Inclusion Connects
An Overview

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NC DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES

Agenda

1. What is Inclusion Connects? Why do we have it? Why does it matter?
2. Direct Support Professionals
3. Access to Services and the Innovations Waiver Waitlist
4. Community Living Services
5. Inclusion Works
6. Discussion Questions

Inclusion Connects Background

Inclusion Connects is **an NCDHHS program to connect people with I/DD to more choices and more access to services and supports.** It is designed to help people with I/DD, regardless of age or ability level, and their families navigate the complex system of services from birth to the end of life.

Link to Inclusion Connects Website

Inclusion Connects Activities

Supporting the Direct Support Professional (DSP) Workforce: Addresses workforce shortages and connects DSPs with providers and individuals with I/DD.

Promoting Access to Services: Focuses on providing access to necessary services, including those on the Innovations Waiver Waitlist.

Improving Housing Access: Enhances the housing options available for individuals with I/DD.

Inclusion Works: Expand supported employment services and increase access to Competitive Integrated Employment

Direct Support Professional Workforce Development

Challenges

Problem Statement: North Carolina is facing a shortage of DSPs who provide home and community-based services, which impacts the ability for people with I/DD to live and receive services in their homes and/or communities.

Low Compensation

DSP wages are often under $15/hr and do not reflect the complexity and importance of their role in supporting people with disabilities.

Lack of Professional Development Options or DSP Career Path

Training and certifications options are limited (often only available through providers).

Multiple Jobs

Due to low compensation, DSPs often need to work for multiple providers or hold multiple jobs to make a living wage, which can lead to burnout and high turnover rates

Fewer Benefits as Part-Time Employees

Providers encourage DSPs to work as part-time employees to reduce overhead costs associated. DSPs have limited access to additional benefits typical with full-time employment

Other Contributing Factors:

- **Provider Billing v. Independent Billing:** DSPs work as provider employees, which may limit their ability to bill directly to Medicaid at a higher rate independently
- **Lack of Professional classification**: There is no defined career path for DSPs. Professions with similar educational requirements (CNA, Nurse's Aid) offer certification, DSP does not

Inclusion Connects Update: DSP Workforce Plan

The Inclusion Connects team is excited to announce an updated **Direct Support Professional (DSP) Workforce Plan** to address North Carolina's critical shortage of DSPs. This shortage directly impacts access to home and community-based services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The updated plan outlines a **multi-year strategy** that includes:

- Strategic recruitment methods
- Enhanced training opportunities
- Improved worker retention strategies

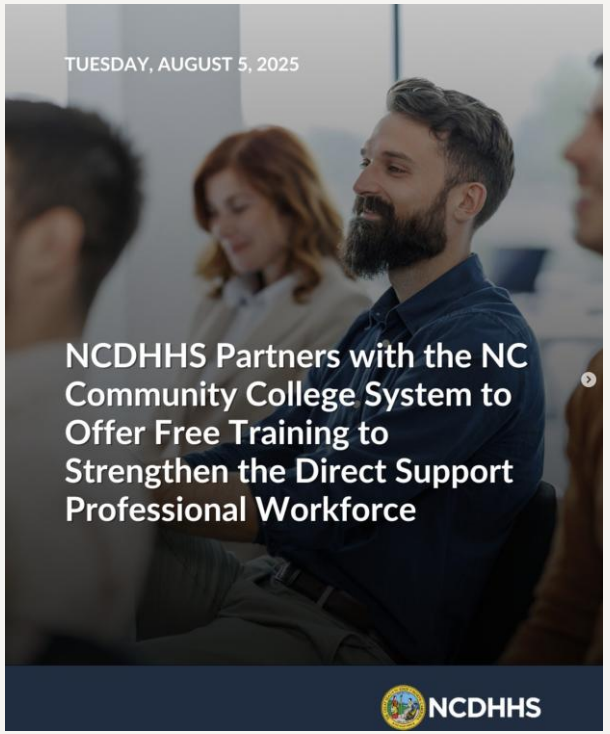
Originally published June 2024 and updated August 2025, affirming our commitment to supporting DSPs and strengthening the vital services they provide across the state.

Free Advanced Training Certificate for Direct Support Professionals

NCDHHS and the NC Community College System have launched a free Advanced Training Certificate to strengthen the Direct Support Professional (DSP) workforce.

Program Details:

- Offered through Stanly, Asheville-Buncombe, and Forsyth Tech Community Colleges (Aug–Sept 2025 start).
- Two eight-week, virtual continuing education courses.
- Open to current DSPs and individuals pursuing a career in the field.
- Space is limited — register through participating colleges' continuing education offices.



Why It Matters:

DSPs support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to live, work, and thrive in their communities. The certificate program builds skills, improves retention, and supports inclusion through the Inclusion Connects Program.

Access to Services

Innovations Waitlist Dashboard

- The Department is working to develop a comprehensive Power BI dashboard to serve as centralized hub for Innovations Waitlist insights.

Dashboard Overview

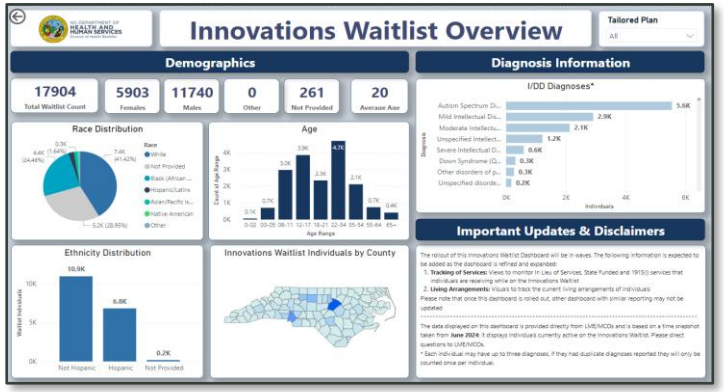
The Innovations Waitlist Dashboard is designed to **aggregate data views across the Tailored Plans and provide quarterly insights** of individuals utilizing the waitlists

Key Insights

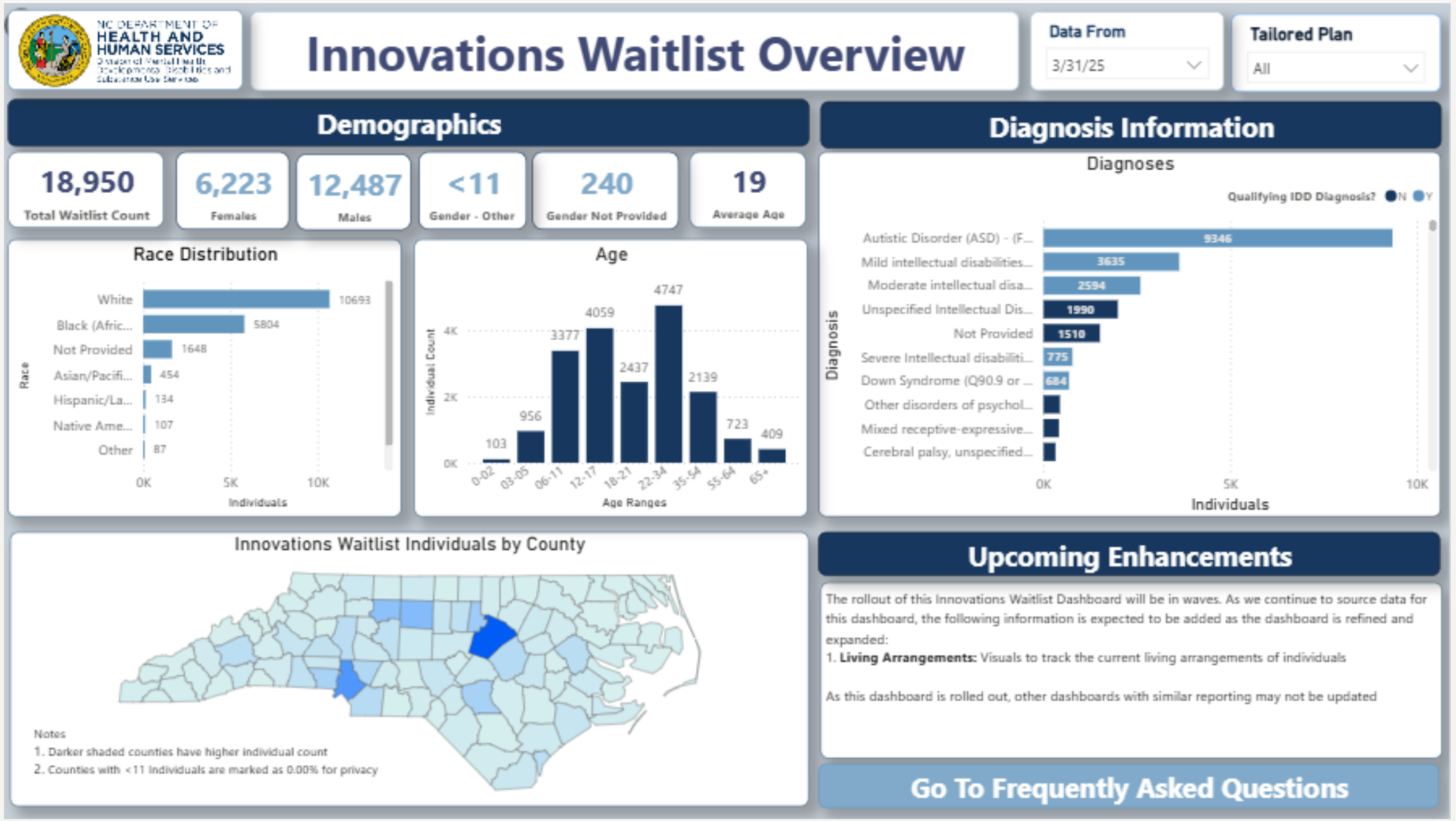
1. **Waitlist Status** – Details on count of individuals on the waitlist and reasons why individuals may have been removed from the waitlist
2. **Demographics** – Relevant information on individual and current diagnoses
3. **Other Enrolled Services** – Information on other state funded or 1915(i) services individual may be receiving
4. **Functional Outcomes –** Overview of living arrangements, behavioral hospitalizations, and homelessness risk

Current State

- **Initial dashboard has been drafted** in Power BI with key visualizations:
  - Age
  - Race
  - Ethnicity
  - Locality Map
  - Diagnosis
- **Continued data cleansing** is required to refine views
- **Launched in mid-October 2024** and updated quarterly

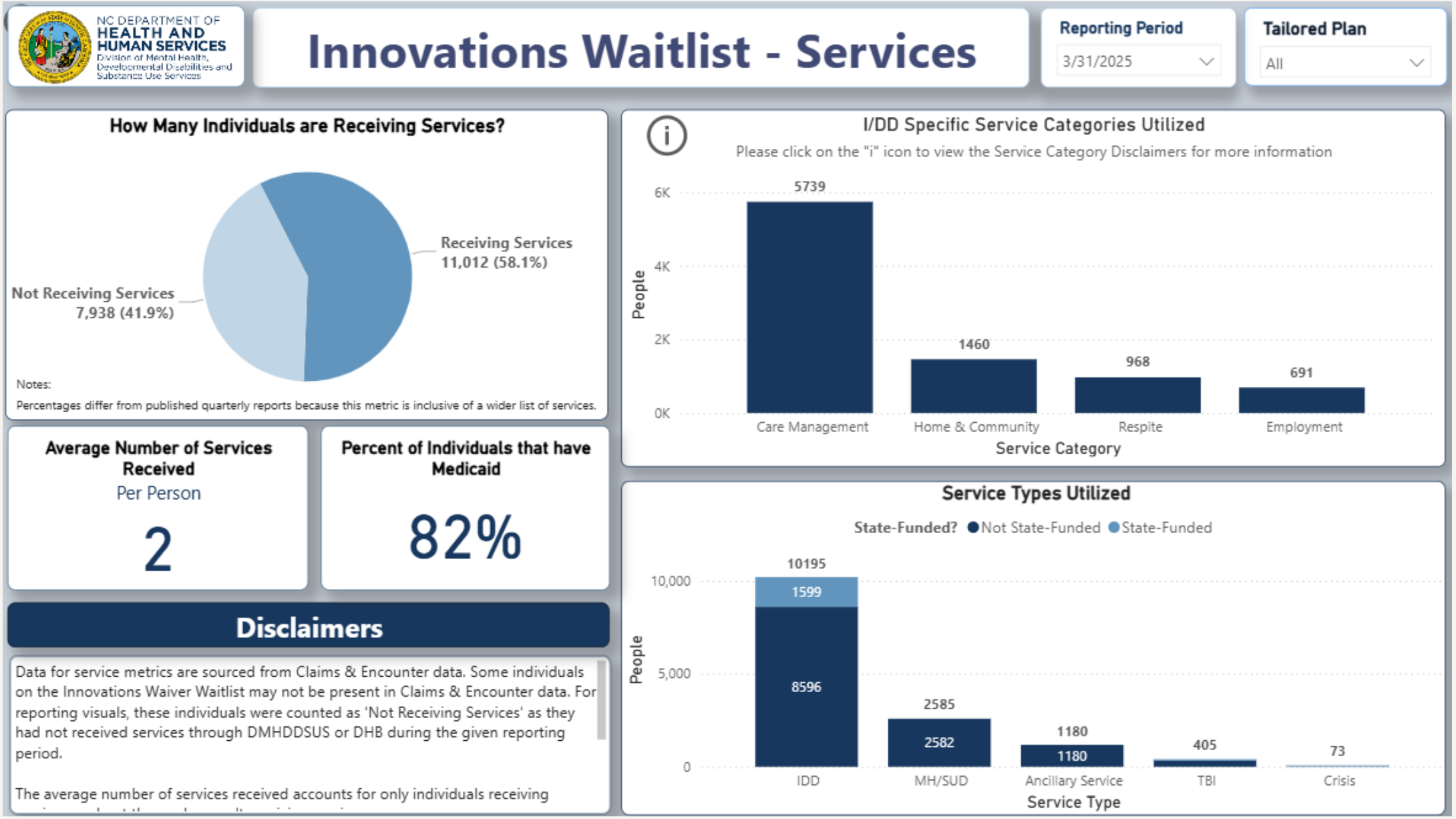


Innovations Waitlist Dashboard*



*Dashboard updated August 2025

Innovations Waitlist Dashboard Services*



*Dashboard updated August 2025

Innovations Waiver Waitlist Dashboard Updates

Inclusion Connects (IC) released new data on our Innovations Waiver Waitlist Dashboard—now showing what services individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) are receiving while they are on the waitlist.

Visit the QR code to explore the Innovations Waiver Waitlist Dashboard, updated on 8/11 with Services Metric information. The Dashboard will be updated quarterly in alignment with the IC quarterly reports.

Visit the QR code to watch the Walkthrough Video, which guides users through the Services Metrics page of the updated Innovation Waiver Waitlist Dashboard.

What 1915(i) Home and Community-Based Services are available?

- Community Living and Support
- Supported Employment*
- Individual Placement and Support Services
- Respite Care
- Individual and Transitional Support
- Community Transition

If a person is on the waitlist for the NC Innovations Waiver or TBI Waiver, they may be eligible to receive these services. Receiving them will NOT affect their waitlist position.

Learn more at: https://medicaid.ncdhhs.gov/1915i

Community Living Services

Accessible Housing Plan

Part 1: Community Living Guide

The Community Living Guide will empower the I/DD community by enhancing awareness of housing options, funding, and support services statewide, enabling individuals to live successfully in community-based settings.

Housing: Community, supportive, and independent living options

Funding: Financial assistance and voucher programs

Supports: Services enabling successful and healthy community-based living

Part 2: Regional Housing Plan

The Regional Housing Plan is a five-year comprehensive plan that seeks to eliminate barriers to housing and create affordable, inclusive, and accessible housing options for individuals with I/DD, TBI, SMI, and SUDs.

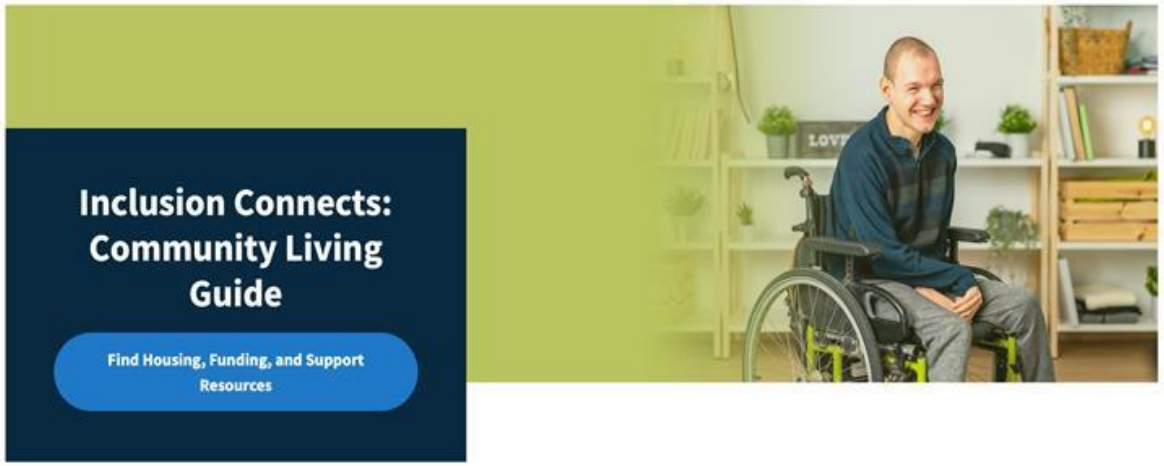
Expand housing development and non-development activities

Improve and expand housing support services

Expand coordination with state agencies and foster community partnerships across the state

Community Living Guide

Inclusion Connects: Community Living Guide



The Transition and Housing Pillar of **Inclusion Connects** is actively working to increase access to a full range of community housing options for individuals with I/DD. This guide provides webpage links and contact information for a variety of resources, including those for **Housing**, **Funding**, and **Supports**.

Using this Guide

1. Click on the drop-down menu for the category (housing, funding, or supports) you want to explore resources related to.
2. Read through available resources and click on the links to learn more!
3. For additional information and specific information related to your region, reach out to your Local Management Entity / Managed Care Organization (LME/MCO) today! Or visit the below links:

Find Housing

Need Immediate Shelter

- For emergency housing in your county:
  - NC DHHS Emergency Housing and Shelter
  - Shelters - NC 211
  - How to Get Help If You Are Experiencing Homelessness

Find Funding

Get Help Paying for Supported and Independent Living

- Funding specific to Tailored Plan catchment areas:
  - Vaya Health: Permanent Supportive Housing Information | Vaya Health and Housing Initiatives | Vaya Health
  - Alliance Health: Independent Living Initiative (ILI) - Alliance Health (alliancehealthplan.org)

Find Support

Find Help for Accessibility Modifications and Technologies

- To increase accessibility in your home and fund modifications, visit North Carolina Housing Finance Agency- Home Repairs and Independent Living and Rehabilitation Program
- Explore assistive and emergency technologies for those living independently:

Regional Housing Plan Overview

State Vision

"Provide quality community-based housing, services, and supports needed to enable people with disabilities to thrive as integrated members of their chosen communities"

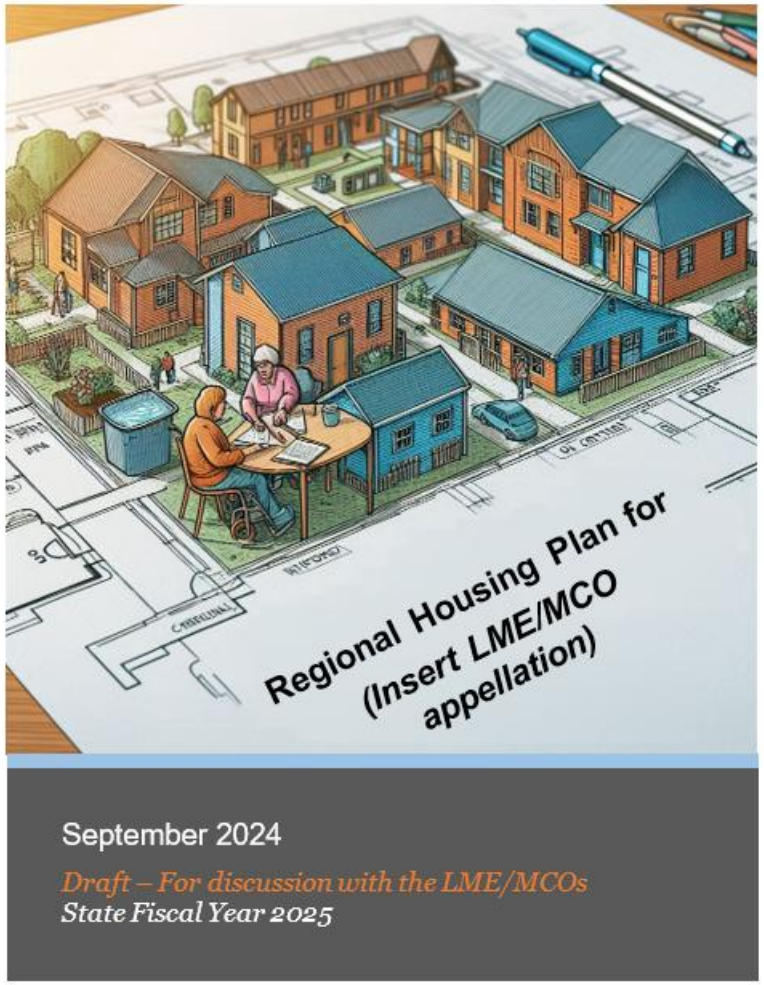
→ inclusive of all members with mental illness (regardless of participation to the TCL program), SUDs, I/DD, and/or TBI

State Mission

- 5-year plan
- Create quality affordable, accessible and inclusive community-based housing tailored to the needs of each region and its unique population
- Improve services, funding, communication, statewide coordination

Permanent Supportive Housing

- Housing model where individuals choose where they live
- Decent, safe, accessible, affordable to their income
- Rights and responsibilities of tenancy
- Voluntary, flexible supportive services available from qualified provider



Top Barriers to Transitions

- Inclusion Connects engaged with LME/MCO housing specialists to better understand the top barriers to facilitating successful transitions from institutional to non-institutional settings.

Training

Insufficient training at the DSS level and lack of person-centered trainings available prior to transitions.

Satisfaction

Guardian preferences delaying transitions; lack of financial assistance options for housing costs; placements not available in preferred communities.

Workforce Shortage

Insufficient network of providers; siloed provider systems unfit to support people with higher needs; lack of available and trained DSPs.

Resources

Delays in licensing group homes; insufficient home modification services; lack of out-of-home crisis supports to prevent re-institutionalization.

Liability

Provider fears of liability, especially for members with documented histories of incidents (property destruction, elopement, harm, etc.).

Additional Barriers

Identified by CLAC Workgroup

- Care managers unaware of services available to people with I/DD
- Housing cost and lack of affordable and accessible housing available
- Greater training needed for providers, landlords, and property managers
- Greater support needed for moving costs and physical labor of moving

Inclusion Works

Inclusion Works Overview

Founded in 2021, Inclusion Works is a **collaboration** between the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services (DMHDDSUS), the Division of Health Benefits (DHB), and the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD)

Our Mission: Inclusion Works is committed to expanding supported employment services and to improving and increasing Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) for individuals with I/DD in North Carolina by:

- Ensuring that individuals with I/DD have more **choices and options**
- Supporting providers to update the **tools and processes** they use to help people with employment
- **Partnering with community services** (including ADVP/ILOS) to support individuals with I/DD and contribute to a meaningful week

Strategic Plan for CIE

The Inclusion Works Strategic Plan for Competitive Integrated Employment was published in August 2025

- **How Did the Plan Begin?**
  - A comprehensive Landscape Assessment with Gap Analysis was completed by Work Together NC

- **Who Developed the Plan?**
  - The Inclusion Works Advisory Committee
  - People with lived experience
  - Advocates
  - Service providers
  - Community members
  - Employers
  - Policy Experts
  - Employment Experts
  - Subject Matter Experts
  - Input from other successful states
  - Medicaid and Tailored Plans
  - Family and caregivers

Five Core Inclusion Works Goals

The Inclusion Works Strategic Plan is organized by outlining the **Goals, Objectives, and Strategies** that DHHS will employ to increase Competitive Integrated Employment for people with I/DD.

Informed Choice

Quality I/DD Services

Community Outreach

Workforce Development

Employer Connection

Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD) and Supported Employment services can support individuals with I/DD find a CIE job if that is their choice

1

EIPD Services (Vocational Rehabilitation)

EIPD Services should be an individual's **first point of contact** before pursuing the supported employment services.

For **eligibility requirements**, individuals can contact their local EIPD office for a referral.

2

Supported Employment Services

After receiving services from EIPD, individuals can apply for **Supported Employment:**

There are multiple service options:

Service Name	Eligibility
Medicaid-funded SE (1915(i) SE)	• Medicaid recipients who complete 1915(i) assessment
State-funded SE	• Non-Medicaid recipients with I/DD diagnosis, SNAP/SIS/TBI/VR assessment, and at least 1 functional impairment
Innovations Waiver SE	• Medicaid recipients and Innovations Waiver beneficiaries

3

Accessing Employment Services

To learn more about how to apply for these services, please reach out to the following:

- *Your local EIPD office*
- Your Tailored Care Manager (for eligible Medicaid beneficiaries) OR
- Your regional Tailored Plan

If you're unsure in which service option is right for you, check out the Paths to CIE Guide on the Inclusion Works website.

Employment Assessment Referrals – Process Flow

WTNC

CIE Coordinator

EIPD

Work Together NC completes Employment Assessments and uploads documents to SharePoint site with EIPD.

EIPD Outreach Team Lead populates LME/MCO-specific Referral Progress Tracking sheets with member information and notifies CIE Coordinators of new referrals

CIE Coordinator identifies:

- Contact information for individual/ guardian
- Name and contact of TCM
- List of services individual is receiving/ authorized for

"Triage Meeting" to determine path of supports (SE vs EIPD) for individual and assign a Primary Case Manager based on team capacity

CIE Coordinator contacts individual and legally responsible person, supports individual to apply for EIPD or SE, and helps coordinate services

EIPD Outreach Case Manager contacts individual and legally responsible person, supports individual to apply for EIPD or SE, and helps coordinate services

Inclusion Connects Advisory Committee (ICAC)

Inclusion Connects Advisory Committee (ICAC)

Focuses on researching, recommending, and supporting the implementation of best practices to improve services and supports for individuals with I/DD

Monthly Workgroups

Community Living

Supporting community access and helping people to live and thrive in their chosen setting

Access to Services

Improving service models, training, and provider guidelines to ensure high-quality I/DD services

DSP Workforce

Recruiting, training, and retaining DSPs to support the growing needs of the I/DD community

Inclusion Works

Expanding supported employment services in North Carolina

Interpersonal Violence

Creating collaboration between the providers, TPs, and IPV experts in response to state CFAC recommend-ations

Tailored Plans

Working group for TP members and DHHS to discuss any recommended updates needed

Other Workgroups

Other workgroups will be formed as needed to make progress towards specific tasks or challenges.

Questions/Comments?

Contact Information:

- Tina Barrett (tina.l.barrett@dhhs.nc.gov)
- I/DD Mailbox (dmhiddcontact@dhhs.nc.gov)

Thank you for your participation!