



Strategic Priorities for FY2019-2022

Our Priority-Setting Process

Disability Rights Texas (DRTx), like many nonprofit and legal service organizations, has a big job to do with limited funds and staff positions. To be successful and achieve our mission, we must use every dollar and position in the most effective way we can.

Toward that end, every four years, the DRTx Board of Directors decides which strategic priorities will direct our work. We start by asking people in the disability community about what's important to them. We go to great lengths to get as much feedback from as many people and groups as we can. We learn from paper and electronic surveys, focus groups, listening sessions, and interviews with leaders and influencers in the disability community.

In setting priorities, the Board weighs the significant problems identified by the disability community along with the activities that are most related to our mission. Federal law and our funders' requirements play a role in our priorities, too.

We are required to serve a wide range of disability populations and offer many different types of services. The priorities reported here reflect many hours of serious thinking and hard work to find ways to offer the most effective services possible to the largest number of people with disabilities we can—with the funding and staff we have.

The strategic priorities are: Living in the Community; Civil Rights; Safety, Protection, and Support in Texas Institutions; Health Care; Going to Public School; Housing, Employment, Access and Transportation; Disaster Planning and Recovery; Protection and Support in Foster Care.

Responding to emerging issues or unexpected challenges

Sometimes, unexpected things come up that have an enormous impact on people with disabilities and can have an impact on our current service priorities. For example, as Hurricane Harvey came ashore in 2017, we saw once again, individuals with disabilities are especially vulnerable in disasters and face unique legal challenges rebuilding their lives. With limited resources and the use of new restricted funding for this purpose, DRTx was able to respond and assist families with legal needs related to housing, avoiding inappropriate institutionalization, accessing appropriate accommodations in services, and legally mandated educational services. Another example of an unexpected demand for our resources is the separation of immigrant children from their parents and placement in detention facilities. Given extensive media coverage of the conditions in detention facilities, our staff utilized our P&A access authority to monitor these facilities and representation of individual youth who experienced issues related to mental health, medical care and special education.

Both examples are about issues that fall within our service priorities but the demand for our immediate help when these situations arise, may exceed our current resources. Because unknown issues and challenges may arise in the next four years, DRTx seeks to be ready to address the changing social, cultural, financial, institutional or legal climate. The Board reviews the priorities at least once every year—to make sure we're putting our money and our work where it's most needed, and is committed to considering emerging issues and unexpected challenges as they arise and will make changes in our priorities as needed..

What does this mean to the people with disabilities we serve?

As much as we might want to, limited staffing and funding means we can't take every case that comes to us. In making the hard decision, we first look to make sure the case is within our strategic priorities. Beyond that, the Board asks staff to consider other things in deciding whether to accept a case:

1. Is there a good chance of success?
2. How much staff time, expertise, and expense will be needed?
3. Given their current workload, can staff work on this case effectively?
4. How does it fit with our funding sources and priority areas?
5. If successful, how much would this case benefit other people with disabilities?

Does DRTx ever serve cases that don't fall within the strategic priorities?

Sometimes. The DRTx Executive Director is allowed to accept a few cases that represent a historically underserved ethnic community or have other special circumstances. These cases can't take up a lot of staff time or funding.

LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY

ACCESS TO COMMUNITY SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

Vision: All people with disabilities—including those with complex medical and behavioral needs—live in the community with their choice of necessary supports and services.

- Goal #1 People with disabilities can move from institutions to the community with all supports and services they are entitled to (including Medicaid) that are:
- Timely and available when needed.
 - Person-directed.
 - Meaningful.
 - Well-planned and carried out.
- Goal #2 People with disabilities can make their own life decisions about which community services and supports they need and want because they are supported to make their own decisions.
- Goal #3 People who are deaf, hard of hearing, unable to speak or have other communication needs—in institutions or the community—can express their own interests and preferences because they get communication testing and assessments, technology, supports and services that meet their needs.
- Goal #4 Make funds available for home and community-based services to support people with disabilities living in the community as a result of advocacy efforts to:
- Reduce waiting lists.
 - Fund more Medicaid Waivers for transition and diversion.
 - Address complex needs.
 - Ensure an adequate workforce.
 - Downsize or close large institutions such as:
 - Intermediate Care Facilities; and
 - State Supported Living Centers.
- Goal #5 People with disabilities, including those who have complex medical or behavioral needs, don't have to be admitted or stay in institutions because they will receive high quality services that will help them be as healthy and independent as possible.
- Goal #6 People with disabilities live in the community and are not at risk of being placed in an institution because they have all the supports and services they are entitled to (including Medicaid) that are:
- Timely and available when needed.
 - Person-directed.
 - Meaningful.
 - Well-planned and carried out.
- Goal #7 People with disabilities living in or moving to community group homes are not discriminated against by local government, homeowners associations, or others.

CIVIL RIGHTS

ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Vision: People with disabilities are not abused or neglected—whether they live on their own in the community or in group homes, nursing homes, or other institutions.

Goal #1 Claims of abuse, neglect, exploitation or other mistreatment by a caregiver or service provider are fully investigated in keeping with the law.

RESTRAINT & SECLUSION

Vision: People with disabilities are not restrained or isolated (separated from others) illegally.

Goal #1 People with disabilities are not restrained, isolated (separated from others), or given emergency medicine in any way that is not allowed by law or best practices.

CIVIL RIGHTS

Vision: People with disabilities have the same rights given to everyone.

- Goal #1 People with disabilities are actively involved in planning for their treatment and do not receive treatment without agreeing to it.
- Goal #2 People with disabilities understand and know how to use their rights, including what to do if a service provider takes away their rights.
- Goal #3 The rights of people with disabilities are protected in the law enforcement, criminal justice, and juvenile justice systems.
- Goal #4 People with disabilities get due process (respect of a person's legal rights) and their civil rights are fully protected in judicial or administrative hearings.
- Goal #5 People with disabilities are not placed under guardianship when they don't need it and unnecessary guardianships are removed. If a person is under guardianship, it is limited so that as few rights as possible are restricted.
- Goal #6 People applying for or getting independent living services from the centers for independent living (CIL), IL services administered by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, or Texas Workforce Solutions Older Blind Services program, know what their rights are and how to protect them.

SAFETY, PROTECTION, AND SUPPORT IN TEXAS INSTITUTIONS

INSTITUTIONS

Vision: All people with disabilities who live in institutions are safe, healthy, respected, treated with dignity, and supported to lead meaningful lives.

People living in or receiving treatment at Texas institutions are protected from rights abuses, abuse, and neglect.

People who live in any state-run institution know how to contact DRTx.

Note: DRTx defines “institutions” as places that people with disabilities are confined to or go to live for short-term and/or long-term care or treatment—away from their own or family homes. Some examples are nursing homes, intermediate care facilities (ICFs), state supported living centers (SSLCs), residential treatment centers, and state-operated and private psychiatric treatment facilities. For this priority, we don’t include places, such as state prisons, that are operated by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice or federal prisons.

HEALTH CARE

HEALTH CARE ELIGIBILITY AND ACCESS

Vision: People with disabilities and/or severe and chronic illnesses – living in community settings or institutions – have health care that provides all appropriate care and services.

- Goal #1 People with disabilities who are eligible for public health benefits have timely access to the care and long-term supports they are entitled to, including:
- Health services.
 - Mental health services.
 - Assistive technology.
 - Durable medical equipment.
 - Other disability-related services
- Goal #2 People with disabilities understand and exercise their legal rights in receiving public health and/or mental health benefits, including their right:
- To be notified about changes to their benefits.
 - To appeal (ask for a change) decisions that affect their health care or long-term supports.
 - To a fair hearing (a person’s chance to explain their case to a judge).

GOING TO PUBLIC SCHOOL

FREE APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION (FAPE) FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Vision: Students with disabilities are successful in school because public schools:

- **Follow all special education requirements.**
- **Use “best practices.”**
- **Are held responsible for student success.**
- **Provide parents with the information they need to be effective advocates for their children.**

- Goal #1 The Texas Education Agency (TEA) enforces and monitors compliance with all laws, rules, and policies related to FAPE.
- Goal #2 Texas laws and regulations require public schools to give students with disabilities equal access to the services and resources that all students get in the least restrictive setting.
- Goal #3 TEA and public schools give parents, adult students, and advocates information, training, and short-term help with legal issues that affect students with disabilities.

UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

Vision: All students with disabilities from underserved groups (because of disability, economic, and/or cultural factors) get a free appropriate public education.

- Goal #1 Students with disabilities in public schools whose families are underserved get services they need to learn and make progress on other goals.

CHILD FIND

Vision: All students with disabilities who need special education are identified and evaluated because public schools comply with federal “Child Find” rules.

- Goal #1 All public schools identify, refer, evaluate and serve students who likely need special education services.

INCLUSION

Vision: Students with disabilities go to class with children who do not have disabilities and are given supports they need to socialize and succeed in regular education classrooms.

- Goal #1 Students with disabilities are included with students without disabilities in their age group in classrooms and lessons, to the greatest extent possible.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Vision: Students with disabilities make progress in public school because they have the assistive technology they need and training to use it.

- Goal #1 Students with disabilities receive testing and evaluations to find out the best assistive technology devices and services for them, and students, parents, and school staff are trained on the right way to use the technology.

TRANSITION SERVICES

Vision: Students with disabilities leave school prepared for life as adults in the community.

- Goal #1 Students with disabilities age 14 and older get transition evaluations, planning, and services that meet state and federal laws and include:
- Supported decision making.
 - Self-advocacy skills and rights training.
 - Information about community supports and Social Security work benefits.
 - Pre-employment training.

DISCIPLINE

Vision: Students who, because of a disability, need help to behave appropriately in school, are given positive planning and supports and are not restrained, pushed out of school, referred to law enforcement, or otherwise mistreated.

- Goal #1 Students with disabilities in public schools are given positive, trauma-informed behavior direction and supports. Students in all alternative settings get a free appropriate public education (FAPE).
- Goal #2 Students with disabilities are not wrongly disciplined because public schools follow state and federal laws for discipline, including:
- Not using restraints (physical or chemical).
 - Not isolating students (separating them from others).
 - Not sending students home.
 - Not suspending students.
 - Not removing students from the classroom or school.
 - Not turning students over to law enforcement.
 - Not assessing students as a risk or threat to school safety solely based on their disability.

HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT, ACCESS & TRANSPORTATION

HOUSING

Vision: People with disabilities are able to access affordable, accessible, and integrated homes or apartments where they choose to live.

- Goal # 1 Through enforcement of fair housing and other laws, people with disabilities are protected from discrimination in living where they choose.
- Goal # 2 Through development of public policy, safe, accessible, affordable, and integrated housing becomes available to people with disabilities. Architectural modifications, reasonable accommodations, and universal design are commonplace housing practices.

EMPLOYMENT

Vision: All people with disabilities have the opportunity to work.

- Goal #1 Individuals with disabilities are supported in their employment goals, and are employed in integrated and competitive employment settings of their choice.
- Goal #2 Ensure that individuals with disabilities in sheltered workshops, segregated or subminimum wage employment receive properly calculated wages and services as required by law.
- Goal #3 Federal and state employment and discrimination and civil rights laws are enforced so that individuals with disabilities are not discriminated against while at work or while trying to access employment, and workers with disabilities are paid fair and legal wages.

ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT, PUBLIC SERVICES & PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Vision: People with disabilities have full access to all government buildings, programs, and services.

- Goal #1 Federal and state laws and policies are enforced so that governmental agencies, schools, other organizations receiving government funds, and private businesses do not discriminate against people with disabilities.
- Goal #2 People with disabilities are able to fully participate in all aspects of the voting process by enforcing federal and state voting and anti-discrimination laws and policies.

TRANSPORTATION

Vision: People with disabilities have full and equal access to public and private transportation.

- Goal #1 People with disabilities can use safe, reliable and accessible transportation because public transportation authorities, para-transit systems, and private transportation companies (which includes transportation network companies) are in full compliance with federal and state anti-discrimination laws and policies.

DISASTER PLANNING AND RECOVERY

VISION: Disaster planning and recovery services exist for the needs of people with disabilities, in a manner that is appropriate, accessible, integrated, and equivalent to that received by others.

- Goal #1 Public and private policies and planning are in place to ensure that in the event of a disaster, appropriate and accessible short-term and long-term emergency and recovery services, supports, shelter, and housing exist for people with disabilities in the most integrated setting possible.
- Goal #2 Through enforcement of laws related to accessibility, education, employment, health care, mental health care, and housing, individuals with disabilities receive meaningful, appropriate, and nondiscriminatory disaster recovery services.

PROTECTION AND SUPPORT IN FOSTER CARE REPRESENTING CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE PROGRAM

Vision: Children with disabilities receive all the services they need when they are in the custody of the State.

- Goal #1 Children with disabilities get the educational, health, and community services they need when they are in the custody of the State because they have been abused or neglected.