



Association of County Human Services

Developmental Disabilities Program Committee

2026 Legislative Priorities

Washington counties are on the front lines of delivering critical services that protect the health, safety, and inclusion of residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). As federal funding changes and state budget pressures increase, counties urge the Legislature to protect essential programs that make it possible for people with I/DD to live, work, and belong in their communities.

1. Protect Medicaid and Safety-Net Services for Vulnerable Populations

Counties urge the Legislature to protect Medicaid and other safety-net services that vulnerable populations, including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), rely on for health, safety, and independence. Loss of these supports will create significant health and safety risks.

As federal Medicaid cuts and new H.R. 1 requirements take effect in 2026 and 2027, access to health coverage, I/DD services, and other basic needs programs will be at risk. For people with I/DD, these losses will be compounded across multiple systems. For example, reductions in behavioral health or housing programs increase the risk of homelessness, hospitalization, or institutionalization.

Medicaid not only provides health insurance, it funds life-sustaining supports including help with medications, meals, and showers; employment and community inclusion; respite for caregivers; and behavioral health care. Without these services, people will lose the supports that help them live safely and independently, forcing some into more restrictive and costly settings and increasing pressure on families, providers, and local safety-net systems.

- A June 2025 [KFF study](#) estimates that 26% of Medicaid recipients in Washington will lose coverage between 2025 and 2034—the highest projected rate in the nation.
- As of July 2025, the [Health Care Authority](#) projected that 200,000 to 320,000 Washington residents will lose Apple Health (Medicaid) coverage.

These coverage losses will destabilize families, increase crises, and shift costs to the state, counties, and providers already operating with limited resources. Counties urge the Legislature to protect Medicaid funding and reject reductions that would compound federal cuts and threaten health, safety, and stability for people with I/DD and their families.

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2. Protect Employment and Community Inclusion Services

Employment and Community Inclusion services, funded through Medicaid waivers, are essential supports that help people with I/DD live, work, and participate fully in their communities. Counties coordinate these services and connect people to other safety-net resources such as behavioral health providers and schools. Research shows people with jobs and community connections have better health and safety outcomes. Without this support, people face isolation, families lose stability, taxpayers are pulled out of the workforce, and reliance on Medicaid and other crisis systems increases.

Counties request that the State Legislature:

- **Maintain and protect current funding so people with I/DD do not lose access to critical supports.** Funding for Employment and Community Inclusion services has been reduced in past legislative sessions. Maintaining current funding levels will help prevent waitlists and support meaningful employment, strong community connections and better health outcomes for individuals.
- **Continue to ensure Home and Community-Based Services Waivers are available to support employment and other essential services for all students with I/DD leaving high school.** Transition supports that build on state and local investments ensure students with I/DD can successfully move to adult life, employment, and community participation.

3. Maintain Access to Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) Ages 0-3 and Special Education for Children Ages 3-5

Counties urge the Legislature to protect funding for Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) for children ages 0-3 and special education and related services for children ages 3-5, funded through the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) and state special education dollars.

ESIT helps families support their children's growth and development during the most formative years. The State Legislature should ensure continuity of services across IDEA Part C (ESIT) and Part B (Special Education for 3–5-year-olds) so children and families experience seamless, coordinated support.

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