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California's protection and advocacy system

BASIC INFORMATION
On
Community Living for People with Developmental Disabilities

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What Is A Developmental Disability?

This is the term for disabilities that occurred in a person's "developmental" years. In California, the disability must occur by age 18. Developmental disabilities include: intellectual disability (mental retardation and similar conditions), epilepsy, cerebral palsy, and autism. This is different from a "mental disability," such as schizophrenia, bi-polar disorders, or other psychiatric conditions.

What is the Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act?

The Lanterman Act, first passed in 1969, establishes California's obligation to provide an array of community supports and services to enable people with developmental disabilities "to approximate the pattern of everyday living of non-disabled persons of the same age," so that they can "lead more independent and productive lives in the community."

What are Regional Centers?

The Lanterman Act created the 21 regional centers, which are non-profit corporations that contract with the state Department of Developmental Services. They provide service coordination, purchase services, and assist people with developmental disabilities in accessing the services they need to increase their independence and integration into the mainstream of community life.

What Are Developmental Centers?

Developmental Centers, formerly called state hospitals, were conceived in the 1800's as "safe havens" for children who had been rejected by their communities. The population of California's institutions has declined from 14,000 in the 1960s to only 2,300 today, even as the state's population has tripled. There are still four of these large, state-operated institutions in California where anywhere from 300 to 800 people live on wards of 20 to 40 people. There are also two smaller state-operated institutions with over 50 persons in each. Developmental centers are the least integrated residential option in the state and also the most expensive, at an average of more than \$270,000 per resident per year.

What other Kinds of Institutions are there?

People with developmental disabilities also live in a variety of other types of public and private institutions when they could live in more integrated or home-like settings. Approximately 1,400 people reside in skilled nursing facilities, and over 3,000 live in large congregate licensed facilities that house between 16 and 100 people. Many individuals are inappropriately sent to acute psychiatric hospitals, others, who may need short-term psychiatric or medical care, languish in hospitals long beyond the time when there is any medical need. Minors with developmental disabilities who are wards or dependents of the court often end up in children's shelters that cannot meet their needs.

Are the People who live in Institutions More Severely Disabled than those Sharing in our Communities?

No. An overwhelming majority of people with the most severe disabilities already live successfully in their home communities.

How Does California Support People in their Local Communities?

We share our parks, theaters, stores, restaurants, schools, and workplaces with nearly 200,000 fellow citizens with developmental disabilities who are supported by regional center-funded services. This includes people of all ages, all types of disability, and all levels of severity of disability. People thrive in all types of communities: Urban, suburban and rural.

Regional centers contract with a network of over 8,000 private, independent service provider agencies and allocate funding through other

mechanisms such as vouchers for services. The range of services includes assistance to continue living with a person's family, licensed residential homes (usually for four-six people, but they can be larger or smaller), independent living training, and personal assistance to live in one's own home. People also receive other services which include job supports, recreational day activity programs, medical care, and support to participate in normal community activities.

Why do People move from Institutions to Community Settings?

In most cases, a hospital-like or other institutional setting is not required—since virtually all of the services and supports provided by institutions can be provided in community settings. The restrictions of institutional life prevent people from reaching their full potential. People with disabilities have the right to the same opportunities as people without disabilities. These include living in neighborhoods, attending schools in the community, socializing and working with a variety of people in a variety of settings.

Also, living in large congregate settings deprives individuals of the opportunity to control simple everyday aspects of their lives - e.g., when to get up or what to watch on TV.