



Office for People With  
Developmental Disabilities



# 2025 Annual Report

## **OPWDD 2025 Annual Report**

Pursuant to Mental Hygiene Law Section 5.07

Submitted to the Legislature and Governor

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2025

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



**2**

COMMISSIONER'S LETTER

**3-4**

STRATEGIC PLANNING ENGAGEMENT

**5-6**

DATA-DRIVEN PLANNING

**7-26**

STRATEGIC GOAL PROGRESS

**27**

CONCLUSION

# 2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES



1

## Strengthen Our Workforce, Technology, and Collaboration

Advance the service system's infrastructure by investing in the workforce, updating data technology, and improving decision-making through collaboration.

### Direct Support Workforce

Improve the recruitment, retention, and quality of the direct support workforce.

### Data Access and Technology

Invest in technology that provides more timely information and increases the availability of data.

### Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

Promote stakeholder engagement and collaboration to inform decision-making.

## Objectives



2

## Transform Our System through Innovation and Change

Expand the system's ability to empower people by strengthening supports, simplifying policies, and exploring new approaches to providing services.

### Supports and Services

Strengthen the quality, effectiveness, and sustainability of supports and services.

### Regulatory and Policy Changes

Change policies to create greater flexibility, increase opportunity for community integration, and incentivize improved personal outcomes.

### Research and Innovation

Conduct research, evaluate programs, and test new methods for providing services.

## Objectives



3

## Enhance Our Person-Centered Supports and Services

Improve services throughout the lifespan by making sure supports are holistic, needs-based, equitable, and person-centered.

### Children, Youth, and Young Adults

Ensure children, youth, and young adults receive appropriate and coordinated services.

### Complex Needs

Expand supports for people with complex behavioral and medical needs.

### Cultural and Ethnically Diverse Communities

Address gaps in services for underserved, and culturally and ethnically diverse communities.

## Objectives

# Message from the Commissioner



”

Together, these efforts are leading to a stronger, more connected, and more inclusive system, one that reflects our shared values of dignity, opportunity, and choice for all New Yorkers with developmental disabilities.

Dear Friends, Colleagues, and Advocates,

As I reflect on this past year and the first three years of our strategic plan, I am deeply proud of the progress we've made together and the shared commitment that drives our work every day.

Across New York State, we continue to strengthen our system of supports for people with developmental disabilities from all backgrounds, focusing on what matters most, the people who make this work possible, the tools that help us do it better, and the opportunities that ensure everyone can live, work, and thrive in their community.

At the heart of everything we do is the people we serve, their families, and our workforce. The dedication of everyone in our system, including staff, makes reaching our mission possible, as do the investments we have made in our workforce through better training, stronger career pathways, increased wages, and initiatives that recognize and support those who choose this vital work. Embracing technology to make our systems more modern, transparent, and responsive has also had a positive impact. By using smarter tools and stronger data systems, we are helping connect people to services more efficiently and ensuring decisions are driven by person-centeredness and outcomes, not paperwork and administrative processes.

As we continue to look toward quality improvement, we are strengthening our employment and residential services, streamlining our oversight, and promoting accountability, as well. All while partnering with providers, families, and people with lived disability experience to ensure every person supported by OPWDD is happy, respected, and heard.

Together, these efforts are leading to a stronger, more connected, and more inclusive system, one that reflects our shared values of dignity, opportunity, and choice for all New Yorkers with developmental disabilities.

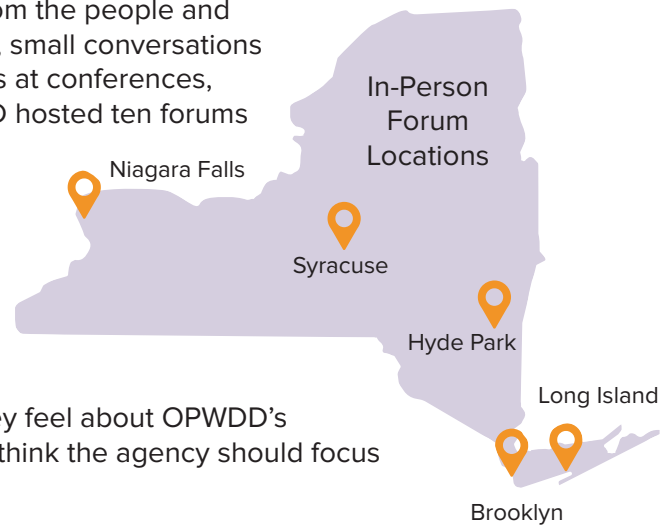
Thank you for your constant advocacy, partnership and commitment to this mission.

With Gratitude,

Willow Baer, Commissioner

# Strategic Planning Engagement

Each year, OPWDD provides a number of opportunities to hear from the people and families we serve. This includes meetings with community groups, small conversations with families, visits to provider agencies and homes, presentations at conferences, and our annual Strategic Planning Forums. This past year, OPWDD hosted ten forums across New York State in the Summer of 2025, with over 800 people participating and close to 150 people providing public comment. Of the ten forums hosted, five were held in-person and five were held virtually. Several of the forums were collaborations with community-based organizations who serve people who speak primarily Spanish, the Chinese-American community, and people with lived disability experience.



People shared feedback on a number of topics, including how they feel about OPWDD’s recent efforts and progress to improve the system and what they think the agency should focus on in the future. Feedback included focus on the need for a system that is easier to navigate, improved access to information and services, and greater flexibility and innovation to account for the changing needs of people with disabilities, their caregivers, and providers.

## Priority Topics of Public Speakers

Self-Direction (Fiscal Intermediaries, Policies, Aging Caregivers)



Housing (Policies, Unmet Needs, Future Planning)



Access (Eligibility, Services, Providers)



Workforce (Shortage, Training, Wages)



Engagement (Future Plans, Collaboration, Advocacy)



Aging (Housing, Planning for the Future)



Care Coordination (Training, Quality, Staffing)



Complex Needs (Unmet Needs, Crisis)



Employment (More Opportunities, Transportation)



Communication (Clarity, Consistency, Ease of Access)



800+

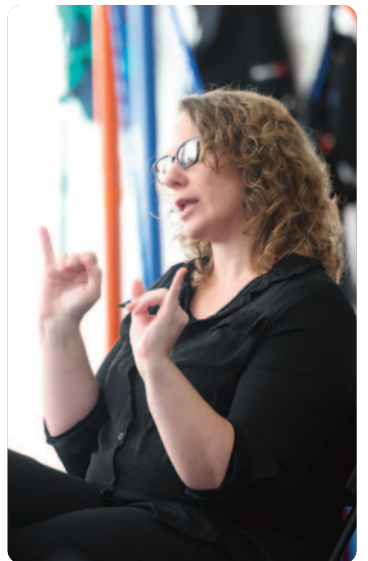
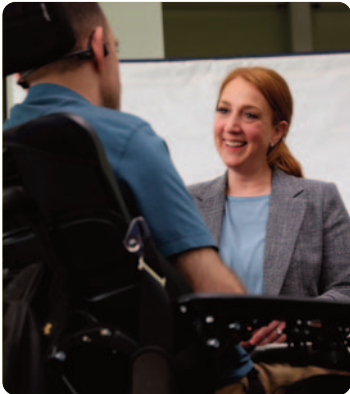
PARTICIPANTS

10

Forums held

150+

People shared feedback during the public comment period



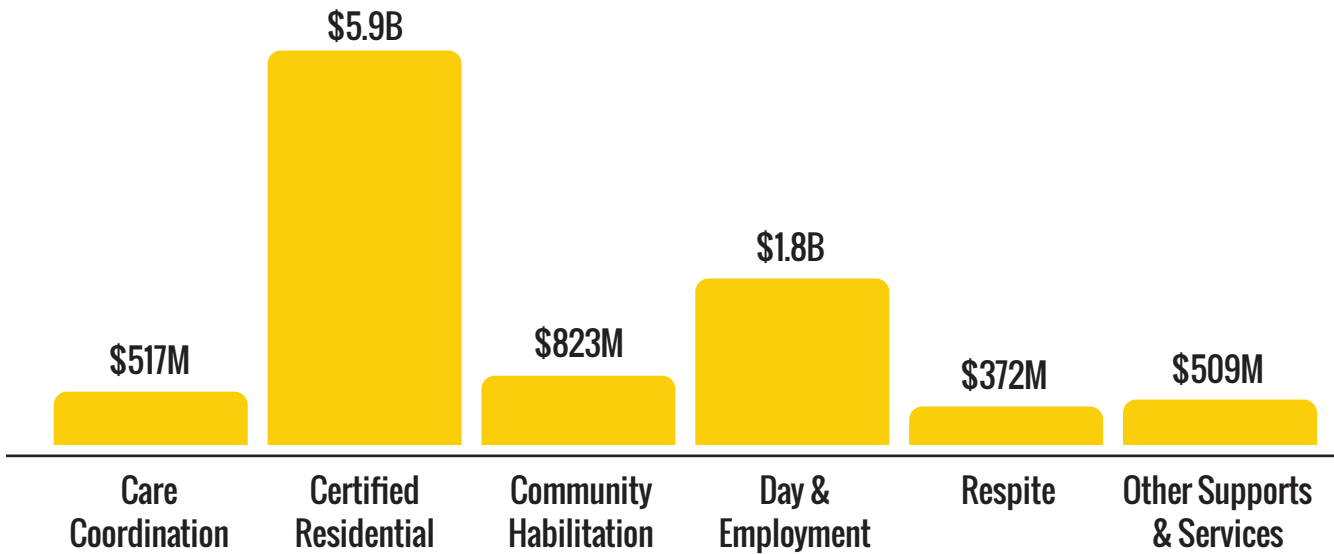
# Data-Driven Planning

## OPWDD BY THE NUMBERS (2024)

**135K** People Served

**\$10B** Medicaid Expenditures

### Medicaid Expenditures by Service Category



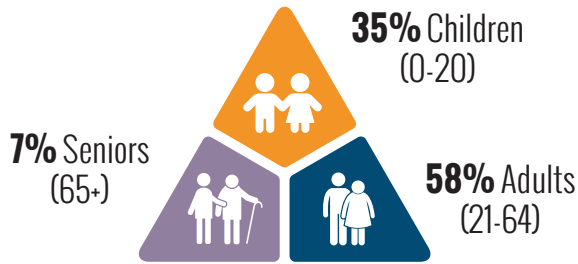
**\$76K** Average Medicaid Expenditure Per Person

### People Served & Average Medicaid Spending By Age

	People Served	Expenditure Per Person
Children (0-20)	47,980	\$20,010
Adults (21-64)	80,679	\$93,663
Seniors (65+)	9,684	\$176,513

Note: OPWDD uses the most recent Medicaid data available based on payments for services that occurred between June 1, 2023, to June 1, 2024.

## Age of People Served



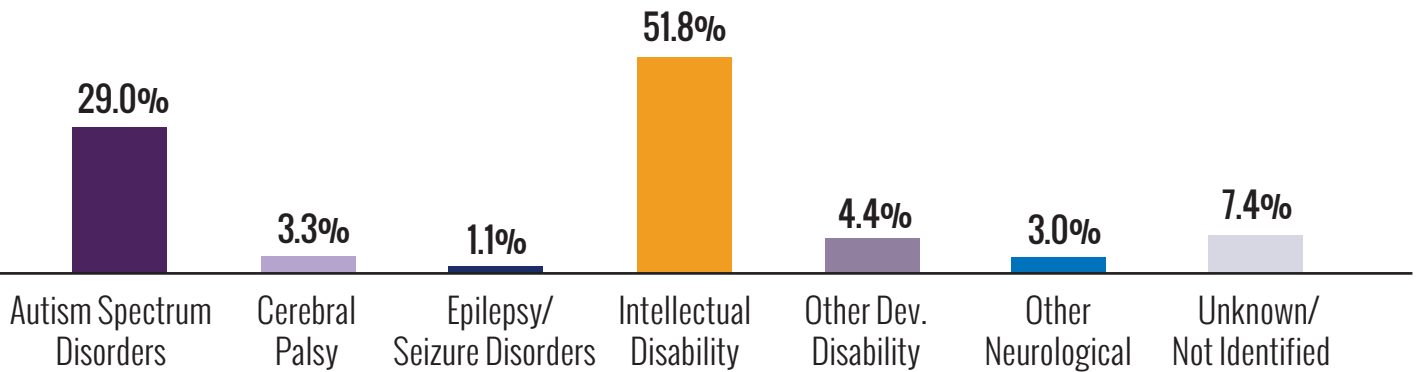
## Sex of People Served

**35% Female**

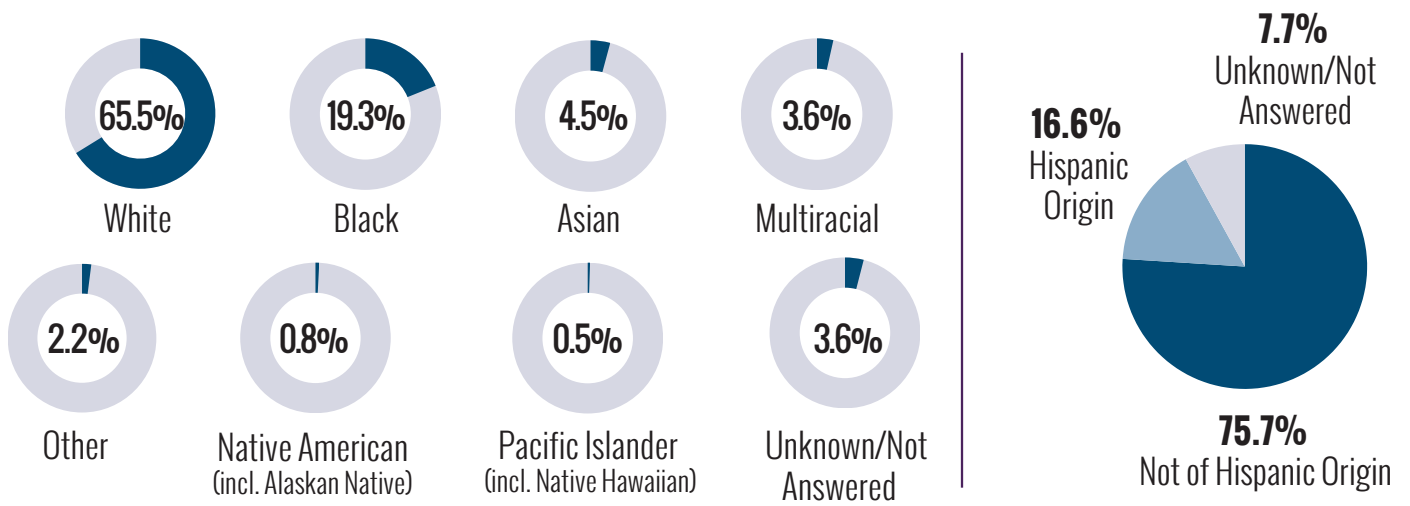
**65% Male**

\*OPWDD promotes inclusivity, and is working to collect and report information on gender identity in addition to sex.

## Primary Diagnosis of People Served



## Race/Ethnicity of People





# GOAL 1

## Strengthen Our Workforce, Technology and Collaboration

Advance the service systems infrastructure by investing in the workforce, updating data technology, and improving decision-making through collaboration.

### Workforce

OPWDD continues to prioritize the workforce as part of our strategic plan efforts. In year three of our 2023-2027 plan, we have built on prior years' work by further expanding training, recruitment, and retention activities for staff, including our work with the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) and the State University of New York (SUNY).

Based on preliminary data from the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration, which is conducting an evaluation of OPWDD's American Rescue Plan funded workforce initiatives, both the NADSP certification and the SUNY DSP (Direct Support Professional) microcredential have

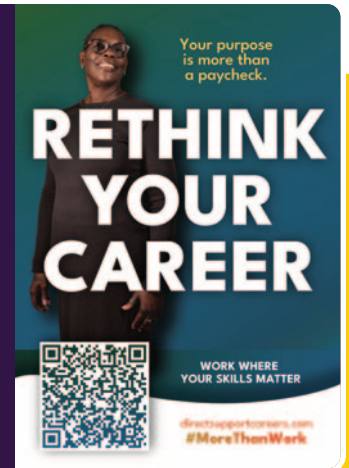
been found to enhance direct care staff confidence and improve retention. To date more than 3,000 NADSP e-badge certifications have been earned by direct support staff across New York State.

**1.6 Million**

people visited the #MoreThanWork Recruitment Campaign website.

**96,000+**

people clicked links to view local job postings



**3,000**

NADSP e-badges earned



**1,300**

Students participated in DSP microcredential certifications across 21 SUNY campuses



**3,000+**

Staff, providers, and care managers trained on key topics



**FLS**

Front Line Supervisor training launched



The #MoreThanWork Recruitment campaign, launched in partnership with OPWDD service providers, continued to deliver an additional \$9 million in advertising across New York State to support recruitment efforts of OPWDD providers and highlight the role of direct support professionals. This advertising has directed more than 1.6 million visitors to [www.directsupportcareers.com](http://www.directsupportcareers.com) since the campaign launched and has delivered more than 96,000 jobseekers to the websites of participating service providers to learn more about their specific job openings.

OPWDD has improved the competency and skills of the workforce within our state operations, voluntary providers, and care coordination organizations (CCOs) through a variety of trainings over the past year. Trainings have included content on trauma informed care, wheelchair securement, fire safety, diversity, equity and inclusion, cultural competence, supporting New Americans to access OPWDD services, Family Support Services reimbursements,

**\$850 Million**

Investment in providers and staff



**\$4.0 Billion**

made available for providers and staff since 2022



and person-centered planning. The trainings have reached over 3,000 members of our state operations staff, non-profit service providers, and CCO workforces, and have received positive feedback from those participating.

OPWDD's Division of State Operations has also created a new training for state operations staff on "Interactions with Law Enforcement," which will be delivered in the coming months to over 15,000 staff. The purpose of the training is to help prepare staff who may interact with first responders during emergencies to communicate clearly, have key information ready and accessible, ensure the safety of others, and understand the necessary follow up required after an incident. Overall, it will help staff collaborate more effectively with first responders.

In the recent budget cycle, Governor Hochul expanded on prior increases, now adding up to four consecutive increases for staff salaries, cost of living, and to cover inflation costs. An additional historic investment of \$850 million was given to our service providers, as well, much of which was used

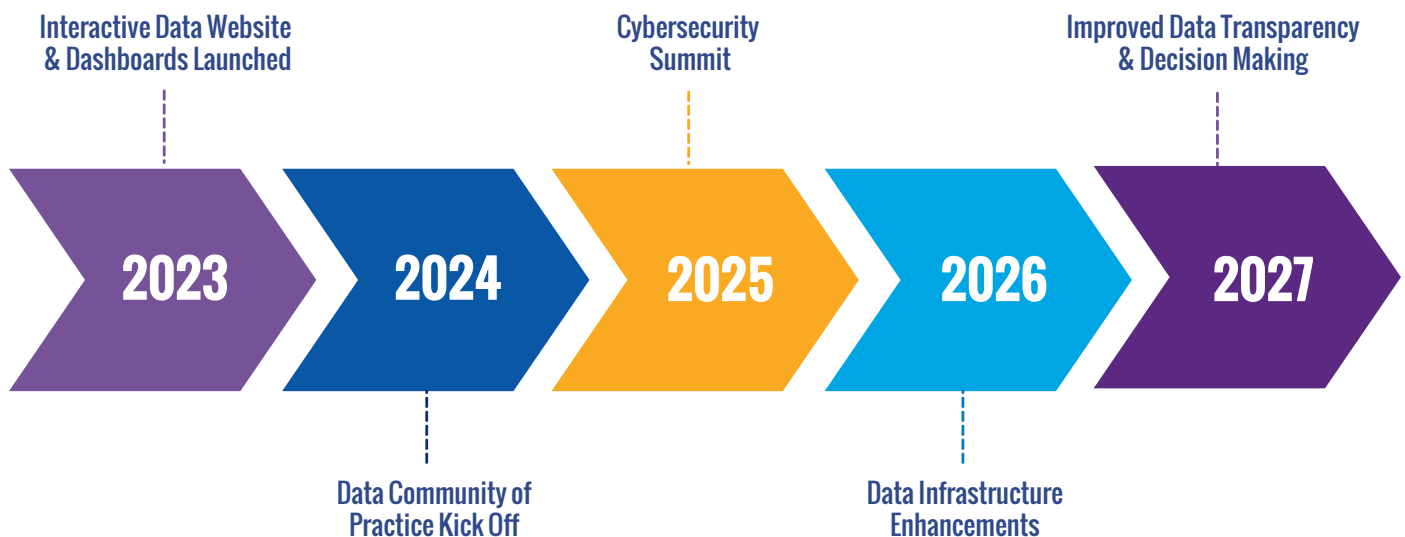
to increase staff wages. Since 2022 alone, the State has made more than \$4 billion available to non-profit providers through these investments.

In the remaining years of the strategic plan, OPWDD will continue to expand access to the DSP microcredential by working with new SUNY and City University of New York (CUNY) campuses across the state, to conduct additional trainings for staff on key areas of quality and safety, consider feasibility of additional financial investments into the system, continue with the third and final year of the #MoreThanWork Recruitment campaign, and explore new opportunities to ensure that the workforce feels supported to provide the best services possible to people with developmental disabilities in New York State.

## Data/Tech

OPWDD is investing in technology and data infrastructure upgrades that will enable the agency to provide more timely information and streamline processes, as part of our strategic plan work.

Since last fall, OPWDD, in collaboration with the Department of Health (DOH), has applied for and received additional funding from the federal government to map current processes and create a transition plan for future modernizations of several different data and IT applications. This multi-year effort includes planning for a new comprehensive customer relationship management system, data warehouse, and billing system, all of which would lead to increased efficiencies, improved information sharing, and reduced administrative burden.



As OPWDD maps out potential options for the future of our IT infrastructure, we have continued to make necessary updates across the agency in the short-term. OPWDD has improved processes and information exchanges related to incidents, site visits, and housing capacity management. The agency has also invested in new call center software for region four, which covers Metro, Brooklyn, and Staten Island, to reduce dropped calls, shorten return call delays, and improve responsiveness.

## Did You Know?

OPWDD started a new **Data Community of Practice (CoP)** with the Developmental Disabilities Advisory Council. This group brings together OPWDD staff, families, and provider partners to learn about data, share ideas, and find better ways to use information to improve services.

In the Fall of 2024, OPWDD also held a Data Summit with leaders from the CCOs. At the summit, OPWDD staff reviewed care coordination and life plan data, as well as health home performance measures, [National Core Indicators](#), and data sets from other state agencies like DOH and the Office of Mental Health (OMH). Based on the success of the initial engagement, OPWDD and the CCO's continued to collaborate on conversations around improving data quality, identifying potential performance measures, and exploring how to best leverage data together moving forward.

Additionally, in late 2024 and early 2025, OPWDD released an [updated data webpage](#), making it easier for people to access and navigate information. The agency also shared new data points related to self-direction, providers, workforce, and OPWDD services. Going forward, OPWDD will be expanding New York's participation in the National Core Indicator (NCI) Family Survey and continuing to update what data we share and how we share it to increase transparency and accessibility of information and improve future planning. Similarly, we have partnered with OMH to increase CCO access to PSYCKES data, which is a valuable resource to support service delivery and outcomes for people.

In a continued effort to strengthen cybersecurity, OPWDD hosted the 2025 Cybersecurity Summit in partnership with Utica University. This summit brought together a diverse group of people, including Chief Information Officers, representatives from state agencies and professional associations, OPWDD service providers, and Utica University students. The summit served as a platform to share insights and research on critical factors affecting the people that we serve, ranging from the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to the importance of neurodiversity in cybersecurity. It also highlighted the work of OPWDD and showcased innovative programs, partnerships, and research initiatives focused on cybersecurity, compliance, and systems modernization.

In addition to the Cybersecurity Summit, OPWDD has prioritized the establishment of a robust information security program. This initiative includes the publication and implementation of multiple basic security policies designed to strengthen the agency's overall security posture and protect sensitive data. These policies represent a vital advancement in securing the digital well-being of the people we serve.



## Engagement and Collaboration

Including the voices and perspectives of people with lived disability experience, caregivers, providers, and staff is a priority of OPWDD. During the last year, the agency has continuously identified and implemented opportunities to gather feedback and input from people who interact with the system. In addition to OPWDD's annual strategic planning forums, the agency has co-facilitated workgroups, hosted regular meetings, partnered with experts in the field, and created opportunities for conversation.

This year, OPWDD launched the agency's new Office of Advocacy, including a team of peer support professionals located in the Commissioner's Office. Focused on supporting people and families who need assistance or peer support, the unit employs several people with disabilities across the state who help inform the work of the agency using their perspectives as people living with disabilities. Their work includes reviewing communications and materials to ensure accessibility, helping with engagement activities, and providing their expertise to divisions across the agency as they create and modify programs, policies, and procedures. Since the creation of the unit, they have attended over 30 events to share resources, provided training to new staff at 45 new employee trainings, and shared expertise on over 15 different committees and workgroups. OPWDD also recently launched a new [Family Advocacy website](#) with information and resources for family members to use as they navigate the service delivery system.

2024 also saw the launch of the first statewide Ombuds program for people with developmental disabilities. The [Independent Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities Ombuds](#) program (IDDO) launched in December of 2024. Operated by the Community Service Society of NY, the Ombuds program was created to support and assist people who are navigating the OPWDD service delivery system, while also helping those who may be experiencing challenges. The program helps people to understand and preserve their rights while navigating the OPWDD system.

We have also continued to bolster the [Developmental Disabilities Advisory Council's \(DDAC\)](#) involvement in agency efforts through process improvement activities and co-facilitating two new collaborations with the Data CoP and the Commissioner's Taskforce on Aging. The aging taskforce was launched in

## Advocacy and Peer Support Activities

30+

Events attended



45+

New Employee Orientation (NEO)  
Trainings conducted



15+

Committees and  
workgroups served on



September, is co-chaired by a DDAC member and staff from OPWDD's Commissioner's Office and is comprised of several external experts and people with lived experience. The goal of the taskforce, over the next year, is to draft a report with a set of specific and actionable recommendations for the OPWDD Commissioner to incorporate in the agency's next strategic plan. The recommendations will be based on experts, experiences of members, presentations, and several deep dive sessions on various topics related to aging in the developmental disability field.

In addition, OPWDD works alongside counties and local government units to understand needs around the state. The agency reviews the strategic plans of all counties, participates in regularly scheduled planning workgroups, and assists with leading quarterly meetings with OMH, Office of Addiction Services (OASAS), and the New York State Conference of Local Mental Hygiene Directors (CLMHD) to discuss cross-systems challenges and solutions.

Similarly, OPWDD staff have continued engagement with the Office of New American's (ONA) Ramirez June Initiative, which provides information and resources to new American families on disability-related services and supports. Resources from the project have been shared in trainings with care managers, OPWDD regional and state operations staff, and community members and organizations. Among the many resources created as part of the initiative, was a multilingual resource book called "Voyage," which supports the early identification of disabilities. The resource is available in ten

languages, free of charge, and more than 5,000 copies have been shared to date.

OPWDD staff participated in other statewide agency projects, taskforces, councils, and workgroups, as well. For example, staff serve on the Most Integrated Setting Coordinating Council (MISCC), Employment 1st and Olmstead workgroups, serve as representatives on the Council on Developmental Disabilities (CDD), and participate in workgroups with the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), OMH, DOH and New York State Education Department (NYSED).

As our agency continues to focus on engagement and collaboration, we are also taking time to look at how we connect with people across the system. With support from Georgetown University's National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC), are reviewing the different ways we listened to people this year and gathering feedback on what worked well and what could be improved. Georgetown has

already shared ideas on how we can strengthen cultural and linguistic competence in our engagement work and a full report will be released.

Involving people from different backgrounds who are connected to OPWDD is very important to us. We will keep trying new ways to engage so that everyone who shares their thoughts with our agency feels heard, valued, and respected.



## Continual Engagement

OPWDD meets regularly with people, family members, advisory committees, Boards of Visitors, providers and Provider Associations, and CCO leadership throughout the year to discuss needs, answer questions, and provide updates.

## Commissioner Conversations

This year, the Commissioner has hosted many small and intimate conversations with family members and people receiving or trying to obtain OPWDD services to hear directly about their experiences with navigating our service system. These conversations will continue in the coming year to inform short-term and long-term planning.

## Regional Outreach & trainings

OPWDD Regional Offices participated in over 300 local opportunities to share information about services and supports with school districts, CCO's, police, hospitals, and the public, reaching close to 25,000 people.

## Listening Sessions

In Collaboration with Georgetown, provider conversations and family listening sessions were hosted to hear about experiences accessing and providing culturally and linguistically competent services. We heard from more than 300 providers and close to 300 families.

## Legislative Outreach

OPWDD staff helped address almost 400 legislative constituent cases in 2025.

## Community Partnerships

OPWDD built and strengthened relationships with community-based organizations and cultural liaisons across NYS and across cultural groups that have never before interacted with or heard about OPWDD.



## GOAL 2

### Transform Our System through Innovation and Change

Expand the system’s ability to empower people by strengthening supports, simplifying policies, and exploring new approaches to providing services.

#### Employment

As an agency, OPWDD has undertaken several efforts in the past three years to expand the system’s ability to empower people and strengthen supports.

In alignment with New York State’s commitment to becoming an Employment First State, OPWDD has partnered with the Chief Disability Office and other state agencies to prioritize employment as the first option of consideration for people with developmental disabilities. At this year’s Disability Rights and Employment Awareness Month (DREAM) Symposium, we announced the creation of an incredible new partnership between the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities, the Office of the Chief Disability Officer and the University at Albany, State University for the Center for Assistive Technologies. The Center will research, evaluate, test, create and report on assistive technologies that can help all people with disabilities be successful in employment. A core focus of this partnership is building a public-private consortium involving industry leaders, academia, government, non-profits, and others to foster collaboration, share resources, develop new technologies and provide user feedback on technologies, ensuring AI algorithms inclusively account for people with disabilities and promote independence.

OPWDD staff are actively engaged in regular conversations with Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) to discuss braiding services and better collaborating to increase the number of people with disabilities employed.

We have worked with providers to update our Pathway to Employment regulations and trainings to increase the accessibility of the program and reduce administrative burden on providers and staff. Likewise, we have developed and are sharing additional guidance and

trainings for providers on supporting people with self-employment and improving day habilitation staff skills on helping people to reach their employment goals. OPWDD has met with more than 200 agencies to discuss employment outcomes and vocational services, collect feedback, and provide technical assistance.

Additionally, we have continued to implement our Career Specific Vocational Training (CSVT), which close to 400 people have now completed, almost doubling participation in the past year. The training helps people be better prepared for their jobs, eventually leading to improved career outcomes for those who are involved. Close to 80% of people who have taken the training have since been recommended for employment. This training will continue through 2027.

To improve understanding and knowledge of employment supports that OPWDD provides, we are working with the DDAC’s employment committee and other state agencies to create new informational materials and revise and expand upon the information available on the OPWDD website with people with disabilities, family members, providers, and CCO’s. Similarly, we have created new materials to engage potential employers in hiring people with developmental disabilities.

**400+**  
people completed career specific vocational trainings

**80%**  
of CSVT trainees recommended for employment

Icons: A person with arms raised, and a group of three people with three stars above them.

# OPWDD Housing Strategy Update:

In our 2024 Annual Report, OPWDD included a short-term housing strategy that focuses on key areas of need identified by the community and agency leadership. The overarching goals of that strategy were to stabilize access to OPWDD-certified residential services, reducing administrative burdens for our provider network, strengthening the state's ability to serve people with the highest levels of need, and enhancing people's ability to remain in the community safely and with support. The short-term initiatives identified were intended to provide more immediate relief while complementing agency efforts meant to strengthen residential services and supports in the long term.

## Housing Capacity Management

**Commitment: Build an IT platform to match people with available housing opportunities**

- ✓ Phase 1 of this IT project went live in July 2025, making it easier for CCO's to get information about people on the Certified Residential Opportunities (CRO) list.

## State Operations

**Commitment: Expand State Operation's role as a safety net provider for people with complex needs**

- ✓ Efforts to support State Operations role as safety network provider continued through the work of 9 operational Comprehensive Adult Transitional Homes (CATH).

## Provider Support

**Commitment: Support providers with tailored technical assistance and training**

- ✓ Offered training and technical assistance to providers on several topics including quality improvement for residential providers.
- ✓ Collaborated with the Attorney General's Charities Bureau to finalize a Board of Directors for OPWDD providers.
- ✓ Launched the Bureau of Technical Assistance to better support providers housing people with complex needs.
- ✓ Invested \$850 million in service providers through rate rebasing across our service delivery system.

## Assistive & Enabling Technology

**Commitment: Support access to new technology that supports community inclusion and independent living**

- ✓ Eight non-profit organizations were awarded certificates to provide Home Enabling Supports (HES) to people across NYS. Training on HES is being provided to staff, CCOs, and providers with a goal of making the service available in early 2026.

## Housing Education Materials

**Commitment: Create and share new resources on housing options and how to access them**

- ✓ OPWDD staff is finishing work on new informational materials on housing options and how to access them. These materials, including videos, will be posted on the OPWDD website in early 2026.

## Housing Innovation

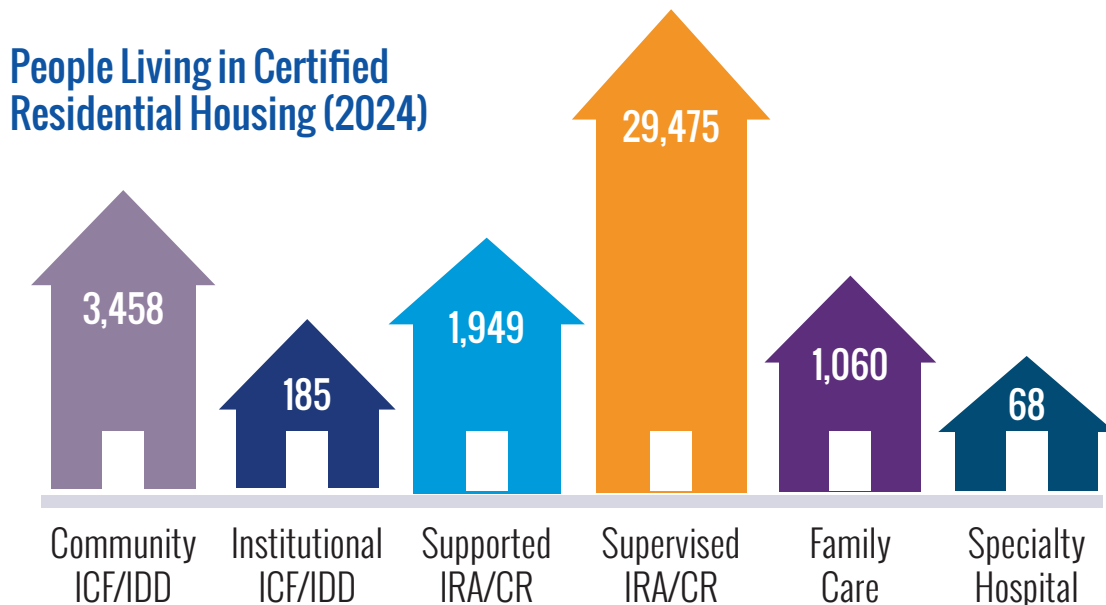
**Commitment: Promote innovation in housing services**

- ✓ Work continued on the Supportive Residential Habilitation Grant which supported over 30 people to transition to less restrictive homes, supported 24 people who chose to age in place, piloted use of 40 assistive technology devices, and engaged over 1,000 people. Integrated Supportive Housing saw the opening of 4 new projects and addition of 136 affordable housing units.

## Administrative Reforms

**Commitment: Identify opportunities for improvement and streamlining in OPWDD procedures**

- ✓ Assistive Technology (AT)/Environmental modifications (Emod)/Vehicle modification (Vmod): We have updated the OPWDD webpage and issued revised guidance and training for AT/Emod/Vmod services to improve understanding. We are also creating a policy manual which details, clarifies, and streamlines service processes while we update forms and templates to make them uniform.
- ✓ Prior Property Approval (PPA)- The agency has drafted a checklist for providers to use when submitting requests and has catalogued training and education for OPWDD staff to better assist providers with PPA packages. We are also assessing internal processes to identify potential areas to streamline.
- ✓ Housing Subsidy – OPWDD is in the process of updating the Housing Subsidy Administrative Memorandum to be responsive to changing needs, markets, and feedback received. We expect to publish the updated policy in the coming months.



## Health Equity

OPWDD has prioritized strengthening health services and reducing barriers to accessing health and dental services over the past two years, alongside Governor Hochul. New York State is investing \$25 million into the health field to establish Regional Disability Health Clinics. The funding will be used to support capital projects that reduce accessibility barriers and increase access to services, including medical, dental and other physical health services provided at Article 16 and Article 28 clinics. A request for applicants was released in August 2025 and funding is expected to be released to awarded entities in early 2026.

The 2025-2026 NYS budget also invests \$75 million over a 5-year period to modernize and enhance the physical infrastructure of the Institute for Basic Research (IBR) in Staten Island. The investment will be used to develop a Genomics Core Facility to provide customized identification of underlying conditions for people with developmental disabilities, as well as to establish a Willowbrook Center for Learning.

In addition to the financial investments made, OPWDD has created new trainings and communities of practice on health and dental related issues. A statewide Community of Practice (CoP) for Nurses is being launched in the coming months. This CoP will



include discussions on developing an annual approved medication administration recertification process, updating forms that track and document trainings for DSPs, redesigning Plans of Nursing Services, and developing an online resource library. It will also help nursing staff to learn more from each other and stay connected.

Other trainings on overcoming dental health barriers, identifying common health issues among people with disabilities, and understanding how one's behavior can be a form of communication related to one's medical needs, have been held for OPWDD State Operations staff. To date, over 800 staff have participated in these trainings, with posted recordings being available for additional people to participate in the future.

Additional efforts related to dental access specifically have also been underway. OPWDD participates in a Dental Taskforce that consists of dentists and experts in the field who are interested in improving dental services for people with developmental disabilities. The taskforce has workgroups that discuss access to care and care equity, oral sedation, behavior management, and best practices. Likewise, OPWDD's Division of State Operations is exploring building its capacity to provide dental services, including light sedation, across the state for those who are supported by OPWDD in both our state run and non-profit programs. In combination, OPWDD hopes the results of these investments of time and funding will increase health equity for those with developmental disabilities across the state.

A dark purple rounded rectangle with a yellow horizontal bar at the top left. It contains three rows of information, each with a large white number, a description, and a white icon. Row 1: "\$25M investment in Regional Disability Clinics" with a white cross icon in a circle. Row 2: "\$75M investment in the Institute for Basic Research" with a white microscope icon. Row 3: "\$800+ staff trained to better understand and identify health and dental needs" with a white icon of a person pointing at a whiteboard to a group of people.

**\$25M**  
investment in Regional Disability Clinics

**\$75M**  
investment in the Institute for Basic Research

**\$800+**  
staff trained to better understand and identify health and dental needs



## Self-Direction

During the past year, OPWDD conducted an [evaluation of our self-direction model](#). The evaluation included opportunities for people to provide feedback on what is working and what could be improved within self-direction. Feedback was received from over 9,000 people, including those who self-direct, family members, people who receive OPWDD services but do not self-direct, Fiscal Intermediary (FI) staff, Support Brokers, Care Managers, OPWDD staff and representatives from peer states and national experts. Results of the evaluation include several high-level and specific recommendations for OPWDD to consider.

For more information on the results of the evaluation, see the [full final report](#) and the corresponding [plain-language version](#), that are available on the OPWDD website.

OPWDD will also be issuing a self-direction manual to support people who choose to self-direct and their caregivers, based on feedback received during the evaluation and in working with the DDAC's Self-Direction Committee. The manual is expected to be shared in 2026.

“My daughter has many friends and lives independently because of her self-direction budget.”

*Parent in Hyde Park, NY*



## Self-Direction Evaluation Recommendations

1. Make sure all people who choose self-direction can access it.
2. Make sure people get help to reach their goals.
3. Better understand children who self-direct.
4. Improve the quality of Fiscal Intermediary services.
5. Improve the effectiveness of Care Coordination Organizations to support people who self-direct.
6. Strengthen the ability of Support Brokers to support people self-directing.
7. Make Individual Directed Goods and Services (IDGS) easier to understand and access.
8. Use data to improve outcomes for people who self-direct and make the model cost effective in the long term.

# CCO Evaluation Recommendations

The results of that feedback were included in the care management final report that was published on the OPWDD website in April. The report shares several insights and recommendations, some of which include:

- Increasing training, improving communication, and clarifying roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in care management
- Improving the clarity and consistency of care management policies and procedures
- Recognizing staffing challenges, turnover, high caseloads and the need to find ways to reduce administrative burden
- Better addressing transition, complex needs, and cultural and linguistic competency

## Care Management

Like self-direction, OPWDD conducted a significant [evaluation of care coordination and management](#) this past year. The evaluation collected feedback from over 3,000 people, including self-advocates, families, CCO's, and providers across the State through surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

OPWDD is committed to improving the quality of care management and has hired a new team to conduct case reviews and CCO recertifications. Staff will be redesigning the CCO recertification and evaluate process to strengthen focus on quality outcomes for people in addition to regulatory compliance.

In response to the recommendations, OPWDD also began several additional improvement efforts in collaboration with CCOs. We have updated the policy manual that CCOs use to administer the program, helping to improve clarity and strengthen expectations, and have improved information and data sharing with CCOs. Additionally, we are co-facilitating five different Communities of Practice (CoP) with CCOs, one of which has been focused on strengthening CCO clinical teams by learning and

sharing best practices on serving people with more complex and critical needs.

Similarly, we have provided several trainings to care managers we have hosted 14 different regional events with over 1,400 CCO staff and Care Managers attending and Quarterly Care Management conferences with over 2,000 staff attending, this past year. Topics covered in these events and trainings, include the front door process, waiver enrollment and eligibility, transitions, life planning, cultural and linguistic competence, supporting new Americans in accessing OPWDD services, and information on Family Support Services.

In collaboration with CCOs, providers, and others, OPWDD is prioritizing additional opportunities to improve the program using the findings of the evaluation. There is already alignment on the recommendations to design a detailed framework that defines the roles and responsibilities of care managers, providers, and other team members more clearly, and for CCOs to better document service approvals. The next step is to engage with CCOs to confirm alignment on additional immediate priorities, clarify activities already underway, and, as we move into strategic discussions, develop a workplan to advance longer-term system improvement with consideration of the short-term and long-term impact, value, and resources required, to implement specific recommendations.

## Care Manager Training

**14+** Events

events to train care managers



**1,400+**

educated over 1400 care managers on key topics



**2,000+**

over 2000 CCO staff attended Quarterly Care Management Conferences



## Supported Decision-Making (SDM)

In our agency's mission to promote opportunities for people to achieve greater autonomy and self-determination, OPWDD continues to support and encourage Supported Decision-Making as an alternative to adult guardianship. To this end, OPWDD issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in the Spring of 2025 to expand and scale the Supported Decision-Making Facilitation model created under prior Supported Decision-Making pilots in NYS. The contract is expected to be in place, making facilitated Supported Decision-Making widely available in 2026.

Additionally, in August of 2025, OPWDD published final regulations to implement Supported Decision-Making as outlined in Article 82 of the Mental Hygiene Law, making formal Supported Decision-Making Agreements enforceable and recognizable by third parties who might otherwise have required a surrogate's or guardian's involvement. This makes it easier for people who are using formal Supported Decision-Making Agreements to enforce decisions they have made in accordance with their agreements, and provide consent for themselves, with some limited exceptions. The regulation also clarifies the extent to which informal Supported Decision-Making can be used by people who do not wish to pursue New York's formal model. Finally, the regulation creates standards under which the Supported Decision-Making Facilitation service can be delivered. More information on the specifics of the regulation can be found on the OPWDD website.

## Family Support Services (FSS)

In the spring, OPWDD released a new RFP for [Family Support Services \(FSS\)](#), in an effort to bolster FSS services across the state. OPWDD understands the importance that services and supports like those provided under FSS play for families who are helping to support people with developmental disabilities who live at home with them. The agency worked collaboratively with the Statewide FSS Committee to determine priority areas and develop the RFP. The local FSS council members are also supporting OPWDD with the technical review of applications to ensure alignment with service goals. Through this effort, in the coming months, OPWDD will invest close to \$20 million into programs across

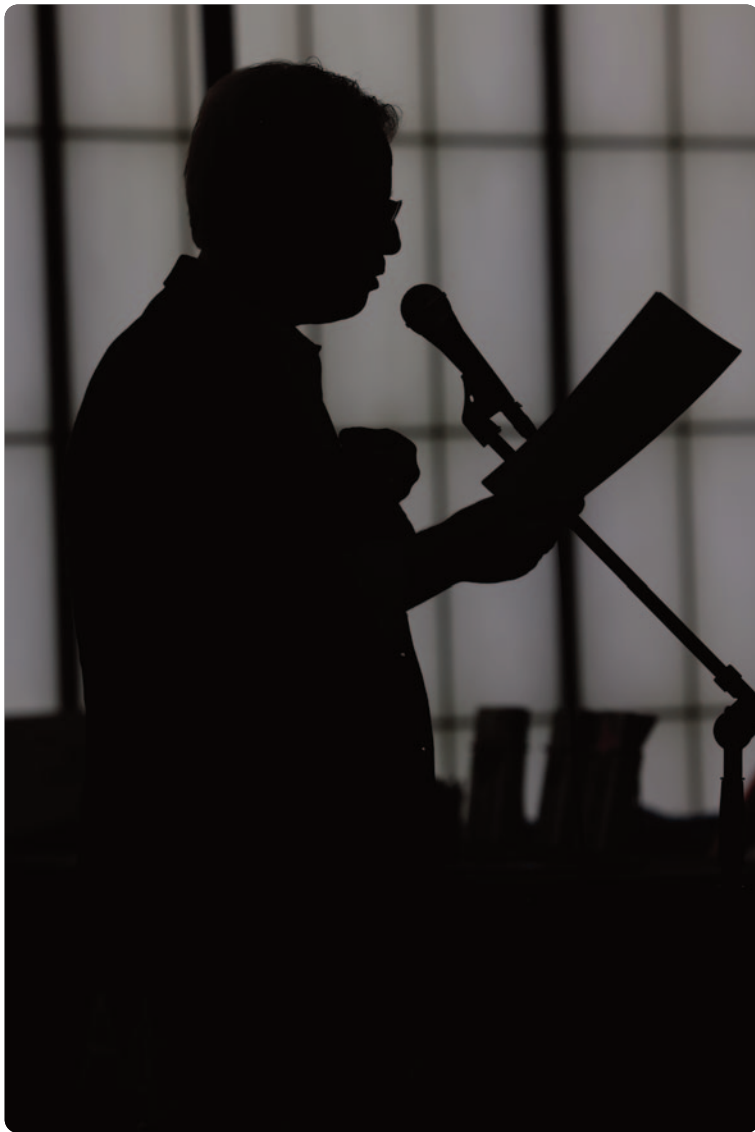
the state to help support families who have loved ones with a disability living at home with them. The agency will continue to evaluate and explore additional opportunities to strengthen the program moving forward, recognizing its imperative role in our service delivery system.

## CAS/CANS Assessment

Based on feedback received from community engagement and strategic planning forums, in 2025, OPWDD is prioritizing increased understanding of the agency's assessment tools and processes. In March a new educational video was posted to the [OPWDD website](#) to help people better understand the Coordinated Assessment System (CAS). The video shares key elements of the CAS process, benefits of the tool, how it works and how it will be used going forward. Additional materials, including a video that highlights the experience of a person with a developmental disability navigating the CAS process, are also available on the OPWDD website.

In advance of public informational sessions, OPWDD presented several statewide informational sessions to CCO partners, and provider agency leadership and their key staff. This effort was undertaken to enhance CCO and provider agencies awareness of the information that would be shared with people and families. These efforts furthered their ability, along with OPWDD, to support questions and inquiries post the public informational sessions.





# CAS/CANS Info Sessions

Info sessions were held online and in person across NYS with a goal of:



Improving understanding of the CAS/CANS assessments



Answering your questions



Empowering people and families to participate and advocate

Similarly, OPWDD's Division of Statewide Services has supported several public presentations on the assessment process, including at various major conferences. Likewise, a statewide public information series about assessments for both adults and children occurred in the fall. The series included over ten sessions with providers, parents, self-advocates and others, across the state and virtually, to share more information on assessment and answer any questions that the public may have.

In alignment with our goals and objectives around data informed decision-making and transparency, OPWDD also created a small workgroup with agencies to support opportunities for data sharing, outreach, and collaboration with providers, and is planning a 5-part training series for care managers on roles and responsibilities with CAS assessments.

The agency will continue to evaluate and identify opportunities to leverage the CAS for planning

efforts moving forward and will complement those efforts with additional education, training, and information sharing as needed.

## Quality Improvement

OPWDD is looking at several ways to improve our agency operations and quality of services. We have expanded support to providers through new trainings, sharing more resources, and creating materials on a wide range of topics. We continue to strengthen the quality, effectiveness, and sustainability of our supports through the launch of several different quality improvement projects that include looking at the timeliness of investigations, conducting thousands of provider site reviews, and using data to inform improvement efforts.

All of these efforts, among others like ongoing updates to our IT applications and platforms,



## Quality Improvement Projects

- Developed preliminary Agency Profile Reports that share data on provider performance.
- Provided trainings to providers on the Fatal Five, PICA, emergency preparedness, fire prevention, provider performance, timely investigations for critical incidents, and other health and safety topics.
- Collaborated with the New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs and family groups to improve information sharing on incidents.

contribute to the agency’s progress toward meeting the requirements of the federal Access Rule. The rule seeks to improve transparency, accountability, access, and quality across the system by ensuring that agencies are monitoring and sharing more data publicly, establishing a grievance process, strengthening their incident management processes, and more effectively assessing service access and authorization.

The work that OPWDD is doing for the Access Rule will result in improved experiences for people, family members, caregivers, providers, and Care Coordination Organizations.

We have several projects underway that will enable us to meet these goals, including establishment of a new grievance process for OPWDD, which will complement the independent ombuds program. The grievance process will provide an additional opportunity for people with specific types or levels of concerns to report them directly to OPWDD so they can be addressed in a timely and effective

manner. More information will be shared on the process, including educational materials in the near future. Additional information on OPWDD’s efforts around implementation of other aspects of the Access Rule, including opportunities for engagement, will be shared in the spring of 2026.

**9,800 +**  
site reviews



**2,000+**  
person-centered reviews





## GOAL 3

### Enhance Our Person-Centered Supports and Services

Improve services throughout the lifespan by making sure supports are holistic, needs-based, equitable, and person-centered.

#### Crisis & Complex Needs

OPWDD is working collaboratively at the state and local level with several partner agencies to better support people (including youth) with more complex behavioral, mental, and physical needs as well as those who may be in crisis situations. These activities are in direct response to feedback received from caregivers, providers, Care Coordination Organizations (CCOs), and local government units.

OPWDD works in close collaboration with OMH on a number of different projects to support people with the most complex needs in both service delivery systems. This includes launching six new Critical

Time Transition Programs (CTTP) and Enhanced Step-Down programs across the State. These programs are designed to support people in crisis and their families to stay in community settings or transition more easily back to community settings in-patient settings.

OPWDD also collaborated with the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to support foster care providers and parents who host children with developmental disabilities. Through this collaboration, a toolkit and trainings were developed and administered.

We have invested in several opportunities to support people with transitions from more intensive settings to



#### Critical Time Intervention & Transitions

OPWDD collaborated with OMH on the creation and launch of six Critical Time Transition Programs (CTTP) and five Enhanced Step-Down programs located in each OMH region throughout the state which are expected to open in 2026.



#### Specialty Hospitals

The agency has supported capacity expansion of an existing specialty hospital at Terrance Cardinal Cooke from 57 to 72 beds, and creation of a new specialty hospital at the Center for Discovery to serve 18 children and adolescents with complex medical and behavioral needs.



#### Biobehavioral Health Unit

In collaboration with OMH, and Upstate Medical Center, OPWDD supported the creation and opening of an 11-bed inpatient unit for youth aged 5-17 who demonstrate challenging behaviors. The unit has provided support to nearly 20 children since late 2024.

# Comprehensive Adult Transitional Homes (CATH)

9

Programs currently operating



3

Programs expected in 2026/27



5 out of 6

State Operations regions covered



less restrictive ones through testing new models, providing funding opportunities, and conducting new trainings, as well.

## Comprehensive Adult Transitional Homes (CATH)

OPWDD continues to increase our footprint of short-term intensive residential services to support people transitioning from more acute clinical services through continuing new development of Comprehensive Adult Transitional Homes (CATH). Currently, 9 CATH programs are operational throughout NYS in 5 of the 6 State Operations Regions with a further 3 programs expected to be opened in 2026 and 2027. Program locations are identified and selected based on regional needs and partnerships with local non-profit providers.

CATH programs are designed to be transitional, with a target length of stay no more than 18 months. The length of stay for the first group of graduates was approximately 14 months. CATH programs have already demonstrated the transformative impact this

kind of support can provide. After an extended period in an emergency room psychiatric center and under one-to-one supervision, a participant in one of our CATH programs received the time and supports needed to transition to a less restrictive supervision level and become more autonomous. They can now participate in more social opportunities, engage more fully in the community, and are transitioning from the CATH program to a new home. The CATH program provided a space for the person to learn new coping mechanisms, independence, and social skills that have been invaluable to their successful reintegration into the community, as well as their overall happiness and ability to thrive.

In addition to our CATH program, OPWDD awarded transitional payments to providers in 2024 and 2025 to help support people transitioning back into the community. In 2024, 34 providers received awards to move more than 100 people from institutional settings to the community, and in 2025, 33 providers received awards to assist with the transition of 100 additional people.

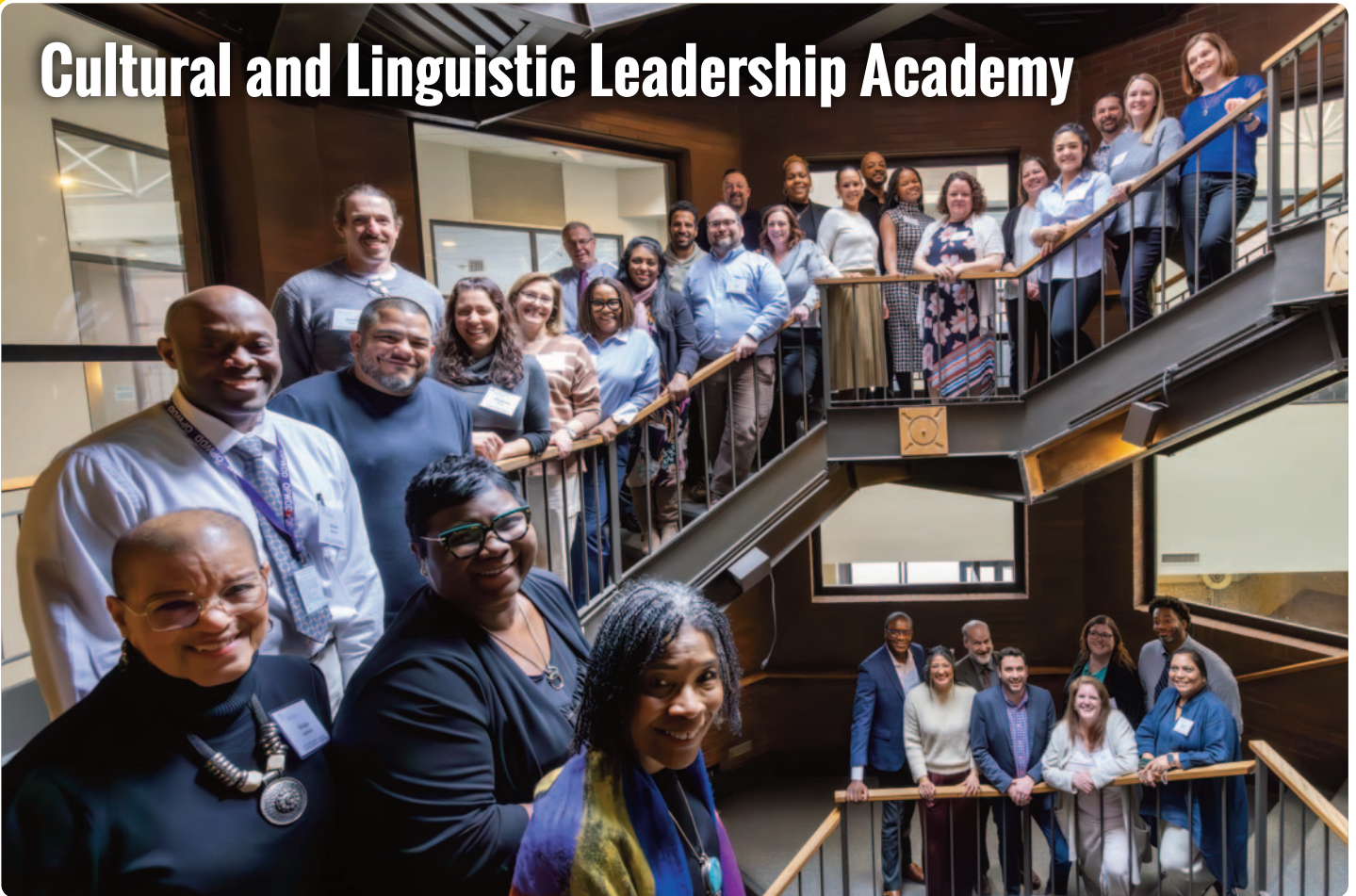
We have also continued to bolster our ability to respond to crisis and complex needs with regional clinical technical support teams that deliver consultation services to non-profit providers, hospitals, school districts, and representatives from DOH, OMH, OASAS, and OCFS across the state. Consultation services help create cross-systems partnerships and solutions to assist providers in serving people with complex needs. To date, the team has supported providers with over 40 different people in crisis.

OPWDD will continue to explore additional ways our agency and others can better serve those with complex medical, health, and behavioral needs, and those who may be facing crisis, including youth, in the remaining years of the strategic plan.



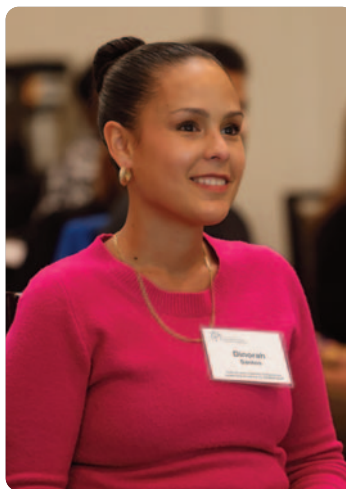
Since the first opening in November of 2023, CATHs have successfully graduated 6 people to date and have 9 pending admissions.

# Cultural and Linguistic Leadership Academy



## 100% of Leadership Academy Graduates Agreed the Experience Helped Them Learn About:

- Culture and Multiple Cultural Identities
- Cultural and Linguistic Competence
- Leader vs. Leadership
- Advocate vs. Advocacy
- Leadership vs. Advocacy



## Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Communities

Centering Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) across our system continues to be an important part of our work at OPWDD. We remain committed to these efforts and to working together to build a more equitable, sustainable system that meets the unique needs of people and families across New York State, respecting everyone's background.

Each year we have built on our previous work and continue our successful partnership with Georgetown University National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC) on the Cultural & Linguistic Competence (CLC) Systems Change Project. Over the past year, this included the implementation of training and professional development for nearly 1,300 OPWDD staff on topics related to language and culture, such as how income, education, employment, racism, intersectionality, ableism, and other disparities, impact people with disabilities, families, and staff. Since conducting the trainings, efforts have expanded to over 1,000 staff at other agencies, who were also invited to participate.

This year, OPWDD and NCCC launched four leadership academies: one academy for OPWDD staff, two academies for people with developmental disabilities, and one academy for family members. The leadership academy for OPWDD staff included



30 graduates from across all regions and multiple professionals with a focus on sustaining efforts beyond the contract with the NCCC and exploring key topics in more detail. The academies for people with developmental disabilities and family members included people with varying levels of advocacy experience, from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and representing the geographic diversity of New York.

The NCCC also previously held forums that engaged more than 300 providers in conversations about their commitment to and needs for cultural and linguistic competence. This resulted in a report that summarizes findings and provides suggestions for next steps, which is posted on the [OPWDD website](#). The report also informed webinars for providers focused on advancing cultural and linguistic competence.

Similarly, NCCC conducted listening sessions with close to 300 family members across the state, to learn about their experiences accessing services that meet their cultural and linguistic needs. Information collected from these sessions will be shared publicly and will inform OPWDD's ongoing efforts and the next strategic plan. In addition, OPWDD's work with the NCCC included an audit of more than 100 OPWDD policies and documents, expanding on efforts started last year. Through this



### CLC Systems Change Project

This year:

**1300+** OPWDD Staff Trained

**300+** Family Members Joined Listening Sessions

**80+** People Completed CLC Leadership Academies

**1000+** Other State Agency Staff Trained



## Did You Know?

In addition to advancing plain language, we continue efforts to improve access to other language services across the agency, including the translation of documents, staff training on language access policies, launching a new landing page on the OPWDD website for translated materials, updating language access complaint forms, and sharing more resources with providers and CCO's.

audit, we identified opportunities to improve our work by reviewing how well policies promote cultural and linguistic competence and equity, and by identifying where policies and documents could benefit from the inclusion of plain language or complementary easy-read versions.

Likewise, OPWDD's Division of State Operations designed 'Creating Space' an experiential training curriculum that enables real-time dialogue among colleagues around safety, belonging, inclusion, and respect. This peer-to-peer collaborative training model draws on the experiences of staff in the room to help teach and apply new DEI practices, embraces diversity as a strength, and fosters inclusivity in the workplace. Since its creation, over 600 staff have participated and over 100 staff have become master

trainers and champions who will continue delivering this training going forward. As additional trainers are created, State Operations will incrementally expand delivery of the training, aiming to reach all 15,000 staff annually.

In 2024, OPWDD continued its efforts to improve access to other language services across the agency, including the translation of documents, staff training on language access policies, launching a new landing page on the OPWDD website for translated materials, updating language access complaint forms, and sharing more resources with providers and CCO's. Last year, OPWDD translated more than 2,600 documents into 60+ languages. Currently, 780 of those documents are available on the OPWDD website, making our agency 2nd among all NYS agencies for document translation and accessibility in 2024/25. OPWDD also provided one on one language support to more than 4,000 people with limited English proficiency as they worked with our staff across the State. Another 900 people were supported by language access services at OPWDD public forums or group settings.

We also expanded our list of language access vendors this past year; we now have first, second and third vendor options across all language service types, ensuring full coverage and backup coverage statewide. Additionally, we have added video remote interpretation services which are available 24/7, 365 days a year.

Although the partnership with the NCCC officially ends this year, however, OPWDD's work to advance cultural and linguistic competence, diversity, equity, and inclusion will continue. In 2026, OPWDD will

## OPWDD State Operations Centers Diversity

600+

State Operations Staff Trained



100+

Staff Became Master Trainers & Champions



work with staff, provider partners, and people with lived experience as well as their families to implement data-informed recommendations from the NCCC that promote greater fairness and equity across the OPWDD service system.

This year, OPWDD prioritized re-engaging with two nations – Onondaga and Kanien’keha:ka (St. Regis Mohawk Tribe). Through visits and presentations led by community representatives, OPWDD staff learned about the importance and role of humility, language, identity, consultation and trust when working with and supporting families, communities, and people with developmental disabilities. OPWDD will continue strengthening the agency’s cultural competence, deepening meaningful consultation with community liaisons and the nations and designing an agency-wide process to continually assess policies for cultural and linguistic competence.

We want to make sure that everyone we support feels seen, heard, and understood. That means making sure our staff and providers are well trained, understand how culture impacts the people and families we support, and can exchange information effectively, regardless of the language someone speaks.



## Promoting Language Access:

**2,600+** Documents Translated

**60+** Languages

**700+** documents on the OPWDD website

**4,000+** People Individually Supported

**900+** people assisted at public forums or in group settings

**700+** OPWDD Staff Trained on Language Access



# Conclusion

OPWDD continues to respond to the feedback received by those who engage with our system to improve the experience that people, families, providers, and care management staff have with our agency.

In 2025, we made several considerable strides in those efforts, as highlighted throughout the report. In year three of the five-year plan, we continued work to improve access to housing resources, increased the number of people with disabilities who are employed, and supported those in transition. We also strengthened transparency and engagement efforts, prioritized technological and process improvements, reduced administrative burdens and enhanced collaboration and understanding across the system.

In the remaining two years of the strategic plan, OPWDD will continue to focus on technological, policy, and process advancements that transform our system into one that better meets the needs of the people we support across all demographic groups.







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

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