

Public and private providers of essential services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) issue urgent call for support

Texas' most vulnerable residents are in danger of losing critical care during the COVID-19 pandemic without urgent action from the state. As providers of support services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Texas, we are urgently calling on Gov. Greg Abbott and Texas Health and Human Services (HHSC) to immediately:

1. Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates across the board by at least 19% to help us cover the growing costs of providing services
2. Designate Direct Support Professionals as "Essential Health Care Staff," giving us access to much needed PPE and allowing our employees to get to work without concern

Operated by more than 500 providers across rural and urban Texas, and serving more than 35,000 Texans who live primarily in foster care arrangements or small group homes, these programs include: ICF/IID (Intermediate Care Facilities), HCS (Home and Community Services), and TxHmL (Texas Home Living).

In the face of this COVID-19 public health emergency, these providers have simultaneously dealt with the challenges of retaining a workforce of direct care workers (often by paying higher wages in an environment that experiences chronic workforce shortages), accessing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to protect themselves and individuals in programs, and assisting residents who may be ill but cannot articulate symptoms, have difficulty understanding the need to isolate, and require additional temporary supports. These programs are working diligently to prevent a larger public health problem and doing their best to keep their residents safe and out of hospitals.

Without immediate financial help, these community programs in Texas are at risk of being completely overwhelmed, leaving many of our most vulnerable residents at risk.

As part of the federal response to COVID-19, Texas will experience a 6.2% temporary increase in the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP). We urge state decision makers to use a portion of this funding to provide a time-limited, 19% reimbursement rate increase to assist providers as they strive to meet the needs of vulnerable Texans with intellectual disabilities.

Other states are taking action. It's time for Texas to join them.

- **Alabama:** Applied an initial 19% rate increase for residential services.
- **Connecticut:** Applied rate increases ranging from 5% to more than 25% to providers depending upon program being operated.
- **Illinois:** Applied a 20% increase to IDD residential provider rates.
- **Kentucky:** Allowed residential providers with staffed residences to request a 50% rate increase for the next 120 days. The provider must submit a letter outlining the reason

for the request, which can include increased staffing costs, day training closures, or any other significant cost increase will be sufficient to receive the increase.

- **New Jersey:** Adjusted provider rates on an emergency basis.
- **North Carolina:** Applied a 40% increase to provider rates.
- **Ohio:** Applied a 30% rate increase to IDD residential provider rates
- **Washington:** Similar to Alabama and Kentucky, funds have been appropriated to cover increased overtime, wage increases and other COVID-19 related costs in residential setting.

We urge action now. Failure of the state of Texas to immediately take steps could have devastating effects on our state's most vulnerable citizens and on the people who care for them.

Signed:

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