

# Inclusion Connects

## Work Plan

March 2025



### Purpose

The **Inclusion Connects Work Plan** is North Carolina’s strategy to improve services for people with **intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD)**, like autism or Down syndrome. This plan supports the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services (DMH/DD/SUS) [Strategic Plan](#) published in September 2024 and helps the state follow the rules from a legal case called *Samantha R. vs. North Carolina*. The *Samantha R.* case says the state must do more to help people with I/DD live in their communities instead of institutions.

### Background: The Samantha R. Case

In 2017, Disability Rights North Carolina went to court, saying North Carolina was not providing enough services for people with I/DD. In May 2024, the [state agreed to a Consent Order](#), which requires specific actions to improve community-based services. The Inclusion Connects plan was created to meet these legal and ethical responsibilities. The Inclusion Connects Work Plan also includes activities to address the needs of people with I/DD beyond the requirements in the consent order.

### Focus Areas

Inclusion Connects is a collaboration among NC DHHS divisions, including DMH/DD/SUS and NC Medicaid, to provide resources for connecting people with I/DD to services and supports available to live, work and thrive in their chosen communities. To improve the connection between people with I/DD and their communities, Inclusion Connects focuses on three areas:



**Better Access to Services:** Promoting access to services for all people with I/DD in need of services, including those on the [Innovations Waiver](#) Waitlist.



**More Housing Choices:** Improving access and enhancing the housing options for people with I/DD.



**Strengthening the Direct Support Professional (DSP) Workforce:** Addressing the DSP shortage, including connecting DSPs with providers and people with I/DD.

Here are the main steps DHHS is taking to reach its goal in each focus area.<sup>1</sup>

 **Better Access to Services**

Many people with I/DD are on a waiting list for services, and there are not enough spots in the NC Innovations Waiver program for everyone. This waiting list used to be known as the Registry of Unmet Needs (RUN). Right now, up to 14,736 people may receive services through the NC Innovations Waiver - this is the total number of slots (or waivers spots) available. Today, over 18,000 individuals are waiting for Innovations Waiver services. There are now services available to help people who have NC Medicaid or qualify for NC Medicaid while they wait for a Waiver slot, including 1915(i) services<sup>2</sup>.

**Goal:** Help people on the Innovations Waiver waiting list get services while they wait and improve how the list is managed.

**Key Actions & Planned Completion Dates**

**1. Standardizing the Innovations Waiver Waitlist Process**

Planned Completion	Action Steps	Complete?
Fall 2025	Work with stakeholders including people with lived experience, caregivers, Tailored Plans, and Service Providers to improve process for managing the waitlist.	
Winter 2025	Provide training for service agencies to follow the new process.	
Annually	Review and improve the waitlist process.	

**2. Understanding Needs of People on the Innovations Waiver Waitlist**



Planned Completion	Action Steps	Complete?
Quarterly	Update <a href="#">Waitlist Dashboard</a> quarterly.	
Ongoing	Validate waitlist data to make sure it is correct.	
	Use data to identify trends and which services are needed most.	
Winter 2025	Propose a plan to assess the needs of people on the Innovations Waitlist, including housing and employment needs, and to collect data uniformly.	

<sup>1</sup> A list of DMH/DD/SUS Frequently Used Acronyms can be found at <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/mental-health-developmental-disabilities-and-substance-use-services/frequently-used-acronyms>.

<sup>2</sup> Information about 1915(i) Services can be found at: <https://medicaid.ncdhhs.gov/1915i>.

## Key Actions & Planned Completion Dates (continued)

### 3. Expanding Services While People Wait

Planned Completion	Action Steps	Complete?
Summer 2024	Complete the 1915(i)-eligibility process for at least 3,000 individuals.	
Spring 2025	Educate families on how to apply for 1915(i) services through webinars and presentations.	
Winter 2025	Launch a statewide campaign to educate families about available services.	

### 4. Tracking Progress with Data

Planned Completion	Action Steps	Complete?
Fall 2025	Add and revise new data tracking tools to measure service use.	
Winter 2025	Update the waitlist dashboard to show how many people are getting services.	



## More Housing Choices

Many people with I/DD live in institutions because they do not have **affordable, accessible housing** or enough support. Inclusion Connects focuses on improving the in-reach and education process, supporting people with I/DD to make an informed choice about moving into community settings, and helping those at risk of institutionalization by providing resources and services.

**Goal:** Help people with I/DD understand and make an informed choice about where they would like to live and ensure they receive the proper care in all living settings (institutional and non-institutional housing).

### Key Actions & Planned Completion Dates

#### 1. Tracking Moves Out of Institutions

Planned Completion	Action Steps	Complete?
Summer 2024	By June 30 <sup>th</sup> , 2024, move at least 68 people with I/DD from institutional care into the community.	✓
	Create a report to track data on the education of people with I/DD living in institutions receive, those choosing to move into the community, and those potentially at risk of entering an institution.	✓
Summer 2025	By June 30 <sup>th</sup> , 2025, move at least 78 new people with I/DD from institutional care into the community	
Quarterly	Track and report the number of people transitioning every 3 months.	


#### 2. Understanding Housing Needs

Planned Completion	Action Steps	Complete?
Summer 2025	Engage with Tailored Plans <sup>3</sup> and community partners to identify and work to address barriers to transitions.	✓
	Develop a tool to assess people’s housing preferences and supports needed to make an informed living choice.	
Ongoing	Assess housing availability for people with I/DD and work to improve support service options, including Supported Living.	


<sup>3</sup> Information about the Tailored Plans can be found at <https://medicaid.ncdhhs.gov/tailored-plans>.

## Key Actions & Planned Completion Dates (continued)

### 3. Providing Resources to Make Community Living More Accessible

Planned Completion	Action Steps	Complete?
Fall 2024	Create a list of statewide housing, funding, and support resources. Available at: <a href="https://www.ncdhhs.gov/about/department-initiatives/inclusion-connects/inclusion-connects-community-living-guide">https://www.ncdhhs.gov/about/department-initiatives/inclusion-connects/inclusion-connects-community-living-guide</a> .	
Quarterly	Update the resources list every 3 months to make sure families know what's available and can access helpful resources.	

### 4. Finding Funding Sources to Support Individuals

Planned Completion	Action Steps	Complete?
Winter 2024	Work with state partners to request a remedial preference letter, which would give people with I/DD priority for federal public housing programs and vouchers.	
Ongoing	Work with Tailored Plans to secure and use vouchers to pay for community housing.	
Ongoing	Track progress towards approval of the remedial preference letter, which was submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in January 2025.	



## Strengthening the DSP Workforce

North Carolina has a shortage of paid caregivers, called Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). Many DSPs leave the job because of low pay, few benefits, and lack of career growth.

**Goal:** Improve DSP pay, training, and job satisfaction to keep more workers in the field.

### Key Actions & Planned Completion Dates

#### 1. Addressing the DSP Shortage

Planned Completion	Action Steps	Complete?
Spring 2024	Release a statewide DSP Workforce Plan.	✓
Quarterly	Track how many DSP hours are available and how many go unused due to staff shortages.	

#### 2. Listening to DSPs & Improving Jobs

Planned Completion	Action Steps	Complete?
Winter 2024	Conduct 5 focus groups with DSPs to understand their needs.	✓
	Conduct survey and gather feedback from DSPs to improve training and job conditions	✓

#### 3. Providing Incentives & Career Growth

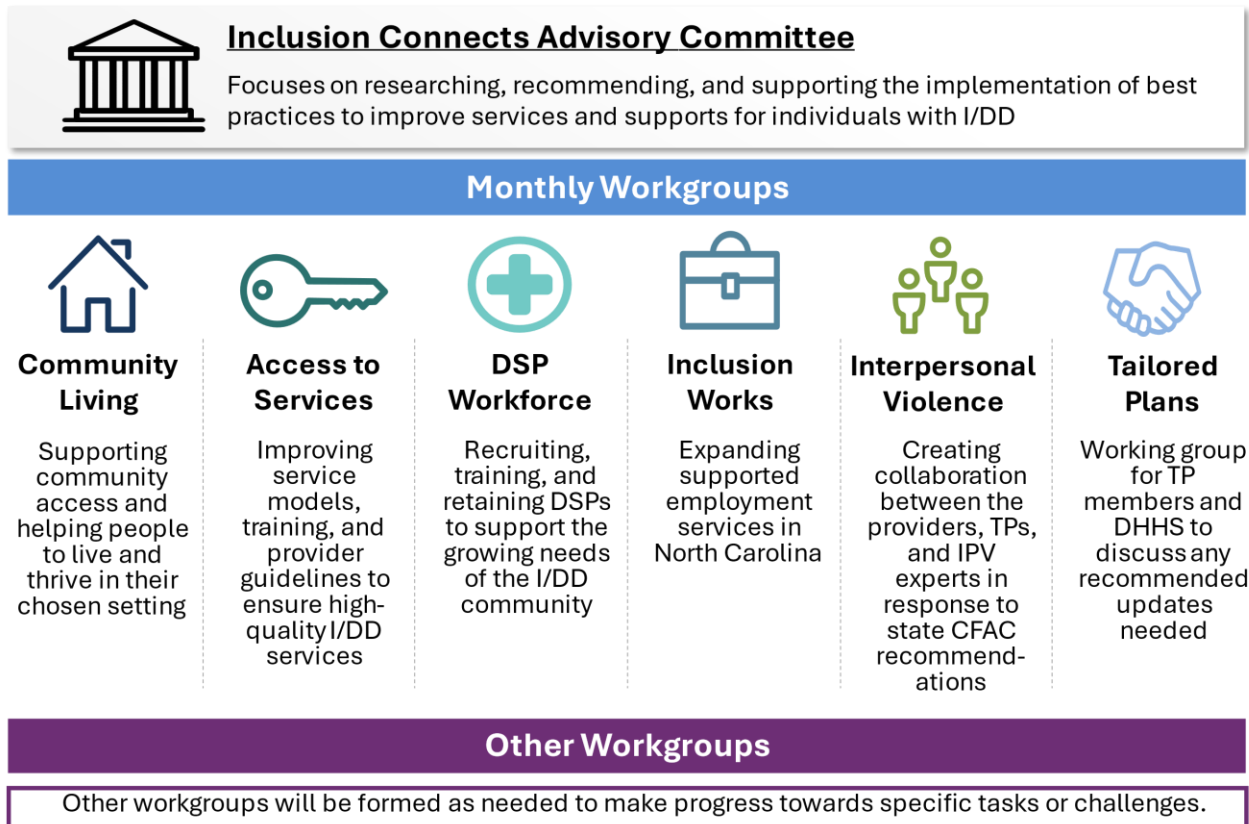
Planned Completion	Action Steps	Complete?
Spring 2025	Award the first round of recruitment and retention grants for DSPs.	
Summer 2025	Launch a second round of grants to attract more DSPs.	
	Start a basic training course for participants to learn skills to work as a DSP.	
Fall 2025	Start an advanced training course to help increase skills and knowledge of DSPs	
Winter 2025	Introduce a wage pilot program to increase pay for DSPs that have the basic and advanced training.	

## What This Plan Needs to Work

For Inclusion Connects to succeed, we need:

- Funding and Workers
  - Funding to support new services and increase access.
  - Enough trained workers to provide services.
- Stakeholder Engagement
  - Community engagement to ensure people with I/DD and their families help shape the process.
  - Strong teamwork between service providers and government agencies.

To enable stakeholder engagement, DHHS has created an Inclusion Connects Advisory Committee (ICAC) that is open to the public and will meet once every three months. ICAC will include people with lived experience, family members, service providers, DSPs, Tailored Plan representatives, and other experts. As part of the ICAC, workgroups will meet monthly to make progress towards goals specific to that workgroup. The structure of the ICAC and workgroups is shown below:



## **What Comes Next?**

The Inclusion Connects Work Plan is a living document, meaning it will keep evolving. DHHS will:

- Keep working with families, service providers, and policymakers.
- Track progress through quarterly reports and public dashboards.
- Make sure people with I/DD and their families have a voice in the process.

To stay updated, visit:

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/about/department-initiatives/inclusion-connects>.