

25th Anniversary

**THE
FAMILY
CAFFE**



**QUESTIONS AND
ANSWERS BOOK!**

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 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 2023!

Navigating the service delivery system and finding resources has always been a challenge for people with disabilities and their families. That's why The Family Café exists! Since 1998, our mission has been to connect Florida's disability community with information, training, support, and opportunities to network with professionals, public policy makers, and each other.

The primary place where that mission has been realized is at our signature event, The Annual Family Café. This year's gathering was an especially meaningful one, as we came together to celebrate twenty-five years of Collaboration, Advocacy, Friendship, and Empowerment at The 25th Anniversary Family Café.

We're excited to report that it was the largest Annual Family Café since our last pre-pandemic gathering in 2019, with more than 14,000 people in attendance. They were treated to the widest selection of activities we've ever hosted, with an assistive technology showcase, a book fair, a sensory room, an adaptive recreation sampler, and a special new addition for transition-age youth, "Club Café." That's on top of our usual array of breakout sessions on a whole range of topics, and our Exhibit Hall with dozens of booths, including key state agency partners and self-advocate owned and operated Micro-Enterprises.

Of course, the core of the event was once again our series of keynotes, with the Ford Foundation's Rebecca Cokley, American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) CEO Maria Town, and Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy Taryn Mackenzie Williams discussing the state of the disability rights movement and its future; self-advocate author Keah Brown sharing her creative and disability advocacy journeys; and actress, comedian, writer, and disability advocate Maysoon Zayid sharing both laughs and insight into her intersectional disability experience on stage. We also renewed our tradition of connecting attendees with key policymakers at The Annual Governor's Summit on Disabilities, where the Governor's Office and disability-serving state agency leaders shared their vision for Floridians with disabilities. All of those events were available to view live through our Facebook page, and we also recorded a dozen breakout sessions to add to our virtual training library at familycafe.net/videos/ and on our YouTube page.

Of course, no matter how informative The Annual Family Café is, it can't answer every question! That's why we collect questions and comments from families like yours and put together the responses we get from state agencies to create ***The Family Café Questions & Answers Book***. This book can serve as a quick reference guide and a starting point for anyone seeking information about disability services in Florida. 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 next year for at The 26th Annual Family Café on June 14-16, 2024, at the Hyatt Regency Orlando. Online registration opens on Wednesday, February 14th. Until then, feed your need for information with *The Family Café Questions & Answers Book*!

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The Family Café

Online safety/trafficking—families need to get more education and transparency is needed.

We agree that online safety and human trafficking are two issues that people with disabilities and their families need to know about. We will share your suggestion with our Planning Committee so they can discuss how to make sure those topics are addressed in 2024 at The 26th Annual Family Café.

At The 25th Anniversary Family Café meeting—not enough police agency representation to assist/educate families.

Thanks for that feedback, which we will share with our Planning Committee.

We need more micro-enterprises.

Micro-enterprises, which are small businesses owned and operated by people with disabilities, are an important part of our Exhibit Hall. We will continue to promote entrepreneurship for Floridians with disabilities as a path to economic self-sufficiency at The 26th Annual Family Café. Learn more at <https://familycafe.net/exhibit-hall-space-available-at-the-26th-annual-family-cafe/>.

We need more gluten-free food offered at the hotel. Most people with autism have digestive issues.

We certainly understand that people with disabilities are more likely to have dietary sensitivities. We do our best to inform the host hotel about these issue so they can plan to accommodate them appropriately, and will share your feedback with them in our planning discussions about next year.

Could we have a room with people available to help fill out SSDI or SSI paperwork?

Thanks for that suggestion. We'll share it with the Social Security Administration to see if they're willing to help people apply on site. In the meantime, we hope you take advantage of the multiple sessions on SSI and SSDI benefits at The Annual Family Café.

Can you all do Friday/Saturday movie nights at 8:00 p.m. or 7:30 p.m.? Can you do some contests all day/night? Can you do karaoke nights all night until midnight? Can you serve breakfasts, dinners and especially desserts? Can you do Broadway shows? How about fashion shows during the days? I would like that! Can you do motorcycle racing/car races too? Can you do more different colors, designs for outfits of tank tops, scarf belts, flip-flops, etc. than the originals?

Wow, those are a lot of cool ideas! Some of them might be more practical than others, but we will definitely share them with our Planning Committee so they can discuss which ones might be possible to include. Because banquet service at the hotel is costly and the event is so large, unfortunately we won't be able to provide meals for everyone.

How do I volunteer for the planning committee?

We love to have participation in the Planning Committee! It includes representatives from Florida's disability-serving agencies, key event partners, and people like you. If you're interested being a part of it, contact our office at info@familycafe.net.

Please do not allow air horns, blowhorns, or loud noise makers! There are people with sensory issues.

The Annual Family Café can be an overstimulating environment for people with sensory issues. If you have a problem with a specific incident, like someone blowing an air horn, let anyone in a red chef coat know and we will do our best to resolve it.

Please allow more booth accommodation for next year, especially if we want booths next to each other.

The Family Café hosts more than 200 exhibitors, and it can be challenging to meet every special request for booth placement. Please let us know about your preferences when you register to exhibit and we will do our best to accommodate them.

Please allow people to choose their own door prizes instead of raffling each one by one. Adults with autism might not want something that is for a child if they don't have children.

Thanks very much for that suggestion! We have a lot of door prizes and do our best to give them out in a way that makes sense and is fun and fair for everyone.

The event was great! I hope we can see the presentations we missed (there were several) online and we can view them despite our really full schedule of advocacy. Also, more importantly, address services for parents like respite, free dental, grants, etc. All our resources go into our kids' expenses. Thank you for a great event.

Glad you enjoyed it! Please check out the breakout sessions we recorded on our website at familycafe.net/videos/ or on our YouTube channel. We also encourage you to contact the presenter for information if there was a session you missed that wasn't recorded. We will share your request for more resources on available services for parents with our Planning Committee.

Bring back or continue Club Café so I can go to youth sessions.

We were very pleased to be able to host the Club Café transition-aged youth room at this year's event through the support of the Department of Health. You will be happy to know that we are already at work on planning the 2024 version of Club Café!

I found everything that I was looking for. Thank you.

That's wonderful to hear! We work hard to bring the resources and information you need to The Annual Family Café each year, and it's great to hear that our efforts led to you being connected with what you needed.

How do I get my child involved in the Youth Council? We live in Tallahassee.

The Florida Youth Council is open to Florida youth with disabilities between the ages of 15 and 30. You can find more information about the FYC and the application on the FYC's website at floridayouthcouncil.org/faq/.

Thank you, thank you for having sessions for the youth and the Club Café for drop-ins. This has allowed me as a single mom to go to sessions I need to and allowed my son to work on independence in a safe space by going to a youth session on his own or drop into the Club Café as needed. Please keep sessions and Club Café for the youth!

It's great to hear that the addition of the Club Café room to The Annual Family Café helped your son to work on his independence while affording you a chance to attend some breakout sessions. Between the Club Café, sessions led by the Florida Youth Council, and

our Youth Track, we make an effort to deliver content that helps young people transition to a successful independent life in the community.

Please consider ways to offer babysitting so parents can attend breakout sessions and not be distracted. For eight years we have asked for The Family Café to provide (or parent pay) babysitting for children who are too young or anxious for the session or teen club. Many parents do not have an opportunity to attend sessions to obtain information. Their child's behavior distracts participants. Please, leadership team, brainstorm!

It's difficult for The Family Café to provide childcare at the event given its size, space limitations, and cost. At one time we did offer respite care, but only a handful of families were able to take advantage of it and the cost was significant. We do our best to create a family-friendly environment, and often suggest that families have one person attend a session while another spends time with the children. That said, we will share your concern with the Planning Committee, and ask that they revisit the childcare issue.

I would like for you to tell us more about what started the event in the first place, like what caused the people to start doing this event in the first place.

The Family Café started in 1998 as a result of the experience of parents of children with disabilities. After going from agency to agency seeking answers about how the service delivery system for children with disabilities works, they founded our organization and created The Annual Family Café so the people that need services and the resources and information they seek could be brought together in a family-friendly environment where people could figure out what's out there and what works for their individual situation. Basically, The Family Café started because people needed help, so they came together to help each other, and twenty-five years later, that has turned into the largest statewide cross-disability event in the nation!

Loved the area for the kids.

Thanks! We do our best to provide engaging programming for people of all ages. Glad to hear you enjoyed it!

Would like to see workshops on aging with Down Syndrome.

Thanks for that suggestion! We will share it with our Planning Committee.

Fantastic Café. My only question is why was the band in the afternoon allowed to play so loudly? It was impossible to hear people outside of the showroom. Heard several parents having to remove their children from nearby areas because it hurt their ears.

We do our best to place musical performances toward the edges of the event space so people can choose to be as close or far from them as works for them. We should also note that musical performances are delivered by outside groups, so The Family Café doesn't always have direct control of their volume.

Are there AA meetings available during the event?

Yes, there are meetings listed in the program as "Friends of Bill." This year we had one each on Saturday and Sunday morning.

Family Café has been wonderful. Looking forward to next year!

Awesome! We love it when people come back and see us again. See you next year!

Wanting to get more involved with The Family Café and so I can get my community involved. Thank you for a great 25 years. Every year I learn and meet others that I can help and they can help me.

That's great! If you're interested in getting people more involved in your local area, you should know about our Family-Run Organization Movement (FROM) program. It exists to help people organize in their local areas. Learn more about it at familycafe.net/from/.

Keep up the great things you do for us.

We definitely will! We've been serving Florida for twenty-five years, and there's no way we're stopping now!

Have less breakouts at the same time—increase days of the conference to allow attendees the opportunity to be able to go to more classes. There were no less than three classes each breakout that I wanted to attend.

With so much great content, it can be hard to get to every session that might interest you. While stretching the event out over more days could help, that would also involve additional resources and hotel availability that isn't available at this time. There are a

number of sessions that we recorded and posted on our website at familycafe.net/videos/, and we also encourage to directly contact the presenters from any interesting sessions you missed using the contact information in the event program.

The conference was great. I really needed the information. This was my second time attending; now I have the resources I feel will guide me in the right direction. Everything was positive, upbeat, and professional.

That's great! We do our best to connect people with information they can use, and it's wonderful to hear that worked out for you. Thanks for coming back for a second helping! We'll hope to see you again in 2024.

I would like to know if Family Café for next year would have more resources for South Florida.

We do our best to bring together resources that are relevant for every community across Florida, including those in the South Florida region. We'll share your request for additional South Florida resources with our Planning Committee.

Can Family Café put on their website the many choices for motorized wheelchair and scooter vendors? Guests want to be able to make reservations as early as April before each Family Café event.

The Family Café provides complimentary scooter and wheelchair rental near the Registration Desk at the event each year, but we certainly understand that demand sometimes exceeds availability. We'll make a note to share some information about options when we send out pre-conference info next year.

Will you please make the dance a little longer? More Star Wars theme please. I want to bring my Jedi robe.

The Saturday Night Dance is always popular, and a lot of people ask for more. We'll be sure to make the dance as long as we can next time! And feel free to wear your Jedi robe, no matter the theme. Jedi robes are appropriate for any occasion.

Everything was excellent, we had a great time. A lot of fun and we are very happy to be back this year, after Covid. We would have liked snacks during the dance party, if there were snacks I did not know where they were. Overall, a great time! Thank you Family Café!

Awesome! It's great to hear you enjoyed it. We usually don't provide snacks, as there are so many people in attendance and banquet service at the hotel is costly. If you were able to find a sponsor to help pay for snacks for everyone, we'd love to hear about it!

I always really enjoy The Family Café! I think in the future, you should spread out the art exhibits more, so they will do better business. This year they were all in the same row, pretty close together, and I don't think some of them did as well as others. By spreading them out more, I think business for them will be better. Thank you!

Thanks for that suggestion. We had a packed Exhibit Hall this year, and it can be tough to fit all of the booths into the space while meeting every request about placement. We'll do our best to spread similar vendors through the hall in 2024.

Please offer Spanish language/translation services for all participants who need it.

The Family Café does offer translation services, with a number of bilingual volunteers on hand to provide it. Just visit the Registration Desk on site if you require translation services.

How do I become a member of the Youth Council?

The Florida Youth Council is open to Florida youth with disabilities between the ages of 15 and 30. You can find more information about the FYC and the application on the FYC's website at floridayouthcouncil.org/faq/.

Please have more affordable food/meal options.

The cost of food in the hotel is a concern for many attendees. We work with hotel management to make things as affordable as possible, including a 20% discount at hotel restaurants and The Market.

Can we have repeat sessions? There are always multiple classes that I want to attend but I miss them.

We often hear this feedback, and we agree that it can be challenging to attend every session that may be of interest over the course of the event. We do record a number of

sessions, and those recordings can be found out our website at familycafe.net/videos/ and on our YouTube channel. We also encourage you to use the contact information from the program to contact the presenters of any sessions you may have missed, as they will be happy to share their presentations and fill you in on what you missed.

You did an excellent job. Clearer communication on where the snacks/food were located would have been appreciated. I had a tough time locating them. Nobody showed me where they were. Overall had a really great time! Having someone dedicated to help show where things like the food are or help me fill out this survey would have been helpful. Thank you for a great time.

Thanks very much! Given the expense and the large number of attendees, The Family Café doesn't provide meals or snacks. That said, we have received feedback about the need for more directional signage and additional volunteers to help direct attendees, and are planning on doing what we can to address that next year.

Next year can we get more classes on Special Needs Trusts, specifically more than just a general overview? Something more than general.

Thanks for that feedback. The Family Café regularly includes multiple sessions on special needs planning, usually in our Smart Money track. As financial planning generally and special needs trusts specifically are complex topics, it can be difficult to go in depth in an hourlong breakout session. If there's a specific aspect of special needs trusts that you'd like to see addressed, please let us know by emailing us at info@familycafe.net. Please also feel free to directly contact the presenters from the special needs trusts sessions we hosted this year by using the contact info from the program.

Why is the amazing speaker last during checkout?

We understand that the Sunday Keynote can conflict with the hotel checkout time. Unfortunately, that's part of trying to fit all of the great programming we have into the allotted time! One suggestion would be to check out before the Sunday keynote, and ask the hotel to hold your luggage at the bell stand, which they will be happy to do. Another option would be to arrange for a late checkout.

Maybe better maps to get to rooms/sessions. Loved outdoor/interactive session for kids.

Thanks for that suggestion, which was made by a number of other attendees. We're planning to add more directional signage next year. Please also note that a hotel map is

printed in the back of the program, and an interactive map is available in our smartphone app. Thanks also for your compliments on the adaptive recreation activities, which were arranged by our long-time friends at Sportsability.

Longer Women’s Summit like before.

Thanks for that suggestion. The Women’s Summit pre-conference event did have a somewhat shorter agenda in 2023 than in previous years. The schedule is set by the presenter that facilitates that event and designs the curriculum. We’ll be sure to share your feedback with her!

When does registration for next year start?

Online registration for The 26th Annual Family Café opens on Valentine’s Day, Wednesday, February 14th 2024 at familycafe.net. If you attended this year, you’ll also receive a printed registration brochure in the mail.

This is a great event.

You’re a great attendee!

This was just amazing and enjoyable.

Thank you! Please come again next year!

Talk more about muscular dystrophy.

Thanks for that suggestion. We’ll share your request for more content on muscular dystrophy with our Planning Committee.

How can I sign up for next year?

It’s easy! Just visit familycafe.net on Wednesday, February 14th 2024, and online registration will be available. If you’ve connected with us before, you’ll receive plenty of email reminders before then, and we’ll post reminders on Facebook and Instagram too!

Amazing event. Board members could have taken turns going through the Exhibit Hall, and checked everything was okay. We asked if there was a video person available, none showed up in spite of being told someone would be available.

Thanks! Staff and Board members always make a point to visit the Exhibit Hall, but with so many exhibitors and so much activity at the event it can be hard to connect with everyone. The videographers at the event that work for our organization are assigned to record select breakout sessions and livestream presentations in the main ballroom. Remember, our Staff and Board wear red chef coats at the event, and are the people to turn to for reliable information about the availability of any service.

Less loud music. A lot of people have sensory overload. Even with the kids activities, music can be played, but it needs to be at a reasonable volume.

Thanks for that feedback. Performers and activity providers at The Annual Family Café manage their own sound, and we understand that some can be a bit loud. We try to locate performances in particular locations to mitigate issues with volume.

When I was going to check out a scooter, I was told I couldn't take it to the Rosen where I was forced to get a room. In the future can you make sure that if someone gets a scooter that they are allowed to go to the overflow hotel with it? Thank you.

We're sorry to hear that you received that incorrect information. People that receive scooters and wheelchairs from The Family Café's complimentary rental are welcome to take them to either overflow hotel.

What other conventions are held at the Hyatt Regency and the Orange County Convention Centers in years 2023, 2024, 2025, and 2026?

For information about what's happening at the Hyatt Regency Orlando, visit www.hyatt.com/hyatt-regency/mcoro-hyatt-regency-orlando. You can learn about upcoming Orange County Convention Center events at events.occc.net.

Can we have more information about requirements for "incidentals" for future hotels. My family was caught off guard at the \$125 deposit need for the Rosen Centre.

Hotels typically require guests to leave a credit card deposit on hold during their stay with the balance being refunded at checkout. That said, we are fully committed to removing financial barriers to attending our event. If being asked to leave a deposit creates a burden for your family, please contact our office or find us on site and we will work with you to resolve the issue. We were able to get the standard deposit waived for several families in 2023.

Can we have more Zumba?

The Zumba sessions on Saturday and Sunday morning are definitely popular! We'll ask our Zumba leader if she's up for adding another session or two.

How can I become more involved in The Family Café?

There are lots of ways to get more involved with The Family Café! Our Planning Committee, which meets monthly to set the agenda for The Annual Family Café, is open to participation. You may also be interested in our Family-Run Organization Movement (FROM) program, which supports people in becoming more active in their local communities. You can learn more about it at familycafe.net/from/. Finally, the most direct way to get involved is to participate as a volunteer at The Annual Family Café! Our volunteers help with bag stuffing, attendee registration, and directing people throughout the hotel, and they are key to making things work at the event.

How early can I book a wheelchair roll-in shower room for The Annual Family Café in 2024? Although we upgraded to a larger room it is impossible to get my adult son in a bath tub! Thank You! We love attending.

We understand your issue. Unfortunately, this is a side effect of hosting an event with so many attendees with disabilities, as even a large hotel has an insufficient number of ADA-compliant rooms. If you would like to make a reservation with the Hyatt and request a room with a roll-in shower, you are able to do so now.

Is there a way to get information from other sessions that we were not able to attend?

Yes! In fact, there are a couple. Every year at The Annual Family Café we record a number of breakout sessions and post them to our website's Video section at familycafe.net/videos and on our YouTube channel. You can check there to see if any of the recordings fit your needs. If not, please feel free to reach out to the presenters from

the sessions you missed directly. We print their contact info in the program for that very reason!

Thank you for the opportunity to experience this amazing event. The financial assistance for the hotel allowed us to go. I will be saving money to attend next year. Please try to have more information on aging adults, 30yrs and older. There is not much for older adults that I'm aware of. Thank you.

Thanks for your suggestion about adding more content about older adults, which we will share with our Planning Committee. Thanks also for your positive feedback about the difference our financial assistance program made for you. We're deeply committed to connecting people with information, resources, and networking opportunities at minimal financial impact to them, and providing financial assistance to cover the cost of the hotel stay is central to that commitment!

When's the next Family Café scheduled?

The 26th Annual Family Café will be held at the Hyatt Regency Orlando on June 14-16, 2024. See you there!

Where do you see Family Café growing and what challenges do you as an organization need to improve?

Over its first twenty-five years, The Family Café has grown significantly, from an event with about 1,200 attendees in our first year to more than 14,000 in 2023, with a lot of lessons learned, changes, and even a global pandemic in between. We've come a long way, but we're still excited about our future, and about finding new ways to keep people connected to resources and information. While meeting the needs of every Floridian with a disability will always be a challenge, we believe that as long as what we do is authentically driven by the people we serve, we'll be on the right track.

Why isn't Walmart a part of the expo? I have been an associate with the company for 19 years.

That's a great question! We would love to have a large employer like Walmart participating in our efforts to encourage disability employment in Florida. If you know anyone within the organization that might be able to make that happen, please let them know about The Family Café! And definitely feel free to connect them with our office.

Would like more information on nonverbal children, behavior issues, and potty training a nonverbal child.

Thanks for that suggestion! We'll be sure to share it with our Planning Committee.

I think it would be helpful to have your presentations available on Zoom or live feed, in case there may be restrictions or conflicts of times. It would also be nice to have appointment services available to book, for some instances, like legal advice, or other services the could take longer than 15 or 20 minutes. Having multiple changing rooms would also be helpful for those not staying in the hotel. We love The Family Café and hope to continue attending!

Thanks for those excellent suggestions. We would love to be able to stream every breakout session on Zoom, but we don't currently have the logistical capacity to do that. Nonetheless, we continue to explore ways to make more content available to more people, and we will look into options for 2024. In terms of appointment services, our Planning Committee would have to discuss how that might work, who would provide the service, and how it would fit within the agenda. In the meantime, feel free to directly contact any presenter with whom you'd like to speak more. Their contact info is in the program. Finally, The Family Café did provide adult changing rooms in two different locations, and will have at least that number in 2024. If you need help finding one on site, just ask anyone in a red chef coat or Family Café apron, or refer to our smartphone app for locations.

It would be great to get sessions about homeschooling curriculums, and more sensory activities to do at home in order to reinforce Occupational therapy.

Thanks for that suggestion! We'll be sure to share it with our Planning Committee.

We got guardianship of our 4 grandsons on June 1, 2022. We were aware that they had disabilities and requested help to no avail. The system was not interested in helping. If it had not been for a friend with a child with a disability who referred me to The Family Café we would never have known about the resources available to us so we can help our grandsons have a happy and productive life. We came home renewed. Thank You.

Wow, that is wonderful, and exactly the kind of story we hope to hear from first-time attendees. It is so great to hear that The Annual Family Café connected you with resources that made a difference for your family. We hope you come back again next year!

Will there be more opportunity for receiving financial assistance next year? Because it was a struggle coming up with funds. I love attending The Annual Family Café, it's very educational for me especially, concerning my daughter with cerebral palsy. Hopefully we can attend next year.

Yes! There will definitely be financial assistance available next year. The Family Café is committed to helping families attend our event at minimal cost, and our financial assistance program is central to that commitment. You will once again be able to request financial assistance when you register, and assistance will be distributed by lottery. Don't forget to register before April 1st to be considered!

Where will the event be held in 2024?

The 26th Annual Family Café will be held at the Hyatt Regency Orlando on June 14-16, 2024.

We were blessed to finally be able to attend via the Family Café lotto. Thank you so very much!!! One suggestion would be to please livestream any/all speakers into the hotel rooms, in case the disabled guests are not able to attend due to overstimulation. My son had a hard time the 2nd day in. We were grateful to be there but his comfort and our safety became priority and I missed a lot of speakers I wished I could have heard. Thank you so much again.

We certainly understand that it can be hard to make it to every session you might want to attend for any number of reasons. In situations like yours, some families will have one person attend sessions while another provides childcare. Streaming sessions through the hotel's TV system would be great, but would require both coordination with the hotel and significant AV support. That said, technology continues to advance, making it easier to share live video, and our Planning Committee will examine all available options for making more live content available.

Can we gear a couple more classes to adults with disabilities?

Thanks for that request. We will share your feedback about the need for more content for adults with disabilities with our Planning Committee.

Most, if not all of the breakout sessions are geared for parents of Downs people, autistic people, etc. I am high functioning autistic myself, so while I got something out of the sessions for parents of aspies, I felt a little out of place. Is

there any possibility of bringing in some speakers and having some sessions directly for people on the autistic spectrum?

Thanks for that feedback. Since The Family Café serves people of all ages with all types of disabilities, it can be challenging to find the right balance to make sure we're including the perspectives of both parents and self-advocates representing all manner of disability identities. That said, we will absolutely share your request for more content for adults on the autism spectrum with our Planning Committee.

Why is there never information on adults with cerebral palsy?

Thanks for that feedback. As The Family Café serves people with all types of disability, it can be a challenge to make sure every disability is addressed sufficiently. We will share your request for information on adults with cerebral palsy with our Planning Committee.



The Agency for Health Care Administration

I would like information on additional lending closets for walkers, standers, adaptive strollers, hospital beds/safe beds, wheelchairs, etc. when insurance is not available/willing to help cover the cost for these needed items.

For recipients enrolled in Florida Medicaid, please contact the recipient's Managed Care Plan, or contact the Florida Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055 (TDD 1-866-467-4970) regarding coverage of durable medical equipment.

How can we team together to help change the income limits for Medicaid and SSI to change the poverty trap people with disabilities are sucked into?

Please reach out to your state legislators.

- Senate: <https://www.flsenate.gov/Senators/Find>
- House: <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/FindYourRepresentative>

Medicaid plan changed therapies to 26 sessions per year. That is not enough. No information was sent alerting families.

Please contact the Florida Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055 (TDD 1-866-467-4970) so we can further research this matter.

Are there grant programs to help get a mobility van for a wheelchair? Or any opportunities with Medicaid services?

For recipients enrolled in Florida Medicaid, please contact the recipient's Managed Care Plan, or contact the Florida Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055 (TDD 1-866-467-4970) regarding coverage of mobility devices.

Brilliant and beautiful session this year! What are resources available for wheelchair minor repairs that don't require lengthy waits and high labor costs? Can AHCA team pay for these repairs via Medicaid provisions?

For recipients enrolled in Florida Medicaid, please contact the recipient's Managed Care Plan, or contact the Florida Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055 (TDD 1-866-467-4970) regarding coverage of wheelchairs and wheelchair repairs.

How come disabilities aren't an automatic Medicaid qualifier in the State of Florida for children? Why is it solely based on parents' income and assets? Furthermore, the waiver that ignores the parents' income you can't get on until your child is 3 is 10+ years long waitlist.

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

How come people that receive SSDI are limited in the funds they can have while working and how does working people with disabilities work? And why aren't agencies aware about the program?

Please contact the Social Security Administration regarding questions on SSDI funding.

Why doesn't the State of Florida have a State advisory board (families and consumers) to assist with transparency, accountability, responsibility, advocacy, training, and fairness for Floridians eligible for services from ACHA and APD?

There is a Federal requirement that each state Medicaid program have a committee to serve in an advisory capacity on health and medical care issues. The Agency for Health Care Administration's (AHCA) committee is called the Medical Care Advisory Committee (MCAC). The committee meets quarterly. For more information about the committee and meeting information please visit: <https://ahca.myflorida.com/medicaid/medical-care-advisory-committee>.

For information regarding any APD boards or committees, please contact APD.

Why with Medicare is maintenance therapy only 1 time a week (that you still have to fight for)? That is supposed to keep somebody walking and using their own body correctly? How can they justify that?

Please contact Medicare at 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).

There needs to be more help to get our children on Medicaid. It took us five (5) years.

Medicaid eligibility in Florida is determined either by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or the Social Security Administration (for SSI recipients). DCF 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. Please contact DCF or the Social Security Administration for further assistance with eligibility.

What does AHCA do?

Our Agency was statutorily created by Chapter 20, Florida Statutes as the chief health policy and planning entity for the state. We are primarily responsible for the state's estimated \$36 billion Medicaid program that will serve over 5 million Floridians in SFY 2023-24, the licensure of the state's 48,500 health care facilities and the sharing of health care data through the Florida Center for Health Information and Policy Analysis.

Does AHCA regulate nursing facilities and group homes?

The Agency for Health Care Administration's Division of Health Care Policy Oversight monitors federal certification of health facilities and services that are funded by Medicaid or Medicare, including Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities (ALFs).

What is Quality Assurance? And how does it work for me?

The Agency for Health Care Administration's Division of Health Care Policy Oversight oversees health quality assurance and is responsible for health facility licensure and inspection for over 48,500 health care facilities and providers. Health quality assurance conducts inspections of health care facilities and providers related to quality of care and regulatory requirements.

We need more day programs available for adults over the age of 22 yrs old, healths insurance options, and more dental programs for adults individuals with disabilities.

For recipients enrolled in Florida Medicaid, please contact the recipient's Managed Care Plan, Dental Plan or contact the Florida Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055 (TDD 1-866-467-4970) regarding coverage questions.

We have lived in Florida a year now. Our 21 year old son has NV infantile autism. It has been difficult finding groups that take Medicaid and provide light/gas sedation for dental, sedation for scans, etc. Provider lists from state agencies are outdated. Now I'm told every year the approval for Medicaid providers changes based on bids. How should parents/guardians navigate this?

Please contact the recipient's Managed Care Plan, Dental Plan or contact the Florida Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055 (TDD 1-866-467-4970) regarding provider network questions.

When applying for SSI disability, how do we see the income per month, once process has begun? Is it normal for your SSI account to be locked during the process?

Please contact the Social Security Administration regarding questions related to applying for SSI disability.

Are there any particular life insurance policies specifically geared towards children who are neurodiverse and on the spectrum? Does the Medicaid/Medicare system back any of these also?

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

What happens to an ABLE account when the beneficiary passes and she is the one handling the account? She passed without a will. Where does the SSI/income go? Does the state get a payback?

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

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

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

The guidelines that Florida Medicaid will use when determining the circumstances under which a health service is consistent with generally accepted professional medical standards (GAPMS) and not experimental or investigational are described in 59G-1.035 F.A.C., "Determining Generally Accepted Professional Medical Standards" (https://ahca.myflorida.com/content/download/5926/file/59G_1035_Determining_Generally_Accepted_Professional_Medical_Standards.pdf). This rule also includes the types of information to be considered in the decision-making process and names the person(s) qualified to make the final determination.

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

Would love to see more sessions on Medicaid/Medicare eligibility at the conference.

Please refer to the Department of Children and Families for inquiries related to Medicaid eligibility.

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

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

Medicaid is a subsidized health care program for low-income children, families and people with disabilities that is jointly run by the federal and state governments.

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

Please get insurance companies to provide coverage for more meds and more therapies. Many are denied even though it's medically necessary.

For recipients enrolled in Florida Medicaid, please request help on the Agency's website at <https://ahca.myflorida.com/medicaid/florida-medicaid-complaints> at any time or contact the Florida Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055 (TDD 1-866-467-4970) Monday through Friday 8am to 5pm EST for assistance.

My son needs short-term rehab. Florida Blue and Medicaid do not cover this. Why? They say the insurance company can choose to provide or not . . . what?

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

Does Medicare provide or pay for service animals?

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

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

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

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

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

Another option is Consumer-Directed Care Plus (CDC+) which is a long-term care program alternative to the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Medicaid waiver. The program provides the opportunity for individuals to improve the quality of their lives by being empowered to make choices about the supports and services that will meet their long-term care needs and to help them reach their goals. For more information about the CDC+ program, please contact the APD CDC+ helpline at 1-866-761-7043.

Does Medicaid cover therapies for individuals with disabilities?

Florida Medicaid provides medically necessary occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT), respiratory therapy (RT) and speech-language pathology (SLP) services to Medicaid recipients from birth through age 20. Regardless of age, the therapy services program provides services to all Medicaid recipients for SLP services for the provision of augmentative and alternative communication systems and PT and OT services for wheelchair evaluations and fittings.

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

For more information about coverage, please call the Florida Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055.

Any state/federal resources for people who do not qualify for Medicaid?

Please contact your local 2-1-1 for resources in your area: <https://www.211.org/>. Additionally, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has other health-related resources available including the Medically Needy Program. More information can be found on their website here: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/medicaid>.

Is there a glossary of acronyms for the Agency that serves Medicaid and Medicare folks?

For Florida Medicaid, the Statewide Medicaid Managed Care (SMMC) Plan contracts contain definitions of commonly used words and acronyms. The model contracts can be found here: <https://ahca.myflorida.com/medicaid/statewide-medicaid-managed-care/2012-2018-smmc-plans>.

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

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

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

Are there age minimums/maximums for Medicare or Medicaid?

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

Medicaid is a subsidized health care program for low-income children, families and people with disabilities that is jointly run by the federal and state governments.

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

Does AHCA pay for the usage of medical marijuana for people with disabilities? If so, what and where can it be found?

No, due to federal regulations, Florida Medicaid cannot pay for medical marijuana. The Food and Drug Administration has not approved marijuana for any medical use. The Drug

Enforcement Agency classifies marijuana as a Schedule I drug, which means that it has no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse.

Does Medicaid support equine therapy?

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

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

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



The Agency for Persons with Disabilities

Why is there never information on adults with cerebral palsy? Called the APD and they could not help. Don't you have an informational webpage?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities or APD provides services to individuals with unique abilities, including Cerebral Palsy, to help individuals reach their full potential and thrive in the community. Services are based on individualized needs and include an array of social, medical, behavioral, therapeutic, and residential services. Examples may include services to assist individuals in meeting physical needs, such as Personal Supports; services to help individuals in reaching their employment goals; meaningful day activities and companionship; supported living; case management; other residential supports; nursing; and therapies, such as physical and occupational therapy. For assistance from APD, please contact the APD Regional offices nearest you. The contact information can be found at <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

Additionally, APD is excited to serve Floridians with unique abilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, *A Pathway to Possibilities*. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 850-300-HOPE.

United Cerebral Palsy is an organization that educates, advocates, and provides support services to ensure a life of inclusion for people with a spectrum of disabilities. For additional information, visit <https://ucp.org/>.

The only thing I would like to know is why is it so hard to find someone to provide respite care for my child to go out? It's been a long year for my son and his parents. He had stomach/anxiety issues which led him to be in the hospital for about 10 days. Mom has been doing her best to get him back to being himself. It has been a new change in him. It would be nice to have a class or support to help.

APD is excited to serve Floridians with unique abilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, *A Pathway to Possibilities*. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 850-300-HOPE.

There are only one or two breakout sessions that interest me. My son is 41. I would like information dealing with group homes or other alternatives for people with disabilities. What are the qualifications a home has to have?

There are several types of living settings available within the State of Florida. The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) licenses community-based group homes that assist individuals with developmental disabilities. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lvns_eryBw.

Alternatives to licensed residential facilities can include the choice to live in an individual's own home or family home with support. For more details, please feel free to contact the APD Regional offices nearest you. The contact information for these offices be found at <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

I have an adopted son who was diagnosed with ASD. I have a form signed by a behavioral pediatrician stating he was diagnosed with ASD. When I completed my application for APD, my application was "rejected" as we do not have his original GARS III test scores. We have contacted his former behavior pediatrician who has retired and scores cannot be obtained. We were then told another office diagnosed him. That office stated they did not diagnose. I have contacted 5 practices with no help. What can I do now? He is now 18.

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities or APD serves individuals with severe forms of Autism, as outlined in Florida Statute and the Florida Administrative Code. APD can provide a comprehensive assessment if it is needed during the application process to definitively identify a developmental disability. For assistance, please contact the APD Regional office nearest you. These offices can be reached here: <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

Additionally, APD is excited to serve Floridians with unique abilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, *A Pathway to Possibilities*. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 850-300-HOPE.

Why is Florida ranked 48th in the nation for serving families with IDD? How does our Government/Governor accept this? Is anything in the pipeline to make this State better? Don't ask for my vote, until you improve our State. I hope lots of voters at Family Café share this concern and will vote accordingly.

The mission at the Agency for Persons with Disabilities or APD is to support individuals with unique abilities and their families in living, learning, and working within their communities by creating multiple pathways to possibilities. APD is striving to serve individuals and families at the earliest moment possible by activating resources and supports to meet needs and create strong support systems for individuals to realize their full potential and maximize community integration. As such, individuals can receive a wide variety of services through APD, depending on their individualized level of need and goals they are seeking to attain. Thanks to the leadership of First Lady Casey DeSantis, individuals with unique abilities and their families can be served through Hope Florida, *A Pathway to Possibilities*. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 850-300-HOPE.

Why is it so difficult to get services for a child/adult who has a disability: autism, Down syndrome, etc.?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities serves and supports individuals with unique abilities and their families in living, learning, and working within their communities by creating multiple pathways to possibilities. For individuals with developmental disabilities eligible for iBudget Waiver services, this includes an array of social, medical, behavioral, therapeutic, and residential services that are based on individualized needs and goals. For assistance in accessing services, please contact the APD Regional Office nearest you.

These telephone numbers and addresses for these offices can be found here:

<https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

Additionally, APD is excited to partner with Floridians with unique abilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, *A Pathway to Possibilities*. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 850-300-HOPE.

We got guardianship of our four grandsons on June 1, 2022. We were aware that they had disabilities and requested help to no avail. The system was not interested in helping. If it had not been for a friend with a child with a disability who referred me to Family Café we would never have known about the resources available to us so we can help our grandsons have a happy and productive life. We came home renewed. Thank you.

The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC) is an advisory board, established under the federal Developmental Disabilities and Bill of Rights Act, 2000, with a mission to advocate and promote meaningful participation in all aspects of life for persons with developmental disabilities. For additional information about the FDDC, please visit <https://www.fddc.org/>.

Where can I find out more about living accommodations in central Florida?

The Centers for Independent Living in Central Florida assists with helping people with disabilities and their families in locating services, including affordable housing. The telephone number is toll free 1-877-891-6448. More information can be found on their website at <https://cilorlando.org/about/about-us/>.

More information and access to APD agency.

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities or APD serves individuals with unique abilities and their families in living, learning, and working within their communities by creating multiple pathways to possibilities. For assistance in accessing services, please contact the APD Regional Office nearest you. These telephone numbers and addresses for these offices can be found here: <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

Additionally, APD is excited to partner with Floridians with unique abilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, *A Pathway to Possibilities*. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 850-300-HOPE.

Is there an independent housing contact person in Miami-Dade and Osceola counties for persons with all types of disabilities? Please provide their contact information.

There are several housing resources for individuals with disabilities in Miami. Below are two examples that may be helpful to include.

Center for Independent Living South Florida: <https://www.cilsf.org/>.

Miami Dade Public Housing and Community Development:
<https://www.miamidade.gov/global/housing/home.page>.

More services to help transition to adulthood.

Planning for transition into adulthood is an important step for individuals with unique abilities. Some resources include:

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<https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

Additionally, APD is excited to partner with Floridians with unique abilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, *A Pathway to Possibilities*. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 850-300-HOPE.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation has programs that help students as they transition from school into adulthood. For more information, please visit

<https://www.rehabworks.org/student-youth/student-steps.html>.

What can I do to help my ASD sister? She is nine.

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<https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

Additionally, APD is excited to partner with Floridians with unique abilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, *A Pathway to Possibilities*. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based

partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 850-300-HOPE.

In addition to Hope Florida: A Pathway to Possibilities, there are a number of partners and resources that may be helpful. Some examples are included below:

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) provides various supports and information for individuals with autism across the state. For more information, please visit the CARD website at <https://florida-card.org/>.

The Autism Society of Florida is a nonprofit organization that helps connect individuals with autism to various resources. For more information, please visit the Autism Society of Florida Website at <https://www.autismfl.org/about-us>.

Brilliant and beautiful session this year! What are resources available for wheelchair minor repairs that don't require lengthy waits and high labor costs?

Thank you for the positive feedback! Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST) is Florida's assistive technology program that provides services to individuals with disabilities. In addition, FASST has an information and referral service that can assist individuals and families in locating resources to meet their assistive technology needs. Please visit <https://faast.org> or call 1 844-FL-FAAST.

Additionally, APD stands ready to assist. APD is excited to partner with Floridians with unique abilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, *A Pathway to Possibilities*. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 850-300-HOPE.

What grants/programs/initiatives are out there or proposed that will help in financing assistive technologies, track chairs, mobility vans, and computer technology? Are there any available or are they still limited? How can we get some pushed through (besides simply "talking with our elected representatives")?

Here are some potential resources:

An ABLE United account is a way for Floridians with disabilities to save, tax-free, and plan for the future. To qualify for an ABLE United Account, the individual must be a Florida resident at the time of application and have a qualifying disability with onset prior to age 26. Funds can be used to pay for disability-related expenses that help improve or maintain health, independence, or quality of life. Please visit <https://www.ableunited.com/> or call 1-888-524-2253.

Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST) is Florida's assistive technology program that provides services to individuals with disabilities. In addition, FAAST has an information and referral service that can assist individuals and families in locating resources to meet their assistive technology needs. Please visit <https://faast.org> or call 1 844-FL-FAAST.

The Wheelchair Project by LifeNets works to put wheelchairs that are not currently being used into the hands of someone who can benefit from them. The program is designed to facilitate the exchange of wheelchairs between individuals and is not for the use of vendors or distributors. Please visit the program website at <https://lifenets.org/programs/wheelchairs/> to get more info.

Special Kids is an organization that has a Wheelchair Van Assistance program that serves children, adults, seniors, and veterans. Please visit <https://specialkidsfund.org/> for more information.

The National Organization for Vehicle Accessibility provides grants to assist with mobility, such as accessible vans, wheelchair lifts, scooter or truck lifts, or car top carriers. For more information, please call 574-607- 5995 or email info@novafunding.org.

Why doesn't the state hire more providers?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities or APD is continuously recruiting quality providers to assist individuals with unique abilities statewide. Currently APD works with over 6,000 providers statewide offering a variety of social, medical, behavioral, residential, and therapeutic supports. To search for iBudget Florida Waiver providers, in your local area, please visit <https://fddresources.qclarant.com/ProviderSearch.aspx>.

Additionally, APD is excited to partner with Floridians with unique abilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, *A Pathway to Possibilities*. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 850-300-HOPE.

What can we do to get APD to add other qualifying diagnoses to their list? They have Prader-Willi, but what about other highly involved rare syndromes/diagnoses?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities or APD supports individuals with unique abilities and their families in living, learning, and working within their communities by creating multiple pathways to possibilities.

The eligibility criteria for individuals to be eligible to receive services through the iBudget Waiver is identified in Florida Statutes. However, there are other services and supports that can assist.

Additionally, APD is excited to partner with Floridians with unique abilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, *A Pathway to Possibilities*. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 850-300-HOPE.

What's available for adults? Which agencies serve all five age generations? Most of the data at the Family Café is for students (teens, youth, children, and young adults).

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Additionally, APD is excited to partner with Floridians with unique abilities of all ages and their caregivers through Hope Florida, *A Pathway to Possibilities*. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 850-300-HOPE.

Help for adult autism population for high functioning, there is no place to go to study, to spend the day, or help for the parents to take them. More therapies for them. More day programs with good conditions. Group homes.

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Here are some resources for individuals with Autism in Florida:

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) provides various supports and information for individuals with autism across the state. For more information, please visit the CARD website at <https://florida-card.org/>.

The Autism Society of Florida is a nonprofit organization that helps connect individuals with autism to various resources. For more information, please visit the Autism Society of Florida Website at <https://www.autismfl.org/about-us>.

We have CDC+. I am my daughter's rep. Over the years the amount of work has grown to be so much. It is harder and harder to get things approved and we see more being denied. The APD also continually tries to cut budget and it is an incredible amount of work not to lose most of the money. I am getting older and very tired. No one wants to do all that work. Consultants keep quitting. Who is going to take over and help my daughter get what she needs when I no longer can, or I die?

The mission for Agency for Persons with Disabilities or APD is to support individuals with unique abilities and their families in living, learning, and working within their communities by creating multiple pathways to possibilities.

APD strives to ensure that the Consumer Directed Care Plus (CDC+) program is streamlined and meets the needs of participants and their families. For assistance, please contact the CDC+ Customer service line by calling 1-866-761-7041.

I don't understand why the Governor is against having diversity, equity, and inclusion. That sounds to me like he is against making sure the disability community is included or have what we need for inclusion. What does the Governor mean by this department and philosophy being eliminated in all educational facilities in the state?

Under the leadership of Governor DeSantis, the mission at the Agency for Persons with Disabilities or APD is to support individuals with unique abilities and their families in living, learning, and working within their communities by creating multiple pathways to possibilities. APD is striving to serve individuals and families at the earliest moment possible by activating resources and supports to meet needs and create strong support systems for individuals to realize their full potential and maximize community integration. As such, individuals can receive a wide variety of services through APD, depending on their individualized level of need and goals they are seeking to attain. Thanks to the leadership of First Lady Casey DeSantis, individuals with unique abilities and their families can be served through Hope Florida, *A Pathway to Possibilities*. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 850-300-HOPE.

If a person 19 years of age doesn't qualify for APD due to late ID of ASD, what can we do for support?

The mission for Agency for Persons with Disabilities or APD is to support individuals with unique abilities and their families in living, learning, and working within their communities by creating multiple pathways to possibilities.

APD is excited to partner with Floridians with unique abilities of all ages and their caregivers through Hope Florida, *A Pathway to Possibilities*. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 850-300-HOPE.

Additionally, APD provides a variety of social, medical, behavioral, residential, and therapeutic supports to assist individuals with developmental disabilities. We would encourage you to contact your local APD office that can help guide you through the necessary documentation you may need to apply for services through the iBudget Florida waiver. The telephone numbers and addresses of APD Regional offices can be found here: <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

What 50+ communities accept residency for one senior and one disabled adult in their 40s? How can we get more information on group homes?

Please contact the Agency for Persons with Disabilities or APD Regional office nearest you for assistance in the local community. They can be reached at the contact information posted online at <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

Are there grant programs to help get a mobility van for a wheelchair?

Here are some potential resources:

The National Organization for Vehicle Accessibility provides grants to assist with mobility, such as accessible vans, wheelchair lifts, scooter or truck lifts, or car top carriers. For more information, please call 574-607-5995 or email info@novafunding.org.

Special Kids is an organization that has a Wheelchair Van Assistance program that serves children, adults, seniors, and veterans. Please visit <https://specialkidsfund.org/> for more information.

Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST) is Florida's assistive technology program that provides services to individuals with disabilities. In addition, FASST has an information and referral service that can assist individuals and families in locating resources to meet their assistive technology needs. Please visit <https://faast.org> or call 1 844-FL-FAAST.

The Department of Children and Families

What happens when I have no relatives left, everyone dies, and it is just me. Or relatives/family are far away. I am autistic. Does guardianship overrule power of attorney or are they the same? What happens when your attorney dies?

Please refer to an appropriate attorney for assistance.

Once your child is on the MedWaiver, in this case, he is only 16 so he is on CMS-Sunshine, why do you have to reapply for Medicaid through DCF?

When an individual (child or adult) is eligible for Medicaid, including a Home and Community Based Services (HCBS)/Waiver, an annual review is conducted to determine if they continue to qualify. Children's Medical Services (CMS) Sunshine is the benefit through which services are provided based on the Medicaid eligibility. The determination of eligibility for Medicaid must be met in order to receive the services and benefits provided by CMS Sunshine.

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

Parents, caregivers, and fictive kin can contact Early Learning Coalition (ELC) in their local area and inquire if they qualify for financial assistance to assist with the payment of daycare. ELC can also assist with locating a daycare that may be within a family's budget. For children in foster care, there is a \$200 monthly childcare subsidy for the caregiver who has a child between the age of birth to school entry (ages 0-5) placed in their home, regardless of their program participation or licensure status, to pay toward the cost of an Early Learning or Child Care program. The caregiver may contact their lead Community-Based Care Agency for additional information regarding the monthly childcare subsidy.

What is peer support and how do I access it?

Recovery peer support services are delivered by individuals called Recovery Peer Specialists who have lived experience with mental health or substance use conditions and have been in recovery for at least two years. Recovery Peer Specialists may also be family members of individuals with mental health and or substance use conditions. Recovery Peer Specialists foster hope and promote a belief in the possibility of recovery.

Peer-support services are provided in a variety of settings and may be provided prior to, during, and after treatment. Services provided include outreach, engagement activities, and ongoing recovery supports. Below are a few links to access Peer Recovery Support services in Florida:

- [Floridians for Recovery, FFR | Recovery Community Organization Florida | Florida, USA https://floridiansforrecovery.org/](https://floridiansforrecovery.org/)

- [Peer Support Coalition of Florida \(peersupportfl.org\)](http://peersupportfl.org)

How to use state college benefit received from adoption.

Youth adopted through Florida's child welfare system are eligible for a tuition fee exemption that may be used at any public state college, university, or vocational school in Florida. After being accepted into their selected institute, the youth should contact the lead Community-Based Care Agency that completed the adoption and request the Tuition Fee Exemption Form. Upon receipt, this form needs to be shared with the Financial Aid office at the institution the youth is attending. In addition, programs such as Posting Pathways are available to assist youth in navigating through their post-secondary education. College Coaches/Liaisons are available at State Colleges and Universities to assist youth adopted through foster care.

- <http://www.adoptflorida.org/contactPACounselor.shtml>
- <https://www.positivepathwaysflorida.org/university-campus-liasons>

Resources for nonverbal autism. Speech resources, OT resources, possible classes to take, certifications to be able to better advocate for our ID, MH young adults especially while being held in facilities under long term Baker Act/Court Order. Our youngest daughter was court ordered into care in Dec. 2021. She was held in our local crisis center for over 6 months, no education (yes she was still in school), no day program, no therapy, no daily activities to keep her hands & mind busy & deter poor choices. She was transferred to another facility in Orlando to continue waiting for a bed to become available at SFSH. Another 6 months was spent there on 1:1, sleeping in the dayroom, acting out for attention in an understaffed (1 nurse) unit. When she finally made it to SFSH in Pembroke Pines, she did so much better because of the programs and incentives to do well. They say she doesn't need that level of care, yet only 1 ICF is willing to accept her. They are NOT a locked facility, and she has an extensive history of eloping. I need to know what I can do to look outside of Florida in case this home does not work out.

Local Baker Act Receiving Facilities are intended to rapidly stabilize individuals in mental health crisis and return them to the community with follow-up services. They are not designed to provide long-term care. Unfortunately, when an individual is not safe to be discharged home but there is no placement available at a higher level of care, people do wait longer than intended. However, day programming and proper staffing is required. If you wish to report additional information to the Department of Children and Families (Department) regarding those specific facilities, please visit our licensure webpage at <https://stage.myflfamilies.com/services/licensing/samh>, select 'Submit a complaint,' and complete the form.

The Department is actively collaborating with the Agency for Persons with Disabilities to address these issues and expand resources that are responsive to the needs of individuals with co-occurring mental health and intellectual conditions.

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

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

Additionally, SNAP provides nutritional support for low-income seniors, people with disabilities living on fixed incomes, and other individuals and families with low incomes. There are different ways an individual can apply for SNAP benefits with the Department. Individuals can apply online at <https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance> or in person at one of the storefronts: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/additional-resources-and-services/ess-storefronts-and-lobbies>. You may also complete a paper application that can be mailed, faxed, or returned to your local storefront.

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

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

The Adult Protective Services Program is responsible for preventing further harm to vulnerable adults who are victims of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or self-neglect. These adults may experience abuse, neglect, or exploitation by second parties or may fail to take care of themselves adequately. Florida statutes require any person who knows or who has reasonable cause to suspect any abuse of vulnerable adults to report that information to the Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-962-2873. In addition, Adult Protective Services assists vulnerable adults to live dignified and reasonably independent lives in their own homes or in the homes of relatives or friends so that they may be assured the least restrictive environment suitable to their needs.

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

Every child who enters the child welfare system has a dedicated team committed to their well-being and success, and foster parents are an important member of that team. If a need or barrier arises, the child’s team is the first line of support. By working together, we can ensure that you have the tools needed for the most appropriate care.

Our system of care is based on the needs of the local community. The system may vary depending on where you live, but the process will include licensing training, background checks, finger printing and a home study. Foster Parent training is a critical part of being a foster parent and provides a great opportunity to learn more about fostering, meet prospective and current foster parents on the same journey, and to begin learning trauma-informed parenting skills.

Additionally, each local Community Based Care Lead Agency partners with agencies in their area to provide ongoing support through community resources that include the statewide Foster and Adoptive Parent Association and local Florida and Adoptive Parent Associations (where available).

To qualify as a potential foster parent, you must:

- Attend an orientation.
- Complete free foster parent educational resource hours.
- Complete background screenings for each household member ages 12 and older.
- Participate in a home study to review your readiness to become a foster parent and have a home inspection completed.

How can I apply for public benefits?

The Department of Children and Families (Department) is responsible for determining eligibility and administering Florida's government assistance programs, including food assistance, cash assistance, Medicaid, and housing assistance for individuals and families. There are different ways that individuals can apply for benefits with the Department. Individuals can apply online at <https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance> or in person at one of The Family Resource Centers: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/additional-resources-and-services/ess-storefronts-and-lobbies>. You may also complete a paper application that can be mailed, faxed or returned to your local storefront. More information on how to apply can be found at <https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/applying-for-assistance>.

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

There needs to be more help to get our children on Medicaid. It took us 5 years.

Florida Medicaid eligibility determined by the Department of Children and Families (Department), is completed within 45 days. An individual may also obtain eligibility for Medicaid based on a determination of eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) by the Social Security Administration (SSA).

Individuals can apply for Supplemental Security Income at [Apply for Benefits, Social Security Administration \(ssa.gov\)](https://www.ssa.gov).

If determined eligible for SSI, the individual is automatically eligible for Medicaid. To qualify for Medicaid, through either the Department or SSA, child(ren) must meet the technical (demographic) and income requirements specific to the coverage groups for which they may qualify. Parents and/or caregiver income is considered during the eligibility determinations for children.

Individuals can apply online at <https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance> or in-person at one of our Family Resource Centers: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/additional-resources-and-services/ess-storefronts-and-lobbies>. You may also complete a paper application that can be mailed, faxed, or returned to your local Customer Service Center. More information on how to apply can be found at <https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/applying-for-assistance>.

Children eligible for Medicaid may enroll in the Child Health Check-up Program. This program provides regularly scheduled health checkups, dental screenings, immunizations, and other medical services for children. For information on the Child Health Check-up Program, visit the Agency for Health Care Administration's information page at <https://ahca.myflorida.com/>. Families may also apply for medical assistance for children through <https://www.floridakidcare.org/>.

We need presentations on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

Free, online trainings are available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for consumers and professionals who care for women at risk for an alcohol-exposed pregnancy, and for those who work with individuals living with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs). These online trainings provide strategies to improve the delivery of care related to FASDs and their prevention. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs) | CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/>).

We need more mental health services.

Individuals with health care coverage such as Medicaid or other insurance should consult their health plan, insurance company or health care provider regarding available services and coverage. If coverage for services is not available through an existing program, the Department's office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health may offer resources to assist.

The Department of Children and Families is responsible for:

- Providing treatment for substance abuse through a community-based provider system that offers detoxification, treatment and recovery supports for children and adults affected by substance misuse, abuse, or dependence.

- Planning, managing, and evaluating a statewide program of mental health services and supports, including community programs, crisis services, state residential treatment facilities, and children’s mental health services.

The Department contracts with Managing Entities across the state who serve as local resources in the communities and assist with coverage of services for individuals who are uninsured or under-insured.

To find the nearest locations for DCF, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Managing Entities, please visit: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/sites/default/files/2022-12/CSC.pdf>.

Managing Entity Name	Contact Information	Counties Served
<u>Northwest Florida Health Care</u>	850-747-5755 extension 1744, https://www.nwfhealth.org/	Bay, Calhoun, Escambia, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Taylor, Wakulla, Walton, and Washington
<u>Broward Behavioral Health Coalition</u>	877-698-7794, https://bbhcflorida.org/	Broward
<u>Central Florida Behavioral Health Network, Inc.</u>	813-740-4811, https://www.cfbhn.org/	Charlotte, Collier, DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Highlands, Hendry, Hillsborough, Lee, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Sarasota
<u>Central Florida Cares Health System</u>	407-985-3560, http://centralfloridacares.org/	Brevard, Orange, Osceola, and Seminole
<u>Lutheran Services Florida</u>	877-229-9098, https://www.lsfnet.org/	Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Citrus, Clay, Columbia, Dixie, Duval, Flagler, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Hernando, Lake, Lafayette, Levy, Marion, Nassau, Putnam, St. Johns, Sumter, Suwannee, Union, and Volusia
<u>South Florida Behavioral Health Network, Inc. dba Thriving Mind</u>	888-248-3111, https://www.thrivingmind.org/	Miami-Dade and Monroe

Southeast Florida Behavioral Health Network	561-203-2485, https://sefbhn.org/	Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, Palm Beach, and St. Lucie
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Need to find emergency housing assistance for persons with disabilities who are homeless.

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

The only thing I would like to know is why it is so hard to find someone to provide respite care for my child to go out. It has been a long year for my son and his parents. He had stomach/anxiety issues which led him to be in the hospital for about 10 days. Mom has been doing her best to get him back to being himself. It has been a new change for him. It would be nice to have a class or support to help.

Please clarify if the child is an APD client. If so, please refer to APD for a response.

When applying for SSI disability, how do we see the income per month once the process has begun? Is it normal for an SSI account to be locked during the process?

The Social Security Income (SSI) determination process is a federal program, and your questions will need to be referred to the Social Security Administration (SSA).

Should I do a will for my adult special needs children?

Please refer to an appropriate attorney for assistance.

What services and resources are available for foster parents?

As a licensed foster parent there are several resources available to assist you and the child placed in your home. Foster parents are provided foster care board payments to assist in covering costs associated with the needs of the child or children placed in their homes. The foster care board payments are intended to cover the basic needs of the child for whom the payments are made. Costs include clothing, food, child care, extracurricular activities, and other expenses.

Foster parents of children ages 13-17 years old receive additional payments that are designed to help in the teaching of life skills for their age group. Many Lead-Agencies also provide additional supports to families including, but not limited to, monthly allowances, transportation reimbursement, and clothing vouchers. Additionally, foster parents have access to a variety of trainings and foster parent support groups. Trainings are often offered by community partners, local Foster and Adoptive Parent Associations, or the licensing agency. In some instances, when appropriate and available, children may be able to receive their services (most commonly counseling/therapy) in the comfort of the foster home.

How does DCF assist with the opioid crisis?

The Department of Children and Families (Department) is the lead agency for substance use and mental health policy in the state. Many programs detailed below exist to help combat the Opioid Crisis in Florida.

The Overdose Prevention Program distributes the life-saving overdose antidote called "naloxone." Naloxone kits provided by the Department have been used to save a life over 36,000 times as reported back to distributors throughout the state. There have been over 675,000 kits distributed into the communities in Florida since September 2016.

Please visit WWW.ISAVEFL.COM to find free naloxone in your community. The Department also funds the mail-based naloxone program through the Florida Harm Reduction Collective, this gives individuals with transportation challenges or not wanting to be stigmatized, the opportunity to obtain this lifesaving antidote. Please visit, www.flhrc.org to obtain mail-based naloxone. Each of these rescues provides another opportunity for individuals to choose a new path of hope and recovery.

Through the State Opioid Response (SOR) grant, the Department supports efforts to address the opioid crisis through the following initiatives:

- Prevention, treatment, and recovery support services.
- Peer Provider Mentors.
- Behavioral Health Consultants.
- Recovery Oriented Quality Improvement Specialists.
- University of Miami's Mobile Buprenorphine Pilot.
- Oxford House.

Funding for prevention, treatment, and recovery support services for individuals with an opioid or stimulant use disorder or misuse is allocated to the Managing Entities to oversee service delivery in their service areas.

Treatment and recovery support is tailored to the individual and family needs. This may involve case management, medication assisted treatment (MAT), respite, recovery community organizations, outpatient counseling, recovery housing, employment support, and other treatment and recovery support services. Hospital and Jail Bridge Programs provide access to treatment for opioid use disorders providing a peer led warm hand off

from emergency departments to local medication assisted treatment providers. Peer Prescriber Mentors provide training and consultation for establishing or expanding a bridge program. Peer Prescriber Mentors are specially trained physicians in opioid use disorder, stimulant use disorders, and MAT who serve as peer mentors for other physicians and professionals.

Behavioral Health Consultants (BHCs) are licensed clinicians co-located with child welfare staff to assist in screening and offer consultation on behavioral health issues. BHCs provide guidance to child protective investigators on understanding the signs and symptoms of opioid use disorders and the best practices to engage and treat.

The Recovery Oriented Quality Improvement Specialist (ROQIS) is an individual with lived experience in recovery from a substance use disorder (SUD) conducting their duties through the lens of their lived experience in recovery and navigating the behavioral health system. ROQISs conduct and document quality assurance visits with providers to identify recovery-oriented principles and practices, promote opportunities for all levels of lived experience to have meaningful inclusion in the evaluation of Recovery Oriented System of Care (ROSC) practices, and enhance the role of peers in the workforce through training and technical assistance. ROQISs also provide technical assistance for the expansion of medication assisted treatment.

The Department collaborates with the University of Miami to provide a mobile buprenorphine program. This program provides opioid treatment to the homeless population while connecting them to community-based services for basic needs and a local provider to continue MAT and other treatment and recovery support services.

The Department contracts with Oxford House to increase recovery housing in Florida. An Oxford House is a democratically run, self-supporting, and drug-free home, that offers a supportive way of living and opportunities to learn life skills. Individuals who reside in an Oxford House have access to 24-hour support from peers in recovery.

The Coordinated Opioid Response (CORE) Network is a collaboration between emergency departments, emergency medical services, and community behavioral health treatment providers to provide low barrier access to medication assisted treatment for individuals with an opioid use disorder diagnosis while also addressing other coexisting medical and mental health needs. The program has been piloted in several counties and will be expanding this year.

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

There are family-run organizations throughout the state. The Family Café oversees the Family Run Organization Movement (FROM) to provide guidance on expanding family-run organizations.

There are five affiliates of the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health in Florida.

- The Family Café, www.familycafe.net.
- Federation of Families of Miami-Dade, www.fofmiami.org.
- Federation of Families of Central FL, www.ffcflinc.org.
- Federation of Families of Florida, www.flfamilies.net.
- South Florida Wellness Network, www.southfloridawellnessnetwork.org.

The Department of Children and Families offers assistance for referrals to local community-based partners through the Hope Florida program. To contact a Hope Navigator please call 850-300-HOPE.

The Department's behavioral health Managing Entities offer Care Coordination to individuals and family members in need of behavioral health services. Care coordinators can assist with navigating the behavioral health system of care by connecting you to services and supports in the community. Please see response to a previous question above for contact information for the Managing Entity serving your county.

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

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

There are a few ways to find a mental health therapist in your area. First you can reach out to your insurance plan or look at their provider directory for a licensed mental health professional.

If you do not have insurance or your insurance does not cover mental health therapy, you can contact the behavioral health Managing Entity that serves the county where you live. (Please see response to a previous question above for contact information for the Managing Entity serving your county.) They can assist by connecting you to a mental health therapist or a community-based agency that offers therapy services in their network.

What exactly does DCF do?

The Department of Children and Families (Department) works in partnership with local communities and key stakeholders to help families and individuals in the State of Florida.

The Department's mission is to support families in their greatest time of need and maximize our moments of impact. Our goal as an agency is to serve Floridians by:

- Supporting strong and resilient families through programs that support economic self-sufficiency.
- Protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and abandonment.
- Promoting and advancing resiliency and recovery for those contending with mental health and substance use disorders.

The Department serves nearly half the population in the state at some point during the year, at every stage of life, from newborns to senior citizens. We offer a wide range of services that include eligibility and distribution of public benefits, child and adult protection, family well-being, state mental health treatment facilities, human trafficking prevention and treatment, protecting special populations including missing children and domestic violence survivors, licensing foster and community care, substance use and mental health treatment, and services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We also have community partners who are equipped to help children and families overcome abuse, neglect, mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence, and other significant challenges that prevent them from achieving their dreams.

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

Yes, there are several options available to support your son and sometimes you may need to explore different types of support before you find the best fit. Importantly, self-injurious behaviors are a warning sign that something is wrong and should never be ignored.

One option for support is to call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 9-8-8. The Lifeline provides 24/7, free short-term crisis counseling. When someone calls 9-8-8, they are connected to a trained crisis counselor to assist them in navigating their existing crisis. This includes de-escalation techniques such as motivational interviewing (client-centered counselling for eliciting behavioral change by helping clients identify their reasons for living), developing safety plans (a written list of coping strategies and sources of support), assessing risk to self or others, and assisting in making connections to care and a pathway for sustained support.

Another option for support is to make an appointment with a therapist for mental health outpatient therapy. There are a few ways to find a mental health therapist in your area. First you can reach out to your insurance plan or look at their provider directory for a licensed mental health professional.

If you do not have insurance or your insurance does not cover mental health therapy, you can contact the behavioral health Managing Entity that serves the county where you live. (Please see response to a previous question above for contact information for the Managing Entity serving your county.) They can assist by connecting you to a mental health therapist or a community-based agency that offers therapy services in their network.

These questions will help you learn whether a provider offers higher-quality treatment and is a good fit for your situation.

- Availability: We are exploring several options. If we choose you, how soon could treatment begin?
- Costs and insurance: Can you help me estimate the cost of treatment? Will insurance cover these costs?

- Credentials:
 - For programs: Are you licensed and accredited? Can you tell me about the qualifications of your counseling staff?
 - For therapists: Can you tell me briefly your background and your credentials?
 - For addiction doctors: Is the doctor board certified in addiction medicine or addiction psychiatry?
- Full assessment and personalized plan: How do you establish a treatment plan? Do you start with a complete assessment and diagnosis? What does that involve?
- Treatment approach for mental health and substance use: Can you tell me about your treatment approach for people with behavioral health problems?
- Medication assisted treatment:
 - For therapists and programs: Can you arrange for someone to prescribe a medication to treat alcohol or opioid use disorder if appropriate?
 - For addiction doctors: Can you confirm that the doctor prescribes medications to treat alcohol or opioid use disorder if appropriate?
- Support for other concerns and medical issues: How do you help people address other concerns or medical issues if needed?
- Expectations: What do you expect of your patients and their families during treatment?
- Managing relapse: What do you do if a patient has a relapse while in treatment?
- Recovery support: What about after treatment or in addition to treatment? is ongoing recovery support available?

How can we better prepare law enforcement officers for interactions with individuals having mental health crises?

First responders dedicate their careers to protecting our communities. These professionals are often the first personnel on scene when a critical incident occurs. To improve their skills to respond to crises, law enforcement officers in Florida may complete mental health Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training, a curriculum developed by a national organization with expertise in mental health crisis intervention. The training aids in improving officers’ knowledge and skills as first responders to incidents involving individuals with emotional disturbance or mental illness, including de-escalation skills to ensure consumer and officer safety. While many Florida first responders take the course, not all first responders are trained. If you are calling 9-1-1, or 9-8-8 for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, for reasons that could be related to a behavioral health crisis a CIT trained officer should be requested.

The following table lists resources for first responders, including counseling lines that are answered by first responders with specialized training in giving information and referral and short-term counseling support.

Resource and Contact Information	Description
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<p>2nd Alarm Project Number: 850-480-9314 Website: https://2ndalarmproject.org/counseling/</p>	<p>Free counseling sessions offered to first responders by clinicians with specialized training in treating mental health conditions presenting in first responders.</p> <p>Crisis line: No</p>
<p>211 Broward/ Hero4Hero line Number: 866-760-HERO (4376) Website: https://www.hero4hero.org/ - https://www.instagram.com/hero4hero_fl/</p>	<p>Counseling line staffed by first responders providing information and referral and short-term crisis counseling.</p> <p>Crisis line: Yes</p>
<p>Crisis Center of Tampa Bay Number: 866-4FL-HERO (4376)</p>	<p>Counseling line staffed by first responders providing information and referral and short-term crisis counseling.</p> <p>Crisis line: Yes</p>
<p>University of Central Florida RESTORES Number: 407-823-1657 Website: ucfrestores.com</p>	<p>Single session consultation line staffed by first responders for mental health related concerns, individuals receive a personalized treatment strategy to be paired with ongoing services.</p> <p>Crisis line: No</p>

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

The Department of Children and Families (Department), Office on Homelessness, provides funding to 27 local Continuums of Care (CoCs) throughout the state. Those CoCs provide housing assistance to families who are eligible for their funding. Although there has been a reduction of homeless students since the 2019-2020 school year, Florida Department of Education (FDOE) reports that there are still students who experienced homelessness. Though most of these youth are not living in emergency shelters, any type of housing insecurity may cause a disruption to a youth’s academic pursuits. To assist these vulnerable families with children, the Department provides emergency financial assistance to families facing the loss of their housing due to a financial or other crisis. The intent of the program is to provide case management and financial assistance for overdue rent or mortgage payments and overdue utility bills to enable families to remain housed after

receiving the assistance. To find available emergency housing assistance for a family, please contact the local CoC. A list of the CoCs may be found at: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/continuums-care-and-local-providers-service>.

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

In many communities across the state, local areas have established local Foster and Adoptive Parent associations. Typically, meetings are held monthly, and this gives foster, adoptive, and kinship caregivers an opportunity to receive ongoing training and supports, and to be able to discuss with other caregivers who have similar experiences. Local associations are open to current and prospective caregivers and there may also be an opportunity to connect with local licensing staff to ask questions. Additionally, the Community Based Care Lead Agency and other licensing agencies have developed their internal supports which may include peer support for current and prospective foster parents and mentoring when families are newly licensed. All these supports are in addition to the support foster parents receive from their licensing agency and other system partners. Foster parents will also have access to the statewide foster and adoptive parent association (most commonly referred to as Florida FAPA). FAPA is operated by current foster parents and provides statewide trainings, advocacy and support to Florida's foster and an adoptive parents.



The Department of Education

I have recently been diagnosed with ADHD and I need to know what services are available to me.

Federal and state law, “Other Health Impairment” (OHI) means having limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment that is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD or ADHD), diabetes, epilepsy, heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, Tourette Syndrome and sickle cell anemia. An OHI can adversely affect a child’s educational performance. (See Rule 6A-6.030152, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.)). The list of chronic or acute health problems included within this definition is not exhaustive. (Students with ADHD may be classified as eligible for services under the OHI category.) If determined to be eligible, an individual educational plan (IEP) team will identify a student’s individualized needs (including specialized instruction and related services, as appropriate) necessary to ensure the student receives a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

Individual Educational Plan (IEP) teams must identify the individual needs of each student. According to Rule 6A-6.03028, F.A.C., Provision of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and Development of Individual Educational Plans for Students with Disabilities, if a child is determined to have a disability, the child is entitled to receive free exceptional student education (ESE) services from their local public school district. This means that the local public school district must provide services designed to help the child achieve their annual goals and progress in the general curriculum, at no cost to the parents. School and district staff must follow specific steps to make sure that ESE and related services meet the unique needs of each public-school student with a disability. Children who qualify for ESE services in one Florida school qualify for ESE services everywhere in Florida. Please refer to section 1003.57, Florida Statutes, Exceptional students’ instruction, for more detailed information about ESE instruction.

We encourage you to contact your district ESE director to address specific curriculum and district-based program options available in the district. You can find a list of all district ESE directors at the following link: <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.shtml>.

Education—bullying statements are taken from minors who are offending/offenders and lying. In the meantime, the victim gets hurt physically and emotionally.

Student safety is a top priority in Florida schools, and this includes bullying prevention. Section 1006.147, Florida Statutes, also known as The Jeffrey Johnston Stand Up for All Students Act, requires school districts to adopt an official policy prohibiting bullying and

harassment of students and staff on school grounds, at school-sponsored events and through school computer networks.

Each district has a Code of Student Conduct that covers rights and responsibilities, disciplinary actions, and procedures which govern student behavior. The Code of Student Conduct addresses consequences and appropriate remedial action for a student who wrongfully and intentionally accuses another individual of bullying or harassment. Questions about the Code of Student Conduct should be referred to the local school district.

The Hope Scholarship is also available as an option for parents to consider for students in grades kindergarten through 12. Students who are enrolled in a Florida public school and have been subjected to bullying have the option to transfer to another public school with capacity or to receive a scholarship to enroll in an approved private school. Incidents reported may be investigated at the district level; however, there does not have to be substantiation on the part of the district to offer a transfer to another public school with capacity or the ability for the student to move to an eligible private school on scholarship. School district personnel in Florida have a responsibility to notify families of the Hope Scholarship Program. For more details on the scholarship, please visit <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/hope/>. For more information about bullying prevention, please visit <https://www.fldoe.org/safe-schools/bullying-prevention.stml>.

Crisis prevention—instruction is needed for educators and parents of dysregulated children who are growing into adulthood. Lack of parent training.

The Florida Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support Project: Multi-tiered System of Supports (FLPBIS: MTSS) is a discretionary project committed to building the capacity of school staff to address significant behavioral problems that contribute to unsafe school environments and reductions in student performance. The capacity built helps those school districts assist schools in developing effective discipline, resiliency, and behavior support strategies for all students. The IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 1465(b)(1), instructs that in carrying out the scope of behavioral supports and systemic interventions, activities shall provide for effective, research-based practices, including the following:

- Training for school staff on early identification of behavioral concerns, pre-referral, and referral procedures;
- Training for administrators, teachers, related services personnel, behavioral specialists, and other school staff in positive behavioral interventions and supports, behavioral intervention planning and classroom and student management techniques;
- Joint training for administrators, parents, teachers, related services personnel, behavioral specialists, and other school staff on effective strategies for positive behavioral interventions and behavior management strategies that focus on the prevention of behavior problems;
- Developing or implementing specific curricula, programs or interventions aimed at addressing behavioral problems;

- Stronger linkages between school-based services and community-based resources, such as community mental health and primary care providers; or
- Using behavioral specialists, related services personnel, and other staff necessary to implement behavioral supports.

Additionally, The Multiagency Network for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities (SEDNET) Administration project is a discretionary project that provides overall management, technical support, and professional learning for the 19 local SEDNET projects as well as completing an annual performance review of all regional SEDNETs in collaboration with the FDOE's Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services. Through support and leadership provided by SEDNET Administration, local SEDNET projects, school districts and other stakeholders are better postured to provide intensive, integrated educational programs to include a continuum of mental health treatment services to enable students with or at risk of emotional behavioral disorders (EBD) to develop appropriate behaviors and demonstrate academic and career education skills. All students in grades 6-12 receive annual instruction in Resiliency Education Civic and Character Education and Life Skills Education. Specifically, the following are addressed through the SEDNET Administration project referenced in section 1006.04, Florida Statutes (F.S.):

- Support and represent the needs of students in each school district in joint planning with fiscal agents of children's mental health funds, including the expansion of school-based mental health services, transition services and integrated education and treatment programs;
- Improve the coordination of services for children with or at risk of Emotional and Behavioral Disabilities (EBD) and their families by assisting multiagency collaborative initiatives to identify critical issues and barriers of mutual concern and develop local response systems that increase home and school connections and family engagement;
- Increase parent and youth involvement and development with local systems of care;
- Facilitate student and family access to effective services and programs for students with and at risk of EBD that include necessary educational, residential, and mental health treatment services, enabling these students to learn appropriate behaviors, reduce dependency and fully participate in all aspects of school and community living; and
- Participate in the planning process for promoting a coordinated system of care for children and adolescents pursuant to s. 394.4955, F.S.

I was told to fight to get policy changed in Florida schools and Hillsborough County regarding exceptions and questions asked for threat assessment. I do not know where to start.

Section 1001.212(12), Florida Statutes, states that the Office of Safe Schools shall develop a statewide behavioral threat management operational process, a Florida-specific behavioral threat assessment instrument and a threat management portal.

Rule 6A-1.0019, Florida Administrative Code, entitled "Threat Management," states the requirements relating to threat management, a process by which school districts, K-12 schools, charter school governing boards and charter schools identify, assess, manage, and monitor potential and real threats to student safety.

To learn more about the Office of Safe Schools regarding behavioral threat assessments, please visit <https://www.fldoe.org/safe-schools/threat-assessment.stml>.

My kindergarten student was suspended even though it was explained that he was echoing statements his sister has said. He had no access to sharp scissors because they are locked up because of his sister. Want to have communication and ASD added to exceptions for different consequences. I also want to have his suspension taken off his record.

Rule 6A-6.03312, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.), entitled "Discipline Procedures for Students with Disabilities," states that a manifestation determination, consistent with the following requirements, must be made within ten (10) school days of any decision to change the placement of a student with a disability based on a violation of a code of student conduct. In conducting the review, the school district, the parent, and relevant members of the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) team (as determined by the parent and the school district) must:

1. Review all relevant information in the student's file, including any information supplied by the parents of the student, any teacher observations of the student and the student's current IEP; and
2. Determine whether the conduct in question was caused by or had a direct and substantial relationship to the student's disability or whether the conduct in question was the direct result of the school district's failure to implement the IEP.

If the parent disagrees with the manifestation determination decision made by the IEP team pursuant to this rule, the parent may appeal the decision by requesting an expedited due process hearing. Information regarding due process hearings is available at <http://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/dispute-resolution/>.

Additionally, you may always address concerns about your child's services, with the IEP team and/or contact the district Exceptional Student Education (ESE) director. The district's ESE director can provide guidance and clarifications regarding schools, resources and services for students based on their individual needs. Please follow the provided link to find the contact information for the ESE director in the school district in which you reside: <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.stml>.

State officials: It took me six years to get an IEP for my child that has multiple special needs. They make it too difficult to get help for a child who needs help in the classroom.

You should always address any concerns about the timely implementation of your child's Individual Educational Plan (IEP) and services with the IEP team and/or contact the district Exceptional Student Education (ESE) director. The district's ESE director can provide guidance and clarifications regarding schools, resources and services for students based on their individual needs. Please follow the provided link to find the contact information for the ESE director in the school district in which you reside <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.stml>.

Are there any colleges that have programs for recent high school graduates that are on the spectrum?

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

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

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

More services to help transition to adulthood.

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How can we get more resources to parents within the school system regarding different services, programs, and organizations having to do with special needs and disabilities?

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

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

What kind of grants are there to support a child in public school with devices or extra therapies needed?

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

There are 18 FDLRS Regional Associate Centers across the state, each with a local Parent & Family Services Specialist who can assist in the development of family-friendly programs, training and support for services for children with disabilities and the support of partnerships between schools and parents to support student achievement. For more information, please visit <https://www.fdlrs.org/parent-services>. This is an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) team decision and should be addressed during the applicable meeting.

Additionally, please address any concerns about your child’s services with the IEP team and/or contact the district Exceptional Student Education (ESE) director. The district’s ESE director can provide guidance and clarifications regarding schools, resources and services for students based on their individual needs. Please follow the provided link to find the contact information for the ESE director in the school district in which you reside: <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.shtml>.

What would be the best place to begin for transitioning services for our son from high school to college?

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

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

Why are school district instructional designers and instructional technologists who are skilled in instructional design techniques and implementations not part of a student IEP team? These professionals are skilled in completing needs assessments and learn in education graduate schools how to do needs analysis and evaluations and reports. Why are these professionals largely missing from an IEP meeting and from case management? What is the state doing to make sure parents and students have access to these learning design and resource experts? I remember the resource teacher in my district was a promoted teacher and not an instructional designer. Can the FLDOE suggest to school districts best practices on hiring instructional designers instead of mismatching for jobs in their hiring? Hiring the wrong talent doesn't help any students with disabilities nor communities to thrive.

District school boards are constitutionally and statutorily charged with the operation and control of public K-12 education within their school district pursuant to Section 1003.02, Florida Statutes, (F.S.). Each school district has local control, meaning that district school boards and superintendents are tasked with the operation of the school district, including hiring staff.

Individual Educational Plan (IEP) teams must identify, discuss, and determine the needs of each student. According to Rule 6A-6.03028, Florida Administrative Code, Provision of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and Development of Individual Educational Plans for Students with Disabilities, if a child is determined to have a disability, they are entitled to receive exceptional student education (ESE) services at no charge from their local public school district. This means that the local public school district must provide education and services designed to help the child meet their annual goals and progress in the general curriculum at no cost to the parents. School and district staff must follow specific steps to make sure that ESE and related services meet the unique needs of each public school student with a disability. Children who qualify for ESE services in one Florida

school qualify for ESE services everywhere in Florida. For more detailed information about ESE instruction, please refer to s. 1003.57, F.S.

We encourage you to contact your district ESE director to address your child's specific curriculum and district-based program options available in the district. You can find a list of all district ESE directors at the following link
<https://www.fl DOE.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.stml>.

When you are disabled, medically complex and you are trying your best to attend college courses while going through treatment and hospitalizations, you tell your teachers when things are getting bad and ask them to give you the work ahead of your surgeries/hospitalizations/illness and they say they can't, the system won't allow them to release it or they just simply choose not to, therefore you constantly end up being failed out of your courses. This affects the GPA I've worked so hard to achieve up to this point and my financial aid eligibility. I constantly end up on Academic warning or suspension, having to submit legitimate medical paperwork proving my illness/hospitalizations/surgeries over & over again and STILL get denied. I am a disability services student with the college as well. Are they supposed to be intervening to prevent this from happening to me time and time again? What are my rights with the college?? Why does this keep happening? Does this happen to all medically complex/disabled students?? Who can help us? I am so discouraged continuing my education to get a degree because the higher learning institutions are either not helping enough or not understanding that these extenuating medical circumstances and crises are out of my control and I NEED help! If the professors would just release the work to me before I become incapacitated to a hospital or my own bed at home, I CAN rally and get the work done when I am well! I feel like there is not enough understanding for disabled people who are medically complex, chronically ill trying to get an education like everyone else. I have had to leap over hurdles and jump through their hoops my entire life just to get the same education as everyone else is entitled to and it's exhausting. Why not just set the education system up to help us succeed once and for all!? Why is it so hard for a disabled, chronically ill/medically complex individual to get a fair and deserving education like everyone else?

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

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

Additionally, students with disabilities are welcome at all Florida colleges. College students with documented disabilities are eligible to receive auxiliary aids and services which may

include services such as extended time on exams, texts in an alternative format, note-takers and sign language interpreters. For more information, please visit <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/higher-ed/fl-college-system/student-services/disability-support-services.shtml>.

Students on the McKay and Gardiner scholarships, and the schools serving our students, had a dedicated office in DOE for questions and assistance. With the merger of all State scholarship programs into the Family Empowerment Scholarship, tens of thousands of families of children with disabilities lost our voice. Please reinstate a DOE role specifically for those on the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Unique Abilities (FES-UA) during the next legislative session.

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

On May 11, 2021, Governor DeSantis signed House Bill 7045 into law, resulting in several changes to the state's K-12 scholarship programs, including an extensive expansion of the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program to include two branches of eligibility, the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Options (FES EO) and the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities (FES UA). As of July 1, 2021, students eligible under the repealed Gardiner Scholarship Program are now eligible under the expanded FES Program.

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



The Department of Health

More about Early Steps program and services. Also, services for someone with learning disabilities.

The Early Steps Program is Florida's early intervention system that offers services at no cost to families. The Early Steps Program serves children from birth to 36 months, who have or are at-risk for having developmental disabilities or delays. Services are individualized for each child and are determined by the goals outlined on the Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) which is designed to meet the child's unique needs and services. To learn more about the available Early Steps Program Services, please check out the direct link here: <https://floridaearlysteps.com/eligibility-screening/services/>. Anyone can refer a child (0-3 years old) to Florida's Early Steps Program, including health care providers, parents and caregivers, family members, friends, and others. The online referral form can be found here: <https://floridaearlysteps.com/make-a-referral/>.

Why is Florida so far behind with adult doctors for people with disabilities? When transitioning from child to adult.

Health care transition is a focus of the Children's Medical Services (CMS) Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) Program. The CYSHCN Program works with many providers and community partners to build awareness or enhance their existing health care transition processes. Resources for youth, families, and professionals, including the new FLY2AT Course for Professionals, are available on the CYSHCN Program's Florida Youth to Adult Transition (FLY2AT) web page at: <https://www.floridahats.org/>. Also, the CYSHCN Program offers a free, one-hour training course on whole-person transition with an emphasis on health care transition. This course is for all professionals who work with youth and young adults: health care providers, therapists, educators, etc. For more information, visit www.floridahealth.gov/CYSHCN.

I am a veteran, and my husband is too! We have a child with a complex diagnosis of mecp2 Duplication Syndrome. I keep hearing how the Panhandle is a desert for services. I would love to see our area get more help in all arenas for pediatric patients and their families. Can you please, please, please help? Thank you.

The Early Steps Program is Florida's early intervention system that offers services at no cost to families. The Early Steps Program serves children from birth to 36 months, who have or are at-risk for having developmental disabilities or delays, such as mecp2 Duplication Syndrome. Out of the 15 Local Early Steps (LES) Offices based in Florida, three service the Panhandle area: The Western Panhandle Early Steps Office, the Big Bend Early Steps – Panama City Office, and the Big Bend Early Steps – Tallahassee. Please see below more information about each office:

- The Western Panhandle Early Steps Office, located at 5045 Carpenter Creek Dr. Pensacola, FL 32503 serves the following counties: Escambia, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Walton. You may also reach the Western Panhandle Early Steps Office at: (850) 377-1334.
- The Big Bend Early Steps – Panama City Office located at 700 W. 23rd Street, Building E 40 Panama City, FL 32405 serves the following counties: Bay, Calhoun, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Washington. You may also reach the Big Bend Early Steps – Panama City Office at: (850) 747-5411.
- The Big Bend Early Steps – Tallahassee Office, located at 325 John Knox Rd, Building A Tallahassee, FL 32303 serves the following counties: Gadsden, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Taylor, Wakulla, Franklin. You may also reach the Big Bend Early Steps – Tallahassee Office at: (850) 921-0772.

To learn more about the available Early Steps services, please check out the direct link here: <https://floridaearlysteps.com/eligibility-screening/services/>. Anyone can refer a child (0-3 years old) to Florida’s Early Steps Program, including health care providers, parents and caregivers, family members, friends, and others. The online referral form can be found here: <https://floridaearlysteps.com/make-a-referral/>.

What organizations are there to help people afford a medical marijuana card?

The Department of Health’s Office of Medical Marijuana Use (OMMU) is not currently aware of nor has affiliations with any organizations that assist patients in covering the cost for a Medical Marijuana Use Registry identification card.

The OMMU works diligently as the regulating entity of Florida’s Medical Marijuana Use program to develop rules and processes to safeguard the medical aspect of the program, combat diversion, and ensure the health and safety of the public as it relates to medical marijuana. Additionally, the OMMU creates and publishes a variety of educational resources on how to access medical marijuana safely and legally in Florida. To learn more about Florida's Medical Marijuana Use Program, please visit: <https://knowthefactsmmj.com/>.

How can we get more training for first responders at the state level?

The Florida Department of Health’s Division of Emergency Preparedness and Community Support supports first responder training at the state and county level. This is done by local agency medical direction and commonly funded through grant opportunities. To learn more about these training opportunities, please visit Continuing Education Course Search (CE Broker) or contact the Department at: EMS@flhealth.gov.

Healthcare—Lack of providers in mental health.

To locate providers in your area, you may want to first start with your insurance company or managed care organization for a directory of mental and behavioral health providers.

Other resources that may have information on mental and behavioral health services are: findhelp.org, HopeForHealingFL.com, or 2-1-1, Florida's Community Help line.

The Children's Medical Services (CMS) Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) Program supports expanding access to pediatric behavioral health care by promoting Integrated Behavioral Health. This health care approach improves access by integrating behavioral health into primary care settings. It supports medical providers, behavioral health providers, and community organizations working together to better meet children's behavioral health needs. The CYSHCN Program offers information and training to encourage pediatric primary care providers to deliver the more common behavioral and mental health services for children in the primary care setting. For more information on CMS's Integrated Behavioral Health initiatives, please visit www.floridahealth.gov/TitleV.

More services to help transition to adulthood.

Health care transition is a focus of the Children's Medical Services (CMS) Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) Program. The CYSHCN Program works with many providers and community partners to build awareness or enhance their existing health care transition processes. Resources for youth, families, and professionals, including the new FLY2AT Course for Professionals, are available on the CYSHCN Program's Florida Youth to Adult Transition (FLY2AT) web page at: <https://www.floridahats.org/>. Also, the CYSHCN Program offers a free, one-hour training course on whole-person transition with an emphasis on health care transition. This course is for all professionals who work with youth and young adults: health care providers, therapists, educators, etc. For more information, visit www.floridahealth.gov/CYSHCN.

Why is there never information on adults with cerebral palsy?

The Department of Health's Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention, Disability and Health Program continues to work with state and local partners to increase access and delivery of quality health services for persons with disabilities. The Department will work with our partners to ensure appropriate information on care and referral services for cerebral palsy is available at next year's Annual Family Café.

Furthermore, cerebral palsy is included in the established conditions list for the Early Steps Program which means that, with this diagnosis, children from birth to 36 months are automatically eligible for the Early Steps Program. Anyone can refer a child (0-3 years old) to Florida's Early Steps Program, including health care providers, parents and caregivers, family members, friends, and others. The online referral form can be found here: <https://floridaearlysteps.com/make-a-referral/>.

The Division of Emergency Management

Please share information on any special needs shelters, both for hurricanes and other related emergencies. Where are they located? How can my family find the location? Can we bring our service animals? What happens if we bring other family members to the shelter? Will they be admitted?

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

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

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

Apply for the Special Needs Registry at [FloridaDisaster.org/SNR](https://www.floridadisaster.org/SNR) or contact your local health department or emergency management office for additional information. It is through these resources that you can find where shelters may be located in case of a disaster and have any specific questions answered with more certainty.

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

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

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

- If you have homeowners’ or renters’ insurance, contact your insurance company, and file a claim to repair the damages.
- Look to see if your county has been declared for Individual Assistance by FEMA. You can find this by entering your city and zip code on www.DisasterAssistance.gov/ or

by calling 1-800-621-3362. If your county is eligible, complete an application for federal disaster assistance on the same website or over the phone at the same number.

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

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

There are some steps that can be taken before a storm to help protect your home from damage. Make sure that you have removed any loose yard debris and secured any outside furniture/toys – these can be picked up by the wind and cause damage to your home. If possible, make sure trees are trimmed around your home and board up windows. Always keep your gas tank at least half full during hurricane season and make sure you have your disaster supply kit fully stocked with at least 7 days of supplies for each member of your family, including pets. Find a full disaster supply kit at <https://www.floridadisaster.org/kit>.

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

When preparing your disaster supply kit, make sure you have all critical medications, important documents (insurance, birth certificates, banking information, etc.), and emergency phone numbers/locations printed out (shelter locations, doctors, schools, and out-of-town contacts). Food, water, and pet care supplies should be stocked for **at least 7 days** after landfall. Other important supplies include flashlights, batteries, toiletries, and a NOAA weather radio.

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

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

It is hard to predict how long power will be out after a storm. You should plan for supplies to last for **7 days after a storm makes landfall**. If impacts are widespread, it will take time for resources to begin re-entering your area.

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

All elder care facilities are required to have generators in the event they lose power due to a storm. These facilities are specifically monitored and keep in contact with emergency services in case they require assistance during and after a disaster.

Are tornadoes something we need to worry about in Florida?

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

What should you do if your house begins to flood?

According to [floodsafety.com](https://www.floodsafety.com), if you're inside your home when it starts flooding, try to move important documents out of reach of the floodwaters.

Seek higher ground immediately and make sure you know what exits you are able to take in case you must leave your home. Don't climb into a closed attic because you may get trapped by rising floodwater. You should only get onto the roof if necessary and signal for help once there.

Never walk or wade through floodwaters as there can be hidden dangers, including displaced wildlife or live electrical wires. Throw out any food that has come into contact with the floodwater and be sure to check with your local county emergency management for any boil water notices. Do not handle any electrical equipment and report any broken utilities to the correct authorities.

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

The latest edition of NFPA's *Emergency Evacuation Planning Guide for People with Disabilities* (PDF at <https://www.nfpa.org/downloadable-resources/guides-and->

[manuals/evacuation-guide-pdf?l=0](#)) provides guidance to building occupants and building managers in non-residential buildings on how to develop an emergency evacuation plan that is inclusive of people with disabilities. The information provided within the document, as well as the accompanying checklist, will assist in preparing evacuation plans to address the needs of building occupants with disabilities regarding their safe evacuation in emergencies.

Resources can also be located on FEMA's website at <https://usfa.fem.gov/prevention/home-fires/at-risk-audiences/people-with-disabilities/>.

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

Broadly speaking, hazards can be classified as being either *natural* or *technical*. Weather related emergencies such as hurricanes, tornadoes and severe heat are only one type of natural hazard that commonly occurs in Florida, but sinkholes and wildfires can happen as well. Technical hazards include things like hazardous materials releases, long-term or widespread power outages, or significant acts of violence.

Regardless of the type of hazard, when you make a plan, build a kit, and discuss safety with your family, then you have taken the first critical steps towards being prepared for emergencies and reducing uncertainty when disaster strikes.

If Florida has a calm hurricane season, does this mean we should expect a big one in the future?

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

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

If you feel unsafe, you should evacuate. The greatest risk to your livelihood from a hurricane or severe storm is storm surge flooding. These threats can be a high risk for those in evacuation zones, low-lying flood areas or mobile homes.

During a storm or other disaster, listen to orders from local officials. Visit the Know Your Zone, Know Your Home page <https://www.floridadisaster.org/know> to determine whether you live in a flood zone or not.

Individuals with special needs are also encouraged to register with the Special Needs Registry. The Special Needs Registry allows residents with special needs to connect with their local emergency management agency to receive assistance during a disaster. You can register <https://www.floridadisaster.org/snr/>.

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 <https://www.floridadisaster.org/snr/> before a disaster. 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, after disaster strikes.

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 7 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 – due to the possible buildup of harmful gases.

Additionally, some virtual registration for assistance can be completed using a cell phone. Make sure your phone is charged before a storm and consider buying portable phone chargers. For more information on how to prepare for a storm, visit www.FloridaDisaster.org/PlanPrepare/.

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? What happened to the rule that you could get your medications 90 days in advance?

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

Prior to a storm making landfall, [Section 252.358, Florida Statutes \(F.S.\)](#) allows individuals to obtain a 30-day refill of your prescription medication – even if you have just refilled it. This will apply to citizens from 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](https://www.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.

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

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

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

Yes. Trained service animals are allowed at special needs shelters. The care of the animals is the sole responsibility of the owner. You will be asked to identify them as a service animal and explain the tasks the animal performs. This information can also be provided ahead of time when applying for the special needs registry (www.FloridaDisaster.org/SNR).

In a disaster, who is in charge? Local, state, or federal? Does FEMA take over? Or does our local Red Cross? Or the Sheriff?

All disasters are local, meaning people must first rely on local community resources and mutual aid to address a crisis or disaster. If a disaster overwhelms the resource capabilities in the area, then the State may be needed to help provide support. If the disaster overwhelms the resource capabilities of the State, then a request for Federal resources may be required.

However, all levels of government work together to save lives, protect property and the environment, and meet basic human needs once a disaster has occurred. We plan for these types of incidents, identify jurisdictional responsibilities, and regularly conduct exercises between local, state, and federal organizations to then test our collective plans.

The disaster response procedure involves all of these parties and all of them should be listened to. The county and city emergency managers may also issue orders and notices as they relate to their area. Make sure to follow all local, state, and federal emergency management accounts for updates and information before, during and after an emergency.

I have a family member with a disability, and we were told to always shelter in place or the hospital. We don't have technology at the schools to help us. However, the wheelchair is large, and the hospital says they don't have enough beds for our family members to shelter. I cannot leave my child/children or be separated from them. We are one family. Any suggestions?

Residents with disabilities should register with the State Special Needs Registry. Residents with disabilities can sign up for the State Special Needs Registry with the Florida Department of Health at www.FloridaDisaster.org/SNR.

Discuss with your family your plans either for evacuation or sheltering before a disaster. Practice your plan with your entire household, including young children. Children who are prepared often experience less anxiety and feel more confident during actual emergencies and disasters. In addition, going over scenarios for how the plan may change is a vital step in being properly prepared.

Don't all shelters have to have a special shelter for individuals with disabilities?

It is required within every county to have shelters that can accommodate the special needs of residents with disabilities. Which shelter can accommodate those special needs is determined by the county given the buildings available. Residents with disabilities can sign up for the State Special Needs Registry with the Florida Department of Health at www.FloridaDisaster.org/SNR.

Completing the Florida Special Needs Registry does not automatically qualify the individual for a special needs shelter. Additional information will be provided by your local emergency management agency regarding evacuation and sheltering options available to you. For more information on your local options, please visit www.FloridaDisaster.org/counties for contact information.

Are you still giving free Covid vaccination shots? If so, where, and when? Or is this only with the community health departments? You used to give out information at the local Red Cross station.

For Covid vaccination information reach out to your local department of health branch. Vaccinations can be received at a variety of businesses and locations that may accept insurance for the shot. To find a Covid-19 vaccine near you, go to Vaccines.gov.

Do you share your registry with the local police/sheriff/fire departments? Do the hospitals know about the registry?

Yes. The special needs registry is shared with the local officials so that they can coordinate evacuation and conduct wellness checks before and after a disaster. First responders within an area will also have access to the registry.

Residents with disabilities should register with the State Special Needs Registry. Residents with disabilities can sign up for the registry with the Florida Department of Health at www.FloridaDisaster.org/SNR.

Who is our local youth representative for FEMA? I had never heard of this council until my neighbor said she lived in the Jacksonville area. How do I reach out to her to help with the efforts of promoting youth involvement? Sounds cool!

FEMA's Youth Preparedness Council members represent all ten FEMA regions and a range of backgrounds and interests. They have been leaders in their communities' preparedness and continue to make a difference as teams working on projects relating to financial preparedness, citizen responder programs, and youth preparedness education.

To find the current council members you can go to the FEMA Meet the Council page online. Visit www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/individuals-communities/youth-preparedness-council/members.



The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

How do I get better services at VR and a better job? They are not helping me in Naples.

Thank you for attending The Family Café and sharing your concern with us. VR has offices across the State to serve our customers and you can change your counselor at any time. We encourage you to speak with the supervisor of your nearest office (<https://www.rehabworks.org/contact/area-offices.html>) about your needs. They can pair you with an appropriate counselor or help you get settled with another VR office if that's your preference.

I've been in college only 3 semesters and each semester I've almost been kicked out of school because VR didn't pay my tuition, even though I called and emailed over and over again.

Education is an important step towards meaningful employment and VR is happy to support your course of study.

In order to meet policy requirements and ensure there are no delays in meeting financial obligations, VR asks participants to submit all required documentation within a reasonable timeframe to allow payment to the educational institute. Please continue to work with your counselor to determine timelines for payment and required documentation.

Can you clarify why a disabled adult would need a "ticket to work" if they only have/are only able to have a part-time job?

Participation in the Ticket to Work (TTW) Program is free and voluntary. To be eligible for the 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) for a disability. It is important to note that earnings and other resources can impact disability benefits regardless of the person's full-time or part-time employment status. Beneficiaries are encouraged to contact the Ticket to Work Beneficiary Help Line at (866) 968-7842 to receive Work Incentive Planning and Assistance services and learn how disability benefits can be impacted by earnings.

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

Yes, VR provides a number of services in helping an individual search for and obtain employment. The kinds of services provided are based on what a customer needs to become successfully employed. To learn more about our services or to find an office near you, please visit [Rehabworks.org](https://www.rehabworks.org).

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

Finding the perfect placement can sometimes take more than one try. If the job you're currently working in isn't the right fit, have a conversation with your counselor first. They will discuss your concerns and present you with options for a way forward. Meaningful employment and a lasting career are the outcomes we want for each of the people we serve.

Will VR help pay my bills while I look for employment?

Generally, no. In rare instances, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) may provide limited monetary support to an individual for necessary expenses related to maintaining or obtaining employment. All VR services are individualized based on the customer's need and available resources. Your VR counselor can, however, help you research support in your community for food stability and temporary cash assistance.

More services to help transition to adulthood.

VR is proud to have a long history of helping adults and teenagers prepare for and obtain employment. Individuals with disabilities can apply for our services starting at age 14 to explore career opportunities, access education and training, and participate in job search and placement. We understand employment is just one part of transitioning to adulthood, which is why we partner with the Centers for Independent Living and others to support our customers in gaining life skills in a broader sense.

What would be the best place to begin for transitioning services for our son from high school to College?

If you haven't already, we encourage you to apply for VR services and speak with a counselor. As a part of the intake process, your counselor will learn about your son's goals, interests, accomplishments and necessary accommodations. If your son is found eligible, you will work together to plan next steps obtaining employment, this could include higher education, on-the-job training and/or apprenticeships before it's time to search for a permanent placement.

How does vocational rehabilitation choose their vendors?

Any person or business interested in providing services to VR customers must first become a registered vendor with the State of Florida. After that, vendors complete the appropriate forms for their vendor type and undergo a background screening. In order to be approved as a vendor, the applicant must meet all requirements for their vendor type

and be in good standing. For more information about the application process, please visit Rehabworks.org.

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

For individuals considering college, university, or technical school in order to prepare for employment, VR may be able to help. VR counselors work with the Student Office of Disability to coordinate the accommodations you need to be successful in obtaining your degree or certification. Additionally, VR may be able to provide financial assistance for eligible individuals working toward an employment goal. For graduates, VR can assist with on-the-job training, job search and placement.

Can VR help me get a service animal?

Service animal requests are considered a reasonable accommodation under Title II and III of the ADA. The appropriateness of this accommodation varies from person to person. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) can provide guidance, counseling and assist customers with research about service animals. If the service is determined to be necessary to obtain or maintain employment, VR can aid the customer in navigating the process to obtain a service animal. However, VR cannot guarantee that a customer will receive a service animal and the Division does not typically pay fees related to the care of a customer's service animal, such as food or vet bills.

Does VR help with trade school?

Yes! For individuals considering college, university, or technical school in order to prepare for employment, VR may be able to help. The first step for VR customers is to discuss your job goal with your counselor and talk about available programs in your area. If you are not yet a VR customer, learn more about how to apply for services by visiting Rehabworks.org.

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

Beginning at age 14, students with disabilities can connect with VR for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). VR works with students, their families, their schools, and community partners to enrich transition planning. In addition, VR supports students in gaining the knowledge and experiences necessary to make informed decisions about their future.

Every student ages 14-21 with a disability has the opportunity to participate in:

- Job-exploration counseling;
- Postsecondary educational counseling;

- Self-advocacy training and peer mentoring;
- Work readiness training; and
- Work-based learning experience.

Students with disabilities may participate in Pre-ETS without having to apply to VR or be determined eligible for services. The focus is to develop work skills, practice social skills and acquire a network of community supports while the student is still in high school.

To learn more, please visit [Rehabworks.org](https://www.rehabworks.org).

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

Finding the right job or starting a career can be difficult at times. VR offers a number of services to people with disabilities to help them secure employment even after they've finished their education. On-the-job training, job search and job placement are just a few ways we can support you in your search for meaningful employment. To learn more, please visit [Rehabworks.org](https://www.rehabworks.org).

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

In some cases, VR is able to provide transportation support, such as bus passes, as we help a customer prepare for and secure employment. Because VR customizes the services each person receives, the best first step is to have a discussion about work and transportation with your counselor. If you are not yet a VR customer, learn more about how to apply for services by visiting [Rehabworks.org](https://www.rehabworks.org).

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

VR has offices across the State to best serve you. To find your local office, please visit [Area Offices | Vocational Rehabilitation | Florida Department of Education](https://www.rehabworks.org/contact/area-offices.html) (<https://www.rehabworks.org/contact/area-offices.html>).

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

When it comes to assistive technology, there is no "one size fits all," which is why VR sends eligible customers in need of accommodations or medical equipment for a rehabilitation technology assessment. Working with a qualified Rehab Engineer, you and your counselor will find the right solution for you and your work environment.

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

Most Ticket to Work Program service providers can assist with making a connection to apprenticeship opportunities. You are free to work with the service provider of your choice. The ChooseWork website is available to assist with a guided search for a service provider that will meet your needs (<https://choosework.ssa.gov/findhelp/>).

Are there any ONGOING programs for Adult Basic Education in VR that could be replicated throughout Florida? Or perhaps an existing exemplary model that would allow us to visit and replicate? Although there were several 'education' focused booths, etc. none were able to address what we are seeking: 1) Not K-12; 2) Not Transition age; 3) Not GED; 4) Not to get a job or for job training; 5) Not college-level or certificates. We are simply seeking basic adult maintenance type of educational services to keep our adult child with I/DD continually exposed to functional reading, writing, math, and finance – to support life skills, enhance enjoyment, and increase independence. While some 'day programs' offer some functional 'academics' many require full-time attendance in the program. We are seeking a part-time social/educational opportunity (perhaps twice a week for 2-3 hours). We spoke with lots of (if not all) education-focused organizations at their booths, and each one said to ask VR about this issue and each one served their niche quite well. Many suggested we seek our answer at yet another booth, only to come back full circle with zero results. We understand that this isn't a 'funded' aspect of education. We also know that what we seek is not unique to us. Others in our 'circle' are seeking something similar. Thank you.

VR's statutorily required focus is on employment, so all services and training programs we provide must be related to an employment goal and lead to competitive, integrated employment. However, the Florida Department of Education's Adult Education system (<https://www.fldoe.org/academics/career-adult-edu/adult-edu/>) offers a range of instructional programs that help adults get the basic skills they need to be productive workers, family members, and citizens. The major program areas are Adult Basic Education, Adult High School, and GED® Preparation. These programs emphasize basic skills such as reading, writing, math, and English language competency. These programs are available to adults throughout Florida, including Floridians with disabilities participating in VR programs. Additionally, you may contact your local Center for Independent Living (<https://floridasilc.org/centers-for-independent-living/>) as well as the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) for more information about their programs.

How do you find out about this program? There is no website!

Thank you for attending The Family Café and sharing your concern with us. You can find more information about our division, including the referral for services, by visiting Rehabworks.org.

My child wants to learn a trade. His high school counselor says to him that there are no programs for his "type." This totally discounts him. Makes him feel bad.

He wants to work, and he should have all the options and opportunities! Why treat him like this?

VR has a long history of connecting people with disabilities to meaningful employment. Our counselors specialize in highlighting a person's strengths, interests, and talents when it comes to finding the right education and employment opportunities. If you would like to revisit the conversation you and your son began with the high school counselor, we encourage you to connect with your local VR office to be paired with a VR counselor. You can find a listing of all of our offices on Rehabworks.org.

Billy is a high school teenager with severe learning issues. He can do anything he puts his mind to and loves to work on automobiles. He is really good at it. Can he fix anything. Well, except for his grades at school. He cannot read beyond a 3rd grade level and is about to flunk out of school . . . again. Years of tutoring and tests have not helped. Can VR work with him to find a job where his skills can shine, instead of always worrying about his grades?

Absolutely! VR has a long history of connecting people with disabilities to meaningful employment. Our counselors specialize in highlighting a person's strengths, interests, and talents when it comes to finding the right education and employment opportunities. We encourage you to connect with your local VR office to be paired with a VR counselor. You can find a listing of all of our offices on Rehabworks.org.

How do we get VR counselors to respond to us? We call ours, and he never responds! My child needs the services you offer, and we cannot get our counsellor to return our calls.

Thank you for attending The Family Café and sharing your concern with us. We take your issue very seriously, because we know good communication throughout the process is key to success.

Please know that if you ever have such a challenge, you can reach out to the Unit Supervisor for that office or our Administrative Offices in the Area. You can find all the contact information you'll need on Rehabworks.org. You may also contact the VR Ombudsman Office toll free at 866-515-3692 or by email at Ombudsman@vr.fl DOE.org.

We wish your child well and are committed to these services making a difference in their journey towards a career.



The 25th Anniversary Family Café Report Card 2023

Attendees of The 25th Anniversary Family Café were given the opportunity to grade their experience on the following scale:

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

The table below displays the average grades for the in-person events in 2018-2019 and 2021-2023. The second table displays the average grades for The Virtual Annual Family Café in 2020.

	2023	2022	2021	2019	2018
I would give the Annual Family Café location a:	A	A	A	A	A
I would rate the hotel's accessibility a:	A	A	A	A	A
I would give the organization of The Annual Family Café a:	A	A	A	A	A
I would rate the choices for breakout sessions and their ability to meet the needs of different interests a:	A	A-	A-	A	A-
Overall, I would give The Annual Family Café a:	A	A-	A	A	A

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

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

1. As a result of attending The 25th Anniversary 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 25th Anniversary Family Café, I am able/will be able to . . .

- Get more help with my children
- Gain more resources, meet other families, and my son enjoyed himself
- Be more independent
- Join some organizations and advocate for my nephew
- Meet people
- Advocate better for my child
- Be more prepared for my students' disability as he transitions—guardian advocacy
- Find resources
- Advocate for myself and my children more effectively
- Better know how to deal with my child with non-visible disability
- Leave better informed
- Understand the close proximity of disabilities and autism
- Enhance my daughter's CDC+ program, learned additional info we were unaware of
- Have a better understanding of how to navigate the health care system and get help through programs I didn't know were out there
- Learn more about the opportunities to continue to help my family member
- Recheck if my daughter qualifies for SSI, SSDI
- Apply for SSI and APD
- Work on my daughter's transition needs
- To understand more about the changes to APD waiver services
- Increase knowledge of disabilities and mental health
- Know more about how alcohol can affect pregnancy
- Find a college, become safer with police interactions, save money for the future
- Provide more information to my Early Steps program families
- Find information that I didn't know about before. Also found products that may benefit my child.
- Better plan for the future
- Get Medicaid for my son regardless of how many hours we work
- Connect with families who need services
- Refer our participants to attend
- Attend sessions that had great information
- Find a day program
- Know what is the right kind of insurance I need for my kid
- Get more information on how to deal with working with special needs patients

- Sign up for ABLE United account
- Reach out to other agencies to obtain resources to help my family
- Connect with all the big resources: APD, Social Security, ABLE, CDC+
- Make connections to grow our business and employ more people with special needs
- Reconnect with friends and associates not seen in a long while
- Speak up with more confidence and do more without being nervous
- Know more about the benefits for adults with autism
- Learn different opportunities for my grandson and granddaughter
- Share information and hope to get more Family Care Council members

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

- Resources and amenities
- To see the other families
- Meeting helpful people and organizations
- The Club Café
- Socializing with other parents and communities
- To learn about specific laws and rights I have
- Self-care and SportsAbility options
- FL SAND self-advocacy presentation
- Breakout sessions
- Having The Club Café was great, allowing parents to explain knowing kids were engaged
- FROM—John was a great presenter
- Guardianship and SS info
- Learning to be a better advocate
- To learn more about disabilities advocacy
- The mental health sessions and the responsibility of service dog users
- Mom-to-Mom
- To learn about all the state organizations and private institutions involved in servicing the disabled population
- CDC+ updates, SNT planning, being among other families like us is a great feeling—where all are accepted
- College sessions—transition planning
- Women’s class
- All of it
- Session on executive functioning
- Meeting with CMS and Sunshine Health
- Disability Rights, Crisis Medwaiver
- Special Needs Trusts people, the sessions about police and special needs
- Guardianship
- The app
- Talking to other families
- All the agencies supporting us
- Sharing information about our services with attendees
- Being able to speak to department heads
- Exhibit hall
- I enjoyed everything. I have a big smile. Thank you!

I thought we could have had more of . . .

- Adult care, more information on activities
- Sensory items in expo
- Complimentary food
- Breakout sessions focused on different age groups
- Not much, everything was great
- Educators and professionals to attend because they don't know or understand the issues
- Time to attend more
- Anime/movie themed vendors
- Help filling out applications for the different government services
- More assistive/adaptive equipment like shoe or climbing equipment
- Help applying to services while at the Café
- Focus on older disabled adults
- Work arounds for waiver
- Housing options
- More days for the conference! There was so much to do and learn
- More accessible seating at the keynote speaker for wheelchairs toward the front
- Scooter rental companies: wheelchair motorized companies to choose from, or any official who put the choices online at the time of registration or in our bags
- More opportunities for employment for those with intellectual disabilities
- More of activities
- Useful government information and strategies for using the agencies effectively
- Offer popular sessions more than one time
- Socialization
- Ideas and programs for small communities
- Financial planning for families with disabilities or more sessions of the same (during concurrent sessions, we missed out on a few)
- Question/answer or Town Hall like venue with our government officials
- Innovative concepts such as special needs adaptive fitness programs or social opportunities
- Longer times for the sessions
- Classes like cooking and activities that are interactive for disabled adults
- Spanish breakout sessions since my wife is a Spanish speaker
- Programs to help hearing impaired and speech impaired
- Information for young adults (25+) with IDD and how to get training and/or help with postsecondary life
- Direction throughout hotel every day for patrons to know where to go
- Content focused more towards actual autistic people as opposed to the parents
- Time with CDC+. They need a bigger room. Also additional sessions. Just one hour isn't enough. Maybe an update session then a training and Q&A session
- Session for typical siblings
- Real APD information/questions answered
- It was perfect

I thought we could use less of . . .

- Wait time to register and pick up badges

- Distance to travel. Is there any way to have a “special” Family Café in South Florida?
- Nothing really
- Breakouts under different names covering the same material
- Old people leading. We need to have the younger generation lead. They are not afraid!
- Discussions that glossed over issues without providing practical ideas
- Classes geared towards younger children
- Loud music
- Walking—too spread out, unless your child is in a wheelchair, it was impossible to get to different locations
- Papers! Too many int eh bags that get thrown out. Maybe do not include, but let us pick what we are interested in
- Commercialized vendors
- There needs to be more sessions and activities if possible, specifically geared toward ages 30-50—perhaps internet/social media safety, identifying scams, text and/or email etiquette
- Noise level outside the exhibit hall
- Struggle trying to secure/reserve hotel room
- Carpet in the hotel hallways. It made it very hard to roll a suitcase, push a wheelchair, etc.
- I would not take anything away, the conference had a very good balance on all areas

I am interested in finding out more about . . .

- Sensory items that are available
- Virtual options for future; recorded sessions of the past
- How to help next year
- Jobs
- Special Needs Trusts
- Supported living
- Education programming for elderly or the community that is 40-60 years old or older. There was a lot of programming for young children and teenagers. My son is 63
- More information for kids under 10
- Healthcare and Centers of Independent Living
- Social Security retirement
- Programs for young adults who have graduated from high school but are still on waitlists for wavier services
- Executive functioning and how to build it
- Medical marijuana or autism
- Information for teens
- Housing
- Aging with Down Syndrome
- Adult transitioning skills for higher functioning adults
- Service dogs
- Being an inclusive society
- Supported living

- Youth Council
- How to find the right attorney for my special needs trust
- Young adult assistance for ages 15-25
- Local services in Miami-Dade county
- How to make a budget while living on your own
- CDC+, adaptive technology, estate planning tools such as special needs trusts
- Options for adults
- Autism and ADHD adults
- Race and neurodivergence
- Finding out about free resources that can help me
- Programs such as respite and day programs
- Deaf families
- Family Café, FROM
- Mental health and mobility devices
- Different colleges that have programs for recent high school graduates that are on the spectrum
- Transportation
- How to find lifelong care for loved one when I am gone
- Making it easier to get IEP for children with special needs
- Job opportunities, Medicaid, how it works, discussion with some Social Security people in rooms
- Becoming a speaker for next year
- Coming early to help
- Hospital homebound
- Next year's event
- Youth Summit in August
- Addiction
- Resources available for young adults with disabilities in Sarasota and Tampa area
- Nutrition for better physical health
- Building a nonprofit
- Usable info on state plan vs waiver for pediatrics and adult least restrictive environment—how legislature action translates to usable knowledge to families
- Obtaining services for those moving from other states that have had services all their life and can't get them, or any help whatsoever, in Florida
- The services available for my Asperger/trans daughter
- Finding out how I can become a vendor of my organization
- Autoimmune/auto-inflammatory conditions
- IEP process
- Step Up Scholarship
- Oppositional Defiant bx and co-regulation skills
- Dentist for children with disabilities. It's all so new for me I need help on finding out how to navigate everything.
- Ways to start networking groups in my county and how to get services provided in my county
- What I don't know, so don't know

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

- Childcare

- Complimentary food and drinks
- Virtual sessions
- Recorded sessions for later viewing
- I would like for the Club Café to come back again next year
- Medicare presentations
- More chairs in the breakouts
- Lined pages in conference book for taking notes
- More rooms available and make the milage be 20 or more miles from the Hyatt Regency to qualify for free room raffle. Maybe have free rooms at the Rosen too
- Activities for my disabled adult child to do while I am in sessions
- Easier transportation/mobility. The venue is great, but so large and the walk from the ballroom to the different breakout rooms then to the parking
- A wheelchair decorating parade
- To be able to apply for services and get help on-site
- Provide additional computers or devices for on-site registration
- Icons on sessions for recommended audiences—babies/toddlers, middle school/high school, transition, adults, all, etc.
- Everything was perfect
- Are there AA meetings available at The Family Café?
- I loved the Women’s Summit—more of this
- Places to eat
- Activities for youth only
- For those that volunteer, provide volunteers with a specific person to contact, volunteer check-in, and a reminder roster listed in check-in area
- More programs and advocacy for people with IDD
- More SSI and SSDI presentations, more family estate planning, more on special needs trusts—or more opportunities to attend across multiple sessions
- More online streaming and interactive lectures for those unable to attend in person
- More breakouts and vendors that relate transitioning of adult children and their needs
- Reach out to the community more
- The Veteran Affairs needs to be in this environment
- Agency head contact info list
- Classes offered more than once. Couldn’t attend all classes I wanted to attend.
- For raffles, give some vouchers for meals at the restaurants
- Not having a speaker at checkout time
- Something for multiple siblings with needs, whole family having disabilities
- Spreading topics related to each other out so families don’t have to split up to attend them
- Later checkout on Sunday
- Employment expo on Saturday too
- Session with tips from parents
- Signs with labeled events in common areas (event schedule)
- A session on recovery
- Post past events pictures throughout the event
- Repeat more events at different time or day so that it’s not a one-time shot to get info we need

- Sign up sheets posted for future support groups or meet ups so I don't feel like support is done after this weekend
- I would suggest more leadership sessions
- Maybe food trucks to make for affordable meals
- A comedy session
- Is there a way to record talks so we can go back and listen to ones we went to as well as ones I couldn't be in two places at once?
- Craft making, breakouts for people socialize and do a project or bring their own project and work on. Like a paint and sip.
- Better signage to know where registration is and better directions on location of breakout sessions
- Keeping up the wonderful job! So grateful!



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