



Public Policy Agenda

2021-2025

Introduction

Alliance is committed to working toward a system of services and supports that honors individual choices, promotes self-determination, and brings out the potential in each individual we are privileged to serve. Our public policy agenda is based on the fundamental values expressed in the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act:

“Disability is a natural part of the human experience that does not diminish the right of individuals with developmental disabilities to live independently, to exert control and choice over their own lives, and to fully participate in and contribute to their communities through full integration and inclusion in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of United States society.”

This agenda is not an exhaustive list of issues important to Alliance. Rather, it includes the high-priority goals we have identified as important to achieve in the next five years through a variety of mechanisms, including legislation, regulation, and waiver amendments. The priorities are divided into ongoing priorities and our five-year strategic priority areas. Alliance will engage with our partners in the disability community as well as other interested stakeholders to fulfill the goals of this policy agenda.

Ongoing Priorities

Ongoing priorities are the issues that Alliance will prioritize every legislative session. Solutions to these ongoing priorities may be connected to the strategic priorities outlined below.

Eliminate the Developmental Disabilities Waiver Waiting List

Despite numerous attempts throughout the years to create a plan to eliminate the DD waiting list, it has continued to grow. Colorado has made significant progress in eliminating waiting lists for the Supported Living Services and Children’s Extensive Support waivers, but a long-term wait list solution has yet to be identified for the Developmental Disabilities waiver. Alliance will continue to examine the political landscape each year and pursue ambitious solutions to eliminate the waiting list.

Enhance Capacity and Sustainability for IDD Services

With each passing year, the gap between the cost to deliver IDD services and reimbursement rates continues to grow. So, too, do service gaps as agencies narrow the scope of services they provide. This has resulted in what we call the invisible waiting list. Although people can enroll into home- and community-based services, many struggle to find providers willing and able to offer the services they most want and need. Due to their reliance on Medicaid and other public programs, IDD providers are disproportionately impacted by economic pressures such as the rising minimum wage and inflation when compared to other Medicaid provider types. Since the baseline rate structure was set at only 76% of the actual cost of providing services in 2008, these economic pressures have continued to grow, and subsequent rate increases have not been enough to fill the gap. To solve Colorado’s structural financing issues, Alliance will continue to pursue long-term solutions to ensure service capacity and sustainability for Coloradans with IDD.

Implement Person Centered Practices

Over the last several years, Colorado has seen several initiatives to implement person-centered practices for people with IDD, including a statewide training program and Alliance's grant program that certified a number of local trainers. As we embark on a new public policy agenda, we now turn our attention to ensuring that person-centered thinking is infused throughout our policy goals. The interests and desires of the people and families we support will be the primary consideration as we work to achieve our long-term goals. We aim to do this by:

- Leveraging initiatives already underway, such as waiver redesign, to integrate person-centered practices into the service system,
- Modernize, simplify, and align waiver program requirements with a focus on personal outcomes, and
- Achieve the strategic policy goals outlined in this document, which we believe will bring us significantly closer to the reality of creating a truly person-centered service delivery system for people with IDD.

Five-Year Strategic Policy Priorities

The following strategic policy priorities are items we hope to accomplish over the next five years, in addition to, and in connection with, our ongoing priorities.

Create Individualized Budget Allocations for Waiver Participants

Currently, individuals who are enrolled in waiver services receive an allocation of a menu of units of service. This unit allocation represents how much of a given service they can receive. This way of allocating services is complex and difficult to manage, even for the savviest of individuals and families. Often, units go unused and needs go unmet. Service Plan Authorization Limits and unit caps on certain services further limit a person's ability to access all of the services they want and need. As a person-centered alternative, Alliance aims to follow the example of states that use individual budget allocations to give people more autonomy and control over how they purchase services. An individual budget is not a cash payment to a service recipient, rather, it is a service budget represented in dollars which the individual and his/her family can manage as they would any other household or personal budget. As a result, people would have the ability to decide which supports are most important to them and how to budget for those services. By putting the control in the hands of the person receiving services, we hope to not only empower people to better access supports, but also to reframe system financing conversations to represent their point of view.

Advance Competitive Integrated Employment Outcomes

Due to a number of systemic barriers including inadequate funding, societal expectations, and difficulties accessing siloed employment services, Coloradans with IDD struggle to obtain integrated jobs that pay a competitive wage. The environment to make significant advances in employment outcomes is ripe in Colorado. Alliance aims to leverage the energy around employment for people with IDD to address systemic barriers to competitive integrated employment, clarify waiver service definitions to maximize the availability of employment supports across the full spectrum of needs, streamline coordination between DVR and waiver services, and update payment models to incentivize competitive integrated employment outcomes, among other goals.

Eliminate Referrals to State-Operated Services by Strengthening Community Supports

The census at Colorado's Regional Centers has been shrinking for a long time, in line with national trends in the closure of state-operated institutions for people with IDD. Thirteen states have completely eliminated such institutions. Rather than perpetuating a costly and unsustainable state-operated service model, Colorado should invest funds to enhance private, community-based services that can meet the needs of individuals experiencing crisis or those with co-occurring behavioral health needs. In so doing, we would eliminate the need for referrals to state-operated services and allow people with IDD to live in the least restrictive setting that meets their needs. Such a plan may include an enhanced funding mechanism for a community-based provider (or providers) of last resort.

Increase Affordable Housing for People with IDD

Colorado's rising housing costs continue to be a barrier to people with IDD being able to find safe, accessible, affordable housing options in communities where they want to live. A number of factors contribute to this issue: a Social Security Room and Board allocation that is less than half the average monthly rental cost in Colorado; a long waiting list for the HUD rental assistance program; lack of affordable housing compared to community need; and a lack of safe and accessible housing options, even when affordable housing is available. Alliance aims to explore a variety of solutions to ensure that all Coloradans with IDD have access to safe, accessible, affordable housing that meets their needs.

Increase Access to Technology

Technological solutions to increase independence and personal outcomes are growing in the form of new devices, web and mobile applications, telehealth, and remote monitoring technology. Personal technology solutions can assist people with performing a wide range of daily activities, reducing reliance on in-person supports and allowing them to live more independently. Telehealth and remote monitoring technologies can bring enhanced access to rural communities and address staffing shortages among Direct Support Professionals. Technology can also be used to help people navigate the IDD service system, which can be complex and overwhelming. By utilizing web-based provider-search tools, people could easily research and connect with providers that offer the supports they need. Alliance continues to advocate for the implementation of an intuitive, functional, provider-search tool that is easy for people with IDD and their families to use. Through implementation of these tools, we hope to position Colorado as a leader in utilizing technology to maximize supports for people with IDD.

Improve Data Collection Related to IDD Services

Reliable data on the IDD service system is woefully lacking in Colorado. In order to create a clear picture of our successes, areas that need improvement, and the degree to which people with IDD can access needed supports, we need a mechanism to collect and disseminate data in a uniform manner statewide, preferably by an independent third party. Ideally, this data will help inform policy and funding decisions made at a state level with the ultimate goal of ensuring sustainable and efficient system funding and improved personal outcomes for the people we serve.