



Home and Community-Based Services Access Program for Individuals Living with I/DD: Program Guidance

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1 Executive Summary

The State of Rhode Island continues to grapple with the impacts of COVID-19, particularly as it relates to providers who deliver home based service alternatives. The goal of this **Home and Community-Based Services Access Program for Individuals Living with I/DD Program** (“Program) is to ensure the safety, well-being and access to services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Rhode Islanders living with intellectual and developmental disabilities -- one of the state’s most vulnerable populations -- have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Adults with disabilities have in large part received services in large group settings pre-COVID-19. Due to the vulnerabilities and poor outcomes associated with COVID-19 infection in this population, an increase in the availability of and access to home-based and small group service delivery is needed. Home based service alternatives require a large and flexible workforce, and to be effective, that workforce needs to be supported in its ability to offer service hours in the community and in rural locations. Data provided through a sampling of providers demonstrated that 492 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Rhode Island are unable to access services due to the workforce shortage. Expanding access to these HCBS services is crucial for the well-being and health and safety of Rhode Island citizen’s with intellectual and developmental disabilities during the duration of this public health emergency.

One of the most effective methods of mitigating the risk of providing services to this vulnerable population during the COVID-19 public health emergency is to increase access to home and community-based day programming. Rhode Island provides home and community-based service options for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in need of services that will reduce their exposure to the COVID-19 pandemic risk by diverting them from congregate care settings.

A second order effect of this COVID-19 pandemic is the increased need to provide individualized services in the home as an alternative to congregate group settings. Home based service alternatives require a large and flexible workforce, and to be effective that workforce needs to be supported in its ability to deliver community-based services in smaller, more individualized settings. Expanding access to these HCBS services is crucial to ensure that family members who provide support to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities can return to the workforce by ensuring that those they support have available necessary services while they are at work.

The principal barriers to the greater utilization of home-based services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are limited access and the capacity of providers to meet demand. Many individuals elected to leave the workforce when the community spread of COVID-19 began, schools closed, and stay at home orders took effect. Rebuilding the supply of direct support staff while the COVID-19 pandemic remains a threat requires the State to invest in recruitment and retention of direct support staff.

Providers must deliver individualized and/or small group service models to accommodate COVID-19 public health precautions. Further, during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, provider agencies are facing challenges retaining and recruiting staff. This continues to threaten the health and safety of individual



with intellectual and developmental disabilities residing in congregate care settings as well as those who are unable to receive necessary supports at home or in alternative community-based settings.

2 Program Overview

2.1 Program Description

The **Home and Community-Based Services Access Program for Individuals Living with I/DD (Program)** is established to support existing direct support staff and increase the number of direct support staff (DSPs and non-DSPs) employed by BHDDH licensed Developmental Disability Organizations (DDO) that deliver supports in residential, community-based or home-based services during the COVID-19 public health emergency and are earning less than \$20 per hour. These funds are an additional measure to be used as secondary funding source to other federal COVID-19 relief funding received by providers, and other similar funding resources made available by the State during the COVID-19 response.

This Program will distribute up to \$3.0 million in funding to the community-based providers and programs licensed by BHDDH as DDOs (“DDO Programs”) to retain existing staff and recruit new staff during the COVID-19 public health emergency. These DDO Programs provide an array of services, including home-based support services to eligible Medicaid beneficiaries as an alternative to the use of higher risk congregate care settings, and as a result serve to mitigate potential exposure to COVID-19 during the pandemic.

The main objective of this Program is to increase the capacity and immediate availability of home and community-based services as a timely, infection safe, community-based alternative to congregate care facilities.

2.2 Funding Allocation Methodology

The methodology outlined below is intended to define an equitable and fair method of allocating funds across the eligible DDO Programs.

Funding will be allocated to applicants based on the number of direct support staff they currently employ and the number of new direct support staff that begin employment during the specified timeframe who earn less than \$20 per hour. All funding will be distributed upon award contingent upon the successful applicant’s ability to meet the agreed-upon goals of this Program. The Program payments are to be distributed as follows:

- New and Existing Direct Support Staff (DSPs and Non-DSPs)
 - \$1200 in additional payroll support to full time direct support staff for their willingness to take the risk of working in a direct service environment during the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing their potential exposure to COVID-19. This is estimated to provide for payroll support to fund employees at a level equating to time and a half for a one (1) month time period.
 - Funding will be available for this payroll support for current and new direct support staff. All direct support staff must have begun employment by November 1, 2020.



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State of Rhode Island, October 16, 2020

- Funds shall be distributed by the applicant as a \$600 payment to each employee no later than November 30, and a \$600 payment after thirty (30) days in Program employment, or by December 30, 2020, whichever comes first.

The State estimates that there are about 2500 active part time and full-time direct support staff who will be eligible for this funding. Funding will be provided for up to one hundred and fifty (150) new direct support staff.

If direct support staff are employed less than thirty (30) hours per week, the payroll support is to be prorated based on their employment level. Please see below schedule for further guidance:

I/DD Direct Support Staff (DSPs and Non-DSPs)	Payroll Support
Staff working 15-21 hours per week	\$540
Staff working 22-29 hours per week	\$750
Staff working over 30 hour per week	\$1,200

3 Program Details

3.1 Funding and Application Dates

Key dates for the **Home and Community-Based Services Access Program for Individuals Living with I/DD (Program)** are as follows:

- **October 16, 2020:** Applications available from EOHHS.
- **October 30, 2020:** Applications due to the State.

3.2 Eligible Applicants

Eligibility to participate in this Program and receive funding through this Program is restricted to BHDDH licensed Developmental Disability Organizations (DDO) providers that deliver services in residential, community-based and/or home-based services.

Applicants that are not in compliance with the terms of other coronavirus relief programs administered by the State may be deemed ineligible for this Program at the discretion of EOHHS.

3.3 Program Application Requirements

In order to receive funding through this Program, eligible applicants must submit a completed application to EOHHS via email by the due date listed above to OHHS.IDDAccessProgram@ohhs.ri.gov. The application includes the following requirements:



1. Signed commitment to implement the payments in accordance with the proposed Program structure, including tracking qualified direct support staff to receive payment.
2. Signed attestation to the number of direct support staff employed by the applicant
3. Signed commitment of intention to employ additional direct support staff for day programming supports. Applications must indicate the target number of new direct support staff to be employed.
4. Signed commitment to use funds for retention and recruitment of direct support staff.
5. Signed commitment to retain funds in a separate account and to provide a program report as required by the State.

All questions regarding applications are to be directed here: OHHS.IDDAccessProgram@ohhs.ri.gov

3.4 Eligibility for Funding

An Evaluation Committee shall be established by the Secretary of EOHHS. The Committee's objective is to review applications in order to determine whether entities submitting applications ("Applicants") meet the eligibility criteria set forth by EOHHS and make recommendations to the Secretary as to eligible Applicants. Committee recommendations on eligibility can result in the following outcomes:

- Eligible
- Additional information required
- Ineligible

If an Applicant is deemed "ineligible", a notification will specify the reason(s) for such ineligibility, based on the criteria provided. If additional information is required, Applicant will have five (5) business days to respond with sufficient evidence to be deemed eligible. As soon as evaluation of all Applicants is completed, funds will be disbursed in accordance with the funding allocation methodology described above.

Applicants who participated in the Workforce Stabilization Loan Program ("Loan") who did not cooperate with the State audit of the Loan and/or have been determined through the State audit of the Loan to owe all or a portion of the Loan to the State, are not eligible to participate in this Program until such time as they cooperate with the State audit of the Loan and/or remit to the State the total Loan balance owed.

3.5 Eligible Uses of Funds and Reporting Requirements

Funds received through this Program shall be applied toward payroll supports for direct support staff. Applicants will have until November 15, 2020, to employ the target number of direct support staff. If the employment target is not met by that time, any unexpended funds allocated for new direct support staff must be returned to the State.

Applicants will be required to report to EOHHS at the conclusion of the program and by December 30, 2020 on the uses of funds and methods of tracking payments. Applicants must also report on the number of direct



support staff employed, the length of employment of direct support staff, and payments made to those direct support staff.

Once funds are disbursed, successful Applicant award recipients are instructed to keep detailed and complete financial records demonstrating that funds received through this Program are spent in accordance with these requirements, as award recipients of these funds will be subject to an audit. In the event of an audit, if the award recipient is found to have used funds for ineligible expenses, the award recipient will be considered in violation of the award agreement at which point RI EOHHS may begin the process of recouping all or a portion of the funds awarded by reducing future payments. The State will determine whether the full award or a portion of the award shall be recouped based on the State's assessment of the unique circumstances of each violation of the award agreement.

4 In Closing

The COVID-19 public health emergency represents a clear hardship for the State's system of care for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities that requires broad cooperation to overcome; it is also clear that the COVID-19 public health emergency shall continue to present evolving challenges. This Program represents an opportunity to extend that cooperation to build strong resilience during the current COVID-19 public health crisis while also protecting the health and safety for Rhode Islanders with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The State of Rhode Island looks forward to working with critically important direct support staff and stakeholders to establish and carry out this Program of support during the COVID-19 public health emergency.