility of coverage of prescribed pediatric extended care (PPEC) services. You may also want to contact the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) as they may know of additional resources in your area. You can find the phone number of your local APD office by visiting <http://apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/> or by calling 1-866-273-2273.

**I am 63, a single mother, became disabled in 2011, started receiving SSD. I receive Medicare, share of cost Medicaid, state pays Medicare premium. I also have two adult children—one is on SSD and the other SSI and SSD, out of my check. How do I save money without it impacting my benefits? I have to be careful since I am the children's trustee and cannot have more than \$5,000 in the bank. Can't afford to have that Medicare premium taken out of my check. At the moment I live with my adult son on SSI and SSDI. Will I ever be able to live on my own financially? I want my son to be independent as possible. I would love to buy a small home that I can leave to them.**

The Florida Department of Financial Services created the My Money Program at [www.myfloridacfo.com/mymoney/](http://www.myfloridacfo.com/mymoney/) to provide educational lessons for individuals with developmental disabilities and important resources for family members and caregivers. The My Money Program allows individuals to learn and practice financial skills at their own pace, using interactive games, activities and educational videos. Lessons focus on money basics, banks and credit unions, accounts, budgeting, government benefit programs and ways to find and keep employment.

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the state agency responsible for determining Medicaid eligibility in Florida. For information regarding Medicaid eligibility and the income and asset limits in Florida please contact DCF at 1-866-762-2237.

You may also want to contact the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) to discuss trust funds that can be established for individuals with disabilities. You can find the phone number of your local APD office by visiting <http://apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/> or by calling 1-866-273-2273.

**Our 26-year-old daughter goes to an adult day facility. Why are there not more options for our adult children who no longer go to school, but cannot work independently during the day? You let people control a day facility where you have no idea how they treat the adults attending and when there is a police report they simply have to say, "I don't know why your daughter has large bruises all over her body," and that is legally good enough and the investigations close. Do you only care for our children when they are in school? And that is not 100% safe as well. You need to do a better job.**

We are sorry to hear about your experience. Florida Medicaid is committed to ensuring recipients have access to all medically necessary Medicaid covered services. If you are having difficulty accessing services through Medicaid, please contact the Florida Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055 or file a complaint on the Agency's website at [www.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/complaint](http://www.flmedicaidmanagedcare.com/complaint).

If you wish to file a complaint regarding Adult Day Training services provider covered Developmental Disabilities Individual Budgeting (iBudget) Waiver, you can do so by contacting the Agency for Persons with Disabilities' regional office near you.

You may also wish to file a report with Adult Protective Services within the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The Adult Protective Services Program is responsible for preventing further harm to vulnerable adults who are victims of abuse, neglect, exploitation or self-neglect. Additional information can be found on their website, or you may submit a report online at <https://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us/>.

There are several ways to report:

- Online at <https://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us/>
- Call 1-800-962-2873
- Florida Relay 711 or TTY 800-955-8771
- Fax your report to 800-914-0004

### **How does one not elderly but disabled get help to pay for home help?**

The Medicaid program is one option for people with disabilities to receive care in their home. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the state agency responsible for determining Medicaid eligibility in Florida. For information on Medicaid eligibility in Florida please contact DCF at 1-866-762-2237 or look online at [www.myflfamilies.com](http://www.myflfamilies.com).



DCF may determine someone disabled if they have a condition that has affected (or is expected to affect) their ability to work for at least 12 full months or result in death. Children may be considered disabled if they have a medical condition severe enough to be considered a disability for an adult.

DCF uses the same rules as the Social Security Administration (SSA) to determine disability. SSA's toll-free number is 1-800-772-1213. The SSA can answer specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Florida Medicaid operates several home and community-based services waiver programs that provide services in the home or other community settings for persons who would otherwise need care in a hospital, nursing facility, or intermediate care facility. Brief descriptions of these waiver programs are provided below. For more information, go to: [http://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/Policy and Quality/Policy/federal authorities/federal waivers/index.shtml](http://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/Policy%20and%20Quality/Policy/federal%20authorities/federal%20waivers/index.shtml).

#### Long-Term Care Waiver

The Long-Term Care program provides services and supports to eligible disabled individuals age 18-64 and elderly individuals age 65 or older, including individuals over the age of 18 with a diagnosis of cystic fibrosis, AIDS, or a traumatic brain or spinal cord injury. Services are delivered through competitively selected managed care organizations.

#### Familial Dysautonomia Waiver (FD)

The Medicaid Familial Dysautonomia (FD) Waiver provides home and community-based supports and services to eligible persons with Familial Dysautonomia living in their own homes or family homes. The FD Waiver is designed to promote, maintain and restore the health of eligible recipients with Familial Dysautonomia and to minimize the effects of illness and disabilities through the provision of needed supports and services in order to delay or prevent hospital placement or institutionalization.

#### DD Individual Budgeting Waiver (iBudget)

The Medicaid iBudget Waiver provides home and community-based supports and services to eligible persons with developmental disabilities living at home or in a home-like setting, utilize an individual budgeting approach, and provide enhanced opportunities for self-determination. The iBudget Waiver is designed to promote and maintain the health of eligible individuals with developmental disabilities, to provide medically necessary supports and services to delay or prevent institutionalization, and to foster the principles and appreciation of self-determination.

#### Model Waiver

The Medicaid Model Waiver provides services to eligible children 20 years of age or younger who are medically complex/medically fragile or diagnosed with degenerative spinocerebellar disease. The Model Waiver is designed to delay or prevent institutionalization and allow waiver recipients to maintain stable health while living at home in their community.

**With being a homeschool mom of a child with unique needs, it is rather disturbing to find out that many services are not open to her. Health insurance is a primary concern. Which no one seems to know what the other is doing. Example: I applied for Florida Kidcare; put she has medical issues. They denied her because that would go under CMS who also denied her. Not sure how when my spouse was unemployed for over 3 months due to covid. When it comes to things like this FL is not special needs friendly.**

Florida KidCare includes both Medicaid for children and the state's children's health insurance program (CHIP) for uninsured children who do not meet the income and eligibility requirements for Medicaid. If you apply for Medicaid and do not qualify, we will automatically send your application to be reviewed for CHIP eligibility. The same happens if you apply for CHIP eligibility, and it looks like you might qualify for Medicaid. We will look at both programs to make sure you enroll in the program for which your child qualifies. You can apply for Medicaid or CHIP for your child at <https://floridakidcare.org/>.

Eligibility criteria for Medicaid are set in federal and state laws and rules. Medicaid is for low-income people who also meet other criteria, such as being a child, pregnant, a parent of a dependent child, an elder, or a person with a disability. Each category may have a different income standard. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the state agency responsible for determining Medicaid eligibility. For questions about appealing a Medicaid eligibility determination, please contact DCF at 1-866-762-2237. For questions about eligibility for the Children's Medical Services (CMS) managed care plan, or to request a CMS eligibility rescreening, please contact the Department of Health's Toll-Free Clinical Eligibility Hotline at 1-855-901-5390.

**I'm retired military with a severely autistic 10-year-old son. What type of state assistance will my son qualify for? I contacted Social Security office, and they said that my retirement pay disqualifies my son. I applied for APD and my son was approved, however he is on the waiting list because there is no funding. Can I apply for Medicaid for my son?**

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the state agency responsible for determining Medicaid eligibility in Florida. For information on Medicaid eligibility in Florida, please contact DCF at 1-866-762-2237 or you can apply online at <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>.

**How do I request a Medicaid replacement card for a current gold card that is wearing out?**

You can request a replacement Medicaid Gold card by contacting the Department of Children and Families (DCF) at 850-300-4323 or you can print a temporary Medicaid card from your MyACCESS Account.

**Options are limited for those “aging out” of high school. What dedicated resources is the state willing to commit to see that appropriate adult programs are available to all?**

Thank you for your question. Unfortunately, we will need additional information to be able to fully address this question. For questions or information, you may contact the Agency for Health Care Administration by feedback form at [ahca.myflorida.com/contact](http://ahca.myflorida.com/contact) or by phone toll-free at (888) 419-3456 / (800) 955-8771 Florida Relay Service (TDD number).

We would also like to refer you to the Florida Department of Education as they may be able to provide you with additional information. Contact information for the Department of Education can be found on their website at [www.fldoe.org](http://www.fldoe.org).

# **The Agency for Persons with Disabilities**

**My question is about APD. My daughter has been on the waiting list from APD for the past five years. Recently with all the changes with CMS I had to reach out to APD for help. We had an assessment done. I also provided them with all the paperwork, but have not gotten any decision from them. Is there anything else I can do?**

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

**I heard you are cutting down the budget to give Medicaid Waiver Services to persons with IDD like myself. Is that true? We hope not. We need your services now more than ever!!**

APD's budget is determined by the Florida Legislature. In fact, the Legislature provided more funding for Waiver services for Fiscal Year 2020-21. Please contact your local state representative or senator for more information.

**Is there any voting accommodations for anyone with disabilities?**

The State of Florida does offer accommodations. Contact your local Supervisor of Elections.

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

Disability rights are human rights. There are multiple disability laws. Here are some resources to educate you on your rights as a person with a disability.

A Guide to Disability Rights Laws, U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division (Feb 2020)

<https://www.ada.gov/cguide.htm>

Your Legal Disability Rights

<https://www.usa.gov/disability-rights>

Disability Rights Florida

<https://disabilityrightsflorida.org/disability-topics>

Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act Public Law 106–402, 106th Congress: Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 <https://www.congress.gov/106/plaws/publ402/PLAW-106publ402.pdf>

**We recently moved from the county and I need to know what activities are available for my child in St. Lucie County.**

Your county school district should be able to assist you.

You may also find programs at the following web sites:

Resource Directory

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

Florida Navigator

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

**I have tried to get back with Med waiver on information that I sent back in November to no avail. My daughter was qualified and I sent information they requested but no one has confirmed that it was received or responded to my email. What is the best contact to reach someone? Thanks!**

Please call your Regional Office for assistance: <https://apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

**How do providers get approved, reviewed, etc.?**

This information is available online here:

<https://apd.myflorida.com/providers/enrollment/>.

**So if a child has a physical disability (falls under rare diseases and is on disability benefits) can a parent receive caregiver benefits to help allay costs of having to stay home, getting to multiple medical appointments, etc.? And how would I apply for these benefits? I have heard they are out there but no one seems to know. I need some direction please. Thank you.**

The Consumer-Directed Care Plus (CDC+) program is open to people with developmental disabilities who are enrolled on the iBudget waiver. Learn more here: <https://apd.myflorida.com/cdcplus/>.

### **Is provider support the same as companionship services?**

There is no service through the iBudget waiver known as “provider support.” However, there is a service known as Personal Supports. Companion services includes supervision and socialization that provides access to community-based activities for individuals over the age of 21. Companion services are provided in relation to a person’s support plan goal. Personal Supports services are more broad but can include companionship as part of service provision.

### **Does APD provide transportation services?**

Some clients do receive transportation services from APD. Please contact your WSC or Regional Office for more information: <https://apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

You may also contact the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged at (800) 983-2435 to discuss your transportation needs.

### **What service programs do you offer?**

Read about APD programs and services here:  
<https://apd.myflorida.com/brochures/APD%20Cares%20B2016.pdf>

More brochures are online here:  
<https://apd.myflorida.com/publications/brochures.htm>

### **How do I get a service animal? Are they covered?**

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>.

### **Is federal funding coming down to assist APD first line workers and group homes and providers?**

The Waiver program is funded in part with federal Medicaid funds. APD's budget is determined by the Florida Legislature. Please contact your local state representative or senator for more information.

### **How does someone get on the waitlist for services?**

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

### **How can I find adult social activities/groups for my adult son with a disability?**

Your local Family Care Council may have some guidance. Find contacts here:  
<https://www.fccflorida.org/local-councils.html>.

You may also find programs at the following web sites:

Resource Directory

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

Florida Navigator

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

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

Use the provider search here:

<https://fddresources.qlarant.com/ProviderSearch.aspx>.

### **How do I join a Family Care Council?**

Please contact your local Family Care Council: <https://www.fccflorida.org/local-councils.html>.

**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 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 adult child needs a guardian advocate but they are against it?**

There are alternatives to naming a guardian advocate. Florida law mandates that the courts consider the least restrictive option for an individual who needs decision-making assistance. The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council has publications related to guardianship that can be accessed at: <https://www.fddc.org/publications>.

If you need further information, consult an attorney who specializes in guardianship or the Office of Public and Professional Guardianship (OPPG). Contact information of OPPG can be found at: <http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/doea/spgo.php>.

### **In addition to the iBudget waiver, what other areas should we focus on for 2021 legislation?**

APD's budget is determined by the Florida Legislature. The 2021 session begins in March, and APD will have more information early next year.

### **It is very difficult to navigate—there is really no central place to get information—families have to struggle to find out anything.**

Please contact your local Family Care Council: <https://www.fccflorida.org/local-councils.html>.

You may also contact your WSC or APD Regional Office for more information: <https://apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

### **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, WSCs 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. WSCs can assist consumers in accessing supports to meet their needs, regardless of the funding source of the supports.

**When will more long-term housing options be available for disabled adults whose caretakers have passed/are no longer able to care for them?**

Please contact the Florida Housing Corporation or the Florida Housing Search: <https://www.floridahousingsearch.org/>.

APD is constantly adding new providers and encourages providers to enroll throughout the year: <https://apd.myflorida.com/providers/enrollment/>.

**Will ICF/DD facilities ever be recognized as having a very different population with more needs but also a much different activity level than a nursing home?**

Intermediate Care Facilities are regulated by the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA). Please contact AHCA for more information: [https://ahca.myflorida.com/MCHQ/Health\\_Facility\\_Regulation/Long\\_Term\\_Care/Intermediate\\_Care\\_Facilities.shtml](https://ahca.myflorida.com/MCHQ/Health_Facility_Regulation/Long_Term_Care/Intermediate_Care_Facilities.shtml).

**What age does APD stop helping in Florida?**

There is no age when APD automatically stops providing services to someone on the iBudget waiver.

**I've been calling every agency for years to find placement for my adult son with neurological disabilities with no luck. Years long wait list for affordable appointments, no openings in group homes, etc. Unless you want your child to live in a homeless shelter or jail there are no good placement alternatives in Florida that I've found. I'd love to be proven wrong.**

APD will be able to provide more guidance. Please email the details about your situation to: [APD.Info@apcares.org](mailto:APD.Info@apcares.org).

The Area Agency on Aging now handles the Traumatic Brain Injury waiver. The

number for your area office can be found on this map:  
<http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/doea/arc.php>.

If you are looking for placement at a facility, please call the Managed Care Plan at (877) 711-3662.

**What is Barbara Palmer's phone number and email? What is the new head of Medicaid's name, phone number, and email? Is there a change in staffing going to happen for CDC+? It has been very difficult for the past few years. I know there are only 12 employees.**

Barbara Palmer is Director of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities.  
Agency for Persons with Disabilities  
4030 Esplanade Way, Suite 380  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0950  
Phone: (850) 488-4257  
Toll-Free: 1-866-APD-CARES (1-866-273-2273)  
8 a.m. - 5 p.m. ET  
Fax: (850) 922-6456  
Email: [APD.info@apdcare.org](mailto:APD.info@apdcare.org)

Please email details about your situation to [APD.info@apdcare.org](mailto:APD.info@apdcare.org) and your message will be forwarded to the agency's ombudsman.

Medicaid information can be found here: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access/medicaid.shtml>.

APD and all state employee positions and budgets are determined by the Florida Legislature.

**I am a single handicapped mother with three special needs children. Is there something that I can proactively do to help alleviate the waitlist for APD? In the event that something were to happen to me, this weighs very heavy on my heart. I just want to ensure that my kids will be cared for. I do own a home. Is a service available to come in to the residential address and keep them in their environment, God forbid my health deteriorates/death? Thank you for your selfless work and dedication. Family Café is a godsend to my family. It's a wealth of knowledge and I am eternally grateful for all those selflessly working to keep this going. May God bless you all with his eternal protection.**

Individuals are enrolled on the waiver from the waiting list based upon available funding appropriated by the Legislature.

Information about applying for the waiver is available here:  
<http://apdcares.org/customers/application/>.

For specific questions, please call your Regional Office:  
<https://apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

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>

**I'd like to find out who can create a law protecting special needs people by being appointed an automatic Guardian. It's not currently required in FL but other states assign one.**

Please contact your state representative or senator.

Your state representative can be found at:  
<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/>.

Your state senator can be found at:  
<https://www.flsenate.gov/>.

**No questions but would have liked some training in CDC+. Thank you!**

To access CDC+ training, visit:  
<https://apd.myflorida.com/cdcplus/cdctraining.htm>. If you have any other questions about CDC+, visit <https://apd.myflorida.com/cdcplus/> or call Customer Service at (866) 761-7043.

**Is there a list or resource that informs of places that offer free or discounts to disabled adults or their companions? For example: Regal Theater in Sarasota allowed companions to go to movie free with paid**

**ticket for disabled ticket. Legoland allowed companion of disabled adult to enter park for free (or at least used to).**

For the most accurate information, you would need to inquire with the business.

To explore disability resources in your area, visit the APD Resource Directory at: <https://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>.

**What help is out here for adults with disabilities? Help for rides to the store, to the doctors, to school appointments. Just in general for those that can't drive during the pandemic? COVID-19 Virus. How are they getting the things that they need? My blind sister lives in Dallas Texas is having a very hard time. This made me think about others.**

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

Additional resources for individuals with disabilities may be found at the following sites:

Resource Directory

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

Florida Navigator

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

For transportation assistance, individuals with disabilities should contact the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged at (800) 983-2435.

**How can individuals protect themselves from an agency changing the support coordinator once the independents have to be part of an agency?**

Changes to statute made by Chapter 2020-71, Laws of Florida, become effective on July 1, 2021 and require that all Waiver Support Coordinators work for a Qualified Organization. Consumers have a choice in Waiver Support Coordinators, and may select or change Waiver Support Coordinators at any time. Consumers desiring to change Waiver Support Coordinators can contact the local APD Regional Office for assistance in making a selection.

Under the iBudget Waiver, clients can choose WSCs who are employed by a qualified organization that provide services in the county where he or she lives.

The WSC must have availability on their caseload, cannot be the legal representative or relative of the client, and meet other waiver requirements.

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

There is no age when APD automatically stops providing services to someone on the iBudget waiver.

Respite services are not available for individuals who are age 21 and older. However, individuals can receive Personal Supports if Respite services are needed at age 21 or later. The iBudget Waiver provides a wide range of services to individuals age 21 and up. For information on all services, please see the iBudget Waiver Handbook on the APD website:

<https://www.apd.myflorida.com/ibudget/rules-regs.htm>.

**Families that have children with disabilities need a book or a guide that provides all of the resources available. Most parents that I have talked to don't know where to start. They are not given any real direction when their child is diagnosed. Most of us have just picked up bits and pieces along the way. I am thankful for Family Café because I have been able to gain a lot of knowledge and resources from there once a year. Parents have enough stress trying to help their child/children with whatever needs they have. Resources are key to our survival.**

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/>

Family Care Councils

<https://www.fccflorida.org/local-councils.html>

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

There is currently no way to check your status online. Please contact your waiting list support coordinator or your Regional Office:  
<https://apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

**I think there needs to be more resources available to those with Autism and all aspects of Autism as I have High Functioning Autism and there needs to be more support staff or helpers to help those in times of need or crisis. What is The Family Café doing or other agencies doing to help those who need help whether it be finding or keeping a job along with a multitude of other support needs out there? Thanks.**

APD offers a range of services to people with developmental disabilities (which includes people with autism). Some of these services include Supported Living, Supported Employment, Nursing, Transportation, and Respite.

Florida Center for Autism and Related Disabilities also offers resources:  
<http://florida-card.org/>.

**I've been discriminated against because of having an invisible disability and have had no recourse or resolution. I have difficulty verbally expressing myself (i.e., finding the correct words, focusing on the subject matter, etc.) and have requested both time and other physical accommodations, but have been turned down or deemed to have a psychological/mental problem. How can I overcome this if I'm not taken seriously?**

If you are unable to resolve a problem by dealing directly with the organization/company, you could consider consulting advocacy-focused organizations, such as Disability Rights Florida, for assistance. You can contact Disability Rights Florida by phone, mail, or online. Contact information is available at <https://disabilityrightsflorida.org/contact>.

If Disability Rights Florida cannot directly assist you, they may be able to provide referrals to other resources or to other organizations that specialize in handling discrimination complaints. In addition, the ADA Helpline, (800) 514-0301, may be able to assist in resolving complaints.

**There is information about Chapter 65G-14 Qualified Organizations & Waiver Support Coordination. What does that mean? Why are solo Providers being eliminated? What is competency base exam? Is it all related?**

During the 2020 legislative session, the Florida Legislature passed Chapter 2020-71, Laws of Florida, which made changes pertaining to Waiver Support Coordination. These changes will become effective on July 1, 2021. The changes reform Waiver Support Coordination services, including requiring all Waiver Support Coordinators to be members of a provider agency, Qualified Organization. The use and designation of qualified organizations that employ four or more support coordinators replaces the current system that allows any qualified individual to independently enroll as a treating provider in the Medicaid program. This change will enable APD to implement a systematic approach to service oversight for persons providing care to individuals with developmental disabilities. As APD and the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) come into compliance with Chapter 2020-71, Laws of Florida, we look forward to engaging the public in the rulemaking process and other meetings. Proposed changes in rules and opportunities for public comment will be noticed in the Florida Administrative Register: <https://www.flrules.org/>.

APD also posts information about workshops on the APD website and APD social media channels.

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

People who are enrolled on the waiting list are placed in a category based on their current living and care situation. If any factors change, such as an aging caregiver, the change may move the individual to a new category. For more information, visit:

<https://apd.myflorida.com/customers/waitlist/docs/WAITING%20LIST%20PRIORITY%20CATEGORIES.pdf>.

**My son with Down Syndrome has been on the waiting list for Medicaid Waiver for 13 years. He is going to be 16 in October. I am concerned about this. I called many times but they say the same thing, that I have to wait. He is in the last category. I don't know what I can do to have the Medicaid Waiver for my son.**

Since he is under the age of 21, he may qualify for services under the Medicaid State plan. Please contact the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration at (888) 419-3456 for more information. You may also email details about your situation to [APD.info@apdcare.org](mailto:APD.info@apdcare.org) and your message will be forwarded to the agency's ombudsman.

**How may a newcomer to the state of Florida due to relocation of employment become informed on what disability services are offered to resident? Also, is there is a particular place where we can measure and/or make a sound comparison of benefits before accepting employment in Florida? Thank you.**

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

You may find providers 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>

This provider search may also be useful:  
<https://flddresources.glarant.com/ProviderSearch.aspx>

**The average cost of a 3 to 4-year-old van that is able to transport my son and his wheelchair is \$40,000. Used. Are there any resources available to help fund a disability vehicle?**

Please call the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged at (800) 983-2435 or call 211 for local programs.

**Will APD/iBudget ever be a federal program where clients can move with their family to a different state and not lose their services from the state?**

Not at this time.

**Why do you have to be on the APD program for 6 months BEFORE you are able to get into the CDC program?**

There is no such rule. A participant can apply for CDC+ services once they have been enrolled in the APD waiver.



**My daughter has Kabuki Syndrome which is not recognized by APD so she's unable to get the services she deserves. Why is the state of Florida allowed to only include very limited syndromes and exclude people like my daughter even though she has been deemed disabled by the Federal Government and turned down for services by the state of Florida?**

States have the authority to specify the disabilities that may be served on the Home and Community Base Services waiver. In Florida, the disabilities that may be served by the waiver are specified in state law.

### **Where can I get help with applying for APD and SSI?**

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

**Hello, I would like to know if there are resources on getting a living will or power of attorney that are affordable or zero cost. My mother is getting older in age and care of my disabled brother will possibly be solely on me instead of the both of us, if my mother was to pass on. Thank you.**

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



# The Department of Children and Families

## What services are available to foster parents?

Services can include but are not limited to: service resources, such as counseling, for caregivers and/or children placed in their home, access to foster parent support groups, foster parent mentors, and financial assistance (foster care board payments) for the care of children placed in the home. To learn more on becoming a foster family, call Florida's Foster Information Center at 1-83-FOSTERFL. The department also recently launched [MyFloridaMyFamily.com](http://MyFloridaMyFamily.com) to connect faith institutions with foster families in need.

## **Please give me information on coping with bipolar, PTSD, and depression for adults and children. What type of training do you offer the community? What type of services are you providing? Please include what type of peer supports the state provides if any.**

General information about these diagnoses, including signs, symptoms, and treatments, can be found on the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) website at the following link: <https://www.samhsa.gov/treatment/mental-disorders/bipolar-disorders>. The National Alliance for Mental Illness offer various supports to families may have some information. You can find the local NAMI organization with this website: <https://www.nami.org/Find-Your-Local-NAMI/Affiliate?state=FL&lstid=799>.

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. These contractors provide behavioral health services and supports to eligible individuals through a network of providers. They may also provide training to the community. Peer support services may be available in some areas. Eligible individuals are adults with serious mental illnesses or who are in a mental health crisis and children with an emotional disturbance, mental illness, or who are in an acute mental health or emotional crisis. To locate these managing entities as well as other mental health resources in your area, visit <https://hopeforhealingfl.com/> or dial 2-1-1.

The Department of Children and Families' Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) contracts with The Florida Certification Board and the Florida Behavioral Health Association to provide web-based training on a variety of topics. You can find more information on their websites:

<https://flcertificationboard.org/education-training/> and [https://www.fadaa.org/page/Training\\_Library](https://www.fadaa.org/page/Training_Library).

Additionally, the department provides training through Florida's Center for Child Welfare at <http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/>.

### **If you are self-employed why aren't you allowed "overhead expenses or supplies" deducted from your gross income for food stamps, Medicaid, or other public assistance?**

Income derived from self-employment, less allowable expenses, is considered earned income. Self-employment wages include the total gain from the sale of any capital goods or equipment in addition to profit and net income. The assistance group is required to keep a record of the expenses incurred in the production of self-employment income and can provide these records during the review of their application for evaluation. To review the department's official policy manual regarding allowable expenses, visit <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access/program-policy-manual.shtml>.

For further assistance, visit <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access> to access the Virtual Assistant or call (850) 300-4323 to speak to the Customer Call Center Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. (EST).

### **How does DCF assist with the opioid crisis?**

In recent years, the department's opioid crisis response efforts have been primarily funded through federal grants from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Beginning in May of 2017, Florida's State Targeted Response (STR) Grant allowed for a significant increase in access to evidence-based prevention, treatment, intervention, and recovery support services for individuals with opioid use disorder, and these services have continued to expand through the State Opioid Response (SOR) Grant.

Florida's SOR Grant is designed to address the opioid crisis and reduce opioid-related deaths and unmet treatment needs by providing a comprehensive array of evidence-based prevention, medication-assisted treatment (MAT), and recovery support services to individuals with opioid use disorder that are uninsured, underinsured, or indigent.

The department allocated SOR funds to each region in the state to contract for behavioral health services through regional systems of care or managing entities to fund the following supports and services:

- Methadone maintenance and buprenorphine maintenance because controlled trials demonstrate that these services are most effective at retaining individuals in care, reducing illicit opioid use, and reducing opioid-related mortality.
- Extended release naltrexone which blocks the effects of opioids and is approved for the prevention of relapse to opioid dependence.
- Expansion of the department’s Overdose Prevention Program which distributes and trains on the use of naloxone (Narcan®), the life-saving medication that reverses opioid overdoses. The program assists community-based organizations with the development of standing orders, policies, and protocols for community naloxone distribution and training.
  - Since the start of this program, over 104,000 naloxone kits have been distributed directly to individuals at risk of experiencing an opioid overdose and to their loved ones that may witness an overdose, and over 5,000 overdose reversals have been reported.
  - More information on the department’s Overdose Prevention Program can be found at <https://isavefl.com/>.
- Evidence-based primary prevention programs that have been implemented in middle and high schools, such as LifeSkills Training, and media campaigns aimed at reducing the number of unintentional prescription drug-related overdose deaths to reduce prescription drug misuse among youth.
- The hiring of Behavioral Health Consultants to support child protective investigators and medical professionals to assist with MAT capacity building, training, and technical assistance.
- Recovery support services, including access to residences using the Oxford House® Model, implementation of Recovery Community Organizations, employment of Recovery Oriented Quality Improvement Specialists, and expansion of the Veterans information and referral service, MyFLVet Helpline.
- Curricula development for medical schools and buprenorphine induction programs within hospital emergency departments.

Additional information on Florida’s SOR Grant, including the project and budget narratives, can be found on the department’s website:  
<https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/opioidSTRP.shtml>.

For immediate help with substance abuse, visit [HopeforHealing.com](http://HopeforHealing.com) or dial 2-1-1 to get connected to a provider.

### **Are there support groups for potential foster parents?**

Yes. Foster parent support groups are available in your community and are facilitated by local foster and adoptive parent associations. Please contact your

local community-based care lead agency to find the local support group in your area, or call Florida's Foster Information Center at 1-83-FOSTERFL. The department also recently launched [MyFloridaMyFamily.com](http://MyFloridaMyFamily.com) to connect faith institutions and community organizations with foster families in need.

### **What services are available for children with behavioral health concerns?**

Many insurance plans and Florida Medicaid cover behavioral health services. Please contact your health plan provider to discuss available services. For individuals who are uninsured or underinsured, the department contracts with entities around the state to manage the behavioral health system of care in their area, including behavioral health assessments, individual and family therapy, group therapy, psychiatric evaluation, medication management, supported housing, and more. To locate these managing entities as well as other mental health resources in your area, visit [www.MyFloridaMyFamily.com](http://www.MyFloridaMyFamily.com) or dial 2-1-1.

### **What is the system of care? What does this mean?**

"System of care" refers to a coordinated network of services and supports across state agencies and providers to meet the many complex needs of any given population. It is a term used frequently in behavioral health and child welfare. In Florida, various agencies collaborate to review, discuss, and implement services that support the child, youth, and their family through multi-disciplinary meetings.

### **We need more and better mental health services!**

One of the Department of Children and Families' primary functions is to ensure everyone has access to quality mental health services. [HopeforHealing.com](http://HopeforHealing.com) is a collaborative site that connects Floridians with mental health and substance abuse resources. In addition, the department partners with 2-1-1 to provide services and referrals to local resources for mental health services.

**Over the years I have become registered amongst various organizations as a disabled person when presenting my congenital heart disease related symptoms. I have yet to use my mental health conditions, for which I take medications, however to some I am considered disabled, even with the state when registering for my medical marijuana license, while the Department of Children and Families Services denies me Medicare because I await a review from the Social Security Appeals Operation Council. I do not get what the difference is and why the games. I have an**

**ABLE United account which we all know and understand that you have to pretty much be born with a disabling condition to qualify for, but I still am not considered to be disabled. I am registered to participate in the Florida Disabled Outdoor Association programs but am forced to take my disability claim to a federal level. To other state funded disability programs I am registered with my congenital heart disease and have been accepted and am an active participant, but with the Social Security Administration I am forced to make a Federal claim and go to court.**

The department determines Medicaid eligibility for parents and caretaker relatives of children; children; pregnant women; former foster care individuals; non-citizens with medical emergencies; and aged or disabled individuals not currently receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Those who claim disability, but do not already have a determination of this from the Social Security Administration, may be eligible to have a determination made with the Division of Disability Determinations upon applying. The guidelines used to determine disability by the Division of Disability Determinations is the same as those used by the Social Security Administration. Additionally, the department will abide by any federal decision made by the Social Security Administration. All applicants must additionally fall into the established income and asset guidelines for any type of coverage they are being evaluated for, with the limits varying depending upon the coverage program.

An online application for Medicaid may be submitted from any computer with an internet connection at <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida>. Once a completed and signed application is returned, the department will evaluate eligibility.

For further assistance, visit <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access> to access the Virtual Assistant or call (850) 300-4323 to speak to the Customer Call Center Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. (EST).

**My son is 33 and unable to self-advocate. He has some violent behaviors that caused his expulsion from schools and ADTs. We need resources and support. Where can we find more information about support for families like ours? Where can I access others, like peer support or family support to help?**

The National Alliance on Mental Illness of Greater Orlando is a local support service that serves families in your area. Contact them by dialing 1-800-950-6264 or visiting <https://namigo.org/>.

The department's contracted behavioral health managing entity can also provide information and assistance.

Central Florida Cares Health System

(407) 985-3560

<http://centralfloridacares.org/>.

You may also visit [www.MyFloridaMyFamily.com](http://www.MyFloridaMyFamily.com) to find additional resources in your area.

### **Why are so many kids with Autism wrongfully Baker Acted? When will the police catch up and learn about the disability? Why do they call DCF first?**

The purpose of the Baker Act is to ensure rapid access to a clinician at a designated receiving facility to determine the need for additional services. The Baker Act allows law enforcement officers to initiate an involuntary examination based on the "reason to believe the person has a mental illness" and is a danger to themselves or others. Individuals with intellectual and developmental disability (including Autism) may display behaviors that mimic psychiatric symptoms.

The department has Mobile Response Teams located in every county in the state that are ready to respond to mental health crises in young people. A parent or caregiver can call the Mobile Response Team in their area to diffuse an immediate emotional or behavioral crisis. Visit <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/docs/maps/MRT.pdf> to locate contact information for your local Mobile Response Team.

### **How can we have a mandate for special needs children to be automatically assigned a Guardian Ad Litem in Florida? Other states appoint "Law Guardians" to protect the child's best interest. Florida seems to have fallen behind on both "typical" also—but very deficient in uneducated judges making mistakes from unawareness! Or give us a peer supporter to assist in the process!**

Ch. 39.822, Florida Statutes, requires a Guardian Ad Litem be appointed for all children in any child abuse, abandonment, or neglect court proceedings. In addition, individuals can request the appointment of a Guardian Ad Litem for family law cases by using forms 12.94(a) and (b) through the Office of the State Courts at <https://www.flcourts.org/Resources-Services/Court-Improvement/Family-Courts/Family-Law-Self-Help-Information/Family-Law-Forms>.

**Are companions for those with mental or behavioral conditions required to have special insurance above and beyond normal insurance, to carry consumers? Is insurance (both for auto and for group home) required and how often is it checked? How often are driving records screened? If so, whose responsibility is it to be screened?**

This question may be better answered by agencies who employ companions for individuals with mental or behavioral health conditions. State law requires background screening for a variety of professions who are working with vulnerable populations but that does not include driving records. Agencies and organizations providing services may have additional requirements for staff.

The Department of Children and Families maintains the administrative rule on licensing residential treatment centers for children which includes therapeutic group homes. 65E-9.003(4), Florida Administrative Code, states:

(4) Liability insurance coverage.

(a) Applicants shall provide proof of professional liability insurance coverage from an authorized insurer in an amount no less than \$300,000 per occurrence with a minimal annual aggregate of no less than \$1,000,000.

(b) Applicants shall provide proof of general liability insurance coverage from an authorized insurer in an amount no less than \$300,000 per occurrence with a minimal annual aggregate of no less than \$1,000,000.

**Will there be virtual Bi-Polar support groups? Bi-Polar disorder along with other multiple mental health disorders is a disability. Can we please have more seminars/groups for mental health as well?**

Please contact the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Brevard County chapter, to find local support groups. Their website is <http://spacecoast.nami.org/>. In addition, visit [HopeforHealingFL.com](http://HopeforHealingFL.com) or dial 2-1-1 to connect with several mental health resources in your community.

**There are not many services in my area. If you want a specific kind of specialty you have to drive anywhere from 2-4 hours away. And for people with no vehicles or anyone to bring them, it's impossible. So, I know lots of kids that don't get the help they need, then they go through life with these disabilities, and that's where/when problems start. Some end up homeless, or into drugs, or dead, or jail. And all that could be avoided with some tools put into hard to reach communities . . . I have a child, and Florida is one of the worst states for specialty services in certain areas of the state. Thank you.**



The department works to ensure all Floridians have access to quality mental health services. Telehealth services are expanding and are a viable option for people in rural areas. If your child received Medicaid or is insured, please contact your provider to see if telehealth services are available. In addition, families can visit [HopeforHealingFL.com](http://HopeforHealingFL.com), [MyFloridaMyFamily.com](http://MyFloridaMyFamily.com), or dial 2-1-1 to find mental health services in their area.

**What services are being offered for caregivers that are caring for people with mental health disabilities?**

The National Alliance on Mental Illness of Greater Orlando is a local support service that serves families in your area. Contact them by dialing 1-800-950-6264 or visiting <https://namigo.org/>.

The department's contracted behavioral health managing entity can also provide information and assistance.

Central Florida Cares Health System

(407) 985-3560

<http://centralfloridacares.org/>.

**How can I find appropriate housing for my adult child with mental illness? Will the state be opening more resources?**

Assistance with housing coordination for eligible individuals may be available. You may contact your local managing entity and request housing coordination assistance.

Central Florida Cares Health System

(407) 985-3560

<http://centralfloridacares.org/>

Serving Brevard, Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties

If your adult child does not live in one of those counties, please follow the below link to the department's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Get Help webpage and select his/her county from the drop-down list. That will provide you with contact information for the managing entity where your adult child lives.

<https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/get-help.shtml>.

**Are there any options to assist parents who have multiple children with special needs?**

If they have developmental disabilities, please contact the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. Their website has contact information: <https://apd.myflorida.com/>.

If your children have behavioral health issues and have Medicaid or other insurance, please contact your health plan provider to discuss available services. The department offers many mental health services, including therapy, medication assistance, and much more for uninsured individuals and families. To locate the provider nearest you or to get additional resources, visit [MyFloridaMyFamily.com](http://MyFloridaMyFamily.com) or dial 2-1-1.

**What services are offered in Florida for young adults with severe behavioral disabilities in Lake County? Bi-polar, schizophrenia, delusional disorder, etc.**

The National Alliance for Mental Illness of Marion County serves Lake County and can connect families with support services in their area: <http://www.namiocala.org> and (352) 368-2405.

**It seems like the Food Stamp office encourages single women to have lots of children, because of the way they give out their funds. I only qualify for food stamps because I did not have children. Yet, if I had children, I would also qualify for cash that can be spent on other items besides food. I see that as unfair, don't you? Even if the amount stays the same, why can't those of us who chose not to bring children into this world be allowed also to spend on something other than food? Or maybe like a portion such as 10 percent, so the majority would be spent on food.**

All programs under the Economic Self-Sufficiency program are administered under both state statutes and federal guidelines. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program provides cash assistance to families with children under the age of 18, or under age 19 if full time secondary (high school) school students, that meet the technical, income, and asset requirements.

The food assistance program, also known as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, helps people with low income buy food they need for good health. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates how much it costs to buy food to prepare nutritious, low-cost meals and determines the amount of food assistance benefits an individual or family receives. Per USDA guidelines, households can use food assistance benefits to buy breads, cereals, fruits, vegetables, meats, fish, poultry, dairy, and plants and seeds to grow food for your household to eat. Households cannot use food assistance benefits to buy nonfood items such as pet foods, soaps, paper products, household supplies, grooming

items, alcoholic beverages, tobacco, vitamins, medicines, food to eat in the store, or hot foods.

For further assistance, visit <https://www.myflfamilies/service-programs/access> to access the Virtual Assistant or call (850) 300-4323 to speak to the Customer Call Center Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. (EST).

**My concern is that group homes are not required to maintain copies of money spent when a client uses their food stamps. Twice in two different group homes I've noticed some odd spending and have asked the group home to produce receipts, and I'm told they don't have to maintain them; but as my son's representative payee and power of attorney, I've asked them several times to give me food stamp receipts and they refused. Receipts for food stamps that are spent will show whether or not a client is being taken advantage of by the group home. When my son goes from spending \$30 to \$50 a week to \$200 and \$300 a week there's an issue.**

Individuals who reside in small, freestanding, community-based living units licensed for 16 residents or less are eligible to participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Residents of these group living arrangements may apply on their own behalf or through an authorized representative/secondary cardholder. The eligibility of the resident is determined as a one-person household. As of October 2020, the maximum monthly amount of Food Assistance a household of one can receive is \$204. The group facility must ensure that each resident's food stamps are used for meals intended for that resident, regardless of whether the facility purchases and prepares food consumed by eligible residents or if the residents purchase and prepare food for home consumption. If needed, DCF can provide proof of transactions performed when funds are debited from the client's the electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card.

For further assistance, visit <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access> to access the Virtual Assistant or call (850) 300-4323 to speak to the Customer Call Center Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. (EST).

### **Looking for a mental health therapist for my children in the Inverness area.**

There are a number of resources to help families find mental health resources in their area. Visit [www.MyFloridaMyFamily.com](http://www.MyFloridaMyFamily.com) or dial 2-1-1 for a list of referrals. Additionally, if your children are uninsured, Lutheran Services Florida is contracted by the department to provide mental health services for Citrus County. Their

phone number is 877-229-9098 and website is <https://www.lsfnet.org/>.

**Need help for foster parents navigate with care and services.**

Foster parent support groups are available in your community and are facilitated by local foster and adoptive parent associations. Please contact your local community-based care lead agency, Community Partnership for Children, to find the local support group in your area, or call Florida's Foster Information Center at 1-83-FOSTERFL. The department also recently launched [MyFloridaMyFamily.com](https://www.MyFloridaMyFamily.com) to connect faith institutions with foster families in need.

Community Partnership for Children, Inc.

(386) 238-4900

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



# The Department of Education

## **How would one go about informing a child about their IEP [individual educational plan] and accommodations?**

The sooner you begin talking to your child about their exceptionality the better. It is important to talk openly about differences. Different is not something to be embarrassed about. The more information the child has about the way their brain and body work, the sooner they begin to know what supports may work best for them. Children can attend their IEP meetings at any age.

By the age of 16, the IEP becomes what is called a transition IEP. Part of the requirements of the transition IEP is that the student must be invited to participate in IEP team meetings. The reason for this is so that students and families can begin to prepare for life after high school. After graduation, an IEP does not follow the student. In order to receive accommodations in school or at work, individuals will need to tell or self-disclose their disability. That is one of the reasons it is so important for the student to learn early on how to advocate for one's self for success.

## **Can RTI [response to intervention] and eligibility for Exceptional Student Education [ESE] run concurrently?**

Absolutely, a student should be receiving both. The school can be providing interventions and the district can be gathering data while a student is being evaluated for eligibility to receive ESE services.

Once a parent or legal guardian asks for an evaluation, one of the following occurs:

- The district has 30 calendar days to get consent from the parent to evaluate the student:
  - This 30-day timeline can be changed if the parent or legal guardian and the district agree to another timeline in writing
  - After the district obtains consent the district has 60 days to complete the evaluation.
- The district provides the parent or legal guardian with a written notice explaining why the district is refusing to conduct the evaluation.

If the student is found to have a disability and is eligible for services, RtI should continue to be used to be sure that the student is making progress in the general education curriculum.

You can find more specific information on this subject in the Florida Department of Education's (FDOE's) technical assistance paper entitled, "Evaluation, Determination of Eligibility, Reevaluation and the Provision of Exceptional Student Education Services" at <https://info.fl DOE.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-7505/dps-2015-152.pdf>. For additional information and questions, please contact FDOE's Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services at 850-245-0475.

**My daughter attends a special school. This past year academically she wasn't challenged. How can I address the school in order to ensure she is working on an appropriate level?**

The ultimate goal is for your child to be college, career or life ready upon graduation. This will take planning and communication with the IEP team, which you and your child's teacher are a part of. Remember that you can request to meet with your IEP team as often as you feel necessary. Keep your conversations solution based.

All students need to grow academically. When thinking about academic growth keep accommodations and supports and rigor in mind:

- Accommodations and Supports—These are listed in the IEP. These benefit your daughter in several ways. One of those is the delivery of her schoolwork in a manner that she best learns, like the use of a communication device.
- Rigor—Creating an environment in which each student is supported in order to demonstrate learning at the highest level. If you believe your daughter is capable of reading at a higher level, what steps are being made toward this? Is it a goal on the IEP? If not, is there a goal that may lead to this?

**We were homeschooling before Covid, but our youngest (17) often is triggered when we go over work that she has incorrect. Her psychiatrist, targeted case manager, etc. are aware of her violent outbursts/elopement attempts and we have a home safety plan. What do I need to submit to reflect this year with little academic progress while in and out of mental health crisis centers?**

This is a very good question. Thank you for reaching out. Your daughter's situation is due to her disability and is taken into consideration under Florida law (section [s.] 1002.41, Florida Statutes [F.S.]), specifically the annual educational evaluation option 4 or 5, which read as follows:

4. The student shall be evaluated by a psychologist or an individual holding a valid, active license pursuant to the provisions of s. 490.003(7) or (8), F.S.; or
5. The student shall be evaluated with any other valid measurement tool as mutually agreed upon by the district school superintendent of the district in which the student resides and the student's parent.

Option number 4 allows any home education student with mental illness, or behavioral issues to be evaluated by a professional for their annual evaluation. That professional provides a report to the parent stating that their child has made educational progress. This report is then shared with the district.

There is also option 5, which allows you and the district to come up with a way to measure and evaluate your daughter's educational progress. You can also contact the ESE department at the district for additional support.

You can access the complete statute at [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?Appmode=Display\\_Statute&URL=1000-1099/1002/Sections/1002.41.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?Appmode=Display_Statute&URL=1000-1099/1002/Sections/1002.41.html).

**If a home education student, who is 16, does not submit an annual evaluation, are districts permitted to terminate the home education program for the student?**

Yes, if the district has notified the parent of failure to complete an annual evaluation, the parent does not provide a portfolio for review, and the student has not submitted documentation to "drop out," the district may terminate the home education program. Otherwise, the district may not terminate a home education student upon turning 16 years of age. A parent who is unable to meet the evaluation deadline should communicate with the school district and request an extension. The fifth evaluation method (option 5) listed in the previous answer allows districts and parents to work out an alternative evaluation method if none of the other four methods is available; however, nothing in the law requires a district to give an extension. Should a student wish to terminate their home education program at 16, the family must notify the school district. Section 1003.21, F.S., requires that students terminating enrollment at age 16 must be notified that their earning power is likely to be reduced. It is in the best interest of the student for the district to maintain home education records until the completion of high school.

For unusual situations, such as this one, you can contact your home school district contact, who can be found at

[https://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/District/district\\_list.asp?prgmtyp e=4](https://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/District/district_list.asp?prgmtyp e=4).

The FDOE's Office of Home Education has a Frequently Asked Questions and Answers document, which can be found at <http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7709/urlt/Home-Ed-FAQs.pdf>.

**Are the students who are on Florida Standards Alternative Assessments [FSAA] in the new data being assimilated and shared in new reports? As of last year's Family Café, FSAA data was not.**

The 2015-16 school year was the first year that the FSAA was administered. Beginning with the 2017-18 school year, the FSAA—Performance Task for English Language Arts, Mathematics, and end-of-course assessments were included in the achievement and learning gains components, and the FSAA—Performance Task for Science assessment was included in the achievement component. The FSAA—Datafolio will only be included for the percent tested; when FSAA is referenced in the achievement and learning gains components, it refers to the FSAA—Performance Task. The 2018-19 Guide to Calculating School Grades, District Grades, and the Federal Percent of Points Index (<http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/18534/urlt/SchoolGradesCalcGuide19.pdf>) provides a description of the procedures used to determine school grades for the 2018-19 school year as set forth in Rule 6A-1.09981, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.) (<https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ruleNo.asp?id=6A-1.09981>), and section 1008.34, F.S. ([http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&URL=1000-1099/1008/Sections/1008.34.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=1000-1099/1008/Sections/1008.34.html)).

**Where can we access reports from the Commissioner's Listening Tour for Career and Technical Education as it relates to those with unique abilities and measurements of not only participation "sitting in class," but measurements and reporting of para professionals assistance for meaningful engagement and progress modifications to learn at the individuals' level?**

Reports from the Commissioner's Listening Tour for Career and Technical Education may be found at <http://www.fldoe.org/newsroom/latest-news/commissioner-corcoran-governor-ron-desantis-is-the-education-governor.shtml> Florida's Perkins 4-year State Plan was approved in June 2020. The plan will serve as a guide for the use of funds and state-level expectations over



the next four years as it relates to those with unique abilities and may be found at <http://www.fl DOE.org/Perkins/>.

**US Department of Education made stimulus/CARES grants available for quick application and access. Did FLDOE encourage and are they listed by districts and [least restrictive environment] for career and technical education? And can those funds assist those with unique abilities to progress their interest?**

Yes, the FDOE made these funds available through two discretionary grants from the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act Fund. These funds are to be used for training and education on essential workforce skills and help the state prepare residents for in-demand, middle-to-high wage careers.

You can find a list of approved plans broken down in several options on the following web pages:

- Approved CARES grant plans and opportunity grants funding information may be found at <http://www.fl DOE.org/em-response/grants.shtml>
- Building K-12 CTE Infrastructure Application at <http://www.fl DOE.org/core/fileparse.php/7515/urlt/TAPS-21B089-Building-K12-CTE-InfrastructureApp.xlsx> or
- Rapid Credentialing Application at <http://www.fl DOE.org/core/fileparse.php/7515/urlt/TAPS-21B088-RapidCredentialingApp.xlsx>.

**How does the IEP come in place after high school?**

An IEP falls under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and is part of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the K-12 system for students with disabilities through the age of 21. When a student leaves the school system they are no longer receiving services under the IDEA. Persons with disabilities have rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday activities. More information can be found at <https://www.ada.gov/ta-pubs-pg2.htm>.

**What are the benefits of Access Points?**

Access Points are only for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The benefits of Florida Standards Access Points include the following:

- Florida Standards Access Points are built to target the salient content of the Florida Standards.
- Florida Standards Access Points are designed to contribute to a fully aligned system of content, instruction and assessment.
- Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities work on standards that are aligned to the general education content.
- Grade-level access points are delivered at the individual level needed, for the student to be successful and move learning forward.
- All Florida Standards Access Points are intended to allow fluid movement as students grow in competency.

**Hi. My son hasn't been in a public school for five years and we're getting ready to go to seventh grade and will need to have his IEP updated. Is there a place that I can look for ideas of what would be best to help him in his IEP meeting?**

There are many places to look for additional information related to the IEP, specifically resources helpful in preparing for your son's upcoming IEP team meeting. Resources that you may want to start with include the following:

- "What Is Exceptional Student Education for Children with Disabilities?"  
<http://www.fl DOE.org/core/fileparse.php/7690/urlt/0070089-ese.pdf>
- "A Parents' Guide to Exceptional Education"  
<http://www.fl DOE.org/core/fileparse.php/7690/urlt/0070085-eseparent.pdf>
- "Getting Ready for Your Student's Individual Educational Plan (IEP) Meeting"  
<http://www.fl DOE.org/core/fileparse.php/7690/urlt/0070119-iep-card.pdf>
- "Accommodations"  
<http://www.fl DOE.org/core/fileparse.php/7690/urlt/0070069-accomm-educator.pdf>

Also, as a parent, for additional information and resources, go to the Family Network on Disabilities website at <https://fndusa.org/>.

**My son turned 21 yrs. old but did not complete this year because of the pandemic. Why can't he go back and finish? They want him out of High School.**

Though schools were out for an extended spring break, educational services continued for students in Florida. Both federal and state laws provide for FAPE for students with disabilities who have not earned a standard diploma through the age of 21.

Exactly when services end is decided by the school district. Some school districts end services on the student's 22nd birthday, others at the end of the semester in which the student turns 22, and still others at the end of the school year in which the student turns 22. This decision

is not made student by student. Each district must state their policy in their Exceptional

Student Education Policy and Procedures (SP&P). To view a district's approved SP&P, go to <https://beessgsw.org/#/spp/institution/public/>. To view a district's past-approved SP&P, go to <http://beess.fcim.org/sppDistrictDocSearch.aspx>.

**Are students with dyslexia or specific learning disability that have IEPs eligible for Florida Bright Futures State Scholarships? Those with dyslexia struggle to get the precise classroom and testing accommodations and few have a fair chance to meet Bright Futures eligibility criteria on [grade-point average] or testing. Is Bright Futures state scholarship program inclusive of students with dyslexia or is there another equitable college funding program offered through the Florida Department of Education Office of Student Financial Aid designated for those with dyslexia? I am not able to locate this diversity category on the State financial aid website.**

Bright Futures Scholarships are available to all Florida students who meet the eligibility criteria, regardless of disability status. Specific Requirements for Scholarships can be found on page 3 of the Bright Futures Student Handbook, which can be found at

<https://www.floridastudentfinancialaidsg.org/PDF/BFHandbookChapter1.pdf>. All of the Bright Futures Scholarships require a minimum score on the ACT or the SAT.

Both of these assessments allow for accommodations for students with disabilities.

For information on how to request accommodations on the ACT, go to

<https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/registration/accommodations/policy-for-accommodations-documentation.html>.

For information on how to request accommodations on the SAT, go to

<https://accommodations.collegeboard.org/>.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a key partner in the transition of students with disabilities from school to employment. VR services help students with disabilities prepare for, get and keep a job. VR can help students access career counseling, postsecondary education or training, and work experience. Students with disabilities may apply to VR as early as age 14.

To locate the VR office nearest you, go to the VR Office Directory at

[http://rehabworks.org/office\\_directory.shtml](http://rehabworks.org/office_directory.shtml). Inform the VR representative that

you are interested in receiving VR services and they will help you determine what to do next.

More scholarship information can be found through the following:

- U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Vocational Rehabilitation Assistance  
<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/scholarships/vocational-rehabilitation-assistance>
- Scholarship Information  
<https://www.floridastudentfinancialaidsg.org/SAPHome/SAPHome?url=home>
- Project 10 Scholarship  
<http://project10.info/DPage.php?ID=167>
- Learning Ally Scholarship  
<https://portal.learningally.org/NAA/Application-LTL>

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

Students with reading difficulties and disabilities, including dyslexia, are served under funding from the Research-Based Reading Instruction Allocation, Rule 6A-6.053, F.A.C., which can be found at <https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ruleNo.asp?id=6A-6.053>.

Students with dysgraphia, dyscalculia and dyslexia who are found eligible for ESE services as a student with a specific learning disability are provided services funded with IDEA Part B funds.

Programs and strategies for reading instruction and intervention can be found in each district's K-12 Comprehensive Evidence-Based Reading Plan for all students. For students with IEPs, the collaborative problem-solving IEP team determines the accommodations and supports for the student to access grade-level content, the multi-tiered system of supports framework allows for flexibility and the intensity of intervention to fit the student's instructional needs.

**Now with all this situation happening (COVID-19) are people with disabilities able to receive their therapies and education with the same quality? How are schools and therapy centers being prepared for the new school year? I'm concerned about kids' health and safety. Some kids with disabilities won't be able to follow social distancing, neither having a mask for several hours.**

The FDOE shares your desire to protect the health and safety of our students through best practices during this unusual time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Section 381.0056, F.S., requires county health departments and local school districts to collaboratively develop a school health services plan. Each school health services plan describes local strategies and responsibilities for implementing activities that promote the health of Florida’s students to support academic success; therefore, policies and procedures for student health services during the pandemic are developed, approved and implemented at the local school district level. Please contact your local school district and county health department for any updates to your district’s school health services plan. All therapy services listed on a student’s IEP must be provided to the student. If therapy services are missed due to the district’s inability to provide the services, the student may be entitled to compensatory therapy services. Therapy sessions offered virtually must be of equal quality to the services that would have been offered in person. You can find the statute at [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=&URL=0300-0399/0381/Sections/0381.0056.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0300-0399/0381/Sections/0381.0056.html).

**What supports are available for students transitioning, before/ during/after in terms of assistive technology? How is funding best acquired for those supports.**

This is a great question. Transition is a very exciting time for students and their families. It is a time to plan and explore options. Assistive technology qualifies for funding under IDEA Part B. These funds may be used to ensure all students with disabilities, ages 3 through 21, have the right to a FAPE designed to meet their individual needs and prepare them for employment and independent living. Funds shall be used to supplement the excess costs of providing special education and related services to students with disabilities. Florida school districts, university research schools and other local educational agencies, as defined in section 300.18 of Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.), provide educational programs and services to students with disabilities.

Below you will find links for more specific information.

The Florida Interagency Agreement for the Transfer of Assistive Technology (<https://info.fl DOE.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-3967/k12-06-131.pdf>) has established a framework for an efficient transition of technology as a student transitions through the continuum of education to employment.

Section 1003.575, F.S. ([http://www.leg.state.fl.us/STATUTES/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.575.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/STATUTES/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.575.html)), requires interagency agreements to support a framework that ensures the opportunity to request assistive technology devices be retained for use by a child

or youth with a disability as the student transitions to another school district, postsecondary institution, state or community agency, employment facility, home or community living facility.

**How is the State of FL working with the FLDOE on students accommodations and services being covered during COVID? If each district across the state is doing something different how is the FLDOE following up with districts on their protocols to ensure students are taken care of during this time?**

Each school district has submitted a District Re-opening Plan to the FDOE that includes how they will address students with IEPs. You can find those plans on the FDOE website at <http://fldoe.org/em-response/index.stml>. For issues related to individual student needs, IEP teams should meet to discuss how to meet the needs of each student depending on which learning environment the family has chosen.

**What is the best way to advocate for your child in school? What strategies work well? Does going in strong and making the demands work better than compromising? How do you develop a good relationship with the school? I find school so political; I am having a hard time finding a happy medium.**

A parent is a valuable member of the IEP team and the school community. It is important to make your concerns known. Try to focus on positive communication and positive meetings. It can be helpful to prepare for conversations and meetings by making a list of the concerns you have and your ideas on how to address them. Bring any information you have, such as grades, doctor notes or what your child is sharing with you to show to the IEP team or staff members. This is not required, but if you have additional information it may help the IEP team better understand your concerns. Be sure to include any solutions you may have. Remember, you are working together for the best possible outcomes for your child.

If you feel there are still issues, contact your district ESE office. For assistance, visit FDOE's Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services website at <http://fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu> or call the bureau at 850-245-0475.

**If RTF (residential treatment facility) has been strongly suggested by a psychiatrist, how is it possible that a child can be denied due to low IQ (intelligent quotient)?**

Educational situations can often be unique to the student. In order to provide you with the most accurate answer for your specific situation, additional information is needed. Please contact the FDOE's Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services at 850-245-0475.

### **Where do I look for resources about home education?**

FDOE's Office of School Choice provides technical assistance and information to school districts and parents on home education. Each district has a home education contact person who works with homeschooling families regarding home education programs. This contact person can provide you with local resources. Many independent organizations also provide resources and support for home educators. For a list of district contacts and resources, visit the FDOE's Home Education website at <http://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/other-school-choice-options/home-edu/>.

### **Our system is not working for kids with disabilities. Especially now that all learning will be online. What can we do to get our kids extra help and services?**

Parent involvement is a key component to a student's success. There are many ways for parents and families to provide input on the decision making. At the state level, there is the State Advisory Committee for the Education of Exceptional Students (SAC). The SAC is required by Florida law. The committee must be made up of 50% or more of parents of students with disabilities. You can find more information about SAC at <http://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/beess-resources/the-state-advisory-committee-for-the-e.stml>.

At the school district level there are many organized groups that you can become involved in or attend the meeting to gather information. These include the following:

- District Advisory Councils
- School Advisory Councils
- ESE Parent Advisory groups—some districts may have an existing group, if your district does not have an existing group, speak with your district's ESE director about starting one

For the 2020-21 school year, school districts are offering parents the choice between virtual and in-person instruction. Each school district has submitted a District Re-opening Plan to the FDOE that includes how they will address students with IEPs. You can find those plans on the FDOE website at <http://fldoe.org/em->

[response/index.shtml](#). You can also find a list of resources for virtual learning under topics of special interest at <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/>.

### **How will the pandemic we are currently experiencing influence your commitment to children with disabilities and their families in the upcoming school year?**

The FDOE is committed to partnering with parents, teachers, educators and community members to improve Florida’s education system for students of all abilities. During this COVID-19 pandemic, it is especially important that we continue to be flexible, equipped with resources, and empower all students. Under the guidance and collaboration of multiple state and federal agencies, the FDOE will continue to make available current information and resources. Guidance put out by the FDOE includes the requirement to continue to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The FDOE’s main resource page can be accessed at <https://www.fldoe.org/em-response/resources-families.shtml>.

Specific to students with disabilities and their families, resources can be found on the FDOE’s Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services website under Topics of Special interest at <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/>.

### **I have been bullied twice at school and the teacher knows it. Heck, everyone knows it. What am I supposed to do now?**

Bullying is not okay. Each school district in Florida has a bullying policy. Visit your guidance counselor’s office to discuss these incidents and ask to file a bullying complaint. The guidance counselor will walk you through the process. You can also visit the FDOE’s Office of Safe School Bullying Prevention website at <http://www.fldoe.org/safe-schools/bullying-prevention.shtml>. Should you have additional questions, contact the FDOE’s Office of Safe Schools at 850-245-5173.

### **If we homeschool our disabled child is there any way to receive FL State monies to assist us financially since our children are NOT attending the Florida Public School system?**

Homeschool is a great option for some. Educational funding is not specifically available for homeschooling; however, there is a scholarship available for students with specific disabilities, the Gardiner Scholarship. This may be an option. You can find more specific information on the School Choice website at



<https://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/gardiner/>.

### **Where do I look for homeschooling support and resources?**

The FDOE's Office of School Choice provides technical assistance and information to school districts and parents on home education. Each district has a home education contact person who works with homeschooling families regarding home education programs. This contact person can provide you with local resources. Many independent organizations also provide resources and support for home educators. For a list of district contacts and resources, go to the FDOE's Home Education website at <http://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/other-school-choice-options/home-edu/>.

### **How does the ADA support adults with autism spectrum in college?**

Both public and private colleges and universities must provide equal access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities. College students with documented disabilities are eligible to receive auxiliary aids and services.

In order to receive services, students must self-disclose their disability and register with their college's Office of Student Disability Services. Current documentation of their disability must be presented. Documentation requirements may vary across colleges and may also be different than the documents required by high schools. This documentation will assist in determining the types of accommodations that can be made available. For additional information, go to the FDOE's Higher Education and Disability Support Services website at <http://www.fldoe.org/schools/higher-ed/fl-college-system/academic-student-affairs/disability-support-services.stml>.

### **What is your resolution if the teacher, special education coordinator, and the principal are all on attack and not helping the student with the disability? I have been in my IEP meetings since first grade.**

There are a variety of options and resources to consider when there are disagreements over a student's exceptional education. At the school and district level, these options include the following:

- Continue to keep communication open with your child's IEP team members, this would include all staff at the school and district levels that work with your child;

- Have a solutions-focused mindset;
- Document ideas, questions and suggestions to ensure everyone has the same understanding of what has occurred and the direction the IEP team is working toward;
- Schedule periodic meetings to discuss issues and proposed solutions to ensure everyone is communicating clearly about potential impediments and concerns; and
- Request information about local facilitated IEP meetings from your district's ESE director.

At the state level, the FDOE's Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services offers many dispute resolution options as well as many resources to parents of students with disabilities. You can review these resources on the bureau's website at <http://www.fl DOE.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/dispute-resolution/>.

Federal resources include the following:

- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs through the Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (known as CADRE) project at <https://www.cadeworks.org/resources/cadre-materials/working-together-series>
- Federally funded technical assistance centers can also offer parents support in this area. Parents can receive these services through Parent Technical Assistance Centers in the following regions:
  - Parent Support Network (PSN)
    - Family Network on Disabilities (Florida Parent Training Information [PTI]) - <https://fndusa.org/contact-us/programs/>
    - Parent Education Network (PEN) –Florida PTI - <https://fndusa.org/contact-us/programs/pen/>
    - Parents of the Panhandle Information Network (POPIN) –Florida PTI - <https://fndusa.org/contact-us/programs/popin/>



# The Department of Health

## **We need more screenings from the DOH for vision, hearing, and orthopedic issues for people with disabilities.**

Local county health departments have contracts with their local school districts, as well as with 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: Florida School Health Program at <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/childrens-health/school-health/school-health-program.html>.

## **What is Early Steps?**

The Early Steps Program is Florida's early intervention system that offers services to eligible infants and toddlers (birth to thirty-six months) with significant delays or a condition likely to result in a developmental delay. Early Intervention is provided to support families and caregivers in developing the competence and confidence to help their child learn and develop. For more information, please visit the program's website: Florida Early Steps Program at <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/childrens-health/early-steps/index.html>.

## **Please give me information about medical marijuana.**

The Office of Medical Marijuana Use is charged with writing and implementing the Department of Health's rules for medical marijuana, overseeing the statewide Medical Marijuana Use Registry, and licensing Florida businesses to cultivate, process, and dispense medical marijuana to qualified patients. The Florida Department of Health, physicians, medical marijuana treatment centers, and patients are bound by Article X Section 29 of the Florida Constitution and Section 381.986, Florida Statutes. For more information about medical marijuana in Florida, please visit [www.KnowTheFactsMMJ.com](http://www.KnowTheFactsMMJ.com) where you can learn more about the Steps to Treatment for qualifying patients, locating qualified physicians, and locations of medical marijuana dispensaries.

## **What happens when my child ages out of Early Steps? Are there more services available?**

Prior to your child aging out of the Early Steps Program, there will be a transition conference held to determine your child's next steps and to identify services in your local school system. For more information, call your local Early Steps Program office or visit the program's website: Florida Early Steps Program at <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/childrens-health/early-steps/index.html>.

### **How can I get PPE if I can't afford to purchase it?**

You may contact your local County Emergency Manager or your local County Health Department for assistance with obtaining PPE. For information about current PPE recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19, you may visit the Florida Department of Health Florida COVID-19 Response website: [floridahealthcovid19.gov/](http://floridahealthcovid19.gov/). Information can also be obtained from the COVID-19 Call Center 24/7 at 1-866-779-6121.

### **I'm scared about getting COVID-19.**

To learn more about COVID-19 and how to stay protected, please visit the Florida Department of Health Florida COVID-19 Response website: [floridahealthcovid19.gov/](http://floridahealthcovid19.gov/). Information can also be obtained from the COVID-19 Call Center 24/7 at 1-866-779-6121.

### **How can I get tested for COVID?**

To learn more about COVID-19 testing in Florida, please visit the Florida Department of Health Florida COVID-19 Response website: [floridahealthcovid19.gov/](http://floridahealthcovid19.gov/). Information can also be obtained from the COVID-19 Call Center 24/7 at 1-866-779-6121.

**Disability for minors in this state is dependent upon the parents' income. However, there is no state mandate requiring all employers in the state of Florida to insure for all therapies that benefit our kids (such as ABA, Music Therapy, Art Therapy, etc). Does KidCare carry?**

Florida KidCare is made up of four unique programs: Medicaid (ages 0-18), MediKids (ages 1-4), Children's Medical Services (CMS) Health Plan (ages 0-18 for children with special medical needs,) and Florida Healthy Kids (ages 5-18). Medicaid, MediKids, and CMS Health Plan covers a variety of behavioral health

benefits, including Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy. Florida Healthy Kids provides behavioral health services; however, ABA therapy, music therapy, and art therapy are not covered. Some Florida Healthy Kids plans do provide certain non-covered therapies as value-added benefits for eligible enrollees.

Please call the toll-free Florida KidCare customer service line at 1-888-540-5437 for application assistance or to learn more about the health plans available. To be screened for CMS Health Plan medical eligibility, please call the toll-free Clinical Eligibility Helpline at (855) 901-5390.

### **What is newborn screening?**

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 born in Florida. Newborns are screened for certain genetic, endocrine, hemoglobinopathy, 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 abnormal, parents will be notified, and the Newborn Screening Follow-up Program will ensure access to diagnostic testing to confirm results. For more information, please visit: [floridanewbornscreening.com/](http://floridanewbornscreening.com/).

**What ways can you support hospitals implementing transition programs from pediatric to adult care? I want you to be aware this is a common problem in the healthcare journey for those living with disabilities. Some of the challenges to launching Adult Transition Care are having specialties under one roof, billing, medical providers not being properly trained about disabilities (due to the fact that with medical advancements many more children are getting to live longer lives). Review the Bridges Program at Harvard for a good model!**

Children's Medical Services (CMS) has specialists who provide education and technical assistance to providers interested in learning more about incorporating Health Care Transition into their practice (whether private or in the hospital setting). Interested providers can reach out to CMS staff in their area to do a presentation. Please feel free to contact Angie Chatfield RN, Statewide Nurse Consultant for Health Care Transition, at [angela.chatfield@flhealth.gov](mailto:angela.chatfield@flhealth.gov). In addition, providers can visit the GOT Transition website at [gottransition.org/](http://gottransition.org/) or the Florida HATS website at [floridahats.org](http://floridahats.org). These sites have tool kits and trainings for

both practitioners and families regarding Health Care Transition. GOT Transition just added disease-specific resources to its website.

Additionally, CMS has Statewide Networks for Access and Quality (SNAQ) teams across the state, which are largely compiled of hospital specialists and clinicians from university systems. These condition-specific or disease-focused (Sickle Cell, Diabetes, HIV, Pulmonary, etc.) SNAQ teams chose quality improvement goals to work toward and many of the teams have chosen Health Care Transition as a priority. The Department of Health looks forward to sharing lessons learned with other provider types to replicate best practices for the future.

**How can I get a service dog for my child? She has seizures. She can't go to college or get a job unless someone or a dog is with her. She receives services through DOH.**

Please contact the Vocational Rehabilitation Program at the Florida Department of Education to learn more about the resources have available to assist your child at 1-800-451-4327 or visit the website: [rehabworks.org/](http://rehabworks.org/).

**How can I get a comfortable, free mattress for my home hospital bed?**

Please contact your health care company or the durable medical equipment provider who can assist in replacing the original mattress.

**Families that have children with disabilities need a book or a guide that provides all of the resources available. Most parents that I have talked to don't know where to start. They are not given any real direction when their child is diagnosed. Most of us have just picked up bits and pieces along the way. I am thankful for Family Café because I have been able to gain a lot of knowledge and resources from there once a year. Parents have enough stress trying to help their child/children with whatever needs they have. Resources are key to our survival.**

Families with children who have special health care needs have a wide range of unique physical, behavioral, or emotional needs. Resources vary based on where you live. A child's insurance plan is a great source for information; some plans may offer social services connections or referrals for community resources. It is important to know what services are covered and decide what additional resources are needed.

**What plans are in place for delayed medically compromised special needs children for school year 2020-2021? Options given do not take these our kids into consideration.**

To learn more about the accommodations available at your child's school, please contact your child's teacher, school guidance counselor, or student services director. A formal request for an evaluation of your child's 504 educational plan is needed to indentify adjustments to more appropriately accommodate your child.

**Will telehealth become a permanent option for early intervention since COVID-19 has no end in sight?**

Telehealth has been implemented as an option during the pandemic to ensure continuation of early intervention services. The program will evaluate the need to expand these services in the future. You can visit the Early Steps Program website to stay up to date on available services: Florida Early Steps Program <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/childrens-health/early-steps/index.html>.

**What is the best way to increase blood cells in a child in with Sickle Cell? Are there any new treatments out for cure?**

To learn more about Sickle Cell, please contact the Foundation for Sickle Cell Disease Research at 954-397-3251. Please contact your health care provider to address your questions related to treatment. As an additional resource, Neashia Rhoden, Nurse Practitioner with the Foundation for Sickle Cell Disease and Research, is available for telemedicine appointments and can be reached at [nrhoden@fscdr.org](mailto:nrhoden@fscdr.org).

**I am having trouble finding a behavioral therapist to come to our home in Osceola County at US 192 and I-4. Any suggestions? I am on that Early Steps program.**

Please contact the Central Florida Early Steps Office, serving Orange, Osceola, and Seminole counties, to assist in identifying a behavioral therapist:  
601 West Michigan Street  
Orlando, Florida 32805  
Phone: (407) 317-7430, Option 3  
Fax: (321) 843-2108  
Website: The Developmental Center for Infants and Children Developmental Center for Infants and Children

<https://www.arnoldpalmerhospital.com/facilities/the-howard-phillips-center-for-children-and-families/about-us/the-developmental-center-for-infants-and-children>.

**When will this virus end? It is making my depression worse having to stay home. What are they doing to help youth like me?**

Social distancing efforts to help reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus have increased depression world-wide. There are many ways you can work to improve your depression safely: you can take a walk to explore your neighborhood or a local park, connect virtually with family and friends, or reach out to help others. The following websites can provide additional ideas on self-care tips to help with depression: TeenHealth 5 ways to Help Yourself Through Depression <https://teenshealth.org/en/teens/depression-tips.html>. Healthy Minds Self-Care for Resilience videos <https://www.mghclaycenter.org/self-care/> and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's How to Take Care of Yourself <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/youth/>. You may also call the Florida Pediatric Psychiatry Hotline at 1-866-487-9507 for assistance. Remember, it is important to let your family and doctor know how you are feeling so they can help you.

**What is being done in the medical community to slow or stop the spread of Covid-19? Will a vaccine be available soon?**

To learn more about COVID-19 and how to stay protected, please visit the Florida Department of Health Florida COVID-19 Response website: [floridahealthcovid19.gov/](http://floridahealthcovid19.gov/). Information can also be obtained from the COVID-19 Call Center 24/7 at 1-866-779-6121.





# The Division of Emergency Management

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

There are many factors to consider when creating a disaster supply kit for your family. Each family has unique needs and circumstances, but all Florida residents need to keep seven days of supplies on-hand in the event of a disaster. This includes non-perishable food, water, batteries and more. This year, it's also important to add items such as face masks and hand sanitizer to further prevent the spread of COVID-19. To get a full list of what you should have stocked, see the Division's checklist at <https://www.floridadisaster.org/planprepare/hurricane-supply-checklist/>.

## **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?**

Recent hurricanes have taught us that it can take up to seven days or longer to restore power in impacted areas. Because of this, Floridians need to have at least seven days of supplies. If you or a loved one has special needs and depend on power, a generator would be a good addition to your family's disaster supply kit. Remember to never use a generator inside – even in the garage. For more information on what to stock up on when sheltering in place, see the Division's checklist at <https://www.floridadisaster.org/planprepare/hurricane-supply-checklist/>.

## **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.**

The greatest risk to your livelihood from a hurricane or large storm is storm surge flooding. This can be a high risk for those in evacuation zones, low-lying flood areas or mobile homes, and will pose a greater risk to you and your family than COVID-19 exposure.

However, if you do not reside in one of these areas, it may be safer to stay home. It's always best to listen to the advice and orders of local officials during a storm. Visit the Know Your Zone, Know Your Home page at <https://www.floridadisaster.org/planprepare/know-your-zone-know-your-home/> to determine what kind of flood-risk area you may live in.

It's also always beneficial to plan in advance of a storm. The best way to do this is to register with the Special Needs Registry as soon as possible at <https://www.floridadisaster.org/snr>. This allows residents with special needs to connect with their local emergency management agency to receive assistance during a disaster.

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

To increase access to resources during a disaster, register with the Special Needs Registry at <https://www.floridadisaster.org/snr>. The registry connects individuals with special needs to their local county emergency management agency. Filling in detailed information on the registry will allow first responders to fulfill your specific needs, including power-dependent essentials.

In the event of a hurricane or other disaster that could leave your home without power, your disaster supply kit should be stocked with at least seven days of supplies. If you or a loved one are power-dependent due to special needs, purchasing a generator for your disaster kit will be a necessity. Remember to never use a generator indoors – even in the garage.

Most virtual registration for assistance can also be completed using a cell phone. Make sure your phone is charged before a storm and consider buying portable phone chargers.

With a stocked disaster supply kit and registration with the Special Needs Registry, being without power becomes much more manageable as you and your family navigate through a disaster.

**In the last hurricane, we evacuated to a hotel but at one hotel their doorways were too small for the wheelchair and another hotel did not have any rooms on the bottom floor and could not let people go up in case the power went out. So be sure to call ahead of time and do it often throughout the season.**

It is a top priority of the Division to ensure inclusive sheltering options for all residents affected by disasters. Because of this, the Division has worked with hotels across the state to establish non-congregate sheltering amidst the COVID-19 pandemic to provide more accommodating sheltering spaces for residents.

Through Safer-FL – a free, web-based application developed by the state to assist Floridians in registering for emergency sheltering during a disaster – residents will

be able to view available hotels in their area ahead of time and register for spaces they are qualified for. Individuals can register by visiting [www.Safer-FL.com](http://www.Safer-FL.com), by texting "SHELTER" to 49729 or by calling (833) 904- 2260.

It is also recommended to register with the Special Needs Registry at <https://www.floridadisaster.org/snr>. This allows residents with special needs to connect with their local emergency management agency to receive assistance during a disaster. Providing as much information as possible will allow emergency management officials to plan accordingly for future disasters.

### **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?**

Stocking up on medications and other scarce supplies can be a big concern for residents when a storm is approaching, but the state has put protocols in place for residents to have access to medical essentials before and after a disaster strikes.

Prior to a storm making landfall, Florida law allows individuals to obtain a 30-day refill of your prescription medication – even if you have just refilled it. This will apply to counties that:

- Are under a hurricane warning issued by the National Weather Service,
- Are under a state of emergency executive order declared by the Governor or
- Have activated their emergency operations center/emergency management plan.

If you are not able to stock up on medications beforehand, visit [RxOpen.org](http://RxOpen.org) to find open and closed pharmacies near you during a disaster. The site also has locations of American Red Cross shelters and infusion centers in the affected communities.

### **Can I bring my service dog with me to a shelter?**

Yes, service animals are welcome in all shelters. Make sure to have documentation of ownership for your animal (paperwork or photos) in the event of separation during a disaster, along with any other supplies they might need in case of evacuation. This includes items like sturdy leashes, carriers, food, toys and more. For more information on things to consider when it comes to including your pet or service animal in your disaster plan, visit <https://www.floridadisaster.org/planprepare/pet-plan/>.

**Here in the Florida Panhandle we are still struggling for resources and supports due to Hurricane Michael. It has been 20 months since the hurricane and yes it was an anomaly, however that's 20 months that the state should have found way to bring more services into the area. We're talking lack of personal care support services, lack of respite services, lack of medical supports and the list goes on. 20 months to me is unacceptable. The support services that were received following Hurricane Michael were unacceptable.**

The Division works extensively through every disaster to ensure all available resources are utilized to assist communities in making full recoveries. Immediately after Hurricane Michael's landfall, the State Emergency Response Team coordinated the establishment of 25 Points of Distribution in the hardest hit counties. These distribution points provided critical food and water relief. Overall, approximately 11 million meals, 3 million gallons of water and 3 million pounds of ice were distributed.

Under Governor and First Lady DeSantis, mental health has also been a large focus when it comes to disaster recovery. As a result, the Division hired the first Disaster Recovery Mental Health Coordinator in Florida's history, Darcy Abbott, in October 2019. Abbott was deployed to Northwest Florida to provide aid after Hurricane Michael. Throughout the Hurricane Michael response, the state provided every mental health resource available, including:

- Installing telehealth portals for mental health services in 63 public schools throughout six counties in Northwest Florida;
- Expanding the Florida Department of Children and Families Crisis Counseling Program;
- Awarding \$1.25 million by the U.S. Department of Education to Bay County for the expansion of licensed school social workers and paraprofessionals; and
- Securing 100 travel trailers from FEMA through FDEM, at no cost to the state, to provide immediate relief to those looking for housing.

Later in January 2020, First Lady DeSantis secured an extra \$690 thousand from FEMA to continue crisis counseling in areas impacted by Hurricane Michael.

The Division and Governor Ron DeSantis continue to provide essential aid to impacted areas. By October 2019, the Division had already distributed over \$400 million to Northwest Florida for Hurricane Michael recovery. Later in December 2019, Governor DeSantis distributed \$20 million to impacted counties through the Hurricane Michael State Recovery Grant Program. The Division has also successfully begun distributing funds for the \$380 million Florida Timber Recovery Block Grant Program, helping timber producers recover lost wages from

destruction by Hurricane Michael. In total, more than \$149 million was distributed in Individual Assistance by FEMA for residents in impacted areas.

**What will PPE be like at a shelter as to its process? Will masks and such need to be brought, worn, or passed out to those staying and working at the shelters?**

It is always best to come prepared to any public space with your own PPE as a safety precaution. However, the Division has made an effort to prioritize PPE availability in the event that congregate sheltering is necessary. For Hurricane Season, the Division has

- 18 million masks,
- 7 million gloves,
- 3 million face shields,
- 150,000 coveralls,
- 20,000 thermometers and
- 200 negative pressure systems set aside.

The Division also purchased PPE kits to distribute to shelters that may open in response to need during a hurricane. The kits contain hand sanitizer, masks and gloves, with equipment for kids, adults and shelter staff. Ultimately, all decisions regarding sheltering during a storm will be decided by local county emergency management.

**Will shelters turn people away if they can't meet social distancing guidelines? Will additional shelters be opened up to meet the needs?**

It helps to plan ahead of a disaster to ensure that you won't be turned away from a shelter. To help the planning process, the State has developed a free, web-based application called Safer-FL to assist Floridians in registering for emergency sheltering during a disaster. This app provides residents with information regarding congregate and non-congregate sheltering options as well as connects them with their county emergency management officials. Individuals can register by visiting [www.Safer-FL.com](http://www.Safer-FL.com), by texting "SHELTER" to 49729 or by calling (833) 904-2260.

The Division works with counties with open shelters to ensure every Floridian has a safe place to stay during a storm. Non-congregate sheltering options have been created through partnerships between local hotels and the state to provide sheltering accommodations for those with special needs, those who are unable to social distance and any other residents who have special circumstances.

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

Preparing your home for a hurricane in advance can save on extensive repair costs caused by destruction from a storm.

Strengthening the exterior mitigates against wind and debris tearing large openings into your home. This can be done by protecting and reinforcing these five critical areas: roof, straps, windows, doors and garage doors. Contact the local building code official to find out what requirements are necessary for home improvement projects.

For more information, visit the Division's Planning For Your Home page at <https://www.floridadisaster.org/planprepare/secure-your-home/>.

It is also important to note that flood damage is not usually covered by homeowners' insurance. Do not make assumptions; check your policy annually. The National Flood Insurance Program is a pre-disaster flood mitigation and insurance protection program designed to reduce the escalating cost of disasters. The National Flood Insurance Program makes federally backed flood insurance available to residents and business owners. Standard flood insurance by the National Flood Insurance Program generally covers physical damages directly caused by flooding within the limits of the coverage purchased. Private providers may have higher limits or broader coverage compared to National Flood Insurance Program policies.

For more information, visit National Flood Insurance Program at <https://www.floodsmart.gov/>.

## **Please share information on special needs shelters.**

Inclusivity among sheltering options is a priority of the Division. To ensure the safety of all Floridians, the Division has made the sheltering process more accommodating.

To plan for a disaster in advance, register with the Special Needs Registry at <https://www.floridadisaster.org/snr>. This allows residents with special needs to connect with their local emergency management agency to receive assistance during a disaster.

If you do need to evacuate, the basic eligibility criteria needed to stay in a special needs shelter are:

- A person with special medical needs
- Care exceeds the basic first aid provided at general population shelters
- Impairments or disabilities are medically stable and do not exceed the capacity, staffing and equipment of the special needs shelter to minimize deterioration of pre-event level of health.

To find and register for shelters in advance, make use of Safer-FL, a free, web-based application developed by the state. Visit [www.Safer-FL.com](http://www.Safer-FL.com), text "SHELTER" to 49729 or call (833) 904-2260 to register. Safer-FL prioritizes vulnerable populations, so you or your loved one with special needs will be able to secure adequate accommodations in advance of a disaster.

### **Will social distancing be possible in shelters if we have a bad hurricane season if we are still in a pandemic?**

Ultimately, all sheltering decisions during a storm are decided by local county emergency management. However, the state worked with CDC, FEMA and the American Red Cross to develop guidance for counties ahead of the 2020 Hurricane Season. This includes less than 50 people in a shelter whenever possible and a recommendation of 6 feet between residents in order to maintain social distancing within a facility.

The Division has also reached out to numerous hotels across the state to provide non-congregate sheltering options for residents to be able to social distance.

Taking safety precautions regarding COVID-19 is a priority for officials when planning sheltering options. Congregate sheltering with social distancing measures and non-congregate sheltering will be readily available if a disaster strikes.

### **What precautions and preparations are in place for individuals in group homes and nursing facilities in the event of a high impact hurricane?**

Ensuring long-term care facilities are prepared for a storm is a top priority of the state. Nursing homes and assisted-living facilities are responsible for coordinating their own evacuation plans, and these evacuation and sheltering destinations are confirmed and shared with the state. To assist in this process, the Agency for Health Care Administration has provided guidance in making sure that facilities confirm evacuation destinations can care for individuals with and without COVID-19 safely.

Additionally, the Florida Department of Elder Affairs coordinates with the Division on emergency preparedness issues and post-disaster response. Visit the Disaster Preparedness page on the Florida Department of Elder Affairs site for more information at <http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/doea/disaster.php>.

### **What happens if there is a COVID outbreak in a hurricane shelter? Are there protocols in place?**

While sheltering decisions are made at the local level, the Division has provided sheltering guidance to counties, including:

- Shelters should use temperature checks and other screening criteria to identify individuals who may have COVID-19;
- Less than 50 people in a shelter whenever possible; and
- CDC and the American Red Cross recommend at least 60 square feet per person – in order to maintain social distancing within a facility.

More structurally social distanced sheltering options are also available this hurricane season. Local hotels participate and provide accommodations through the state for residents to utilize during and after a disaster. To find and register for shelters in advance, make use of Safer-FL, a free, web-based application developed by the state. Visit [www.Safer-FL.com](http://www.Safer-FL.com), text "SHELTER" to 49729 or call (833) 904-2260 to register.

### **How can you social distance in a shelter?**

All decisions regarding sheltering during a storm will be decided by local county emergency management. The CDC and the American Red Cross have recommended at least 6 feet between residents within congregate shelters whenever possible to enforce social distancing. The Division has also recommended that shelters keep their capacity under 50 individuals whenever possible.

If social distancing becomes difficult in a shelter, there are still precautions every resident can take to stay safe. Remember, sheltering is temporary. As long as you and your family are taking the best precautions you can, such as wearing face masks when around others and washing your hands frequently for 20 seconds or longer with soap and water, you will be able to stay safe when staying in a congregate shelter.

More structurally social distanced sheltering options are also available this hurricane season. Local hotels participate and provide accommodations through the state for residents to utilize during and after a disaster.



To find and register for shelters in advance, make use of Safer-FL, a free, web-based application developed by the state. Visit [www.Safer-FL.com](http://www.Safer-FL.com), text "SHELTER" to 49729 or call (833) 904-2260 to register.

### **How will evacuation shelters deal with the virus?**

The Division is continuously working to ensure the safety of residents who must evacuate due to a disaster in their area throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The state is utilizing non-congregate sheltering plans wherever possible. In typical congregate sheltering spaces, updates have been made to take precautions and prioritize safety when considering COVID-19. This includes:

- Less than 50 people in a shelter whenever possible,
- Use of temperature checks and other screening criteria within shelters and
- A recommendation of 6 feet between residents in order to maintain social distancing within a facility.

The Division has 18 million masks, 7 million gloves, 3 million face shields, 150,000 coveralls, 20,000 thermometers and 200 negative pressure systems set aside for Hurricane Season. We are continuously ordering additional PPE to deliver to counties, first responders and healthcare workers statewide.



# **The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**

**How many new members have you had and helped or are helping to employ that have lost their jobs or careers due to COVID-19?**

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has been monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on our customers, staff and providers. VR has requested that all of our Rehabilitation Counselors reach out to their customers to verify their employment and assist with obtaining employment if a job was lost, as well as provide other needed supports to obtain or maintain employment during this pandemic. If their job was lost as a result of COVID-19, VR has rolled out a COVID Re-Employment Service to assist with customer job replacement.

**Even before COVID 19 my son's VR services have been very slow to do anything. What if we find a job for him on our own since VR has not really done much to help?**

We are sorry to hear that you have experienced slow services. The Division continues to work diligently to serve customers. We are happy to assist you navigate through the VR process. Contact your VR counselor or 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](mailto: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). We are happy to work with you to resolve these issues.

**The economy is showing signs of recovery, but not all businesses are functioning, employment dreams are on hold as well. Can you share what is happening across our state regarding employment efforts?**

Our VR Business Relations Team provides an array of services, resources and solutions to increase disability inclusion in the workplace. Services to employers include recruitment support, technical assistance on disability-related matters, disability awareness training, tax credit assistance and work-based training. Business Relations also conducts targeted outreach to employers in in-demand industries to build relationships that expand career opportunities for VR participants. Outreach includes networking with workforce partners and industry associations, collaboration with VR employment services providers, participation with Chamber organizations, and partnerships with other stakeholders to improve business services and customers' career outcomes. Despite the challenges

presented by COVID-19, partnerships with businesses are being developed and growing, such as partnerships with Collins Aerospace, Sodexo, Wyndham, and county and state government. Networking, collaboration and partnerships with targeted high skill high-wage industries are expanding in-demand career opportunities for VR participants.

VR also collaborates with a network of providers. The vast majority of VR's 350+ Employment Services Providers are currently open and serving customers. Most providers are offering virtual or remote services. VR's Bureau of Vendor and Contracted Services has expanded communication efforts with providers to include a regular weekly email newsletter and bi-monthly webinars. Communications include tips and guidance on delivering services virtually, as well as helpful reminders on things such as advertising and marketing. Additionally, each of our providers have access to a Provider Liaison who can assist the provider in communicating with VR counseling and business relations staff.

### **Can we get a list of actual VR office contacts (personnel) in each county throughout the state?**

All of our office locations are found on our website at [http://www.RehabWorks.org/office\\_directory.shtml](http://www.RehabWorks.org/office_directory.shtml). Select VR Office Locations.

### **What happens if furloughed workers are still active workers?**

All workers negatively affected by COVID-19 are encouraged to apply for Reemployment Assistance benefits. The Reemployment Assistance Team will review your application and determine your eligibility for benefits. Complete an online application at <http://www.floridajobs.org/>.

If an existing VR customer is furloughed or temporarily laid off by the employer, VR may continue to serve them by focusing on improving transferrable skills, and exploring other service options such as On-the-Job Training. New applicants to VR who have been furloughed and determined eligible for VR services may benefit from Job Retention Services to increase the customer's skills and make them qualified for other jobs with their employer.

If you would like help from VR to find a job, you may apply for VR services. For more information, go online at <http://www.RehabWorks.org/customers.shtml>, call toll free at 800-451-4327 or 866-515-3692 or mail [Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org](mailto:Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org). TTY users dial 711 to connect with the telecommunications relay service (TRS). Video phone users can call through the video relay service (VRS).

### **After job placement of 90 days does the Job Coach follow up?**

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services are highly individualized. Some of our services end after 90 days of continuous employment. If a customer needs job coaching support after 90 days, VR may be able to assist with post-employment services to ensure job retention.

### **Does VR provide funding for wheelchairs especially if I need one for working?**

You may be eligible for VR services. VR may be able to provide a wheelchair for employment purposes, if appropriate. All VR services are individualized based on each customer needs.

### **How do I get Phase 1 certificate?**

Individuals determined eligible for VR services may receive (Phase I) Supported Employment services. VR secures the provision of Phase II services through collaboration with other agencies such as the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. For more information about our Supported Employment Program, contact our Employment Programs Team at [VREmploymentPrograms@vr.fl-doe.org](mailto:VREmploymentPrograms@vr.fl-doe.org).

### **Transitioning out of high school, having difficulty with Vocational Rehab and programs available, son is non-verbal but cognitively intact and in wheelchair, any advice?**

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has many opportunities for students transitioning out of high school to help find and keep a job. VR offers a variety of services such as Job Exploration Counseling, Work Readiness Training, Discovery, Vocational Training, as well as Job Placement and Retention services. 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 about VR, contact the local office in your area to apply for services. To find an area office near you, go to [http://www.RehabWorks.org/office\\_directory.shtml](http://www.RehabWorks.org/office_directory.shtml), call toll free at 800-451-4327 or 866-515-3692 or email [Ombudsman@vr.fl-doe.org](mailto: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).

**How long is it now that one may work, so that if they have a disruption in their ability to work, or they lose their job for whatever reason they do not have to start the SSI or SSDI program all over again? Thank you!**

If Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits ended due to earnings from working, then the beneficiaries can request for benefits to restart without having to complete a new application by way of an Expedited Reinstatement. While Social Security determines whether benefits should restart, provisional (temporary) benefits can be paid for up to 6 months. This request can be made within 5 years from the month benefits ended.

**If we live in a county that doesn't offer apprentice positions or ticket to work program or youth programs, can we work with a different county?**

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.

**It seems like VR & Career Source overlap each other. I'm not sure how this works exactly. Do you or VR work with kids 14-18 while they're in High School or is this strictly for people after high school?**

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Career Source are both wonderful resources for job seekers in Florida. VR and Career Source 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 for my son such as soft skills and testing?**

Vocational Rehabilitation offers many pre-employment services such as Job Exploration Counseling, Work Readiness Training, Vocational Assessment and Work-Based Learning Experiences. If you are not currently connected with VR, contact the local office in your area to get started at [http://www.RehabWorks.org/office\\_directory.shtml](http://www.RehabWorks.org/office_directory.shtml). We look forward to working with you.

**Do you work with 13-year-olds with disabilities to work on pre-employment services?**

Vocational Rehabilitation serves individuals with disabilities aged 14 and up.

**My son is 24 and having no luck with VR. Can he use CareerSource? He is autistic and has ADHD.**

We are sorry you are having difficulty receiving services from VR. We encourage you to reach out to our Ombudsman Office by phone at 800-451-4327 and 866-515-3692 and email [Ombudsman@vr.fl DOE.org](mailto: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). We will be happy to help you resolve your concerns.

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

Yes. To be eligible to participate in the Ticket to Work Program, a person must be between the ages of 18 and 64 and receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits due to a disability.

**Is the importance of PPE and so on explained to your clients currently?**

Currently, we follow the CDC guidelines (social distance and safety measures) with regards to PPE.

**Does employment services offer companionship services?**

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) offers services to assist customers with finding and maintaining employment. Since all of our services are individualized based on customer need, VR may be able to assist with Personal Assistant services. Another resource for companion services is the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. VR and APD work collaboratively in order to serve mutual customers.

**Would a person with disabilities who has very little work experience through high school be able to seek assistance through CareerSource in conjunction with VR? My son is a client of VR but has not received much help at all.**

We are sorry that you have not had good success with VR. VR and Career Source works collaboratively to provide assistance. We encourage you to reach out to our Ombudsman Office at 800-451-4327 and 866-515-3692 and email at [Ombudsman@vr.fl DOE.org](mailto: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). We will be happy to help you resolve your concerns.

### **How do you get a VR referral?**

Access the VR Referral Form online at <http://www.RehabWorks.org/customers.shtml#referralform> or you may contact your local VR office to speak with a representative and submit your form.

### **Why doesn't Florida have a Vocational School for disabled students after 22 years? Where they can do short career as clerk, data entry or something in manual labor. Please let me know. Thank you.**

Florida has many opportunities for vocational training, post-secondary education and work-based learning experiences for both students and adults with disabilities. If you have not connected with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) we encourage you to contact the local VR office in your area at [http://www.RehabWorks.org/office\\_directory.shtml](http://www.RehabWorks.org/office_directory.shtml). We look forward to working with you.

### **What does a child with a disability do after they graduate from high school? What kind of programs do they have in Florida to teach them about college or work?**

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has many opportunities for students with disabilities as they transition out of high school to learn about work and training opportunities including services such as Job Exploration Counseling, Vocational Assessment, Work Readiness Training, Work-Based Learning Experience and Discovery. The best way to begin working with VR is by contacting the local VR office in your area. To get you started on your journey to employment, find an office in your area at [http://www.RehabWorks.org/office\\_directory.shtml](http://www.RehabWorks.org/office_directory.shtml). We look forward to working with you.

### **My son has autism. What can VR do for him in terms of a job?**

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 and maintain a job such as Job Exploration Counseling, Vocational Assessment, Vocational Training, Discovery, Work Readiness Training, job seeking, resume development, as well as job placement and retention services.

**What job opportunities are there for people with disabilities who want to work from home? Moreover, how can we tell which work-from-home job postings are legitimate?**

One of the positive outcomes from the COVID-19 pandemic has been the increased availability of work-from-home 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.

**My 15 year old son is supposed to be connected to Vocational Rehabilitation services (Star Program). Despite the fact that I have tried to reconnect multiple times with his service worker, it appears that this agency is not following through with disabled adolescents.**

We are sorry that you have not had success with VR up to this point. We encourage you to reach out to our Ombudsman Office by calling 800-451-4327 or 866-515-3692 or by email at [Ombudsman@vr.fl DOE.org](mailto: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). We look forward to helping you address these concerns.

**How can I obtain assistance with a job coach for my 26 year old son with autism? He just finished his BA degree from USF in Tampa, but I am having no luck in obtaining resume, interview training, or supported employment for him.**

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a great place for your son to begin his journey to employment. Visit our website to complete a VR Referral Form or call your local office to get the process started. Our website is at <http://www.RehabWorks.org>. Once you are determined eligible, your VR Counselor will work with your son to develop his Individualized Plan for Employment and determine the services he will



need to find a job, such as resume assistance, Work Readiness Training and job coaching services.

**I have found that services for my son with Asperger's are pretty limited, or we have to constantly push to get anything done. I'm speaking particularly about Voc Rehab. My son has had 5 or 6 specialists since he started working with them at 18. His first OJT was with Goodwill, and even though it wasn't working out, his specialist refused to look for another program/work environment to place him in. My son was punctual, dressed appropriately, and did the work assigned. The supervisor/Director at Goodwill would not give him the support he needed to be successful though we had several meetings with her. I've been told by other parents of kids with disabilities whose children were placed there that Goodwill uses them for free labor, as VR pays for the OJT. Then when that period is over, they're let go. As in my son's case. Or at that point, they were not teaching him anything (he was putting clothes into rolling bins to go into the Good Cents store) and working him well below his capabilities and intellect! He was assigned with supervisors or other workers with intellectual disabilities who keep him busy or didn't know to do so. He would be waiting to find out what was the next task, and that would make it look like he wasn't working. It was a very disappointing experience for him other than the structures for going to work. He was set by the Director and his Goodwill work specialist to start testing computer games, technological equipment, etc. But that person was moved to another store and nothing was put in place by either entity (VR, Goodwill) to go any further. My son enjoyed making the money and learning some basic skills. I have a cleaning business where he had helped me and was taught these things before and after the Goodwill debacle, as well as given autonomy and specific instruction for each successive step as well as frequent breaks. These are the supports he needs! With his current VR specialist, while that person is very patient, kind, and helpful, my son is on his third vendor in three years. This guy is overworked I know. But he also places more emphasis on what the agency mandates (employment) instead of what my son needs (school, and/or more training)! The most recent vendor has a specialist who is wonderful and understanding of my son's needs, but has had more meetings than any real progress. My son has attended one pre-employment training there. But most of those days, the group watched movies or played video games.**

Thank you for bringing forward these concerns. We have sent your feedback to our Bureau of Vendor and Contracted Services and one of their team members will reach out to you. We are sorry for your experience with Goodwill. We encourage

you to reach out to your VR Counselor and discuss options to move forward. Our Ombudsman Team is also available to assist you with addressing your concerns by calling 800-451-4327 or 866-515-3692 or email at [Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org](mailto:Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org). TTY users dial 711 to connect with the telecommunications relay service (TRS). Video phone users can call through the video relay service (VRS).

**My daughter is working with VR and she had been told that they will pay through a Bachelors; however, she wants to be a professor and would like to continue on and get her Doctorate. The only place she can get a Doctorate in her major (American Sign Language) is an out of state private college, but there is an option for a Master's at a Florida State College. Can you please advise?**

Thank you for your question. Florida Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) full policy on post-secondary training is available online in the *Florida VR Counselor Policy Manual-Chapter 13* at <http://rehabworks.org/docs/manual/manual13.rtf>. 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 individual is seeking an advanced degree. Your daughter's VR counselor (or the unit supervisor) should be able to explain these policies in more detail. If you would like to speak to an Ombudsman, call 800-451-4327 or 866-515-3692 or email at [Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org](mailto:Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org). TTY users dial 711 to connect with the telecommunications relay service (TRS). Videophone users can call through the video relay service (VRS).

**VR services for adults that want to pursue both work and advance in schooling. Why is VR not able to do both? My daughter had delay after delay. She is behind in school because of a mistake on her financial paperwork due to her struggles, and had to choose one path. Both of which had financial consequences. If she chose VR to help her get a job she had to absorb the school costs. And if she chose for VR to help her fund school, she didn't get help to find a job which she needed to live.**

Thank you for your question. We apologize that your daughter experienced delays. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) full policy on post-secondary training is available online in the *Florida VR Counselor Policy Manual-Chapter 13* at <http://rehabworks.org/docs/manual/manual13.rtf>. Your daughter's VR counselor (or unit supervisor) should be able to explain these policies in more detail. If you

would like to speak to an Ombudsman, call 800- 451-4327 or 866-515-3692 or email at [Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org](mailto:Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org). TTY users dial 711 to connect with the telecommunications relay service (TRS). Videophone users can call through the video relay service (VRS).

**Do you foresee employment opportunities for people with disabilities at the state, city, and county levels within the Florida government? I only see real change happening in the area of employment for individuals with disabilities when our state fully embraces them and gives an opportunity and fair chance for employment.**

The state of Florida has launched several initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life and integration of individuals with disabilities in the workforce. These initiatives are outlined in Chapter 2016-3, Laws of Florida at <http://laws.flrules.org/>. This includes affirmative action for individuals who have a disability. More information may be found at [https://www.dms.myflorida.com/workforce\\_operations/human\\_resource\\_management/for\\_state\\_personnel\\_system\\_hr\\_practitioners/equal\\_employment\\_opportunity\\_affirmative\\_action/employment\\_of\\_individuals\\_with\\_disabilities](https://www.dms.myflorida.com/workforce_operations/human_resource_management/for_state_personnel_system_hr_practitioners/equal_employment_opportunity_affirmative_action/employment_of_individuals_with_disabilities).

**Why are DVR services throughout the state so different (unequal), i.e. services are covered and paid by DVR in one county but not paid by another county?**

All of our services are individualized based on the customer's need and available resources. We would love to evaluate your case. Contact our Ombudsman Office at 800-451-4327 or 866-515-3692 or email at [Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org](mailto:Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org). TTY users dial 711 to connect with the telecommunications relay service (TRS). Video phone users can call through the video relay service (VRS).

**What agencies help employ disabled adults?**

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a great start for people with disabilities who are seeking employment. If you are not connected with VR, we encourage you to contact a local office in your area to get started at [http://RehabWorks.org/office\\_directory.shtml](http://RehabWorks.org/office_directory.shtml). A VR counselor will work with you to help you prepare for a job, as well as find and keep a job. VR works with a network of provider partners who can assist people with disabilities. To learn more about our provider network use our *Service Provider Choice Directory* at [http://RehabWorks.org/choice\\_directory.shtml](http://RehabWorks.org/choice_directory.shtml).

**I've been with Wal-Mart over 15 years—I'm officially full-time and loving every moment. I'm proving and making a difference for every customer and provide great service and expanding new opportunities in the company and community.**

This is great news and we are happy to be a part of your career success.

**My son graduated high school in 2013 and enrolled in Vocational Rehabilitation. He was placed in a job for one year then told after a year the job was not appropriate for him, very little contact with parent, he is still waiting for another job placement. Who gives job skills tests?**

We apologize for your experience with VR. We would like to evaluate your case further. Contact our Ombudsman Office at 800-451-4327 or 866-515-3692 or email at [Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org](mailto:Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org). TTY users dial 711 to connect with the telecommunications relay service (TRS). Video phone users can call through the video relay service (VRS).





## The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Family Café Report Card 2020

Attendees at The 22<sup>nd</sup> 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      **F** = Poor

The table below displays average grades for 2014-19:

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
I would give the Annual Family Café Location a...	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>
I would rate the hotel's accessibility a...	<b>A-</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>
I would give the organization of the Annual Family Café a...	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>
I would rate the choices for breakout sessions and their ability to meet the needs of different interests a...	<b>A-</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>A</b>
Overall, I would give The Annual Family Café a...	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>

As the 2020 event was virtual, attendees graded it on adjusted metrics:

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

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

1. As a result of attending The 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Family Café, I am able/will be able to . . .***

- Continue to advocate and help my son
- Increase information received to help family members and friends
- Set up an ABLE account for my son
- Continue to Advocate for myself and others
- Have more resources
- As a parent resources specialist I will be able to compile a nice list of resources for parents
- Understand mental health issues in not just children, but young adults too
- Understand certain disabilities better
- Organize plans for my child's future
- Reach more resources for my child
- Enhance the way I do my job
- Using technology more in homes
- See a more positive future for my adult son with autism
- I have information about FDLRS that I didn't know existed, and where to get info
- Make more accessible travel plans
- Share the videos with more of my friends and coworkers
- Rewatch sessions or recommend sessions to others
- Create a database of resources
- Contact a variety of organizations that can assist me that I was not aware of before the event
- Choose better healthcare options
- Live life more independently and confidently
- Better understand transition for young adults

- Help my son and his future
- Understand mental health issues in not just children, but young adults too
- Not only help myself in doing things for my daughter, I am able to pass on the information to others that may need assistance

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

- The IEP and early education sessions
- All of it
- Allowing this conference to continue. Thank you!
- The True Colors presentation was excellent!
- The platform used
- Session on the ABLE Account
- Still having access to attend the conference
- Getting inspired
- APD sessions
- Special needs trust info
- Nothing
- Being able to rewind the presentation when I was a few minutes late for the seminar.
- Mental health and behavioral services in the state of Florida
- The Women’s Summit was amazing!
- Everything was helpful
- I enjoyed the Cerebral Palsy and Autism Roundtables. It’s educational, enlightening, and inspiring to see the individuals, and their families, and hear their stories first hand.
- Too many to list
- This was our first year and frankly just learning all there is out there!
- The presentation about disaster preparedness, response, and recovery
- Printed flyer on voting
- Having the option to watch anytime
- Updates about what’s going on at APD and VR
- It all was. It is the first time that I attended and I got a lot of information, so many things that parents like me did not know
- The ability to have the contact information for exhibitors and the different sessions. Love how they were broken up into tracks
- I thought it was better than expected under these circumstances

***I thought we could have had more of . . .***

- The IEP and early education sessions

- You can never get enough of what you guys do, thank you!
- How to network locally for job connections in Florida as a person with multiple disabilities.
- Nothing—just wish it was live instead of virtual
- One or two sessions on Medicaid
- Vocational Rehab; transition
- Nothing. I think it was great given the circumstance
- Everything was great
- Giveaways. Love giveaways LOL
- Interactive presentations
- Resources for pro bono legal help
- More live events
- Conference had the perfect balance
- Spanish subtitles
- Transition from high school to work/college; VR
- Facebook live information sessions throughout the year
- You, The Family Café did awesome this year with the pandemic. Great information
- Always more sessions. All topics are good and informative.

***I thought we could have had less of . . .***

- Nothing. It was wonderful
- COVID-19 (lol!) make it go away
- Agency Head presentations
- Problems with sound
- Boring sets, seated hosts
- Dancing; fluffy-non informative sessions
- Roundtables that pertain to only one disability
- We can only use more of everything, not less!
- Breaks
- Pre-recorded live sessions, especially roundtables!
- Facebook dependency. It was so hard to get into the live events. Horrible platform
- Nothing

***I am interested in finding out more about . . .***

- Disability laws and how to teach my younger child self advocacy.
- SSI
- Employment



- CDC+
- ABLE account and guardianship
- Recreational choices in the state for individuals with disabilities of all ages
- Long term care options
- What is available for teens becoming 18 and help available to them to help find a job and maintain a successful life.
- Services for people more profoundly effected by autism, level 3
- Elderly Disabled options for a better life in Florida
- Events and happenings in the Northern part of the State
- Support groups
- Small business help for disabled adults
- The services, activities, and housing available for adults with autism who do not have Medwaiver services due to the long waitlist.
- Guardianships and trusts
- VR benefits
- Availability of funding for Respite for families/caretakers
- Housing for special needs
- Supported decision making
- Starting a micro-enterprise or small business myself without impacting my benefits
- Transition
- Mental health, and how people can get help and counseling without health insurance. More about companies giving young adults with disabilities the opportunity to work and help with job skills.
- Life after graduation
- Adults on Spectrum
- Any and everything
- Consortium of higher education

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

- More info sessions pertaining to education, IEP, and self advocacy.
- Both virtual and in-person options
- More attention to parents that homeschool
- More info for older individuals with special needs—autism. Living and working options. Aging individual with special needs. Age 30+
- Nothing
- Love it, just missed not getting to meet everyone and talking to vendors. Loved the goodies they hand out.
- More focus on dyslexia

- More Q&A sessions
- Explore other online platforms. I realize Facebook may be easy for many attendees, but other formats might be more powerful. Keep virtual attendance in mind for future.
- Healthy eating sessions
- Behavioral health, mental health, employment, advocacy
- Socialization skills
- That event is subtitled in Spanish
- I look forward to person-to-person contact again
- More breakout sessions for adults with disabilities
- Even if we are face-to-face, please keep these video options for individuals who cannot travel
- No suggestions. I love The Annual Family Café. Thank you for not cancelling.



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