

# Inclusion Connects Work Plan

Updated: March 2026



## 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 NCDHHS divisions led by DMH/DD/SUS with valuable partnerships and input from provider agencies, people with lived experience, advocates, managed care organizations, and other community stakeholders. The goal is to connect people with I/DD to the services and supports they need 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 the following 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 Information about Housing** – Educating people with I/DD on their living options and improving access to housing settings of their choice.



**Strengthening the Direct Support Professional (DSP) Workforce** – Addressing the DSP shortage through recruitment efforts and working to help ensure a well-trained workforce.



**Support in a Crisis** – Strengthening the crisis system in North Carolina to better meet the needs of people, including those with I/DD, in distress.



**Preventing Interpersonal Violence** – Preventing interpersonal violence (IPV) for people with I/DD through trauma-informed information and tools.



**Inclusion Works** – Expanding supported employment services and increasing access to Competitive Integrated Employment. Learn more at the [Inclusion Works website](#).

Here are the main steps NC 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 waiver slots available. Today, over 20,000 individuals are waiting for Innovations Waiver services through a waiver slot. There are 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.

<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

### 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 2026        | 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 collect data uniformly. | ✓         |
| TBD*               | Begin assessing the needs of people on the Innovations Waiver Waitlist.<br><br><i>*This will begin after funding is identified.</i>           |           |

### 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.                                     | ✓         |
| Spring 2026        | Contact people on the Innovations Waiver Waitlist who are likely eligible for other services while they wait. |           |
| Summer 2026        | Create tool to help people navigate I/DD services in NC.  |           |

#### 4. Tracking Progress with Data

| Planned Completion | Action Steps  | Complete? |
|--------------------|---|-----------|
| Fall 2025          | Add and revise new data tracking tools to measure service use.  | ✓         |
|                    | Update the waitlist dashboard to show how many people are getting services.   | ✓         |
| Winter 2025        | Update the waitlist dashboard to show the average wait time for those on the waitlist.  | ✓         |
| Summer 2026        | Update the waitlist dashboard to show the average time until a person on the waitlist is assigned an Innovations Waiver slot. |           |



### More Information about Housing

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 information about resources and services, sometimes referred to as diversion.

**Goal:** Help people with I/DD understand and make an informed choice about where they would like to live and ensure they receive appropriate 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, 2024, move at least 68 people with I/DD from institutional care into the community.   | ✓         |
|                    | Create a report to track data on the education that 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, 2025, move at least 78 new people with I/DD from institutional care into the community.   | ✓         |

|                    |  |  |
|--------------------|--|--|
| <b>Summer 2026</b> | By June 30, 2026, move at least 83 new people with I/DD from institutional care into the community.  |  |
| <b>Quarterly</b>   | Track and report the number of people moving into the community every 3 months. See <a href="#">Data and Reporting   NCDHHS</a> for quarterly updates. |  |

## 2. Understanding Housing Needs

| <b>Planned Completion</b> | <b>Action Steps</b>   | <b>Complete?</b>                    |
|---------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Summer 2025</b>        | Engage with Tailored Plans <sup>3</sup> and community partners to identify and work to address barriers to transitions.                                     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>Summer 2026</b>        | Develop a tool to assess people’s housing preferences and supports needed to make an informed living choice.  |                                     |
|                           | Work with the LME/MCOs and community partners to create an In-Reach toolkit to educate people living in institutional settings on community living options. |                                     |
| <b>Ongoing</b>            | Assess housing availability for people with I/DD and work to improve support service options, including Supported Living.                                   |                                     |

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

| <b>Planned Completion</b> | <b>Action Steps</b>  | <b>Complete?</b>                    |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Fall 2024</b>          | Create a list of statewide housing, funding, and support resources. Visit the <a href="#">Community Living Guide</a> to explore resources. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>Winter 2025</b>        | Update the definition of diversion used in reporting to better understand and support those at risk of moving into institutions.           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>Summer 2026</b>        | Create a Housing Term Glossary and add to the Inclusion Connects website.  |                                     |
| <b>Quarterly</b>          | Update the resources list every 3 months to make sure families know what’s available and can access helpful resources.                     |                                     |

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

#### 4. Finding Funding Sources to Support People with I/DD

| 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.   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Ongoing            | Educate people and their legally responsible people on housing agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).   |                                     |
| Ongoing            | Work with Tailored Plans to secure and use vouchers to pay for community housing.  |                                     |
| Ongoing            | Track progress toward approval of the remedial preference letter, which was submitted to HUD in January 2025.<br><br><i>HUD responded in June 2025 by sharing a notice from 2012. It explains how housing agencies can give priority housing vouchers to people with disabilities who are leaving institutions or may be at risk of entering them.</i> |                                     |



### 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. Inclusion Connects works to fix the DSP worker shortage by helping build a strong team of skilled helpers. To do this, we will work to keep our workers longer, find the right people to hire, and give them better training so they can do their jobs well.

**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 for Year One (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025).                        | ✓         |
| Summer 2025        | Release a statewide DSP Workforce Plan for Year Two (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026).                        | ✓         |
| Summer 2026        | Release a statewide DSP Workforce Plan for Year Three (July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027).                      |           |
| Quarterly          | Track how many hours usually provided by DSPs 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 | ✓         |
| Summer 2026        | Design state-wide networking opportunities for DSPs.                                |           |
| Ongoing            | Facilitate monthly DSP workforce workgroup meetings with community members.         |           |

### 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.   | ✓         |
| Fall 2025          | Start an advanced training course to help increase skills and knowledge of DSPs                           | ✓         |
| Spring 2026        | Award the second round of recruitment and retention grants for DSPs.                                      |           |
|                    | Start a basic training course for participants to learn skills to work as a DSP.                          |           |
|                    | Introduce a pilot program to provide a training bonus for DSPs that have the basic and advanced training. |           |

## Strategic Plan

The Inclusion Connects Work Plan supports the NCDHHS Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services [Strategic Plan for 2024 – 2029](#). The below focus areas are tied to Strategic Plan priorities.



### Support in a Crisis

Fast and effective crisis services are important for helping people across North Carolina. The crisis system must also be able to support people with I/DD who may be experiencing a mental health crisis or another type of emergency.

**Goal:** Strengthen crisis services for people with I/DD.

### Key Actions & Planned Completion Dates

#### 1. Connecting People with I/DD to Crisis Resources and Services

| Planned Completion | Action Steps  | Complete?                           |
|--------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Fall 2024          | Add information on 988, North Carolina Crisis Services, and NC Peer Warmline to the Inclusion Connects website. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Ongoing            | Share crisis resources through presentations, the Inclusion Connects website, and community partnerships.       |                                     |

#### 2. I/DD Specific Training for Staff in Agencies Providing Crisis Services

| Planned Completion | Action Steps  | Complete? |
|--------------------|---|-----------|
| TBD*               | Provide I/DD specific training for staff working in the crisis space<br><br><i>*Date will be updated once training is reviewed.</i> |           |



## Preventing Interpersonal Violence

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) experience disproportionately high rates of interpersonal violence, including physical, emotional, and sexual harm. They often face extra challenges getting help, being believed, or getting justice. Inclusion Connects works to reduce IPV in the IDD/TBI community by spreading awareness to the community, providing training and educational tools, and helping people with IDD/TBI get the help they need.

**Goal:** Reduce IPV in the IDD/TBI community by raising awareness, offering training, and connecting people to support.

### Key Actions & Planned Completion Dates

#### 1. Providing Educational Opportunities and Spreading Awareness

| Planned Completion | Action Steps   | Complete?                           |
|--------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| November 2025      | Launch <a href="#">Interpersonal Violence Resource Hub</a> on the Inclusion Connects webpage to provide training resources and ways for people with IDD/TBI to get help. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| March 2026         | Conduct webinar on “Interpersonal Violence: Supporting People with IDD and TBI”.   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Fall 2026          | Provide training on Interpersonal violence to be included in DSP Core Competency Curriculum.   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Monthly            | Conduct Inclusion Connects Advisory Committee workgroup on Interpersonal Violence  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Quarterly          | Update the IPV resource hub every 3 months to make sure people know what’s available and can access helpful resources.   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Ongoing            | Provide information for the community to access future training opportunities on IPV   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Ongoing            | Conduct additional webinars on IPV   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |



## Inclusion Works

North Carolinians with disabilities continue to remain less likely to be employed in the community than their peers without disabilities. Inclusion Works empowers people with I/DD to thrive in integrated workplaces of their choice through access to supporting services, ensuring fair pay, and fostering inclusivity.

Visit the [Inclusion Works website](#) to read their [Strategic Plan](#). Updates on progress will be shared annually.

**Goal:** Expanding supported employment services and increasing access to Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE).

### Key Actions & Planned Completion Dates

#### 1. Helping People with I/DD Reach their Employment Goals

| Planned Completion | Action Steps  | Complete?                           |
|--------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Spring 2025        | Create a clear process to help people make an informed choice about their work options.         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Ongoing            | Work with people to complete Employment Assessments and create Career Development Plans.        |                                     |
| Ongoing            | Maintain a strong, full system of support for people with I/DD by offering wraparound services. |                                     |

#### 2. Increasing Engagement with Community Partners and Sharing CIE Resources

| Planned Completion | Action Steps  | Complete?                           |
|--------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Winter 2024        | Create an Inclusion Works Advisory Committee.   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Fall 2025          | Implement the Disability Benefits 101 (DB101) website - <a href="#">DB101 North Carolina - Home</a> . | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Monthly            | Hold monthly Inclusion Works Advisory Committee meetings.   |                                     |
| Monthly            | Hold monthly meetings with providers and Tailored Plan stakeholder.                                   |                                     |
| Spring 2026        | Launch a social media campaign to share information and increase awareness.                           |                                     |

### 3. Strengthening the Employment Workforce to Support People with I/DD.

| Planned Completion | Action Steps   | Complete? |
|--------------------|--|-----------|
| Ongoing            | Offer opportunities for provider trainings and certifications.   |           |
| Ongoing            | Provide employers with training, tools, and connections to other inclusive employers.                      |           |
| Ongoing            | Host events that bring together employers, service providers, and adults with I/DD to share opportunities. |           |

#### 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, NCDHHS 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 toward goals specific to that workgroup. The structure of the ICAC and workgroups is shown below:



## **Inclusion Connects Advisory Committee**

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 recommendations



#### **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.

**Register to attend Quarterly ICAC Meetings here: [Register for the meeting](#).**

Upcoming meeting dates and time include:

|  |
|--|
| <b>Monday, April 20, 2026 from 11 – 12 ET</b>    |
| <b>Monday, July 20, 2026 from 11 – 12 ET</b>     |
| <b>Monday, October 19, 2026 from 11 – 12 ET</b>  |
| <b>Tuesday, January 19, 2027 from 11 – 12 ET</b> |

### **What Comes Next?**

The Inclusion Connects Work Plan is a living document, meaning it will keep evolving. NCDHHS 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 and get more information, visit the [Inclusion Connects website](#).