

King County Developmental Disabilities State Legislative Priorities for 2025

Services for people with developmental delays and intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) should be sustainable and promote equity, inclusion, and belonging. These priorities would further that vision. They reflect input from impacted communities across King County, centering people with intellectual and developmental delays and disabilities, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. **King County urges the legislature to act on these priorities in 2025:**

1. **Protect opportunities for employment and meaningful inclusion in the community.**

Employment and community inclusion services support individuals with I/DD in reaching financial, vocational, and social goals. In addition, county coordination of these two types of services helps participants connect more effectively to other service systems such as behavioral health and school districts. Provider capacity challenges, compounded by artificial caps on provider payment rates, have reduced access to these supports and kept budgeted funds from being spent. When access is limited, individuals with I/DD face greater barriers to employment and social engagement, contributing to isolation, reduced health and wellness, and missed opportunities to be included in their communities. The legislature should:

- **Adjust Employment and Community Inclusion provider rates to avoid delays or interruptions in service access.** Rates should be aligned with recommendations from the October 2022 State Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) Employment and Day Rate Study. Stronger rates would support providers to recruit, retain, and train staff to help individuals with I/DD to get and keep jobs and participate in community activities.

2. **Improve access to early support for infants and toddlers ages 0-3 through equitable special education funding.**

The Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program provides essential services such as speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy and specialized instruction to children aged 0-3 with developmental delays or disabilities. Federal and state requirements and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act shape how the program is carried out. ESIT providers' inflexible state funding does not keep up with costs, making it difficult to retain workers and compete with school district wages. This can result in staffing shortages that impact young children and their families.

In the past, the special education cost multiplier that determines funding for ESIT increased alongside the multiplier for children aged 3-5. However, when ESIT's special education funding moved to the Department of Children, Youth, and

Families (DCYF) in 2020, these coordinated adjustments stopped. In 2023, the multiplier for children aged 3-5 increased, while the multiplier for ages 0-3 remained unchanged. The legislature should:

- **Realign the 0-3 and 3-5 special education multipliers and ensure they remain linked in the future.** This change is critical to providing equitable support for young children with developmental delays and disabilities during their most formative years. Realigning and linking the multipliers will aid in ESIT staff recruitment and retention, improve service availability, and increase access to culturally relevant ESIT services for children and families.

3. **Maintain access to high school transition investments.**

To become active, engaged community members, students with I/DD require comprehensive preparation, planning, and resources during their transition from high school to adulthood. The legislature should:

- **Continue funding to support employment and other essential services for all students with I/DD leaving high school.** This support builds on other state investments such as High School and Beyond Planning, special education services, and the expansion of School to Work programs.

4. **Strengthen services and treatment for youth with behavioral health conditions and intellectual and developmental disabilities in crisis.**

Children and youth with co-occurring behavioral health conditions and I/DD who are experiencing a crisis often face significant service gaps, leading to extended hospital stays and multiple emergency room visits. These youth need comprehensive, community-based supports. The legislature should:

- **Sustain and expand behavioral health support teams.** These teams are needed to provide in-home crisis stabilization and behavioral supports for up to 90 days for children with co-occurring behavioral health and I/DD and their caregivers. Stable state funding would provide for the continuity of these existing vital services. Expansion would increase referrals from community behavioral health providers and provide extended services beyond 90 days for youth with more intensive needs and address wait lists.
- **Expand short-term residential treatment for youth.** Increasing facility-based capacity to serve youth with co-occurring behavioral health and I/DD needs would address a gap in the continuum of care for youth in crisis. It would offer a less restrictive alternative to hospital stays, addressing a gap in services between short-term crisis centers and longer-term inpatient programs.

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5. Increase and maintain access to affordable housing and wraparound services.

According to a 2022 state Department of Social and Health Services/Developmental Disabilities Administration report, approximately 37,000 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) in Washington are facing housing insecurity. Safe, accessible, and affordable housing must be paired with supportive services to ensure that people with I/DD can live as independently as possible. Investments are needed for both affordable housing structures and supportive services. The legislature should:

- **Continue investing in the Housing Trust Fund and include funding for repairs to existing buildings.** These investments are needed to ensure people with I/DD and their families can live in safe, accessible, and affordable housing in their communities.
- **Continue investing in the housing support services workforce by adding more funding for operations and essential supportive services.** Increasing funding for housing support services will better support people to live in their own homes, including people leaving institutions or hospital settings. Additionally, funding operating costs keeps homes safe and accessible for households with the lowest incomes.

6. Promote language access for all children and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Language access is a fundamental civil right protected by laws designed to provide for interpretation and translation services. Service providers for children and individuals with I/DD are frequently forced to rely on underfunded or inefficient state systems to offer required interpretation services, making these services less accessible and less effective for kids and families. The legislature should:

- **Require state agencies to pass through dedicated funding to service providers for interpretation and translation services** as part of agencies' language access plans (LAPs) to promote equitable access to spoken and signed language supports. This would support individuals with I/DD and their families to receive linguistically relevant services while supporting the financial sustainability of nonprofit service providers.