



# 2024 State Legislative Priorities for Children with Developmental Delays and People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Services for people with developmental delays and intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) should be sustainable and promote equity, inclusion, and belonging. The below priorities aim to achieve that vision and reflect input from impacted communities across the region, centering people with delays and disabilities, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

## **1. Improve access to culturally rooted and linguistically accessible services by investing in interpretation, translation, cultural navigation, and other language and cultural supports.**

Intentional investments in linguistically accessible and culturally rooted services would reduce barriers and improve access to services, especially for BIPOC people with I/DD or delays and their families. In King County, 28 percent of residents over age five speak a language other than English at home—higher than the 20.8 percent statewide. Nearly 40 percent of these residents in King County report they do not speak English very well or at all.<sup>1,2</sup> As of 2021, 24.2 percent of King County residents were born outside the country.<sup>3</sup> Residents with disabilities who are also BIPOC face barriers to getting their needs met from the developmental disabilities, healthcare, and K-12 education systems and experience racial, cultural, and language biases. To produce equitable and high-quality results, services must be co-created with communities, especially those at the intersection of race and disability.

We critically need language across all systems and programs to ensure access to services for multilingual and multicultural residents. King County supports robust funding for state agencies, including the Developmental Disabilities Administration, Department of Children, Youth, and Families, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Health Care Authority, to support equitable language access across services. Service providers lack the resources needed to build language access equity on their own. It is crucial to invest in the translation of all necessary developmental disability services documents in each family's preferred language. For families accessing Medicaid, interpretation services may be funded through their insurance, but for families using private insurance, developmental disability services providers must provide interpretation at their own expense.

## **2. Fund the first month of services provided by Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) agencies with Special Education funds.**

ESIT agencies are federally mandated to provide services to all eligible children, and the number of eligible children served increases by approximately 10 percent annually. In FY 23, the number of children served increased by an unprecedented 19 percent. This dramatic increase in children served within the ESIT system—which is already chronically underfunded—is creating alarming instability. In King County, ESIT agencies had to identify approximately \$4 million from their reserves to address the financial gap.

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<sup>1</sup> Immigrant, Refugee, and Language Access, King County [\[LINK\]](#)

<sup>2</sup> Washington Office of Financial Management [\[LINK\]](#)

<sup>3</sup> Demographic Trends of King County [\[LINK\]](#)

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Currently, RCW 43.216.580 prohibits agencies from billing for Special Education, administered by the Department of Children, Youth, & Families (DCYF), for the first funding month an eligible child receives services. Yet, the first month of services can often be the most time intensive when providers build relationships with families, assess children's needs, and shape service delivery as a team. King County urges the Legislature to amend RCW 43.216.580 to allow billing of Special Education funding for the initial month of services and begin to strengthen ESIT agencies' capacity for providers to deliver timely and quality services to children and families.

- 3. Increase Employment and Community Inclusion provider rates** as recommended in the State Developmental Disabilities Administration's October 1, 2022, [Employment and Day Rate Study](#).

Employment and Community Inclusion supports provide critical stability in the lives of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Services connect individuals with employment or other community activities that provide purpose and belonging so individuals live happier and healthier lives. However, the current statewide staffing shortage has reduced or suspended services for many people.

King County appreciates the Legislature increasing provider rates for the 2023-25 biennium. However, the funding does not yet fully implement the recommended rates from the legislatively mandated 2022 Employment and Day Rate Study. King County supports the State Developmental Disabilities Administration's 2024 Supplemental Budget Proposal of \$47.6 million to increase provider rates to cover their full costs and maintain the infrastructure and capacity required to deliver services. These rates are necessary to recruit and retain qualified workers to ensure that individuals with I/DD can access services. In an October 2023 provider survey, 86% of King County providers responded that they would be able to take new referrals for employment and community inclusion services and 81% responded that they would be able to fully serve current participants if services were funded at the full recommended rates in the 2022 Employment and Day Rate Study.

- 4. Implement the recommendations in the State Developmental Disabilities Administration's October 1, 2022, [Housing Fund Priority Study Report](#); expand permanent revenue sources for affordable housing; and invest in the housing support services workforce.**

According to ECONorthwest's report [Housing Needs for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Washington State](#), approximately 37,000 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) are facing housing insecurity. Housing stability for people with I/DD depends on pairing homes with support services that enable people to live as independently as possible. To best support people, investments are needed for both affordable housing structures and the housing support services workforce.

**Housing Capital and Operations.** Expanding permanent revenue sources for State and local housing funding will increase and maintain the supply of accessible and affordable housing in King County for people with I/DD and their families. The Housing Trust Fund is the primary source of financial equity for developing and preserving affordable housing across Washington State. A dedicated revenue source would help increase total funding and reduce reliance on fluctuating annual appropriations. Local housing funding options are also needed for stabilizing housing maintenance and operations. With costs increasing

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drastically, the limited operations funding available does not fully meet the current operational need.

**Workforce.** Accessibility is key for individuals with I/DD; they need more affordable housing, with support services immediately to promote housing stability for people with I/DD living in our communities and exiting institutions or hospital settings. Accessible housing depends on services provided by the community residential services workforce. According to the Community Residential Services Association, this workforce has been consistently underfunded and has experienced nearly 50% workforce turnover annually, a staffing issue that could be addressed by increasing community residential provider rates. Additionally, strengthening the State Developmental Disabilities Administration's housing support services workforce by increasing housing specialists, as recommended in the [Housing Fund Priority Study report](#), is needed to improve coordination between affordable/accessible housing and support services.

**5. Invest in recruitment and retention strategies to develop a behavioral health workforce that is responsive to the needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).**

Individuals who have I/DD and behavioral health conditions are part of the growing behavioral health crisis. Nearly two in every five (37%) people eligible for State Developmental Disabilities Administration's services also have behavioral health treatment needs.<sup>4</sup> Compounding the issue of increased prevalence of mental distress are the barriers people with I/DD experience in accessing the continuum of behavioral health services. The Washington State Developmental Disabilities Administration's October 1, 2022, [Best Practices for Co-Occurring Conditions](#) report describes a shortage of workers and mental health providers who do not have training in effective treatment models for those with I/DD. Without a continuum of appropriate behavioral healthcare, people with I/DD experiencing mental health distress are at greater risk of a crisis. Costly alternatives like hospitalization become the only immediately available option to promote safety.

King County supports the Legislature implementing the recommendations in [Best Practices for Co-Occurring Conditions](#) to address the behavioral health crisis faced by people with I/DD. The report identifies strategies to develop a behavioral health workforce that is responsive to people with I/DD that include funding student loan repayment and forgiveness programs for individuals who treat and support people with I/DD and training providers on recognizing and treating people with co-occurring I/DD and mental health conditions. These strategies will help individuals with I/DD and their families access a range of essential behavioral health services.

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<sup>4</sup> Washington State Department of Social and Health Services [\[LINK\]](#)

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