



# Office for People With Developmental Disabilities



# Front Door Access to Services





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# Welcome to the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities Front Door!

## What is the Front Door?

Opening the door to a richer, fuller life—that’s the goal of the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) Front Door, a person-centered approach to planning supports for people with developmental disabilities.

The Front Door process will guide you through the steps involved in finding out if you are eligible for services with the OPWDD, identify your needs, and help you work on a plan for getting those services.

The Front Door process seeks to provide culturally competent services that are inclusive of language, ability and traditional values to support individuals and family members.

## What is this Guide For?

The purpose of this guide is to familiarize you with OPWDD’s Front Door process. This guide will help you to understand the services that OPWDD offers and how they might fit into your life. Other topics to be covered include what you will need to demonstrate to become eligible for OPWDD supports and services. These include determinations related to your developmental disability, Medicaid eligibility and enrollment in the Home and Community Based waiver program (through which most OPWDD supports are delivered.) This guide will also give you an idea of important considerations to make in how you plan your services, and the range of options available to you and/or your family member.

### Mission Statement:

We help people with developmental disabilities live richer lives.

## Where Do I Begin?

To help you get ready to plan for OPWDD services, you will be asked to attend an information session. The information session is a way for you to learn valuable information about:

- The supports and services that may be right for you, and how to access them
- The options that exist for helping individuals and families
- How the Front Door process works

## About the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

The New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) is responsible for coordinating services for more than 126,000 New Yorkers with developmental disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorders, and other neurological impairments. It provides services directly and through a network of not-for-profit service providing agencies.

OPWDD is proud of our strong working partnership with families and individuals. This partnership shaped the way the system grew to assist increasing numbers of individuals to live with greater independence in their communities.

Supports and services are provided in community settings across the state and include long-term care services such as habilitation and residential supports. Individuals and their families are able to manage their own services and manage their own staff by self-directing any or all of their services, if they choose to.

OPWDD also provides family support services, which are designed to assist families in providing care for their loved ones who live full-time in their family home, and employment supports, which include ongoing job coaching, job matching, and vocational training.

## How OPWDD is Structured

Five Developmental Disabilities Regional Offices (DDROs) coordinate and oversee not-for-profit provider services, and manage the Front Door process. Most of your interaction with OPWDD will be through your local DDRO. You may also interact with not-for-profit agencies which are funded by OPWDD.

OPWDD also operates six other regionally based offices (State Operations Offices) which manage services that are run directly by New York State.

The OPWDD system is moving into a managed care model and in the future services will be coordinated by managed care organizations specifically designed to meet the diverse needs of people with developmental disabilities. These Developmental Disability Individual Support and Care Coordination Organizations (DISCOs) will offer specialized developmental disability services through a variety of providers within the future managed care delivery system.

### Ways to contact and stay connected to OPWDD

OPWDD website:  
[www.opwdd.ny.gov](http://www.opwdd.ny.gov)

OPWDD Facebook page:  
[www.facebook.com/NYSOPWDD](http://www.facebook.com/NYSOPWDD)

Commissioner's  
Email Address:  
[Commissioners.Correspondence.Unit@opwdd.ny.gov](mailto:Commissioners.Correspondence.Unit@opwdd.ny.gov)

Any inquiries you have may be directed to OPWDD's Information Line at 1-866-946-9733. See page 25 in this guide for further details.

## Eligibility

### The Key to Accessing Supports

To be able to access the majority of OPWDD services, most individuals will need to:

- Provide evidence that they have a developmental disability
- Enroll in Medicaid (if needed), and
- Enroll in the Home and Community Based Waiver (if needed)

### The OPWDD Eligibility Review

The Eligibility Review process is the way OPWDD determines if someone has a developmental disability and is eligible for OPWDD supports and services.

The eligibility review process begins at one of OPWDD’s five Developmental Disability Regional Offices (DDROs) located throughout New York State. The individual and their family submit materials and records to the DDRO, such as reports of assessments conducted by medical professionals. A service coordinator may help with this process.

Qualified DDRO staff review this information to see if the person’s disability meets requirements specified in New York State law. If they meet the requirements, the person is deemed to have a developmental disability and becomes eligible for OPWDD services. **(Please note:** additional steps are needed—such as enrolling in Medicaid—to gain access to most supports and services.)

Depending on the complexity of an individual's condition, the process for obtaining an eligibility determination may require reports from multiple specialty assessments. A face-to-face interview may also be part of this process.

The **Transmittal for Determination of Developmental Disability Form** must accompany all requests sent to the DDRO for eligibility determinations. Eligibility requests and supporting documentation must be sent to the Eligibility Coordinator at the DDRO where you live.

For detailed information on how the eligibility determination works, please see the Appendix at the end of this guide.



You can find the Transmittal for Determination of Developmental Disability Form online at the OPWDD website.

Go to **“Resources”** on the homepage, choose **“Forms,”** and scroll down to **“Eligibility Form and Information.”**

Or, just type this address into your browser:  
<http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/node/1018>

## OPWDD Eligibility Determination Frequently Asked Questions

### What is Eligibility?

Each person who wants OPWDD supports or services has the right to an individual eligibility review. That review will determine whether he or she has a condition that qualifies – or makes the person “eligible” -- for services or supports from OPWDD.

### Who may ask for a review of eligibility for OPWDD supports or services?

Individuals, or their caregivers, guardians, advocates, or care coordinators may apply to get supports or services provided or paid for by OPWDD. The application and review process is called the Eligibility Determination Process.

### Who decides whether a person is eligible for OPWDD services?

Only OPWDD can determine whether a person has a developmental disability and meets all the conditions of eligibility for OPWDD-funded services.

### What is required for a person to be eligible for OPWDD services?

This is what the New York State Mental Hygiene Law requires in order to be eligible for OPWDD services:

1. The presence of a developmental disability that is described by certain qualifying diagnoses or conditions
2. The disability has occurred before the person reached age twenty-two
3. The disability can be expected to continue indefinitely or permanently
4. The disability causes a substantial handicap to a person’s ability to function normally in society

### What are developmental disabilities?

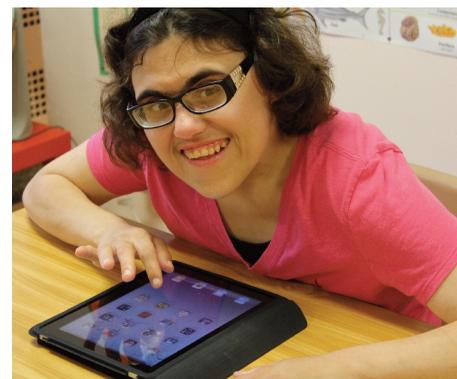
Developmental disabilities are special conditions that may occur anytime from before a baby’s birth, up until the age of 22. A developmental disability may take different forms. They are different from “developmental delays,” that show up as a lag in one or more areas of growth or skill. Developmental delays can be reduced by providing Early Intervention services and special help in the classroom. A developmental disability condition may cause a child to develop more slowly all along, or to have physical difficulties and limitations, or have trouble learning and growing like other children in general. Sometimes an individual has more than one condition or disability.

Developmental disabilities that qualify a person for OPWDD eligibility include: intellectual disability, autism, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, familial dysautonomia, and neurological impairment (injury, malformation, or disease involving the Central Nervous System).

### What is NOT considered a developmental disability?

- Mental illness (e.g., bi-polar disorder or depression)
- Loss or absence of senses, motor skills or physical abilities
- Mild forms of conditions such as cerebral palsy, seizure disorder or brain injury, if there is no evidence of “substantial handicap”

An individual may qualify for OPWDD eligibility if they have one of the conditions listed above as well as a qualifying developmental disability.



**What does “substantial handicap” mean?**

For OPWDD eligibility, “substantial handicap” means that a developmental disability is so serious that it makes it very difficult for an individual to live everyday life independently. Qualified professionals are trained to evaluate individuals for developmental disabilities and difficulties with everyday life and functioning.

**What kinds of records are needed to show that a person meets all the requirements for OPWDD eligibility?**

In general, the records for an OPWDD eligibility review would include reports of current or recent psychological testing of the person’s intellectual functioning, a standardized evaluation of the person’s “adaptive” behavior functioning, a social/developmental (or psychosocial) history, and medical reports indicating the person’s health status. For children or adults with special medical conditions, genetic disorders, or neurological impairment, medical records that confirm the diagnosis of these conditions or disorders are required. Educational records (IEPs, report cards) can be helpful, too. The DDRO staff can answer additional questions, explain the records requirements in more detail, and advise applicants and their representatives about giving permission and requesting copies of evaluations and other records.

**How is eligibility determined for children?**

For children between birth and eight years of age, the eligibility review requirements are the same as those for adults, although the qualifying condition requirement leaves room for flexibility. Sometimes, children will be given provisional eligibility for OPWDD supports or services.

**What is “provisional eligibility”?**

In some cases, based on clinical judgment of a child’s needs, the DDRO may grant a child provisional eligibility. Provisional eligibility means that a child may get OPWDD supports or services for a limited period of time. Before the end of the time period, OPWDD must review updated information about the child’s condition and functioning to see if the child is still eligible for supports or services. The reason that some children have provisional eligibility is that they may have qualifying levels of delays in development that can still change or improve as they grow older. All children with provisional eligibility must be reviewed again before their eighth birthday, but some may be reviewed earlier. The DDRO will decide when the child should be evaluated again, and whether a child who has had provisional eligibility is still eligible for OPWDD supports or services.

**What is a “qualifying level of delay in development” for children?**

New York State Education Law has standards that explain how to measure the possible kinds and levels of delay that a child under eight years of age may have. These rules help to determine how much the child’s delay affects the child’s ability to live a normal life. This information about the kind and level of delay in development is usually contained in a report that is reviewed for OPWDD eligibility.

**Is there any age limit for applying for OPWDD eligibility?**

There are no age limits for requesting OPWDD eligibility. Eligibility status can be reviewed from infancy throughout a person’s life. It is important to be aware, however, that a person’s age can affect the ability to find proof of the disability before age 22. As a person gets older, it may become more difficult to find the records and reports from schools, clinics, hospitals, and other settings that could show how a person’s condition met the age requirement for OPWDD eligibility.

**How does OPWDD work with children who are over the age for school or social service programs, and may need adult services?**

OPWDD works closely with schools, foster care agencies, and other programs that provide services to children to plan for the transition away from these services once the child becomes too old to receive them. Usually, individuals become too old for children's services when they turn 21 years old. Ideally, planning for this transition should begin when the child is age 15.





## Medicaid and OPWDD Services

Most OPWDD services are provided through New York State's Medicaid program, which is jointly funded between the federal and state government. OPWDD also offers limited services with state funding. OPWDD's largest Medicaid program is the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waiver (discussed on the next page).

OPWDD expects each individual seeking services to access available benefit programs (like Medicaid) which help pay for the services they want. For example, if a person is seeking HCBS waiver services, the individual will need to be eligible for and enroll in Medicaid and the HCBS waiver for the government to pay for these services. Individuals may also pay for the cost of services with their own funds instead of enrolling in a benefit program.

### Medicaid pays for the following OPWDD supports and services:

- Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waiver (i.e., most OPWDD services, such as respite, supported employment, community habilitation, day habilitation, and residential services)
- Care at Home waiver services (for children up to age 18 who have severe medical needs and a developmental disability)
- Medicaid Service Coordination
- Residential Care
- Additional health-related items and services (like Article 16 clinic services)

Most OPWDD services are funded through Medicaid; **therefore, in most cases, it is necessary that individuals seeking services from OPWDD enroll in Medicaid.** You must be eligible for and enrolled in Medicaid to enroll in the HCBS waiver, Care at Home waiver, or Medicaid Service Coordination programs. If you are not already enrolled in Medicaid, you can apply directly to the Medicaid office in your county. If you currently work with a community services agency, staff at that agency may be able to assist you with the Medicaid application process. The agency can help you complete the Medicaid application and explain what documents will be needed. Additionally, assistance with completing the Medicaid Application can also be obtained by calling New York Health Options at 855-693-6765.

Please see the frequently asked questions section on pages 11-13 for detailed information about applying for Medicaid.

The Medicaid Program has special provisions for people with developmental disabilities:

- Individuals can work and still qualify for Medicaid (although depending upon their income, a person may need to contribute to service costs)
- Parental income and resources may not be considered for children living at home and seeking enrollment in the HCBS or Care at Home waiver programs

- And financial resources can be put into a Medicaid qualifying supplemental needs trust and be exempt for Medicaid purposes

## How to Enroll in the Home and Community Based Services Waiver

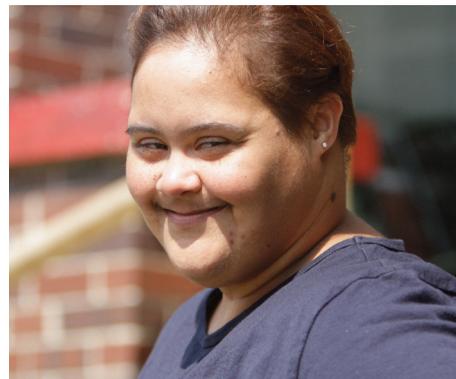
The Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waiver offers a number of different services to support individuals in the community so that they do not need to live in institutions. The HCBS waiver is one of many waivers that the federal government approves to allow states to be more flexible with the use of Medicaid funds. Under these special agreements, the federal government forgoes certain Medicaid rules to allow states to use Medicaid funding for services that will allow individuals to live at home with their families or independently in the community, instead of in a nursing home or other institutional setting.

### Individuals who would like to access the supports and services offered through the HCBS waiver will need to enroll in the HCBS waiver program.

To request enrollment in the Home and Community Based Services waiver, you must fill out and submit an Application for Participation. At the time of enrollment, you must reside at home or in a certified Family Care home, Community Residence or Individualized Residential Alternative (IRA).

#### You will need to provide evidence of:

- A developmental disability
- An appropriate level of need to obtain services
- Eligibility for Medicaid enrollment
- An appropriate living arrangement
- Other information as necessary



## Medicaid and HCBS Waiver Frequently Asked Questions

### How do I apply for Medicaid?

Individuals or families can apply directly to Medicaid or work with the agency they want services from when applying for Medicaid. The agency can help with the application and explain what documents will be needed, and can connect individuals or families with a service coordinator who can assist with the application process.

In order to apply, an individual will need his or her personal records. For example: his or her birth certificate; proof of where he or she lives, such as a rent receipt or utility bill; proof of income, such as a Social Security check; and proof of his or her resources, such as bank records.

You can request an application for Medicaid by phone, by mail or in person through your local department of social services (LDSS) or by contacting a Facilitated Enroller (FE).

An FE is a community agency trained to assist with Medicaid applications. An FE may have hours or a location that is more convenient than the LDSS. They are available to provide application assistance but you do not have to use an FE in order to apply.

**Assistance with completing the Medicaid Application can be obtained by calling New York Health Options at 855-693-6765.**

You also can contact your local OPWDD Revenue Support Field Office, who will assist you in locating the appropriate Medicaid Office to apply for benefits. Ask your Front Door team representative for further information.

**Who is eligible for Medicaid?**

Individuals with disabilities age 18 years or older are eligible for Medicaid if their income and resources (bank accounts, life insurance, etc.), are below a certain amount. Programs like the Medicaid Buy-In for Working People with Disabilities can help working adults keep more of their income and still get Medicaid. Children with developmental disabilities under age 18 who live at home with their families may be eligible for the Medicaid HCBS waiver based on their own income and resources. Their family income and resources may, in some cases, not be considered when applying for the Medicaid HCBS waiver.

**What other benefits does Medicaid provide?**

In addition to funding many OPWDD services, Medicaid provides health insurance that will pay for medical care and also for specialized medical care that is not covered by other types of insurance. For example, Medicaid can pay for home health aides and transportation to medical services. An individual can have other insurance coverage and still apply for Medicaid.

**How to find out what type of Medicaid to apply for:**

Individuals or families should talk to the local Revenue Support Field Office or the agency they want services from to get help with applying for the right Medicaid coverage. Either will know what type of Medicaid coverage is needed.

**What if an individual wants a new Medicaid or HCBS waiver-funded service?**

If an individual wants a new service, the person or their family should talk to the agency they want the service from. The agency will tell you if they can provide the service to the individual and will also explain if the individual has the right Medicaid coverage to pay for the service. If the individual does not have the right Medicaid coverage, he or she must enroll in the right coverage before new services will be provided.

If the individual or family does not apply for the Medicaid coverage needed, the agency can deny the request for service. However, in cases where the person's health or safety would be in danger without the service, the agency may choose to provide the service before the individual has enrolled in Medicaid.

**What if an individual or family decides not to apply for Medicaid?**

If an individual or family does not apply for coverage or does not complete the application process then payment must be made for the full cost of the service. The agency the individual wants services from will tell him or her how much will have to be paid for the services.

However, if an individual is not eligible for Medicaid because of a reason other than income or resource level, then that person or their family should ask the agency for assistance in getting support.

**What if Medicaid finds that an individual is not eligible?**

If Medicaid finds that an individual is not eligible for coverage, Medicaid will send a letter stating that Medicaid coverage has been denied. If an individual or family receives a denial letter, the letter must be saved and shown to the agency the individual wants services from to see if he or she should appeal the decision. The agency can help with the appeals process.

**I still need help! What do I do?**

If you have more questions, our Revenue Support Field Offices can help. There are nine Revenue Support Field Offices (RSFOs) located throughout New York State. RSFO staff share their expertise with voluntary provider agencies, individuals with disabilities, their families, advocates, and other representatives. Contact your Front Door representative for more information.





## Planning

- OPWDD will learn about your needs, strengths and abilities through an assessment process.
- A service coordinator will work with you and your family to develop an Individualized Service Plan (ISP). The ISP is a roadmap to your personal goals, and indicates the supports and services that will help get you there.
- Your “circle of support” (the people from your life and the staff you want involved in helping you choose services) and service coordinator will be there to help you figure things out and assist in making informed choices.
- You are at the center of the planning process!

### The Assessment Process

Once your eligibility to receive OPWDD services has been determined, you will be directed to an Assessment Specialist to start the assessment process. The purpose of the assessment is to determine your current strengths, needs and the natural or community supports available to you. This information will be used to identify additional service needs and develop a person-centered plan.

The Developmental Disabilities Profile (DDP-2) is the primary tool used by OPWDD to assess the challenges that an individual with developmental disabilities may have, and which are related to his or her service needs. OPWDD staff will discuss the DDP-2 with you and/or your family member(s) during the initial assessment process. In order to more fully understand your strengths and needs, an assessment specialist will ask you questions related to your life circumstances which go beyond the information gathered by the DDP-2.

OPWDD is in the process of developing a new comprehensive assessment tool called the Coordinated Assessment System (CAS) which will replace the DDP-2.

## Person-Centered Planning

### What is Person-Centered Planning?

Person-centered planning is a way to explore your needs and wants—what you value, how you want to live, and how OPWDD can provide the support to help you get there.

The person-centered planning process is directed by you and the people important to you, including your family members. The focus is on your abilities, capacities, and what you are seeking from life. By planning supports and services around individual needs and goals, OPWDD can help you reach your potential and live a fulfilling life.

### Focus on Outcomes!

The results of the planning and services provided—the outcomes—are what really matters. Outcomes are not goals, but tell us whether a person’s goals are being achieved.

The planning and supports provided should work for you and your family, so we look at the results and ask questions like:

- Are you connected to activities that are meaningful to you?
- Are the supports helping you develop and maintain relationships that are important to you?
- Do you feel safe and stable?

Developing a plan of support is only the first step – questioning, monitoring, and revising the plan is an active and ongoing process.

### Student Graduates New to OPWDD

Families should be aware that OPWDD needs your help to prevent a lapse in service for children graduating from the school system. Local school districts provide developmental disability services, including special education, until an individual’s twenty-first birthday. Families can begin the process of determining eligibility and planning for services ahead of time.

We strongly urge you not to wait until the “school bus stops coming” before beginning this process—ideally, transition planning for students should begin at age fifteen. If your child is older than fifteen, you are encouraged to start the process as soon as possible. This allows time to find the best supports, develop a plan everyone is happy with, and do so at a more relaxed pace.

OPWDD’s transition coordinators can help students at local schools plan for the OPWDD supports they may need as adults. Please ask your Front Door team representative for more information. Coordinators are also available to help children aging out of residential schools.

### Assessment Tool Checklist

Preparing for the assessment may be helpful. You can think about these topics and have the following information available:

- Your strengths
- Goals you want to achieve
- Changes you would like to make in your life
- Areas where you need help or assistance to complete everyday activities
- Cognitive, sensory, motor and communication needs
- Medical history
- How often you see medical/behavioral professionals (e.g. doctor, psychologist, speech therapist)
- Supports you have now (e.g. family, friends)

**TIP:** When preparing for an assessment, it may be a good idea to create a seven-day (week-long) calendar reflecting your current base of activities, needs and supports. This will help in the assessment and in planning services.



## Service Coordination

Service coordination assists individuals with developmental disabilities and their families to gain access to services and supports. OPWDD offers two types of service coordination, Plan of Care Support Services (PCSS) and Medicaid Service Coordination (MSC). Both are delivered by qualified service coordinators and utilize a person-centered approach for planning supports and services.

The primary difference between the two models is how often service coordinators will make contact with you. MSC offers a more intensive approach for individuals that have an ongoing and comprehensive need. PCSS is for individuals who need a lower level of support for the coordination of their services.

### Service Coordinators Promote and Support Informed Choice

**Informed choice:** a choice that a person makes based on a good understanding of the options available to him or her, and how each option may affect his or her life.

Service coordinators provide information to individuals so they can make informed choices about their life and services. A person may be supported to make an informed choice on his or her own, or may have assistance from family members, friends or other people important to the individual.

### The Circle of Support: Individualized Service Planning via a Person-Centered Approach

Service coordinators focus their planning on the needs and desires of the person with developmental disabilities, drawing input from the individual’s circle of support. The circle of support may include family members, friends, or other people the individual chooses.

The circle meets on an ongoing basis to evaluate the success of and make changes to the plan. The individual with a developmental disability is at the “center” of the circle, and everyone works cooperatively to develop a personalized plan for the individual. A circle can be as small as the person being served and their service coordinator, or can be larger.

## Individualized Service Plan (ISP)

A service coordinator will work with you and your family to develop an Individualized Service Plan (ISP). The ISP is a roadmap to your personal goals and describes the supports and services that will help get you there.

### Developing the Individualized Service Plan (ISP)

#### The service coordinator:

- Develops the ISP using a person-centered approach, which includes people you and your family think should be involved
- Helps you make informed choices and develop a personal network of activities, supports, services, and community resources based on your needs and desires
- Documents in the ISP the supports, services, and community resources needed and chosen by you and the entities that will supply them
- Helps you identify the additional service coordination activities and interventions that you want and need to meet your individualized goals and valued outcomes as described in the ISP

### Implementing the Individualized Service Plan (ISP)

#### To implement the ISP, the service coordinator:

- Shares his or her knowledge of the community and researches available resources to help you make informed choices about how to achieve your valued outcomes
- Makes referrals and facilitates visits and interviews with family members, service providers, housing options, etc.
- Coordinates access to and the delivery of supports and services identified in the ISP, including natural supports and funded services



## Services

- OPWDD services and supports can help you live in a home of your choice, find employment and other meaningful activities to participate in, build relationships in the community and support good health
- OPWDD offers an array of supports which offer different levels of assistance
- You are in control of your supports and services!

### OPWDD Supports and Services

OPWDD is committed to providing a wide variety of support and service options to meet your needs. OPWDD supports and services include:

- Help to live independently in the community with rent subsidies, community habilitation and other services
- Help for your family to support you in the family home with respite and other family support services
- Help with employment training and support, volunteer opportunities, and other types of community engagement if you choose to work in the community
- And help with intensive residential and day services if needed

You have the opportunity to self-direct your supports and services, allowing you the maximum amount of control over your supports if you choose.

OPWDD is committed to helping you obtain the supports that most closely match your preferences through an ongoing person-centered planning process. Please keep in mind that OPWDD serves individuals in the most community-integrated setting possible.

The supports and services you may access come from a number of sources. You may get help from family, friends, neighbors, or you may participate in community programs that help you to be part of the community. This kind of assistance is referred to as natural and community support. OPWDD's goal is to provide services which add to those natural and community supports to help you accomplish your goals and valued outcomes.

### Self-Direction of Supports & Services

Individuals and families are encouraged to consider self-directing supports and services. Self-direction empowers you and your family to determine the supports and services that best fit your needs. Individuals who self-direct their services are afforded a great amount of flexibility, and pay for those services with funds from a **Personal Resource Account (PRA)**. The PRA is a resource level determined by the individual's assessed needs, and the dollar amount varies for each person. You can self-direct some or all of your services.

If you self-direct your services, you will be assisted by a group of people who advocate for your best interests and support your success, called a **circle of support** (mentioned earlier

### What is the difference between supports & services?

The difference between the two is that a **support** can refer to any help an individual with disabilities receives from any source, while a **service** more generally refers to a type of support that is provided by a service agency. To make things easy, it's best to think of OPWDD supports and services as simply **help provided to an individual with developmental disabilities to address needs which stem from his or her disability.**

in the section on service coordination.) Family members, staff, friends and others can participate in the circle of support, along with your service coordinator. Circles of support can be as small as a few people, or they can be large. You are at the “center” of the circle, and members communicate on an ongoing basis to discover, discuss, and plan the best way to meet your needs and fulfill your personal goals.

## Employer and Budget Authority

You may choose to exercise decision-making authority over some or all of your services. By exercising this choice, you also accept the responsibility of taking a direct role in managing these services. As noted before, you will be helped by a circle of support to do this.

**Employer Authority** allows you to be responsible for hiring staff who will provide your supports and services. You can work with a Fiscal Intermediary that can help you by co-managing, recruiting, supervising and directing support workers, or you can handle some or all of these responsibilities yourself. The Fiscal Intermediary also supports you by providing functions such as screening potential employees and handling payroll. These are some, but not all, of the potential responsibilities.

**Budget Authority** allows you to take on the responsibility of managing your individualized service budget. This authority enables you to make decisions about the purchasing of supports and services included in your service plans.

**The Fiscal Intermediary** can also provide you with: billing and payments for approved self-directed supports and services; fiscal accounting and reporting; and general administrative supports.

## The Self-Directed Lives of People With Developmental Disabilities: Stories and Insights

Chad is vice president of a not-for-profit group that is based at the Webster’s Pond 95-acre nature sanctuary. Chad, who was born with cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, is in charge of the pond’s various activities. He is proud of the fact that he has not missed a day of work since graduating from high school. He also created a Webster Pond website after taking a computer course at ITT Technical Institute. He said it took him a year to complete as he only has the use of one of his 10 fingers — the pointer finger on his right hand.

John and Erin are a married couple who self-direct their supports and services. They are very supportive of one another and have what anyone would call a successful marriage. John and Erin became very involved with self advocacy, which encourages individuals with developmental disabilities to speak up for themselves. In addition, they speak to various advocacy and community groups and organizations, as ambassadors and role models.

Kayla has self-directed her services and supports for over four years, and has set goals in many different areas of her life. Kayla currently works in an office, and is also pursuing a college degree. Kayla volunteers at a community program for deaf children, both because she loves to give back to the community and also to keep up on her sign language skills. Kayla is a Special Olympics World Games athlete and a motivational speaker, speaking out against the use of the “r-word” and bullying.

Carrie embodies the message that it is important for other students and teachers to realize that people with Down syndrome are like everyone else and should be fully included in their schools. Carrie has inspired other people with Down syndrome to realize they have every right to dream big, and received a variety of supports that helped her to become independent and be part of her community. After being accepted at a local community college with tutorial support, Carrie started to self-direct her own services. Today, Carrie lives in her own cozy apartment and has staff supporting her part-time during the week.

## Apartments & Housing

OPWDD offers a continuum of housing supports and services based on the goals and needs of an individual with developmental disabilities. OPWDD supports individuals to live in the most integrated community setting possible.

### Independent Living in the Community

Community and independent living can be extremely rewarding and help individuals to reach their potential. While it is often seen as more common for individuals with milder disabilities to live independently in the community, individuals with moderate to very severe disabilities have also been successful at living independently in apartments and their own homes. Staff, family and friends may assist an individual living independently in the community.

**Individual Supports and Services (ISS)** assists adults with developmental disabilities to live independently by providing funds to pay for rent and utilities in community-based apartments. ISS is only available to individuals living independently.

**The Home of Your Own program** is open to income-eligible people with developmental disabilities and their parents or legal guardians. The program offers a wide range of supports, including information on low-interest mortgages, as well as homeownership counseling and training programs. Individuals with developmental disabilities and their parents may obtain a 30- or 40-year fixed rate mortgage with a low interest rate through the program.



## Community Habilitation

Community habilitation helps individuals with developmental disabilities that live independently, or at home with family, to learn and experience community-based activities. Learning is often focused on the areas of social skill building, developing skills for daily and community living, behavior stabilization, and health education. Community habilitation services are available to individuals who do not reside in a residence which is certified or operated by OPWDD.

## Community Residential Settings

**Community residential settings** in the OPWDD system are certified homes which offer different levels of support to individuals with developmental disabilities who have greater needs.

**Family Care** provides community-based housing in certified private homes. The Family Care program fosters a caring and stable home environment.

**Group Homes** provide room, board and individualized service options. Group homes are designed to provide a home-like atmosphere where individuals with developmental disabilities can acquire the skills necessary to live as independently as possible.

## Employment and Day Supports

OPWDD values the abilities and talents each person has to contribute, and supports individuals with developmental disabilities to work in integrated community settings alongside individuals who do not have disabilities. OPWDD also offers services to help people with developmental disabilities prepare for the world of work and be volunteers in their community. In addition, other OPWDD services provide meaningful activities for individuals who cannot work in the community. Individuals who participate in day services can also participate in employment services.

### Employment Services

OPWDD employment services help people with developmental disabilities earn wages, increase their independence, gain self-confidence and develop relationships in their community. Individuals with developmental disabilities work in all types of community businesses including banking, education, technology, health care, hospitality, food service, retail, not-for-profit corporations and government. Some individuals have also started their own businesses.

OPWDD offers several employment services to assist individuals with varying support needs. All employment services provide employment staff or job developers and coaches to assist individuals with developmental disabilities at work.

#### Job Developers and Coaches:

- Use person-centered planning to help identify job strengths, skills and interests
- Develop employment opportunities to match the right person with the right job
- Help with resume development and preparing for job interviews
- Provide travel training assistance
- Often accompany applicants to interviews
- Help individuals learn their job duties and work environment
- Provide ongoing assistance through periodic worksite visits
- Assist with retraining if job duties change
- Help with learning appropriate workplace behavior and social skills
- Can help individuals increase their hours or secure a new job

**Supported Employment (SEMP)** provides support to assist individuals to obtain and maintain paid competitive jobs in the community. Individuals with developmental disabilities will typically transition to SEMP after they have received intensive supported employment services funded by the Adult Career and Continuing Education Services Vocational Rehabilitation Office (ACCES-VR), and require extended job coaching to successfully maintain their employment.

**The Employment Training Program (ETP)** offers individuals an opportunity to work in a paid internship that will lead to permanent employment in a community business. ETP participants have enhanced job coaching and attend job readiness classes that cover topics like conflict resolution and how to dress for work.

Prevocational Services provide the opportunity for individuals to participate in general training activities to build on their strengths and overcome barriers to employment.



Day Habilitation services can assist individuals to acquire, retain or improve their self- help, socialization and adaptive skills, including communication and activities of daily living. Activities are provided at either a site-based location or directly in the community (which is referred to as day habilitation without walls).

## Family Support Services

Family support services help families who care for their loved ones with developmental disabilities at home. These services can provide needed breaks to caregivers, provide training and moral support, recreational and social activities, sibling services, parent to parent networking and support in times of crisis. Community habilitation, noted earlier in this section, is one of the most important services families rely on.

### Family support services include:

- Respite (provides relief to individuals who are responsible for the primary care and support of an individual with a developmental disability)
- Family member training
- Support groups
- Training in how to manage challenging behaviors
- Reimbursement
- Parent to parent networking
- Information and referral
- Sibling services
- After school programs
- Recreation/ Social activities

## Health and Assistive Technology

OPWDD is not a primary provider of medical services, but offers supports designed to foster behavioral health. OPWDD also operates clinics with limited services.

### Intensive Behavioral (IB) Services

Intensive Behavioral Services are short-term – about 6 month – services that focus on developing effective behavior support strategies for individuals whose challenging behavioral issues put them at risk of placement in a more restrictive residential setting such as a group home or hospital. This program teaches individuals, family members and other caregivers how to respond to challenging behaviors. To be eligible for these services, the individual must live in his or her own home, their family's home, or a Family Care home and must be enrolled in the Home and Community Based Services waiver.

### Assistive Technology

Assistive Technology is a category of services that encompasses both adaptive devices and environmental modifications (E-Mods).

Environmental modifications include physical changes to the home such as a ramp, and can include modifications that address the individual's sensory deficits or promote a safer environment for individuals with challenging behaviors.

Adaptive devices include communication aids and adaptive aids and devices, including feeding, dining and meal preparation aids.

## Clinic Services

OPWDD clinics were established to meet the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities in areas where there are not enough generic providers of medical services. OPWDD clinics also provide services to individuals with very complex needs.

## Charting Your Course

- You will need to supply documentation to establish eligibility for OPWDD services. There will probably be three processes to complete to get services. Those are the OPWDD determination of a qualifying developmental disability, determination of eligibility for Medicaid, and enrollment in the Home & Community Based Services waiver.
- Your documentation will be reviewed. The review may take up to three steps, and may involve OPWDD requesting additional information from you, or you appealing the decision OPWDD makes (if you do not agree with the decision.)
- After eligibility is established, OPWDD will assess your needs, wants and strengths using a standardized survey to create an individualized profile of your abilities, wants and needs.
- A service coordinator will work with you, your family and others who are important in your life to make decisions about what supports and services best fit your needs.
- An Individualized Service Plan will be agreed to and services and supports will be identified to carry the plan forward.
- Services are authorized and begin.

OPWDD strives to make sure things are easy to understand and run as smoothly as possible. The process may seem challenging at times, but we would like you to know that OPWDD is available to help. Please contact your regional office front door team with questions or concerns.

Now that you know more about what we have to offer, the next question to think about is where you want your life to take you, and how OPWDD can help.

**Chart your own course—the first step is going through OPWDD’s Front Door!**





## Contact Information

### Region 1

**Rochester: 585-241-5700** (Counties: Chemung, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Wayne, Wyoming, Yates)

**West Seneca: 800-487-6310** (Counties: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans)

### Region 2

**Central New York: 315-473-6978** (Counties: Broome, Cayuga, Chenango, Clinton, Cortland, Delaware, Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, Otsego, St. Lawrence Tioga, Tompkins)

### Region 3

**Capital District: 518-388-0431** (Counties: Albany, Fulton, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, Warren, Washington)

**Theills: 845-947-6100** (Counties: Orange, Rockland, Sullivan, Westchester)

**Poughkeepsie: 845-473-5050** (Counties: Columbia, Dutchess, Green, Putnam, Ulster)

### Region 4

**Queens: 718-217-5890**

**Brooklyn: 718-642-6000**

**Manhattan: 646-766-3222**

**Bronx: 718-430-0885**

**Staten Island: 718-983-5233**

### Region 5

**Hauppauge: 631-434-6100** (Counties: Nassau, Suffolk)

**For individuals with hearing impairment use NY Relay System 7-1-1**

## Information Line

OPWDD’s Information Line is designed to help people get answers to questions about supports and services for individuals with developmental disabilities in New York State. It is also used to take complaints of alleged misconduct, fraud, waste and abuse in the OPWDD service system. Your request for information will be referred to someone who will return your call and provide you with the information you are seeking. English and Spanish speaking representatives are standing by to assist you. If you speak another language, we will connect you with a translator within minutes of your call.

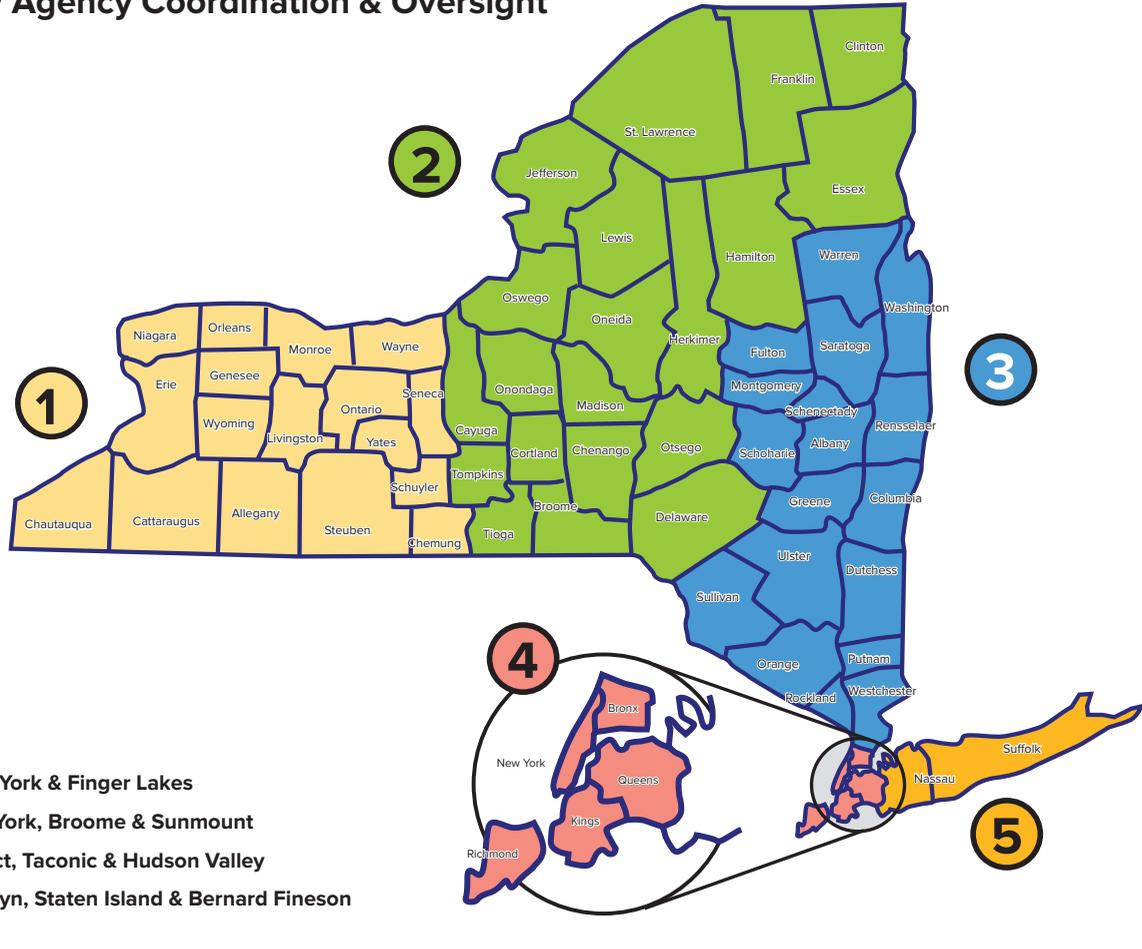
**Call OPWDD’s Toll Free Information Line at 1-866-946-9733**

**You may also email the Information Line at [www.opwdd.ny.gov](http://www.opwdd.ny.gov):**

look under Contacts, Information Line. Or, type this address into your web browser:  
[http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/opwdd\\_contacts/information\\_line/home](http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/opwdd_contacts/information_line/home)

# 5 Developmental Disabilities Regional Offices

## Voluntary Agency Coordination & Oversight



- 1** – Western New York & Finger Lakes
- 2** – Central New York, Broome & Sunmount
- 3** – Capital District, Taconic & Hudson Valley
- 4** – Metro, Brooklyn, Staten Island & Bernard Fineson
- 5** – Long Island

## Appendix: Detailed Information on the OPWDD Eligibility Determination

### Required Documentation for Eligibility Determination Requests

In order to determine if you are eligible for OPWDD services, the following information must be submitted to your local Developmental Disabilities Regional Office (DDRO) Eligibility Coordinator for review:

- **A psychological report within 3 years which includes an assessment of intellectual functioning (“IQ test”).** This report should include all summary scores from the assessment (Full Scale, Index, Part and Subtest scores).
  - For people with **IQ scores above 60**, an interpretive report of a standardized assessment of adaptive behavior, including summary, composite, scale, and domain scores, is required.
  - For people with **IQ scores below 60**, an adaptive assessment may be based on an interpretive report using information gathered from interviews with caregivers, records review, and direct observations.
- An interpretive report of adaptive behavioral assessment results.
- For conditions other than intellectual (developmental) disability, **a medical or specialty report which includes health status and diagnostic findings to support the diagnosis.**
- A recent general medical report should be included in all eligibility requests.
- **A social/developmental history, psychosocial report or other report which shows that the person became disabled before age 22.**

In some cases, the DDRO may require additional information or further evaluation. The DDRO may recommend where additional assessments can be completed.

We recommend that you work with the Eligibility Coordinator at your local DDRO to ensure that you have submitted a complete eligibility packet when requesting an eligibility determination.

### Eligibility Determination Checklist

The DDRO Eligibility Coordinator will need this information to establish if a person is eligible for OPWDD services:

- Psychological report(s) identifying intellectual functioning
- Psychosocial report documenting developmental/social history
- Recent general medical report, for individuals thought to have intellectual disability
- For a person with a condition other than intellectual disability, a medical specialty report that includes health status and diagnostic findings will be needed to support the diagnosis
- Interpretive report of adaptive behavioral assessment results

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## Diagnostic Evaluation

The most critical component to determining eligibility is the diagnostic evaluation. A diagnostic evaluation is done to determine the nature and significance of an individual's developmental disability (i.e., his or her diagnosis.)

A **Guide to Eligibility Assessment Resources in New York State**, which includes OPWDD-certified clinics and the services they offer, can be found at the OPWDD website or by contacting your Eligibility Coordinator. To find the guide online:

- Go to “Services & Supports” on the homepage and click on “Eligibility,” then choose “Finding Testing/Assessment Services” from the left menu and select “**Guide to Eligibility Assessment Resources in New York State**” or
  - Type the following web address in your internet browser:  
<http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/node/1024>.
- 

## Acceptable Measures of Intellectual and Adaptive Behavior

The following measures provide information about an individual's intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, which is needed for eligibility to be determined. You may wish to share this information with your doctor, or clinicians who will conduct these assessments.

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### Acceptable Measures of Intellectual Functioning

- The Wechsler series of Intelligence Scales
- The Stanford-Binet Scales
- Leiter International Performance Scale
- The Kaufman series of Intelligence scales

#### Considerations for Measures of Intellectual Functioning:

- Brief or partial administration of comprehensive intellectual measures may only be used in circumstances where standardized administration is impossible.
  - Abbreviated measures of intelligence (WASI, K-BIT) are not acceptable as the only measure of intellectual functioning.
  - Language-free instruments (Leiter, CTONI) in combination with the Performance items of a comprehensive IQ test will be considered for individuals who do not speak English, are deaf, or are non-verbal
  - Intelligence tests standardized in English cannot be administered in a different language and then be used for eligibility determinations
- 

### Acceptable Measures of Adaptive Behavior

- Adaptive Behavior Assessment System
  - Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales
  - The Motor Skills Domain only of the Scales of Independent Behavior
- 

Other intelligence tests and/or adaptive behavior measures are acceptable if they are comprehensive, structured, standardized and have up-to-date general population norms. Results from a measurement that is not on this list, but was given prior to the person reaching age 22, can be used to establish a past history of adaptive deficits during the

developmental period. Adaptive behavior measure ratings should reflect the person's actual, typical behavior, not their best behavior under ideal circumstances or with assistance.

Please note: it is expected that current/updated evaluations of intellectual or adaptive functioning are based on the most recent editions of the standardized instrument used.

## The 3-Step Eligibility Determination Process

The process for determining eligibility may involve multiple review steps, and is designed to make sure that every person receives a fair and thorough review.

### 1st Step Review

**At the First Step**, DDRO staff review the eligibility request to make sure it is complete. After this first review, the DDRO notifies the requestor in writing that:

- (a) Eligibility or Provisional Eligibility has been confirmed; or
- (b) The request is incomplete and requires additional documentation; or
- (c) The request is being forwarded for a Second Step Review

### 2nd Step Review

If your eligibility request is forwarded for a **second step review**, a committee of clinicians will evaluate the materials in your request file, and any additional information that you provide. If you are found to be ineligible, you will be able to schedule a meeting with staff to discuss that decision and to request a third step review. You can also request a Medicaid Fair Hearing at this point if you are seeking Medicaid-funded services.

When the Second Step Review is complete, the DDRO will send the requestor a written notice of the determination (also called a Notice of Decision). If the committee determines that the person does have a developmental disability, that person is deemed eligible for OPWDD services. If the committee determines that the person does not have a developmental disability, the person is deemed ineligible for OPWDD services. In that case, you will be able to

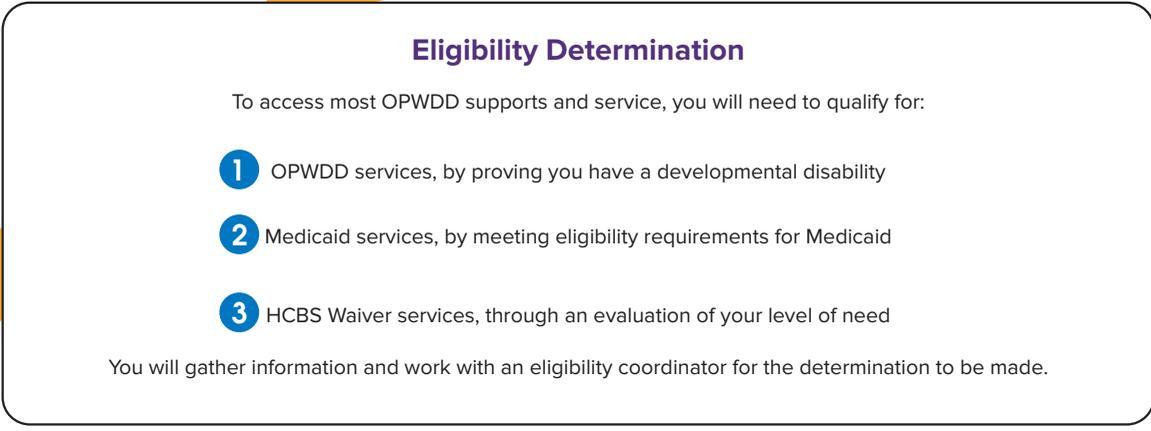
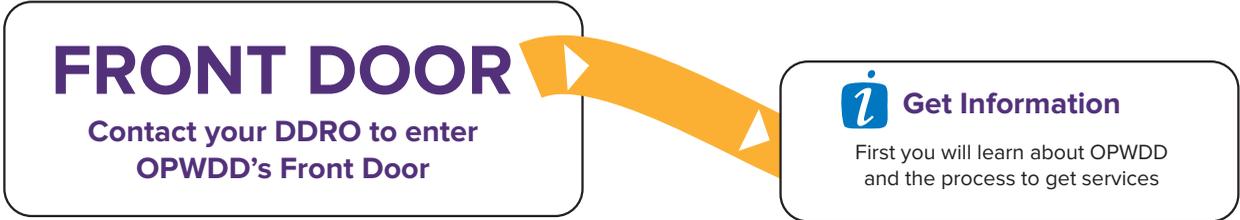
- a) Meet with OPWDD staff to discuss the determination and the documentation reviewed; and
- b) Request a Third Step Review; and
- c) Request a Medicaid Fair Hearing (if seeking Medicaid-funded services)

The person may choose any or all of these options. If a Medicaid Fair Hearing is requested, a Third Step Review will happen automatically. **Please note** that the Notice of Decision will only offer a Medicaid Fair Hearing if the person has requested Medicaid-funded services on the Transmittal for Determination of Developmental Disability Form.

### 3rd Step Review

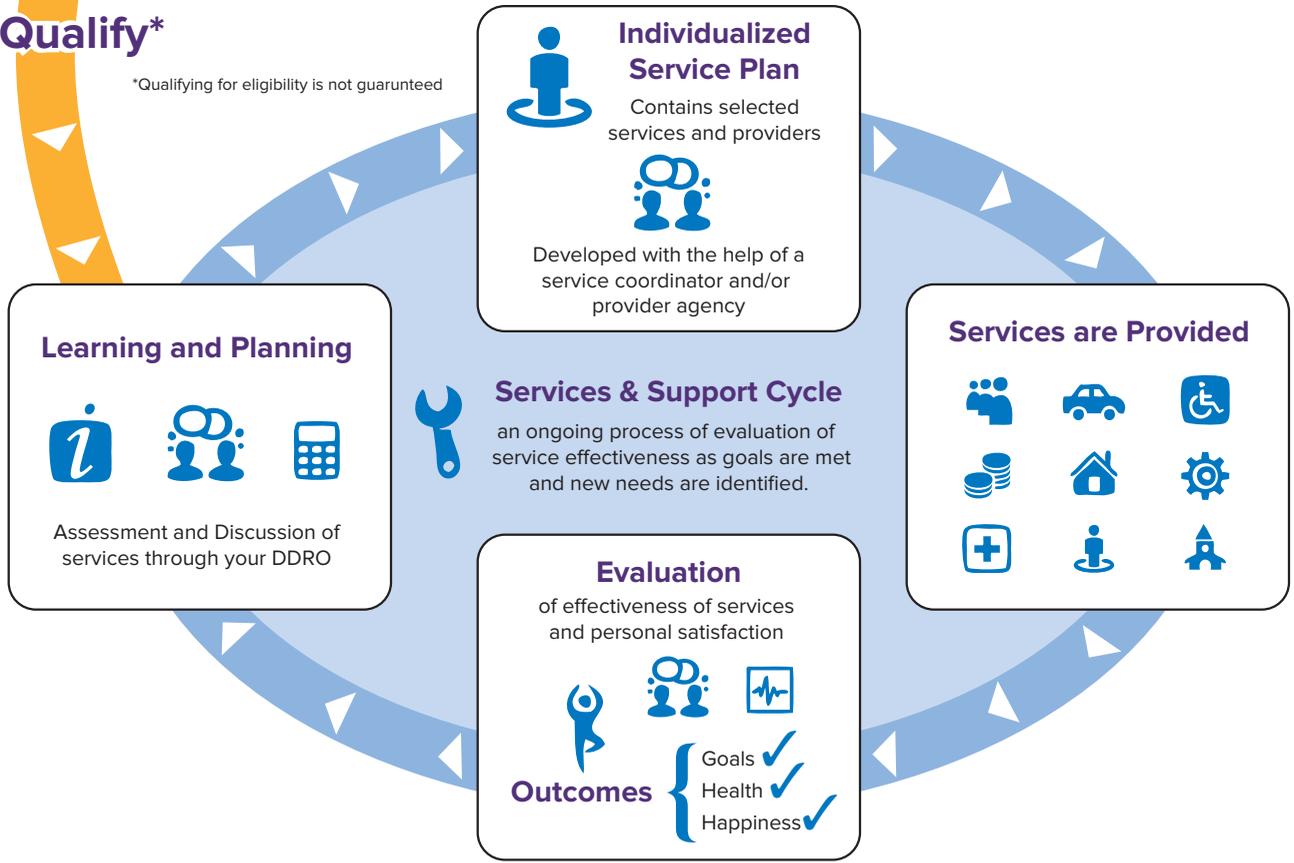
**Third Step Reviews** are done by an independent Eligibility Review Committee of licensed practitioners not involved in the First and Second Step Reviews. The committee reviews the eligibility request and provides recommendations to the DDRO Second Step Review coordinator. The Third Step recommendations are considered by the DDRO Director (or designee) and the requestor is informed of the results, including any changes in the DDRO's determination. Third Step Reviews are completed before Medicaid

Fair Hearing dates.



**Qualify\***

\*Qualifying for eligibility is not guaranteed









**Office for People With  
Developmental Disabilities**

866-946-9733 • [www.opwdd.ny.gov](http://www.opwdd.ny.gov)