



DDA



annual report



COMMISSIONER'S NOTE

This year has been one of meaningful progress and continued momentum for the Department of Disability and Aging. With the opening of our new West Regional Office in Arlington, including the launch of our West Region Innovation Center, we have taken a major step forward in expanding access for older adults and individuals with disabilities. The Innovation Center is already becoming a one-stop resource where older adults and people with disabilities can explore tools, supports, and technologies that help them reach their independence goals. We look forward to opening MTRO and ETRO next, further strengthening our statewide presence.

We also celebrated a milestone: three years since launching the MAPs Program. This anniversary marks not only the growth of the program but also the achievements of several MAPs graduates who have completed up to three years of personalized goals. Their accomplishments in home life, employment, and the community reflect the power of individualized support and the dedication of our staff and partners. This year, we expanded our investment in communities across Tennessee by launching additional senior center grants, more Tennessee Believes grants, a new youth camp grant, and a new program at Trevecca Nazarene University to equip Tennessee teachers with enhanced tools to support students with disabilities. These initiatives strengthen our commitment to serving Tennesseans across the lifespan.

As Tennessee prepares to elect a new governor in November, I want to express what an honor it has been to be appointed by Governor Bill Lee and serve in his administration for the past eight years. His support for older adults and people with disabilities has been instrumental in advancing our mission. We look forward to continuing this important work under the next administration and building on the strong foundation we have established.

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to the DDA employees, providers, direct care staff, and partners who work tirelessly every day to support older adults and Tennesseans with disabilities. Your dedication makes our progress possible. Together, we are shaping a future where every Tennessean can thrive.



Brad Turner, Commissioner

Department of Disability and Aging



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Overview of FY 2025	6
Program Innovation	8
Katie Beckett	21
Clinical Services	25
Communication & External Affairs	33
Additional Updates	52
Councils	58
A Look Ahead	63



INTRODUCTION

The Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) became an official state department on July 1, 2024. This department combines the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) with the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability (TCAD). The department now has more than 1,600 people serving more than 1.5 million older adults and Tennesseans with disabilities.

For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, this is done through the home and community-based waiver programs, the Tennessee Early Intervention System (TEIS), Katie Beckett Program, Medicaid Alternative Pathways (MAPs) Program, and Family Support Program. For older adults, some of those programs include the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), home and community-based programs, nutrition services, caregiver support, transportation assistance, and public guardianship.

MISSION:

The Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) became an official state department on July 1, 2024. This department combines the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) with the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability (TCAD). The department now has more than 1,600 people serving more than 1.5 million older adults and Tennesseans with disabilities.

For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, this is done through the home and community-based waiver programs, the Tennessee Early Intervention System (TEIS), Katie Beckett Program, Medicaid Alternative Pathways (MAPs) Program, and Family Support Program. For older adults, some of those programs include the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), home and community-based programs, nutrition services, caregiver support, transportation assistance, and public guardianship.

VISION:

To create an environment where every Tennessean, regardless of ability or age, has access to the resources, support, and opportunities needed to thrive and contribute to their communities

Total DDA Budget: \$ \$493,060,200 (Includes Aging)

Total TCAD Budget: \$ 81,187,300

TennCare IDD Waiver Budget: \$ 872,423,800

(\$ 919,423,800 including Katie Beckett Part B)

DDA Authorized Positions: 1,885

	Expenditures	Persons Supported
Waiver		
SD	\$24,986,693	787
CAC	\$287,492,192	1,114
SW	\$488,405,530	3,543
Non-Waiver		
ICF	\$58,635,825	95
Strong Family Homes	\$6,062,170	16
Family Support	\$8,410,733	5,112
Strong Family HRA	\$8,508,685	1,059
MAPs	\$12,208,296	981
TEIS	\$101,203,297	23,263
Katie Beckett	\$59,418,237	5,083
Seating & Positioning	\$4,411,721	417
Protection from Harm	\$8,659,322	
Central Office Administration	\$46,121,522	
Community Services	\$55,891,187	

OVERVIEW OF '25

Commissioner's Visits:

During FY26, Commissioner Brad Turner advanced the Department of Disability and Aging's national leadership by representing DDA across the country. His engagements throughout the year amplified DDA's commitment to collaboration, innovation, and supporting states seeking to strengthen their own systems for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and older adults.

Commissioner Turner was reappointed to the NASDDDS Board of Directors this past year, which gives the department the opportunity to help shape national disability policy and advocate for our community. In addition, he participated in several national events shaping policy and practice in disability and aging services. He joined national leaders at The Link Center's Children's Summit in Washington, D.C., the Enabling Tech Summit in Little Rock, and the NASDDDS Directors Forum and Annual Conference in Phoenix to build stronger partnerships across systems, promote effective technology solutions, and elevate services statewide.

Across Tennessee, Commissioner Turner held several check presentations, highlighting the impact of DDA's investments. He awarded \$250,000 to Special Olympics Tennessee, \$50,000 to High Hopes Development Center, and \$100,000 to Best Buddies Tennessee to expand inclusion, health, and family support initiatives. Through the Tennessee Believes Grant, he celebrated new higher education and career readiness programs at UT Martin and Lee University.

Commissioner Turner also visited DDA partners to see their work firsthand. In West Tennessee, he met with MIFA, which serves more than 30,000 older adults annually, and toured the STAR Center in Jackson, which supported over 3,200 individuals of all ages with I/DD this year, including more than 1,700 receiving assistive technology services.

Across FY26, Commissioner Turner's visits and engagements demonstrated DDA's ongoing commitment to strengthening partnerships and ensuring programs remain responsive to the needs of Tennesseans.



STATEWIDE ADA PROJECT

In May 2025, the Department officially began leading the Statewide Enterprise ADA Initiative. This initiative stemmed from the 2024 Department of Justice (DOJ) technical requirements for state and local governments to ensure that all websites and mobile applications are accessible to people with disabilities. In April 2026, the DOJ published an Interim Final Rule extending the compliance date to April 26, 2027.

To support implementation across all Tennessee state agencies, the Department began hosting weekly office hours, offering question-and-answer sessions and demonstrations related to the compliance effort. In addition, the ADA Initiative Team—made up of a collaborative effort between DDA and the Department of Finance and Administration—developed supporting resources and guidance documents and worked as a support team, reviewing websites and remediation efforts for the statewide project.



Over the course of the 14 months following the May 2025 DDA takeover, the Department recorded the following metrics:

- 29 Remediation Office Hours sessions
- 12 live trainings
- 30+ consulting hours completed
- 2,866 completions of ADA training in Edison
- 31 state agencies and programs supported through PDF remediation
- 1,563 total PDFs remediated

JOINT TBI SAFE SENIOR EVENT

On June 5, 2026, DDA partnered with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) to distribute magnets and informational cards to older adults. The distributed materials were designed to help recipients recognize and prevent common scams targeting their community, including scams involving technology, finances, and personal safety. To support outreach and distribution, DDA and the TBI coordinated with the East Tennessee Human Resource Agency (ETHRA) and Mobile Meals Community Kitchen in Knoxville, which distributed the magnets through their meal delivery program. The Department plans to continue working with similar organizations to distribute materials across the state through the Aging Nutrition Program, which provides an average of more than 200,000 meals to more than 15,000 Tennessee residents every month.

NEW REGIONAL OFFICES

DDA began construction on new offices in Middle, West, and East Tennessee in the summer of 2024. These facilities were developed to support the Department's growth and to provide innovative, welcoming spaces for the people we serve. The West Tennessee Regional Office (WTRO) was the first to complete construction. On February 27, 2026, the Department hosted a Community Open House in Arlington, Tennessee, to commemorate the completion of the West Tennessee Regional Office. The event included key partners from across the construction process. Remarks were delivered by WTRO Director CJ McMorran, DDA Commissioner Brad Turner, and Department of General Services (DGS) Commissioner Andy Kidd. More than 200 people attended, including DDA employees, DGS employees, community partners, and construction stakeholders.

In addition to remarks, attendees had the opportunity to tour the Enabling Technology Model Home, where individuals could view the vast array of technologies that can assist people with disabilities and older adults with independent living. Informational sessions regarding the new Innovation Centers were held, where those in attendance were granted the opportunity to tour wheelchair modification rooms and test tracks and learn more about the Centers' offerings.

Following the completion of the Middle and East Tennessee Regional Offices, the DDA Communications team, in collaboration with DGS, will host two additional ribbon cuttings in November 2026.

PROGRAM INNOVATION

DDA's Division of Program Innovation broadened its impact throughout FY26 by advancing forward-thinking solutions that strengthen provider capacity, expand opportunities for individuals, and improve quality of life across Tennessee. This year, the division supported statewide growth in Technology First credentialing, certification, and accreditation; launched Tech First training for self-advocates; advanced the Employment First accreditation program; and recognized creative provider efforts through innovation grants. The team also expanded its work in dental health, complex behavior support, and Enabling Technology tools for older adults. In addition to capacity building efforts, Program Innovation created meaningful experiential opportunities through the Enabling Technology and Innovation Summit, Power Up Tech Camp, and the Enabling Technology Model Homes. Notably, FY26 also marked the launch of the Innovation Centers program, which builds on the foundations of the Seating and Positioning Clinics to deliver more integrated and innovative supports for people with disabilities and older adults.

Looking ahead to FY27, the division is preparing to scale the Enabling Technology for Older Adults Pilot, introduce a home modification grant, develop new housing-focused training and resources, continue its collaboration with The Kelsey on disability forward housing solutions, expand the TRIAD pilot to more providers statewide, and formally introduce innovation services across its three regional Innovation Centers.

Program Innovation will continue strengthening its flagship initiatives—Enabling Technology, Employment Innovation and Community Inclusion, Benefits Counseling, Medicaid Alternative Paths to Independence (MAPs), Tennessee Believes, Housing Innovation, and the Innovation Centers—and remains committed to designing, testing, and expanding practices that make Tennessee’s disability and aging services more effective, inclusive, and responsive to the people DDA supports.

2025 Enabling Technology and Innovation Summit: “Architects of Innovation”

In November 2025, DDA proudly hosted the 8th annual Enabling Technology and Innovation Summit, convening nearly 400 service providers, persons supported, technology partners, advocates, and community members for two days of connection and collaboration. The summit theme— “Architects of Innovation”—celebrated the designers, builders, and visionaries shaping the future of technology-forward supports in Tennessee. Throughout the event, attendees explored new frameworks for advancing accessibility and inclusion, including insights from the annual State of Innovation presentation, Employment First and MAPs sessions, initiatives focused on technology for older adults, self-advocate spotlights, and demonstrations featuring emerging tools such as artificial intelligence and immersive virtual reality.

Participants also engaged with stories of innovation in action and celebrated leadership excellence through the Tech Trailblazer Awards. The summit reinforced the conviction that innovation does not happen by chance; it is designed, constructed, and continually refined by dedicated partners across the state who are committed to expanding opportunities for people with disabilities and older adults.

DDA is grateful for the ongoing collaboration that makes this movement possible. Mark your calendars for the next Enabling Technology and Innovation Summit, taking place October 28–29, 2026, where the theme “Symphony of Solutions” will bring a new harmony to Tennessee’s collective efforts in technology and inclusion.

Middle Tennessee PowerUp Tech Camp

DDA’s Program Innovation Team hosted another successful Power Up Technology Camp, a hands-on, outdoor learning experience designed for individuals aged 15 and older with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The camp introduces participants to a wide range of enabling and assistive technologies in an engaging environment, all set in Tennessee’s beautiful state parks.

This year, Tech Camp returned to Middle Tennessee, partnering with Tennessee State Parks to host the event at Henry Horton State Park. The location offered campers the perfect blend of nature and learning, with opportunities to explore technology while enjoying outdoor activities, nature walks, and making s’mores.

“People actually interacting, asking those questions, just the whole learning and knowledge-building is the best part about Tech Camp,” said Milton Neuenschwander, DDA’s State Director of Enabling Technology.

Tech Camp also serves as a bridge between DDA’s innovation efforts and accessibility initiatives across the state. This year, campers learned about Tennessee State Parks’ Access 2030 program, which is focused on expanding accessibility for visitors with disabilities. Participants were able to test Tennessee State Parks’ all-terrain wheelchairs, which are available for free at select parks across the state. These chairs are an important resource for visitors with mobility impairments, providing access to outdoor recreation areas that might otherwise be inaccessible.

After exploring all-terrain chairs, campers enjoyed another special experience: Park Ranger Hannah Bell introduced campers to several of Henry Horton’s animal ambassadors, including Cotton the Barred Owl, Adeline the King Snake, and Marshall the Box Turtle. These up-close encounters helped campers learn more about local wildlife and the park’s conservation efforts.

Throughout the day, participants discovered how enabling and assistive technologies can support greater independence, confidence, and personal choice. These tools not only help people navigate daily life more easily, but they also play a critical role in employment. Enabling technology can help someone find and keep a job, stay organized, communicate effectively, manage schedules, and access transportation. Assistive tools such as communication apps, smart home devices, mobility supports, and travel-related technologies can make it easier for individuals to get to and from work, perform job tasks, and maintain long-term success in the workplace.

As Neuenschwander noted, “Technology is a big part of people’s lives, and we need to help them understand how they can incorporate it and use it for their own benefit.”

Power Up Technology Camp continues to demonstrate how innovation and accessibility can empower individuals to pursue their goals. DDA looks forward to welcoming campers again next year as the event is set to take place in West Tennessee.

Innovation Centers

As we look forward to a new chapter in our mission to serve the community, we are excited to announce the rebranding of our Seating and Positioning Clinics to Innovation Centers. This transformation not only reflects a fresh vision but also signifies our commitment to expanding the range of services we provide while maintaining our traditional seating and positioning expertise. Our goal is to deliver comprehensive, innovative solutions that empower individuals to achieve their aspirations. Combining our specialty collaboration between licensed Physical/Occupational Therapists and specially trained equipment

fabricators, we intend on introducing additional support in the form of an Innovation Manager at each location to develop a specialized treatment team of clinicians, fabricators, and innovation specialists to assist community members in achieving their goals.

The Innovation Centers will continue to offer the essential seating and positioning services that our community has come to rely on. Alongside these traditional offerings, we will introduce groundbreaking elements such as 3D printing technology and alternative assistive technology solutions. By piloting new programs and approaches to addressing challenges, we aim to create pathways for individuals to meet their goals effectively. DDA's Innovation Centers will be a center for all where ideas can be expressed, explored and piloted for evaluation. At the conclusion of this innovation journey, improvements in efficiencies will be offered and made available to community members and DDA supports.

In our rebranding efforts, we have developed user-friendly online applications and have trained our team members on innovative programs designed to connect individuals with essential services and supports. We are proud to announce the procurement of our first 3D printer, which will be utilized to fabricate custom seating and positioning equipment using advanced technologies, including customized moldings derived from 3D scanning materials. This initiative will also encompass a variety of assistive technology solutions tailored to the unique needs of each individual DDA serves. Intentionally, we will add additional 3D printing devices in the other 2 regions that will also serve as a tool for the creation of customized seating and positioning equipment that offers more supports and longevity to those members while also allowing for the creation of Assistive Technology that can be “printed” to help people achieve their goals.





In addition to our 3D additive solutions, our Innovation Centers will implement customized evaluations performed by our team of clinicians and dedicated Innovation Managers. This tailored approach is designed to help individuals achieve their desired outcomes. Our tagline, “You have come to the right place,” reflects our commitment to welcoming individuals to pursue their goals with the support of our dedicated clinicians, fabricators, and innovation specialists. If individuals are uncertain about where to begin, we encourage them to start at our Innovation Centers, where we will guide them on their journey!



Reflecting on our progress, the Seating and Positioning services have seen significant growth. From 2024 to 2025, we delivered 232 pieces of equipment, including custom wheelchairs, standers, and SideLiers to community members. This number increased to 271 pieces in 2025, and as of June 30, we are on track to administer over 300 pieces of equipment in 2026. These metrics do not account for the standard repairs we perform, which further amplify our impact within the community. The Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) continues to average over 327 visits per month, including 41 mobile clinic visits across our three facilities. These visits encompass individualized services for specialized seating and positioning equipment.

Furthermore, our services are reaching more demographics as youth throughout our space are visiting our Innovation Centers and gaining access to this unique and specialized medical equipment for earlier intervention.

Other youth are benefiting from access to alternative positioning, which impacts skin breakdown, postural effects like scoliosis, mental health and cognition, increased visual and perceptual abilities, and much more.



Looking ahead, our goals for the upcoming year include ensuring all regions successfully transition into new buildings and systems, establishing processes for the use of the new spaces and inventory items, and identifying fabrication standards for the implementation of 3D printing for assistive technology devices and seating and positioning equipment. We will also partner with UCEED in relevant research to demonstrate the effectiveness and quality of 3D printed materials. Additionally, we aim to expand our team to include the necessary support that will enhance our overall impact on the community. Once aligned, our marketing efforts will focus on ensuring that community members are well informed about how to access the services available at our Innovation Centers.

In summary, the rebranding and expansion of our services through the Innovation Centers signify a new era of growth and opportunity. We are committed to delivering innovative, effective solutions that empower individuals to achieve their goals while continuing to provide the critical services that our community has come to rely on.

Housing

DDA launched its Housing Innovation program in 2025 with the goal of supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and older adults with the vision that every individual deserves access to safe, affordable, accessible, and inclusive housing to whatever degree they desire. We are working

alongside individuals supported, families, organizations, service providers, housing developers, and other state agencies to collaborate as they navigate learning more about “disability-forward housing,” which is housing that is affordable, accessible, and inclusive for people with disabilities.

Fiscal Year 2026 Highlights

- The Housing Innovation team was fully staffed, made up of Community Housing Navigators in all three regions across the state, as well as a Housing Independence Specialist for the MAPs program. These staff members are available to assist people with I/DD and older adults with questions and concerns related to housing.
- DDA continues working with The Kelsey to educate housing developers and other community partners about disability-forward housing best practices and strategies.
- DDA participated in the newly formed Interagency Housing and Health Task Force, which is focusing on the following goals during FY27:
 - 1. Fix the Transition Handoff:** Identify and address challenges and gaps that people with disabilities and older adults experience during disruptive events or other critical transition points.
 - 2. Improve Navigation and Resource Awareness:** Connect housing navigators and coordinate resources among state government and community housing partners.
 - 3. Build a Shared Evaluation Framework:** Develop standardized metrics and data dashboards to track whether the system is improving.

Benefits Counseling Program:

The Benefits Counseling Program (BCP) helps individuals see a clearer pathway to employment by helping them understand how work may impact their benefits, such as Social Security, Social Security Disability Insurance, Medicaid, and Medicare. The BCP provides free, one-on-one support to help individuals see the relationship between working and benefits. DDA's Benefits Coordinators assist with exploring work incentives to make achieving employment goals possible. The BCP also provides education and training to disability service professionals and other stakeholders to increase their knowledge and awareness of how working impacts benefits. There is a lot of misinformation and fear about losing benefits that comes along with the prospect of going to work. The BCP helps demystify working and benefits, breaks down barriers, and dispels misinformation, all with the goal of supporting individuals with disabilities to feel empowered to work in their communities.

Fiscal Year 2026 Highlights

- **Expanded Community Outreach and Education:** With a program model that relies on generating our own referrals, the BCP team placed a strong emphasis on community outreach. By actively participating in local outreach events, building relationships with service providers, and offering educational sessions, we have expanded awareness and strengthened our presence across the state. During the reporting period, we participated in 59 outreach events and/or group presentations. In support of this goal, the BCP team, in coordination with the Employment Innovation team, launched a new educational series called the “Employment Success Forums” to share information about employment and benefits best practices and create an open forum to field questions from employment professionals and other stakeholders.
- **Benefits Counseling Services:** During the reporting period, benefits counseling services were provided to 247 individual beneficiaries. Each counseling session typically included additional participants such as family members, support staff, or service providers. As a result, the total number of individuals impacted by these services was significantly higher than the number of beneficiaries alone.
- **NEON Grant:** DDA was among 7 states that were awarded a national grant, the National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network (NEON), from the U.S. Department of Labor. As a part of this grant, the BCP team will be working with a national Subject Matter Expert on expanding Benefits Counseling services to individuals who have a dual diagnosis of an intellectual and developmental disability and severe mental illness. This work includes partnering with the TN Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services to expand DDA’s Benefits Counseling services to support the state’s Individual Placement and Supports (IPS) program.
- **SHIP Medicare Counseling:** The Benefits Coordinators earned their SHIP counseling certification and have begun working with the AAADs in the regions to support older adults with their Medicare enrollment and questions. The BCP program is proud to support older adults as they navigate insurance and benefits changes.

Fiscal Year 2027

- The program aims to continue building on its momentum by increasing the number of referrals and expanding its community engagement and outreach across the state.
- In FY27, the BCP looks forward to continuing to expand its service offerings to better serve individuals with a dual diagnosis, older adults, veterans, and self-advocates.
- The BCP team is committed to becoming the go-to resource for individuals, families, and professionals seeking accurate, timely, and person-centered benefits counseling services throughout Tennessee.

Employment First

Employment First: Employment Innovation & Community Inclusion team is committed to advancing opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and older adults to engage in meaningful work and community life. Going beyond traditional Medicaid-reimbursed employment services, the team leverages innovation and enabling technology to break down systemic barriers and promote inclusion. The team works to ensure that individuals have access to real jobs in their communities while fostering a culture that supports independence, dignity, and self-determination.

Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Highlights

FY26 marked a period of continued growth and progress for Employment Innovation & Community Inclusion.

Key initiatives and milestones include:

- **Employment First Education & Accreditation Program:** The Employment First Education & Accreditation program is now available to all LTSS service providers in the 1915(c), ECF CHOICES, CHOICES and MAPs programs. As of the end of FY26, 8 provider agencies achieved full Accreditation status and thus have been deemed as Employment First leaders in TN. Additionally, 31 individual learners have earned their ACRE certification through the Job Developer education course and are now prepared to deliver high-quality employment services through the waiver programs.
- **DDA, in partnership with Tech First SHIFT, launched a new training series for Job Seekers called “My Work, My Way”.** The curriculum helps job seekers think about work, interests, strengths, support needs, and what matters to them as they explore employment.
- **DDA’s Employment and Community Inclusion team has strengthened its partnership with the Managed Care Organizations in order to further align our employment services and processes.** DDA has been conducting joint training sessions with the MCOs for provider agencies and has revised its Job Coach Fading Plan review process to align our processes and simplify Job Coach fading expectations for providers.
- **Windmills Disability Inclusion Training:** The Employment Innovation & Community Inclusion team facilitated 4 interactive disability inclusive trainings, reaching approximately 100 learners. The Windmills team is continuing to expand on this training by partnering with the American Job Centers and will be bringing this training to their staff across the state in the future.

Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27)

Looking ahead to FY27, the Employment Innovation & Community Inclusion team will build on its momentum with a focus on expanding impact and deepening collaboration:

- **Continue Circle of Support (COS) meetings to promote Employment Informed Choice (EIC) and**

encourage individuals to explore work opportunities.

- Expand its partnership with the American Job Centers through joint trainings for job seekers.
- Support the rollout of the new Centers of Innovation services by supporting individuals with employment and community integration service opportunities.
- Further strengthen service offerings for individuals with a dual diagnosis through the NEON grant work.

Success Story: Walter

Walter began receiving VR services at Emory Valley Center, where he participated in our Thrive and Dine Café program. Thrive and Dine Café is designed to provide individuals with real-life work experience in a supportive, controlled environment while building meaningful job skills.

The program opens at least once a month, where we invite internal and external community members to participate. Each participant has the opportunity to take on different roles such as order taker, food prep, dishwasher, kitchen lead, server, and more. While the café focuses heavily on food preparation, participants gain many additional skills, including social interaction, money management, budgeting, customer service, hygiene, food safety, and problem-solving.

During café openings, staff may create real-world customer service scenarios, such as a customer concern or issue, so participants can learn how to respond appropriately and work through challenges with guidance and support. Participants also have opportunities to earn certifications that can strengthen their resumes and support future employment.

While Walter was participating in the program, our team quickly recognized his potential. He naturally stepped into a leadership role, especially when it came to making sure food safety procedures were being followed. During one café event, Walter had the opportunity to run the kitchen, and that day, he truly found his voice. He led with confidence, gave clear instructions, supported his team, and successfully guided the event from start to finish.

Walter has since obtained a food prep position at Aubrey's, a job he says he loves. Because of the skills and confidence he developed through Thrive and Dine Café, Walter was able to transition smoothly from work training into competitive employment with minimal job coaching support; we're talking less than a week. He now works independently with natural supports in place at his job.

We are incredibly proud of Walter's progress, confidence, and continued success. His story is a wonderful example of how the right support, training, and opportunities can help someone discover their strengths and thrive in the workplace.

MAPS

The Medicaid Alternative Pathways to Independence (MAP) program achieved transformative growth in FY2025, significantly expanding its reach and impact across all service regions and areas of the State of Tennessee. Participant enrollment surged by 38% (from 233 FY24 to 321 FY25), and total enrollment for the MAPs program reached 723 individuals supported. MAPs providers have successfully validated over 600+ total milestones and nearly 250 Virtual Community Resource Maps (VCRM's). The continued growth was managed by increasing the MAPs provider network by 46.7%.

The Medicaid Alternative Pathways to Independence (MAPs) program crossed a major program milestone in FY2026, celebrating our first round of successful graduates. MAPs awarded a \$4000 ABLE account for the completion of six or more milestones across MAPs' three years of services for each graduate and has been able to award 55 such incentives to date. MAPs participant enrollment has maintained steady numbers during graduation season and currently supports 713 MAPs participants in Tennessee. We have seen incredible growth and investment in Virtual Community Resource Mapping and Employment Milestones, with VCRM completions now at 679 and 397 Employment Milestones successfully validated.

In FY2026, MAPs introduced two new service options for MAPs participants, including a new Peer Mentoring service available to all participants for peer support and encouragement, as well as a new integration between Wayfinder Travel Training and the VCRM, allowing MAPs participants to request routes directly from their VCRM, resulting in a customized walking, biking, driving, or public transport option for the participant.

In FY2027, MAPs looks forward to expanding our current network of 22 MAPs Provider Agencies to account for growth in applicants and regional demands.



MAPs Success Stories

Warrick Mikaelian is a MAPs participant out of Lebanon in Middle Tennessee, who has recently graduated from the MAPs program! Warrick's journey began just over three years ago when he was preparing to graduate from high school. Warrick's desire for independence centered around his interest in community travel and skill development in his home while his parents were at work. What began as Independent Travel and Self-Care Milestones, quickly included Career Development, Financial Management, Health Management, and Community Relationships! Warrick acquired meaningful Enabling Technology in each year of his MAPs services and successfully graduated with a \$4,000.00 ABL Account.

"[MAPs helped with] learning how to live on my own, being more mature," said Warrick. MAPs leadership, along with Warrick's family, are proud of everything he has been able to accomplish.

"Three years ago, I couldn't have imagined [Warrick] doing what he's doing now," said Allison Jordan, Warrick's mother.

DDA joins The ARC of Davidson County, Warrick's coordination team at the Charles Lea Center, and his family in congratulations!



Scan QR code for video



Link here: https://youtu.be/EZUpic43xv4?si=TPgDobWSKa_y2lvn

Mallory Bomar is a MAPs participant in Hixson in East Tennessee who is in her third year of the MAPs program. Mallory's desire for independence came to fruition in the MAPs program through Enabling Technology and her dedicated team. Mallory's work for her Self-Care and Home Safety milestones reflected a spectrum of support methodologies, such as demonstrating, mirroring, visual cues, and technology to create a system of support that gave Mallory the tools to express her independence.

"I have seen her pick up skills and achieve goals that nobody thought she'd be able to," said MAPs Mentor Brittany Kemp. "We have backed away from every aspect of her life being in the hands of other people to her indicating choice, planning for her preferences, and communicating all of that."

Mallory cooks through a series of scheduled snacks and meals, with visual aids that include smart buttons programmed to initiate a microwave for the specified time of the snack. Mallory can select weather-appropriate clothing all from a smart button that connects to a smart speaker, which connects to a weather service, that changes the color of the lights near her closet to select clothing from the rack that corresponds with the color of the light.

"I think you can tell in just their actions and their expressions that, oh, I'm doing this or I can do it, you can see in her everyday life that she's grown up," said Kristin Bomar, Mallory's mother.

DDA wants to recognize Mallory, her family, and her team at CNS and the Charles Lea Center for their work and commitment.



Scan QR code for video



Link here: <https://youtu.be/pwuTE0oqyUY?si=Bgw7iEWzRJ8dGilo>

KATIE BECKETT

The Katie Beckett Program entered its 6th year of operation in FY26. The program serves children ages 0 to 18 who have intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities, or complex medical conditions. At the end of fiscal year 2026, the program was serving 4,628 children. In Part B of the program, the Health Reimbursement Account (HRA), which allows parents to utilize an HRA debit card or receive reimbursement for qualified medical expenses, continues to be the most popular service, with nearly all children having at least a portion of their funding going to the HRA. The second most popular service, Health Insurance Premium Assistance, allows parents to offset the cost of their child's private health insurance and has further reduced the financial burden on families as they support children with disabilities in Tennessee. The Katie Beckett Program remains one of the most popular programs for children with disabilities in TN. To illustrate further, over the course of the fiscal year, DDA intake staff received and processed 2,822 referrals for the program, with an average of 235 referrals each month.

Success Story: Lily & Lizzy

With support from the Katie Beckett program, 8-year-old twins Lily and Lizzy Page refuse to let their disabilities define them.

The twins have been enrolled in Katie Beckett Part B since its inception and have benefited greatly from the program so they can grow and thrive in their home environment.

Lily, who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, is described by her parents as a social butterfly. Katie Beckett funding has helped her stay connected to her community through activities such as dance, equine therapy, and Girl Scouts. She's also working hard in physical therapy, with hopes of one day using a walker.

Lizzy has epilepsy, cerebral palsy, and cortical visual impairment. She feels most comfortable at home, where she enjoys playing on the floor with toys that light up or play music.

Through Katie Beckett services, the family was able to modify their steep driveway to include a more accessible platform for their wheelchair van. The program also helped cover the cost of essential adaptive equipment, including wheelchairs, highchairs, and bath chairs. In addition, the girls were able to enroll in different traditional and non-traditional therapies, while the family received essential assistance with medical care.

"We're thankful for Katie Beckett because it has helped us overcome that financial burden that we would have otherwise," said the mother of Lily and Lizzy, Kristi Page.

The Katie Beckett program has eased the challenges their family once faced and opened the door to greater independence.

AGING

Over the past year, the Aging division has continued to advance its mission of supporting older adults and individuals with disabilities through a wide range of programs and services. Our Nutrition program served 24,767 older adults and delivered 2.7 million meals statewide. In partnership with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, we have increased outreach around the SafeSeniorTN website and related resources to help reduce the number of older adults targeted by scams.

The Alzheimer's Disease Program Initiative (ADPI) Grant has remained a cornerstone of our efforts. This year, DDA connected with 175 caregivers and provided training to more than 1,600 community members and staff on best practices for supporting Tennesseans living with dementia-related illnesses.

Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) assisted 12,160 older adults and individuals with disabilities, helping them remain safely in their homes and communities. Despite ongoing workforce shortages, providers continued to deliver flexible, non-traditional supports including minor home modifications, personal emergency response systems, pest control, food boxes, grocery pick-up and delivery, and errand assistance.

Volunteers were essential to our success this year. A total of 13,506 volunteers supported older adults statewide, collectively serving more than 220,000 Tennesseans. Impressively, 99% reported having a positive experience and plan to continue volunteering in the future.

Senior centers across Tennessee benefited from \$5 million in grant funding from the General Assembly, enabling meaningful upgrades to facilities and programming.

Finally, the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman program addressed more than 3,200 complaints from or on behalf of long-term care residents, achieving a satisfaction rate of 78%.

TEIS

In fiscal year 2026, the network of TEIS staff, providers, and families continued to demonstrate its strength and stability. Relationships remained steady, and the year brought meaningful milestones that reflect the effectiveness of this collaboration.

INVESTING IN LEADERSHIP & STAFF

Like many programs within DDA, TEIS serves Tennesseans in every corner of the state. From major gatherings like the Fall Creek Falls Central Office conference and Regional Time for Teaming events, to Point of Entry office visits, these moments bring staff, providers, and families together to share ideas, build relationships, and strengthen the connections that make our work possible.

CO Conference & POE Visits

This year included a special focus on opportunities to connect directly with staff across the state, recognize their work, and strengthen the relationships that drive early intervention in Tennessee. These engagements highlighted the commitment, expertise, and care that TEIS staff and partners bring to families every day.

Our annual TEIS Central Office conference at Fall Creek Falls State Park once again brought together central office team members for learning, connection, and reflection. Staff revisited key accomplishments from 2025, celebrated milestones such as the first group of children transitioning from the TEIS Extended Option to kindergarten and aligned priorities for the year ahead.

Throughout the year, TEIS leadership visited Point of Entry offices across the state to connect with staff and better understand local needs and successes. In Fall 2025, leadership met with the Upper Cumberland POE team in Cookeville, which supports more than 1,700 families, and then visited the First Tennessee POE office in Johnson City, which serves over 1,300 families. Leadership continued these visits into early 2026 with a trip to the South-Central POE office in Murfreesboro, TN. These visits create valuable opportunities for direct feedback and strengthening alignment between statewide leadership and frontline early intervention work.

Time for Teaming

The annual Time for Teaming events in East and Middle Tennessee brought together TEIS staff, early intervention providers, and families for a day focused on strengthening resilience and connection. This year's theme, Building Resilience, highlighted the importance of supporting families while also caring for our professional well-being. Keynote speaker, Allison Cooke Douglas, offered valuable insight into how early experiences and relationships shape resilience and provided practical strategies for strengthening the support we offer families. Interactive sessions encouraged reflection on communication, boundaries, and teamwork, while the family panel in Middle Tennessee offered powerful firsthand perspectives on persistence, adaptability, and hope. These events continue to reinforce the importance of partnership across roles and regions.

TEIS Institute

The year concluded with the newest cohort of TEIS Institute. Service Coordinators gathered in Nashville

for a full day of learning and engagement. TEIS Institute remains a core component of our commitment to staff development, offering participants the opportunity to explore departmental operations, engage with leadership, and deepen their understanding of TEIS within the broader mission of supporting individuals with disabilities and older adults in Tennessee. This initiative continues to strengthen our workforce and cultivate future leaders within the program.

FEDERAL MONITORING

HOPE Family Survey

Each year, TEIS administers the HOPE Family Survey to families who have received at least six months of early intervention services. In Fiscal 2026, 8,652 families completed the survey, resulting in a 91% response rate. TEIS has maintained a response rate of 90% or higher for 3 consecutive years, reflecting strong family engagement and consistent participation across the program.

The HOPE Survey provides valuable insight to IFSP teams and TEIS leadership, helping identify family needs and assess overall program effectiveness. Among families who responded, 94% reported TEIS helped them to know their rights and communicate their child's needs. Additionally, 92% reported TEIS helped them to help their child develop and learn.

Compliance Monitoring

As part of our commitment to delivering timely, high-quality services, TEIS completed its annual compliance monitoring in alignment with federal requirements.

- Timely Service Delivery:
 - o 98.85% of the 1,390 services due in March 2026 were delivered within 30 calendar days of addition to the child's IFSP
- Timely Initial Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs):
 - o 99.16% of the 713 initial IFSPs were completed within 45 calendar days of the child's referral to TEIS
- Timely Transition Planning Conferences (TPCs):
 - o 100% of the 528 TPCs due in March 2026 were completed in coordination with the local educational agency (LEA) at least 90 days before the child's 3rd birthday

BUILDING PROVIDER PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT GROWTH

TEIS provides services to more than 23,000 children each year, offering individualized developmentally appropriate therapies designed to help each child achieve the goals outlined in their IFSP. TEIS delivers a comprehensive range of services such as Developmental Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech Therapy, Audiology, Psychology Services, Vision Therapy, and Assistive Technology.

More than 200 contracted providers work alongside TEIS to deliver these services statewide and support

children in achieving IFSP goals. During fiscal year 2026, eight new vendor therapy contracts have been added to provide services to children across Tennessee. Additionally, 20 existing vendor therapy contacts were amended to increase available services in response to rising referrals and growing statewide need for early intervention services.

TEIS continues to collaborate closely with both new and existing vendors to strengthen service delivery and support program growth. As part of ongoing quality improvement efforts, TEIS has worked to streamline administrative processes, including enhancing data systems used to track services, billing, and reimbursements. These improvements support more efficient operations and reinforce the program's commitment to ensuring that children and families receive timely, high-quality early intervention services.

STAFF & PROVIDER SUPPORT

TEIS Central Office, in collaboration with District Administrators, initiated onsite and virtual visits with contracted vendors to encourage ongoing relationship-building, increase resource awareness, and promote effective collaboration between TEIS and contracted vendors. In FY26, TEIS visited 17 vendors during which representatives shared key operational resources, including the TEIS website, Tri-Starts newsletter, and additional guidance materials, to support effective vendor service delivery.

TEIS leadership also collaborated with the EIRA Advisory Council to implement updates to the TEIDS database to better support IFSP teaming. Additionally, they collaborated with the Vendor Advisory Council to address billing and reimbursement concerns.

LOOKING AHEAD

TEIS is entering the new program year with a strong focus on quality, connection, and collaboration. Key efforts include strengthening IFSPs and child outcomes, enhancing service delivery, and deepening our engagement with families, POEs, and districts. Staff development remains a major focus through ongoing Management vs. Leadership initiatives and continued POE visits that support meaningful connections across the state. Another major emphasis for this year is strengthening our vendor and provider network. TEIS is expanding opportunities for local meet-and-greets, collaboration with the Vendor Advisory Council, and continuing conversations around provider support and reimbursement. These partnerships remain essential as TEIS continues work to ensure strong, sustainable service delivery systems. At the same time, TEIS is investing in closer relationships across state departments to create a more seamless experience for families navigating multiple systems.

CLINICAL SERVICES

Therapeutic Services

During FY26, the creation of our Therapeutic Services Unit (TSU) has allowed both the BA units and our regional therapy teams to collaborate in order to serve as many people within the 1915c and ECF waivers as possible. During FY26, the Behavior Analysis units provided 3078 consultations and assistance. All live and online clinical trainings have been updated and shared among all units statewide to ensure that all providers can access these trainings as needed. Our units are further collaborating to update our data collection and tracking system to better analyze trends and the needs of those we serve across the state. TSU has continued to expand services to children and youth. Through a collaboration with the Department of Children's Services, DDA operates Medically Fragile IDD Foster Homes (MF-DD) for children in custody. TSU staff have provided direct clinical support for 28 children served through this program. TSU is also available for services to the aging population, and this is expected to grow in the coming year. Our clinical team continues to support TN START by attending weekly clinical meetings and providing consultations as requested. Our clinical units across the state have been trained by the National Center for START Services and are prepared to collaborate in support of future TN START Resource Centers.

Nursing

The Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) Nursing Department continues its mission to protect, promote, and optimize the health and well-being of individuals across all ages through high-quality consultation, education, and technical assistance. In 2026, DDA Nursing sustained its leadership in competency-based medication administration training for unlicensed personnel supporting individuals unable to self-administer their medications. Medication-certified employees safely administered millions of doses this year, serving thousands of individuals receiving Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS).

The Medication Administration Program expanded significantly in 2026. Regional, agency, and independent Nurse Trainers conducted 974 classes statewide (up from 841 in FY25), including 305 in West Tennessee, 341 in Middle Tennessee, and 328 in East Tennessee. A total of 7,371 participants were trained (up from 7,087 in FY25), with 2,526 participants in West Tennessee, 2,555 in Middle Tennessee, and 2,290 in East Tennessee. The pass rate increased to 85% (up from 80% in FY25), underscoring the effectiveness of the curriculum and the fully online webinar model. This continued growth reflects strong trust in DDA Nursing by HCBS providers and increased participation from Personal Support Services Agency (PSSA) staff licensed by the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS).

Community Homes nurses in each of the three grand regions continued to provide essential direct care to medically fragile children in TN Strong Homes in partnership with the Department of Children's Services. DDA is leveraging its expertise supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to expand service options for children with IDD who are in state custody or at risk of entering state custody. The partnership with Belmont University entered its third year, offering nursing students supervised clinical experiences within the Middle Tennessee Strong Home and introducing them to disability centered pediatric nursing.

Beginning July 2026, TennCare and DDA implemented the option for ECF CHOICES, CHOICES, Katie Beckett, and 1915(c) Waiver members to self-direct their healthcare tasks through provider agencies. Previously, self-direction of healthcare tasks (SDHCT) was limited to members enrolled in Consumer Direction (CD). Under the expanded model, provider agencies—including PSSA providers licensed by the DMHSAS—may now support members who choose to self-direct certain eligible healthcare tasks. SDHCT is not a service; rather, it allows competent members or healthcare decision makers to direct and supervise a paid staff member in performing specific healthcare tasks that would otherwise be provided by a licensed nurse. TennCare and DDA jointly developed an SDHCT Training to outline requirements, expectations, and the list of tasks that may or may not be self-directed. Guidance for provider participation is included in both the training and the Self Direction of Healthcare Tasks Protocol.

DDA Nursing continued its essential role in the Tennessee START Assessment & Stabilization Teams (TN START AST), a systems-based partnership model grounded in strong collaboration and coordination among all stakeholders. Each TN START AST region is supported by a dedicated Regional Nurse Consultant who provides clinical guidance and expertise, as needed. Regional Nursing will be working closely with the Resource and Respite Home staff to promote independence, support treatment goals, and maintain continuity of care—contributing to successful reintegration for individuals returning to their home and community environments. DDA nurses additionally participate in treatment teams at the Harold Jordan Center (HJC) and administer medication to its residents.

Technical Assistance (TA) remains a core function of the Nursing Department. Regional nurses provided expert consultation in response to issues identified through Quality Management reviews and Reportable Event analyses. When training or clinical review was needed, nurses were assigned to ensure timely, accurate, and evidence-based support. DDA nurses collaborate regularly with the Regional Therapeutic Services Team (RTST), Behavior Analysts (BA), Enabling Tech, Provider Support, Independent Support Coordinators (ISCs), and Regional Clinical Review Committees (RCRC), serving as nursing subject matter experts across units and departments.

The Nursing Department also contributes to the death review process. A Mortality Nurse in the region identifies causes of death and contributing factors; the Comprehensive Death Review (CDR) Committee then evaluates systemic risks and opportunities for strengthening supports. This work complements broader departmental efforts to improve early identification of cognitive decline or dementia—conditions disproportionately affecting older adults and individuals with disabilities—through collaboration with Disability and Aging program teams and external partners. All DDA nurses are Dementia Capable Care Certified, and most have completed Dementia Gatekeeper training.

TN START Assessment and Stabilization Teams (TN START AST)

TN START AST is a statewide crisis prevention and intervention service that supports people who have complex behavioral or mental health needs. Our mission is to help people with co-occurring disorders live a healthy life in their community. TN-START accomplishes these aims through prevention services, assessment, crisis plan development, goal setting, training, and a focus on wellness. TN START AST provides intervention services through 24/7 crisis response support and collaboration with emergency service providers for enrollers. The program serves children from age six up through adulthood. In FY 26, TNSTART provided Phase 4 services to any person diagnosed with a disability who is eligible for a Medicaid waiver, even if they are not enrolled yet. TN START also broadened consultation support to community partners, with 24/7 availability for consultation through the crisis line. This is expected to remain stable through FY 27.

The following table outlines quantitative data related to TN-START services in FY26 compared with FY 25:

Variable	FY25	FY26
Number of People Supported	426	505
Crisis Calls	825	1455
Diversion from Hospital/ER	82% (677)	84% (1224)

TN START AST added to the number of people served by 79 for a 19% increase during FY26. Crisis calls increased to 630 for a 76% increase. This year, no new staff were added to the teams, so the volume of work increased for each staff person on the team.

Community training represents an important component of TN START AST services. By providing training opportunities for community partners, we strengthen system capacity. The table below provides information about TN START AST training comparing FY 25 and FY 26.

Variable	FY25	FY26
Total Training Events	76	59
Number of Personnel Trained	1552	1551
Training Events for First Responders	28	30

Total training events decreased by 23%, but the number of personnel trained remained stable, and the number of training events for first responders increased slightly. The overall training stability demonstrates that the program is maintaining productivity without adding personnel.

Systemic partnerships provide a basis for the achievement of the outcomes stated above. TN START AST reaches out to community partners to establish agreements that outline what each party can do for the other. As TN START AST increases partnerships, they strengthen the overall system by making services more accessible and accountable. The table below outlines basic data regarding partnership agreements.

Variable	FY25	FY26
Number of Partnership agreements	33	44

Partnerships with law enforcement departments have led to TN START’s inclusion in Crisis Intervention Team training opportunities. Crisis Intervention Teams have been established in many police departments to deal more effectively with people with behavioral health concerns. This has allowed TN START AST staff to meet with officers, actively educate them about co-occurring MH/IDD, and develop plans for co-responding to crisis calls.

In the coming year, TN START will continue to focus on building community capacity through training, resource sharing, and partnerships. TN START AST seeks to increase the reach of our program by expanding caseloads, reducing waiting times, and decreasing crisis response time.

Clinical Consultation Network

The Clinical Consultation Network (CCN) is a one-hour weekly podcast hosted by the DDA Clinical Services team. The clinical services team works together to recruit guests from different clinical disciplines to provide updates on research, new community resources, and a deeper dive into general clinical topics such as trauma-informed care, behavior analysis interventions, etc. In addition to covering various clinical topics, these episodes also highlight new programs with DDA, success stories from various DDA support units, and collaborations with community providers. During FY26, CCN continued the partnership with NADD (National Association for the Dually-Diagnosed) to host “Fourth Tuesday Features” as a nationwide resource for clinical practitioners. The division hosted 12 of these episodes focused on the nationwide outreach through NADD for a total of about 40 episodes overall. These podcasts provide another medium for clinical education in Tennessee

Forensic Services

After people are charged with a crime, they may be referred for an evaluation to assess their competency



to stand trial and their mental condition. If they are not competent, are charged with a felony, and are diagnosed with an intellectual disability, they may be referred to the Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) by the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS) for competency training.

Over the past year, we continued work on the referral process to ensure DDA received appropriate referrals (i.e., persons diagnosed with an intellectual disability versus a psychiatric illness or dementia), and an additional psychologist was hired to reduce wait times for training and to reduce the dependency on contract employees. To assist with the caseload, psychology staff continued intensive training with behavior analysts to assist with the competency training process. We also continued with a peer consultation group to collaborate on cases and to further the knowledge base of evaluators and trainers with a specific focus on best practices for teaching people with disabilities, ethical practices, and the use of videoconferencing to work more efficiently across the state. This group has also worked to develop a more person-centered manual that provides different modes of learning for people with disabilities.

FORENSICS – COMPETENCY TRAINING:

During the 25-26 Fiscal year, 54 competency training cases were completed/resolved on an outpatient and inpatient basis; this represents a decrease of 12 cases from the previous year. Cases were received by the referral process from the TDMHSAS or directly from the court. Clinical staff worked closely with DDA administration, DDA intake, DDA legal counsel, and TN-START to ensure that cases were appropriately resolved and to develop recommendations for supports and services within and outside of the DDA system to reduce the likelihood of criminal involvement in the future. For persons whose primary disability appeared to be mental illness, they were referred back to TDMHSAS for stabilization before competency training could be completed.

BREAKDOWN OF COMPETENCY TRAINING CASES RESOLVED IN FY 25-26:

Compared to FY25, there were 12 fewer competency training cases completed in FY26 than the previous year. Additionally, fewer cases were resolved due to the charges being dropped/training was determined to be no longer needed/because it was inappropriately referred, and there were no cases discontinued due to noncompliance with training sessions. There was a slight increase in cases referred back to TDMHSAS because a diagnosis of an intellectual disability could not be verified.

FORENSICS – COMMITMENT EVALUATIONS:

DDA receives requests to complete commitment evaluations from TDMHSAS and directly from courts throughout Tennessee. During FY26, 26 commitment evaluations were completed/resolved, which represents a decrease of 3 cases from last year. However, there was a larger percentage (i.e., 27% increase) found committable this year. In order to meet commitment criteria, the defendant must present a risk to

himself/herself or others due to his/her intellectual disability rather than a psychiatric illness or substance abuse issue. The evaluator must also ensure that the least restrictive alternative is found, which may include placement with a stable support system, such as family or an agency that provides support staff. If a defendant does not meet commitment criteria due to an intellectual disability, he/she may be referred back to mental health and/or treatment recommendations are made to provide resources to reduce the risk of future incarcerations or psychiatric hospitalizations.

Harold Jordan Center

If a Defendant is committed to the Harold Jordan Center (HJC), competency training is continued. If he/she is opined to be competent to stand trial, the defendant is returned to jail until a hearing can be held. If he/she is opined to be not competent to stand trial, a treatment plan is developed by the clinical team at HJC, and an appropriate placement is located with the necessary supports and/or services. The length of the stay may be longer depending upon the need for a conservator or the type of placement sought. The Harold Jordan Center served fourteen (14) people in FY26, and six (6) people were discharged and placed in settings with appropriate supports to increase their likelihood of community success.

ACCREDITATION

Accreditation Overview

In January 2015, the Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) became the first accredited state service-delivery system for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the United States through the Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL). DDA was granted Person-Centered Accreditation from CQL, which has been successfully maintained through subsequent accreditation cycles—renewed in January 2019 and again in March 2023. The 2023 Person-Centered Excellence (PCE) Accreditation represented a significant milestone as it included, for the first time, the Tennessee Early Intervention System (TEIS).

CQL continues to provide consultation, training, and certification services focused on advancing person-centered excellence. Central Office leadership and Regional Accreditation Teams collaborate to collect data, deliver training, and implement the goals outlined in statewide accreditation plans designed to sustain accreditation and support system improvement.

Accreditation Activities and Achievements

During FY26, the Accreditation Team completed:

- Over 400 Personal Outcome Measures© (POM) interviews
- 21 Basic Assurances© (BA) Reviews with DDA and TEIS providers
- Five statewide POM training workshops for providers, EIRAs, MCOs, and TennCare leadership

Since the fall of 2024, DDA has partnered with TennCare to utilize POM interviews to support CMS Performance Measures, providing essential data on the service-delivery system. In order to continue this work, the team expanded from 14 to 19 members this year—also marking the first time in four years that the Accreditation Team is fully staffed. Four new DDA Accreditation Team members successfully became certified POM Interviewers during this time.

Given the importance of Network Accreditation for both DDA and TEIS, the Accreditation Team has continued robust stakeholder communication through weekly newsletter articles, social media content, training sessions, and presentations. With TEIS completing its initial PCE accreditation, TEIS Accreditation Team members presented information regularly to Early Intervention stakeholders, completing 43 presentations statewide to regional offices, EIRAs, SICC meetings, Exchange Clubs, and more.

Statewide and regional accreditation plans remain active, identifying improvement opportunities and outlining action steps, responsible parties, and timelines.

Other notable achievements include:

- Development of a Self-Advocate webpage, now available on the DDA website, Accreditation section
- Updated the crosswalk for Basic Assurances and the newest QA tools used by DDA.
- Developed and finalized a Personal Outcome Measures Summary, which highlights what is learned from people receiving services and how to enhance their lives.
- Development of and distribution of a Human Rights Survey for providers' input, New Provider Orientation sessions, and numerous provider presentations.

Self-Advocacy Initiatives

The Accreditation Team continues to strengthen partnerships with Self-Advocates (SAs)—individuals receiving services who mentor peers in areas such as rights, decision-making, and independence. This year, the team launched a dedicated Self-Advocacy webpage on the DDA website and successfully expanded funding for SA activities. Enhanced funding enabled opportunities for self-advocates to travel, participate in conferences, and engage in statewide advocacy events.

Self-advocates participated in Disability Day on the Hill, MegaConference, Disability Mentoring Day in Smyrna, and completed and submitted more than 300 People Talking to People (PTP) surveys. The Accreditation Team also partnered with the Communications Team to engage universities in exploring internship pathways for future self-advocates.

Additional accomplishments included:

- Supporting over 100 individuals to attend the Enabling Technology and Innovation Summit (Fall 2025)
- Providing 262 individuals with access to a dental hygiene initiative
- Offering 100 individuals the opportunity to participate in the Employment First Training Program

Looking Ahead to 2027

The primary focus for the upcoming cycle will be reaccreditation of DDA and TEIS, anticipated in early 2027. This marks the fourth accreditation term for DDA and the second for TEIS. Capacity building will continue as two additional DDA team members become certified POM Interviewers to support ongoing CMS reporting requirements. Additionally, two other team members will become certified as Basic Assurances© reviewers in early fall 2026, and eight current team members will be re-certified as Basic Assurances© reviewers during summer 2027.

The Accreditation Team will also expand the Self-Advocacy Program, increase outreach efforts, and continue identifying and sharing advocacy resources for both adults and children/families across Tennessee.

COMMUNICATIONS & EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

The Communications and External Affairs (CEA) division promotes the Department's initiatives and resources by keeping persons supported, families, caregivers, employees, and stakeholders informed about key services, programs, and supports. The CEA team works to amplify the stories of various Tennesseans—from families and caregivers to individuals with disabilities to older adults—to support them in living the lives they envision for themselves.

CEA shares information about initiatives and programs through social media, printed materials, outreach events, media relations, and photo and video production. During FY27, the CEA team noted a few key areas of important communication strategy for both internal and external partners, including keeping stakeholders and persons supported informed about new regional offices and Innovation Centers, garnering awareness for programs such as the volunteer program and the Ombudsman office, and spreading information to various state departments with the most up-to-date ADA resources and updates.

Looking ahead to the next fiscal year, DDA will continue to use various avenues, including media, physical materials, and events, to share information about its programs and services. The CEA team will spearhead the planning and execution of various department conferences, new office ribbon cuttings, grant check presentations, and other department events. Additionally, the team will look to increase communications with state departments ahead of the April 2027 federal deadline and maintain ADA compliance across all materials created and housed by the Department. Lastly, the division will continue to serve both aging and disability populations in the state to strengthen their awareness regarding resources provided by DDA.

MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

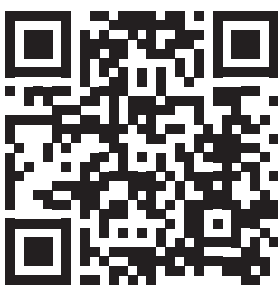
Volunteer Recruitment Campaign

As a result of the Department's growth, DDA recognized the need to develop a strategy to recruit more volunteers for its various programs in Tennessee. DDA's CEA team utilized its relationships with news organizations across the state to support a communications plan that centered on publicizing information about the importance of volunteers.

This campaign began on May 1, 2025, and ended on July 31, 2025, and included the following marketing initiatives:

- A volunteer recruitment flyer and poster
- An updated aging push card, with high-level information covering all aging programs and services
- A refresh of the DDA Volunteer webpage
- An organic digital media campaign ran through DDA's various social media channels
- A commercial campaign run through five different news organizations across each Tennessee Designated Market Area (DMA)
- A paid social media campaign with ads being shared on Facebook to individuals who fit the campaign's demographic

Scan QR code for video



Link here:
<https://youtu.be/ykEcNJ9O0Xw>

To give an overview of the effectiveness of the campaign, for FY27, DDA recruited 178 new volunteers to assist in various aging programs, an increase of 53 volunteers from the previous fiscal year.

The campaign delivered over 250 spots on network television, resulting in an average reach of 89.7 and an average frequency of 6.7. It also delivered over 240,000 clicks via ads displayed on the Google network, gaining over 25 million impressions.

In addition, DDA conducted additional marketing efforts throughout the rest of the fiscal year by placing the commercial spot on television and on Facebook through News Channel 5 Nashville. These efforts resulted

in 7.2 million impressions on Facebook with 2,081 link clicks and 956,095 impressions through television commercials. For the entirety of the fiscal year, the Volunteer webpage on DDA's website saw a total of 1,337 page views and 1,139 unique visitors looking at the page.

Long-Term Care Ombudsman Campaign

A number of Tennessee residents, along with the families and caregivers who support them, may not realize that the Tennessee Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman is a current resource for them. The Ombudsman advocates for individuals receiving care in long-term care facilities, including nursing homes, assisted care living facilities, homes for the aged, and adult care homes. Ombudsmen are available to assist residents and families by helping resolve issues and answering questions about long-term care.

DDA partnered with News Channel 5 in Nashville to spread the word about this resource. The campaign took place from August 1, 2025, to September 15, 2025, and included the following marketing initiatives:

- Contextual/Search Retargeting via Google Display Ads
- Social Media Advertising on Facebook and Instagram
- Newschannel5.com display ads

Through banners displayed on NewsChannel5.com, the campaign saw 2,000,039 impressions with a total of 976 clicks and a click-through rate of .05%. The Facebook campaign saw a total of 2,368,374 impressions with 4,014 clicks, 1,984 link clicks, and a click-through rate of .17%. Finally, ads displayed on the Google network saw 2,130,000 impressions with 24,800 clicks and a click-through rate of 1.17%. For the entirety of the fiscal year, the Ombudsman webpage on DDA's website saw a total of 64,338 page views and 41,995 unique visitors looking at the page.



Caregiver Support Campaign

According to a 2025 study, “Caregiving in the U.S. 2025: Tennessee”, of the more than 1.5 million adults in Tennessee providing care to a family member or friend, 48% of Tennessee family caregivers experienced at least one negative financial impact, while 39% reported high emotional stress while caregiving. With an ongoing shortage of paid care workers, family caregivers often have little to no opportunities for respite on top of the financial burden of out-of-pocket expenses and loss of income due to the high time demands for caregiving. In response to this data, DDA wanted to spread awareness about caregiving resources such as the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) and the Lifetime Respite Grant.

This campaign ran from July 1, 2025, to September 15, 2025, and included the following marketing initiatives:

- An organic digital media campaign ran through DDA’s social media channels
- A commercial campaign ran through five different news organizations across each Tennessee Designated Market Area (DMA)
- A paid social media campaign with ads being shared on Facebook to individuals who fit the campaign’s demographic
- The creation and refresh of printed materials to be shared at outreach events and with senior centers
- The creation of a caregiver hub on DDA’s website

The television campaign resulted in over 2 million impressions across all DMAs and was completed with an average reach of 81.8 for over 200 spots that the commercial was displayed on.

Scan QR code for video



Link here:
<https://youtu.be/8UCjwsvMZK8>

GENERAL MARKETING

General DDA Awareness Campaign

DDA maintains a year-round standing partnership to increase general awareness of the Department and to focus on specific programs or services as needed. This campaign focuses on placing digital advertisements on the Google Display Network (GDN) and Facebook, as well as on streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu.

The campaign running from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, resulted in 10,206,471 impressions, with a total of 345,812 estimated unique users seeing the ads placed on the Google network. These ads were placed on the network at an average frequency of 2%

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has proven to be one of the most effective ways for the Department to reach its various audiences, ranging from LinkedIn to Facebook to YouTube. Below are the metrics for our various social media pages for FY27.

Facebook

DDA has had great success on its Facebook account, which can be seen by the account's increase of 1,792 new followers. This brings the total follower count to 18,000, which includes 1,488,571 impressions during this fiscal period. Compared to the previous fiscal year, we gained over 400,000 more impressions from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026.

Instagram

DDA's Instagram had 347 total posts and gained 989 new followers, leaving the current follower count to 2,547, with 153,091 impressions. DDA's videos posted on Instagram gained a total of 34,924 views.

YouTube

On DDA's YouTube channel, there was a total of 77,023 views, and 204 new subscribers, which brought the follower count to 2,042. The Department also accumulated 404 likes across all videos posted during this time and saw 422,334 impressions.

LinkedIn

DDA remains active on LinkedIn, where this past fiscal year it gained 1,137 new followers, for a total follower count of 5,142 individuals. The Department saw 9,739 video views and 2,922 reactions for the 68 posts created during the fiscal year.

STORIES FROM ACROSS TN

In celebration of Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month, the CEA Division launched its annual #IAmASDinTN social media campaign in April 2026. This campaign, in collaboration with the TN Council on Autism Spectrum Disorder, aims to highlight the stories of Tennesseans with autism living independently, working towards the goals they've chosen for themselves, and making an impact in their communities. Below are a few of the individuals highlighted across DDA's social media account for the 2026 #IAmASDinTN campaign!

Daniel Michael Crane

Daniel Michael Crane, also known as DMC, is an award-winning performer who also happens to be on the spectrum. He sings, acts, plays multiple instruments, and lights up every room with his personality! His talents have taken him to competitions and performances all over the Southeast... and he's not slowing down anytime soon!

"I think it makes it easier, honestly, cause I channel the emotions and stuff, if you will. I mean, I've like ballistically burst into tears just thinking about something during different scenes and stuff. I feel like I could be more honest with my songs and everything. Honestly, without the Asperger's, I don't think my performances would be as honest."

- Crane



Scan QR code for video



Link here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hH93Oal4A88>

Derrick Freeman

For some, art is a hobby. For Derrick Freeman, it's a voice.

During Autism Awareness Month, we highlighted Derrick's talent and his ambition to never let his diagnosis define him. Derrick has already created more than 2,000 pieces of art and shows no signs of slowing down.

You can also find Derrick bringing his creativity and dedication to the team at Muse Knoxville. Recently, Derrick had the honor of speaking at DDA's 2025 Expect Employment Report, where he shared his perspective on the importance of inclusive hiring with Governor Bill Lee.

Derrick's next goal: open his own art studio, where he and other artists with autism can create and showcase their work!



Scan QR code for video



Link here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kzCY7qPAts>

Rhodes & Strawberry Road

Strawberry Road is a music group and children's channel that celebrates people on the spectrum and all of their loved ones and friends!

Binny and KK are two moms and best friends who wanted to find a creative way to do music and celebrate kids with autism. KK's son, Rhodes, is a 10-year-old with Autism, and the inspiration behind the name!

Songs like "My Brain is Beautiful," "Stimmy Shimmy," and "The Headphone Song" celebrate the neurodiverse population and include a learning element!



Scan QR code for video



Link here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zWMJHJxvih8>

OUTREACH

The Department of Disability & Aging (DDA) considers family outreach a key component to success in maintaining positive relationships with the community. DDA provides outreach and training to special educators, people supported, family members, and more. Staff continuously participates in special education and advocacy forums, statewide disability conferences, summit fairs, resource and transition fairs, and accommodates other requests as well. Staff are available for presentations and trainings upon request by any entity seeking information about DDA services.

Between July 1, 2025, and June 30, 2026, DDA participated in 130+ outreach and engagement events statewide, reflecting strong cross-division collaboration and increased public visibility. These outreach efforts spanned Middle, East, and West Tennessee and included school transition fairs, community resource events, early childhood engagements, professional trainings, disability conferences, and senior health programs.

Throughout the fiscal year, DDA staff played pivotal roles in delivering information, strengthening partnerships, and improving access to services. TEIS supported numerous Head-Start open houses, early childhood provider trainings, and community baby showers, ensuring families understood referral processes and developmental supports. MAPs advanced postsecondary preparation by attending high-impact school transition fairs across major districts, providing guidance on employment and education pathways. The Division of Communications & External Affairs maintained a broad community presence by attending multi-agency resource fairs and presenting at several disability-focused events, while the Aging Division delivered dementia education, brain-health sessions, and outreach at senior expos.

High-impact events included large regional conferences, such as the Chattanooga Autism Walk & Conference. In addition, widely attended school transition fairs in Williamson County, Rutherford County, Knoxville, Memphis, and the greater Chattanooga area connected hundreds of families with services and supports. These efforts collectively strengthened DDA's statewide network, increased awareness of available programs, and ensured Tennesseans received timely, accurate information about DDA services and resources.

If you are interested in having DDA attend an event as an exhibitor or if you would like to request a DDA speaker, please fill out our Outreach Request Form: [DDA Communications Outreach Request Form](#).

GRANTS

Tennessee Believes Grant

The Department of Disability and Aging continued its efforts to expand inclusive higher education opportunities through the Tennessee Believes grant program. Through the program, DDA provides support to two- and four-year institutions that are building new inclusive pathways or strengthening existing programs.

These grants are designed to help campuses support students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in both academic and social environments. Funding emphasizes the planning, coordination, and cross-campus partnerships necessary to ensure students are fully included in coursework, campus activities, and community life. By supporting institutions, DDA aims to increase the number of inclusive

postsecondary options available statewide and promote long-term student success.

For the 2026–2027 academic year, DDA awarded grants to five institutions across the state, continuing an investment in postsecondary pathways for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In FY26, 207 students were enrolled in Inclusive Higher Education (IHE) programs, and 67 students graduated.

2025 – 2026 Academic Year

- Graduates: 67
- Students Employed: 67
- Internships Completed: 345
- Classes taken: 1,534

Fall Semester

- Enrollment: 185
- Classes: 802
- Internships: 132

Spring Semester

- Enrollment: 193
- Classes: 867
- Internships: 181

Highlights from the 2025 – 2026 Academic Year

The accomplishments highlighted in this report represent only a small sample of the outstanding work taking place across Tennessee’s inclusive higher education programs. While it is not possible to capture every achievement, each program continues to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to support students as they pursue their educational, career, and personal goals. Through the dedication of program staff, campus partners, employers, and families, students are building meaningful careers, developing independence, enriching campus communities, and making valuable contributions to Tennessee’s workforce and communities. Together, these accomplishments reflect the continued growth and impact of inclusive higher education across the state.

Chattanooga State Community College – Tiger Access

Austin Clark, a student in the TigerLIFE program, competed on the Unified Flag Football Team at the 2026 Special Olympics USA Games in Minnesota and helped Team Tennessee win a Silver Medal.

Dyersburg State Community College – Eagle Access

The Eagle Access program expanded its inclusive education initiative by completing its first year of operation across two locations: the main campus in Dyersburg and the Jimmy Naifeh Center in Covington.

Lipscomb University - IDEAL

The IDEAL program has been working with Vocational Rehabilitation to consolidate cases to fewer counselors in order to streamline communication and increase efficiency.

Union University - EDGE

The EDGE program opened its renovated Union EDGE lab space. The enhanced facility features a cooking lab, teaching station, student lounge, and classroom equipped with presentation technology and computers to support student learning and engagement.

University of Tennessee Martin - SAIL

The SAIL program has been working diligently to establish its program and successfully launched its application in October 2025, for the 2026–27 academic year.

Vanderbilt University - Next Steps

The Next Steps program celebrated its 15-year anniversary and hosted a tailgate celebration at Vanderbilt's homecoming game to commemorate the occasion!

In preparation for the Vanderbilt Commodore Career Fair, students in their senior year wrote tailored elevator pitches and practiced various career fair interactions. Seniors were prepared to speak to employers of interest and gain important contacts to use in their job searches.

Student Self-Advocacy

Three students participated in a panel discussion during the Enabling Technology and Innovation Summit, highlighting how technology supports their success in inclusive higher education and daily life. Panelists included Fu Caudill of Vanderbilt University Next Steps, Caleb Williamson of the University of Memphis TigerLIFE program, and Pisanach "Peach" Chinratanalab, a 2020 graduate of Vanderbilt University Next Steps.

Collaborations

Through the Tennessee Inclusive Higher Education (TN IHE) Alliance, member programs have had opportunities to learn about the Medicaid Alternative Pathways (MAPs) program and the resources it offers to students. Representatives from the DDA MAPs program presented at a TN IHE Alliance meeting to provide an overview of the program and explain how it can support students enrolled in inclusive higher education programs.

The TN IHE Alliance has also maintained an up-to-date informational flyer featuring all Tennessee inclusive higher education programs. This resource is distributed at outreach events to increase awareness among

students and families of postsecondary opportunities available across the state.

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission developed a one-page informational flyer on the Tennessee STEP UP Scholarship. The flyer is distributed at outreach events to ensure students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families are aware of the financial assistance available to support college enrollment.

Plans for FY 2027

The TN Believes Grant Program received \$1 million in recurring funding for FY 2027 to support the continued success and long-term sustainability of Tennessee's inclusive higher education programs. An additional \$1 million in nonrecurring funding was also appropriated for FY 2027 to support the development and implementation of three new programs, as well as the expansion of existing programs across the state.

Programs in Development

Lee University

Region: East

Location: Bradley County / Cleveland, TN

Walters State Community College

Region: East

Location: Hamblen County / Morristown, TN

William and Johnson Career College

Region: West

Location: Shelby County – Memphis, TN

Entering its fifth year, the Tennessee Believes program will distribute \$1 million in FY2026, bringing total program funding to more than \$4 million awarded to ten colleges and universities since 2021. This sustained support reflects the state's ongoing dedication to building inclusive campus environments and strengthening student success outcomes. DDA accepted applications for the Tennessee Believes Grant in January and February of 2026 and began to provide the funding on July 1, 2026.

The grant awardees for FY27 are as follows:

- **Lipscomb University:** \$129,737
- **East Tennessee State University:** \$130,488
- **Union University:** \$100,000

- **Chattanooga State Community College:** \$124,016
- **Lee University:** \$53,276

Success Story

Lillian Benkert's journey at Chattanooga State shows exactly what the Tiger Access Program makes possible. Thanks to funding from the Tennessee Believes Grant, students with IDD can fully participate in college life, learning work skills, building independence, joining clubs, and discovering new passions on campus.

For Lillian, that passion is music. As a member of the school's symphonic band, she's found a place where her talent shines. "Thanks to music, it helped me realize that I had the potential to be good at it," she said. Program Coordinator Tina Gower sees that same spark in every student who walks through the door. "The Tennessee Believes grant has really helped our students so that they can get the education that they need, the education that they deserve, so that they can learn the skills that they need to be part of the real world as a whole and to get the jobs that they really want."

The Tiger Access Program is opening doors, not just to classrooms, but to confidence and independence.

Senior Center Grants

The Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) continued its commitment to strengthening Tennessee's senior centers through the administration of competitive grant funding. This one-time allocation is designed to enhance the ability of senior centers to connect older adults with essential resources, engaging activities, and meaningful social opportunities.

In FY26, the Tennessee General Assembly appropriated \$5 million for statewide distribution, marking the sixth consecutive year of legislative support for these community institutions. This sustained investment underscores the critical role senior centers play in improving the quality of life for older adults across Tennessee.

Senior centers were invited to submit applications for awards ranging from \$5,000 to \$50,000. Funding priorities emphasized projects and initiatives that strengthen long-term operations and community impact, including capital improvements, marketing efforts, programming and activities, and routine operating expenses.

The grant awardees are as follows:

- **Anderson County Office on Aging and Senior Center** — \$48,000
- **Emory Valley Center** — \$15,000
- **Shelbyville/Bedford County Senior Citizens Center, Inc.** — \$17,000
- **Bledsoe County Senior Citizens Center** — \$50,000
- **Bradley County Committee on Aging** — \$50,000
- **Cannon County Senior Center** — \$13,000

- **Carroll County Office on Aging — \$11,000**
- **Elizabethton Area Senior Citizens Center — \$12,000**
- **Thrive 55+ Ashland City — \$30,000**
- **Harrogate Senior Citizens Center — \$20,000**
- **Tazewell Senior Center — \$20,000**
- **Clay County Multi-Purpose Senior Citizens Center — \$50,000**
- **Cocke County Senior Center — \$24,000**
- **Crockett County Office on Aging — \$18,000**
- **Fair Park Activity Center — \$50,000**
- **Inspiritus Live-Thrive-Give Senior Center — \$50,000**
- **FiftyForward Madison Station — \$50,000**
- **FiftyForward Donelson Station — \$50,000**
- **FiftyForward J.L. Turner Center — \$10,000**
- **FiftyForward Bordeaux Center — \$50,000**
- **FiftyForward Knowles Center — \$50,000**
- **Alexandria Activity Center — \$49,000**
- **Dickson Senior Activity Center — \$23,000**
- **Dyer County Office On Aging — \$45,000**
- **Fayette County Commission on Aging — \$50,000**
- **Fentress County Senior Citizen's Center — \$50,000**
- **Franklin County Senior Citizens, Inc — \$33,000**
- **Sewanee Senior Citizens Center — \$50,000**
- **City of Milan Senior Citizens Center — \$14,000**
- **Gibson County Office on Aging/Bradford Senior Center — \$29,000**
- **Humbolt Senior Citizens Center — \$19,000**
- **Giles County Senior Citizens, Inc — \$50,000**
- **Bean Station Senior Center — \$50,000**
- **Grainger County Senior Citizens, Inc — \$46,000**
- **Roby Adult Center — \$46,000**
- **Senior Citizens Center - Morristown — \$50,000**
- **Jewish Federation of Greater Chattanooga — \$50,000**
- **Glennwood Community Center — \$18,000**
- **North River Family YMCA — \$50,000**
- **City of Bolivar Senior Center — \$50,000**
- **Hardin County Senior Center — \$18,000**
- **Mooresburg Community Association — \$50,000**
- **Brownsville/Haywood County Senior Center — \$20,000**

- **Henderson County Senior Center** — \$11,000
- **Sardis Senior Citizens Club** — \$10,000
- **Paris Henry County Senior Citizens Center Association** — \$50,000
- **Hickman County Senior Citizens Center** — \$50,000
- **The J.D. Lewis Senior Citizens Center of Houston County, Inc** — \$50,000
- **Dandridge Area Senior Center** — \$11,000
- **Strawberry Plains Senior Center** — \$13,000
- **New Market Senior Center** — \$12,000
- **White Pine Senior Center** — \$13,000
- **Jefferson City Senior Citizens Center** — \$12,000
- **Johnson County Senior Center** — \$21,000
- **John T O'Connor Senior Center** — \$50,000
- **South Knoxville Senior Center** — \$17,000
- **Karns Senior Center** — \$50,000
- **Halls Senior Center** — \$22,000
- **West Knox County Senior Center** — \$10,000
- **Wesley House Community Center** — \$50,000
- **Corryton Senior Center** — \$25,000
- **Lawrence County Senior Citizens Club, Inc.** — \$50,000
- **Lewis County Senior Citizen Center** — \$18,000
- **Loudon County Senior Center** — \$43,000
- **Our PLACE Adult Day Center** — \$37,000
- **Whitwell Senior Center** — \$34,000
- **Marshall County Senior Citizens** — \$21,000
- **Maury County Senior Citizens** — \$15,000
- **Etowah Area Senior Citizen's Center** — \$38,000
- **McMinn County Senior Citizens, Inc** — \$45,000
- **Selmer Senior Center** — \$10,000
- **Meigs County Senior Center** — \$50,000
- **Monroe County Senior Citizens and Friends, Inc.** — \$44,000
- **Clarksville Ajax Turner 50+ Center** — \$50,000
- **Moore County Senior Citizens, Inc** — \$13,000
- **Deer Lodge Abner Ross Memorial Center, Inc** — \$50,000
- **Coalfield Senior Center** — \$25,000
- **Obion County Senior Citizens Association Senior Center** — \$10,000
- **Overton County Senior Citizens** — \$50,000
- **Perry County Senior Centers** — \$50,000

- **Monterey Activity Center — \$23,000**
- **Putnam County Senior Citizens — \$50,000**
- **Rhea Richlands Senior Neighbors — \$50,000**
- **Byrum Porter Senior Center — \$30,000**
- **Robertson County Senior Center — \$43,000**
- **Mindful Care - Elders First Adult Day Services — \$13,000**
- **Smyrna Senior Citizens - Senior Activity Center of Smyrna — \$50,000**
- **Scott Appalachian Industries — \$35,000**
- **Scott County Senior Center and Friends — \$41,000**
- **Sequatchie County Senior Citizen Center — \$32,000**
- **My People Senior Activity Center — \$50,000**
- **Bartlett Senior Center — \$50,000**
- **Pickering Center — \$50,000**
- **Raleigh-Frayer Senior Center — \$30,000**
- **Ruth Tate Senior Center — \$45,000**
- **Josephine Lewis Senior Center — \$30,000**
- **Hickory Hill Community Center — \$15,000**
- **McWherter Senior Center — \$40,000**
- **Orange Mound Senior Center — \$28,000**
- **Golden Years Adult Daycare — \$50,000**
- **Goodwill Homes Senior Center — \$30,000**
- **Oasis of Hope — \$50,000**
- **TEES Senior Center — \$50,000**
- **Feels Like Home Senior Residences — \$50,000**
- **Smith County Senior Citizens Center — \$42,000**
- **Stewart County Senior Citizens, Inc — \$50,000**
- **Slater Senior Center — \$30,000**
- **Kingsport Senior Center — \$50,000**
- **Kingsport Senior Center at Lynn View — \$50,000**
- **Gallatin Senior Citizen's Center, Inc — \$50,000**
- **Tipton County Commission on Aging — \$50,000**
- **Clinchfield Senior Adult Center of Erwin and Unicoi County, Inc. — \$50,000**
- **Fall Creek Falls Community Center — \$22,000**
- **McMinnville Warren County Senior Center — \$50,000**
- **Johnson City Senior Center — \$50,000**
- **Jonesborough Senior Center — \$15,000**
- **Wayne County Senior Citizens, Inc — \$15,000**

- **Gateway Senior Center** — \$10,000
- **Dresden Senior Citizens Center** — \$10,000
- **Sharon Senior Center** — \$10,000
- **Sparta/White County Activity Center** — \$42,000
- **FiftyForward Martin Center** — \$45,000
- **Cedar Seniors, Inc** — \$50,000
- **Lebanon Senior Citizens Center** — \$32,000
- **Mt. Juliet Senior Activity Center** — \$19,000

Success Stories

Ajax Turner Senior Center

The Clarksville 50+ Activity Center (Ajax Turner Senior Center) is proving just how powerful a good meal and a good community can be. With support from the Senior Center Grants, the center completely revamped its breakfast program, introducing healthier, more diverse options that honor the needs and preferences of older adults.

Executive Director Rita Allsop knew the community deserved better. She believed in offering food that was not only nutritious but genuinely enjoyable. And the response has been remarkable. “We went from like 35 to 40 people up to in that one day to 125 people. They are telling other people, and we are gaining members due to this, these shifts,” she said.

The revitalized breakfast program isn’t just feeding people; it’s strengthening connections, boosting membership, and turning mornings at the center into something people look forward to.

Roby Adult Center

In Greeneville and Greene County, where more than 60% of residents are 50 or older, the Roby Adult Center has become an essential place for staying active and connected. It’s a community hub built around the belief that older adults deserve opportunities to move, socialize, and thrive. And at the Roby, there truly is something for everyone.

For many members, the center is more than a place to exercise or take a class. It’s a lifeline. Member Jamie Wells shared how the Roby helps her stay motivated and connected: “I’m cricking out of bed and tight, and I think, okay, get to the Roby, and I’m going to be okay. And once I do, I just think, you know, the world is great. When I’m not, I tend to be a hermit sometimes, and so knowing I have a Roby class to go to gets me out.”

The Roby Adult Center is meeting a real community need, offering activities, companionship, and a welcoming space that encourages older adults to stay active.

McMinnville/Warren County Senior Center

The McMinnville/Warren County Senior Center is thriving, thanks to support from the Senior Center Grants. After moving from a 5,200-square-foot building into a spacious 17,000-square-foot facility, the center has transformed what it can offer older adults in the community.

With room to grow, the center now features a dedicated craft room, an exercise room, pool tables, and a larger dining space that fills to capacity every day meals are served. Open to anyone 60 or older, it's become a welcoming hub where people can stay active, connect with friends, and enjoy nutritious food.

The congregate meal program alone serves more than 200 people a day, three days a week, but the impact goes far beyond lunch. As member Sandra Nunely shared, "It's almost like having Sunday lunch with people from your church. It gives you a warm feeling to have lunch with folks you know, it really does."

With its expanded space and renewed energy, the McMinnville/Warren County Senior Center is supporting wellness and creating a place where older adults feel at home.

Thrive 55+ Ashland City

Thrive 55+ Ashland City shows exactly how impactful the Senior Center Grants can be. With support from the grant, the center has been able to make meaningful upgrades that improve the experience of its members. From fresh interior paint and new flooring to a resurfaced parking lot and expanded parking to accommodate growing attendance.

Inside, Thrive 55+ is buzzing with activity. Members enjoy Monday and Wednesday lunches, Friday chair volleyball, and plenty of pool and card games throughout the week. The improvements have made the center more welcoming, more accessible, and better equipped to serve the community.

Director Tammany Carter shared how transformative the grant has been: "It really is helpful to have the opportunity to apply for that grant and be awarded the grant so that we can make these much-needed improvements to better benefit our members."

Thanks to these upgrades, the center is ready to serve even more people in the years ahead.

Youth Camp Grant

The Department of Disability and Aging expanded its support for community-based recreational opportunities by launching a new funding initiative aimed at strengthening programs that serve children and youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). This effort reflects DDA's commitment to

increasing access to inclusive, nonacademic activities that promote social engagement, skill development, and community participation. DDA has a total of \$500,000 in funding for this program.

During FY26, DDA made available one-time awards of up to \$25,000 for eligible 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. The funding is designed to help established recreational programs, such as youth development camps, grow their capacity so more participants with IDD can take part alongside their peers. In addition to expanding enrollment, the grants support programs in meeting the needs of youth with higher acuity or complex medical conditions by funding appropriate staffing and resources. Preference was given to organizations serving youth with IDD who are also in foster care, recognizing the importance of inclusive recreational opportunities for this population.

The grant awardees are as follows:

- **Little Blue Theater Company:** \$25,000
- **Nature Together:** \$25,000
- **Project Inspire Foundation:** \$25,000
- **Hope's Haven:** \$25,000
- **Downside Up:** \$25,000
- **Creative Discovery Museum:** \$10,500
- **Arts for ALL TN:** \$24,990
- **Camp Able at St. Columbia:** \$25,000
- **Hope Hohenwald:** \$25,000
- **The STAR Center:** \$25,000
- **Vanderbilt University:** \$24,999
- **White Fawn Farm:** \$25,000
- **Community Intervention Memphis:** \$25,000
- **Daughters of Zion:** \$25,000
- **Down Syndrome Association of Middle TN:** \$20,000
- **LIFT East TN:** \$25,000
- **Linc Unites Inc.:** \$25,000
- **Special Kids – Camp Ability:** \$23,000
- **Able Voices:** \$25,000
- **My Brother Rocks the Spectrum – Murfreesboro:** \$25,000
- **My Brother Rocks the Spectrum – Franklin:** \$25,000

Scan QR code for video



Link here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIWxT1dkPS8>

ADDITIONAL UPDATES

General Counsel

The Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) Office of General Counsel (OGC) provides legal services to support DDA. During the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the OGC reviewed and advised on several pieces of legislation that impacted the DDA, including the Senate Bill 1777 Caregiving for Caregivers Creates, which created a \$200,000 grant program from which \$6,000 grants can be provided to qualifying caregivers.

The OGC further worked on the implementation of multiple new state laws, including: (1) the creation a new licensure category for Tier 1 Homes for the Aged to be licensed by DDA; (2) the creation of the Conservatorship Management Task Force; and (3) the creation of residential pilot programs in each of the three grand regions of the State.

Over the course of the past year, the OGC also provided legal support to DDA, touching upon a broad range of business functions. This work encompassed:

- The updating of the TennCare Interagency Agreement and Provider Agreement;
- Creation of a new Interagency Agreement with the Department of Children Services (DCS) to establish a coordinated partnership for children with ID/DD.
- Review of policies, RDAs, internal operating guidelines, and rules;
- Submission of DDA's Title VI Implementation Plan and Report;
- Revision of the DDA Tennessee Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) plan;
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance, which included legal assistance on reported breaches/potential breaches and executing several HIPAA Business Associate Agreements (BAAs) and MOUs;
- Conservatorships – both new conservatorships as well as existing conservatorships when a successor conservator was needed, removal of conservators for malfeasance, and Restoration of Rights;
- Contracts;

- Conducting educational seminars related to conservatorships and alternatives to conservatorships and supported decision-making (SDM);
- Issues arising under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Issues arising under the ADA in the context of public access to programs and activities of DDA;
- Coordination and oversight of a State-wide effort to ensure all Executive Branch agencies are in compliance with the ADA's new requirements with respect to web content;
- Investigation of employment-related complaints (human resource complaint investigations);
- Public records requests;
- Records compliance, which includes: updating RDAs and creating new RDAs as needed, and shepherding those RDAs through the approval process with the Public Records Commission; the annual records count for the Secretary of State's office; and guidance on destruction of records per the 63 applicable RDAs;
- Forensic services to criminal courts in cases involving a defendant with an intellectual disability, including the admission of such defendants who have been involuntarily committed to the custody of DDA, including ensuring court orders are in compliance with applicable commitment statutes;
- Issues arising from the operation of the Tennessee Early Intervention System (TEIS), which include working with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs to address questions stemming from its on-site visit;
- TEIS administrative complaint investigations; and
- Collaboration with other state agencies and the Attorney General on pending and anticipated Federal and State litigation.

Further, the OGC provided legal support for the continued expansion of the Medicaid Alternative Pathways (MAPs) program, the TN Start Assessment & Stabilization Teams, Tennessee Strong Homes, and the Tennessee Strong Families program. The OGC's Division of Administrative Appeals unit continues to oversee the issuance of cease-and-desist letters related to unlicensed facilities, requests for removal from the Abuse Registry, involuntary disenrollment from the DDA home and community-based waiver, and appeals regarding provider sanctions.

Reportable Event Management

Executive Summary During Fiscal Year 2025–2026, the Reportable Event Management system continued to support safety, wellness, and accountability across Tennessee's home and community-based programs. This year saw a total of 10,783 Reportable Events submitted across the 1915(c), CHOICES, ECF, and ICF programs. A total of 1,169 investigations were opened, primarily within 1915(c) and ICF programs.

1. Program Overview

This report covers Reportable Events and investigations submitted between July 1, 2025, and June 30, 2026, within the following benefit programs: 1915(c), CHOICES, ECF CHOICES, and ICF/IID.

2. Total Reportable Events

A total of 10,783 Reportable Events were submitted. Counts by program:

- 1915(c): 2,303
- CHOICES: 4,879
- ECF: 2,127
- ICF: 1,474

3. Investigations Opened

A total of 1,169 investigations were opened. Breakdown:

- 1915(c): 702
- ICF: 467

Note: Investigation counts for CHOICES and ECF did not appear in the dataset provided.

4. Program Trends & Analysis

Summary of trends across 1915(c), CHOICES, ECF, and ICF programs, including medical events, behavioral crises, supervision issues, and allegations of neglect.

5. System Themes

Themes observed: medical emergencies, behavioral crises, supervision concerns, neglect allegations, elopements, and hospital utilization.

6. Quality Improvement Activities

Activities included provider technical assistance, corrective actions, documentation training, behavior plan updates, fall-prevention strategies, and crisis-prevention improvements.

7. Conclusion

The fiscal year reflects strong reporting, responsive investigations, and a commitment to safety and accountability across all programs. Quality improvement efforts continue to drive system enhancements. Additionally, in FY 2025-2026, REM rolled out a new data management system. The REM/PERLSS system was rolled out on 3/16/26 and is now how all Reportable Events are reported and recorded. The new system has enabled all Investigations (State and Provider Investigations) to be completed in PERLSS. The Action Plans and Appeals process are also being completed in the new system. The ability to have all REM functions completed in one system has greatly reduced the need for reliance on multiple systems to complete the process and has greatly reduced the need for email correspondence (both internal and external) to coordinate the tasks associated with the REM process.

Program Operations

Intake & Case Management

DDA conducts Intake and Referral activities for the Employment and Community First CHOICES (ECF) program for people applying in TN who currently do not have Medicaid. DDA also conducts outreach for

people on the ECF waiting list and works with other State Departments, like Adult Protective Services and TennCare, to coordinate efforts to support people in exigent circumstances and assist in getting services in place as soon as possible. During the period, DDA received and processed 1,574 new referrals for the ECF program. Moreover, DDA attempted outreach to over 1,000 people on the ECF waiting list as part of an initiative to reduce the number of people on the list. During the period DDA, completed and submitted 428 Preadmission evaluations (PAEs) for people who requested enrollment into the ECF program.

As part of our legislative mandate, DDA Intake staff administer the community informed choice process (CICP) for any individual seeking care in an intermediate care facility (ICF/IID) in Tennessee. This process ensures people and their families are educated about home and community-based service options prior to receiving institutional care.

DDA also provides oversight and case management for the 1915c Self Determination Waiver which currently serves 766 people. The Self Determination waiver promotes maximum choice and control in selecting and hiring direct support staff through an option called Consumer Direction as well as serving people through traditional community provider agencies.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT

The Office of Quality Management includes the functions of Quality Monitoring (formerly Quality Assurance), Compliance, Fiscal Accountability Review, Risk Management, ICF/IID Survey Operations, and Licensure. These groups exist to further the overall mission of DDA and have established practices to ensure issues related to the quality of service provision is regularly reviewed, analyzed, and addressed.

Quality Monitoring

During FY26, Quality Monitoring Reviewers conducted 234 quality surveys for providers of 1915c, ECF CHOICES, and CHOICES CLS/CLS-FM services. Additionally, 268 Qualified Provider Reviews, which encompass a review of compliance with background and registry check requirements as well as training requirements for provider staff, were completed for providers of 1915c services. As part of the Individual Record Review, records were reviewed for 463 people receiving supports via the 1915c waivers. These reviews are conducted to assess DDA's compliance with its assurances to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), with a focus on health and welfare.

The Accreditation Relief initiative began on January 1, 2026, and nine (9) providers were eligible to skip their Quality Monitoring survey and solely receive the Qualified Provider Review, while one (1) provider was eligible for an abbreviated Quality Monitoring survey. As the current survey cycle continues, more providers will benefit from this initiative. Outreach packets for providers were developed during FY26, one packet is specific to providers currently scheduled, and the other packet is specific to new providers

who have not been surveyed yet and are just starting to provide services for people. In addition to these packets, one-page resources specific to the Quality Monitoring Survey as well as the Qualified Provider Review were developed and are now being shared by DDA's credentialing unit as well as by each MCO in an effort to better inform new providers of the reviews they will be subject to when providing services in the 1915c, ECF CHOICES, and CHOICES waivers.

ICF/IID Survey Operations

The ICF/IID Survey Operations unit completed a total of 134 recertification surveys during FY26, as well as 79 complaint investigations. Additionally, the unit has provided training to providers on active treatment, death review investigations, investigation requirements for Intermediate Care Facilities, plans of correction, progress monitoring and documentation, and team member responsibilities.

Fiscal Accountability Reviews

The Fiscal Accountability Review (FAR) unit completed 100% of all assigned reviews for FY26, with 150 FAR audits and 20 grant reviews.

Risk Management

During FY26, Risk Management collected 26 tips from DDA entities and external sources, along with supporting information, and forwarded them to TennCare's Office of Program Integrity for review. When appropriate, Risk Management contacted complainants to obtain additional details prior to tip submission. Additionally, Risk Management assisted other DDA program areas in developing and implementing Risk Management processes.

Internal Audit

Internal Audit's primary objective is to add value to the Department and assist in achieving its strategic goals while also providing recommendations for improvement to management. The Internal Audit Unit analyzes departmental conformance to policies and procedures as well as applicable laws and statutes, all while determining processes are in alignment with the overall mission of the Department. Additionally, the Internal Audit Unit completes multiple engagements addressing anonymous tips and other risks that could potentially impede the Department's operations.

Licensure

The Licensure unit is comprised of both the Licensure Survey team and the Housing Inspection team. During the previous fiscal year, Licensure developed the Licensure Rules for the new Tier 1 Home for the Aged category and the rule became effective in FY26. Further, the Licensure unit demonstrated sustained operational growth and improved regulatory reach. The department increased the number of licenses issued from 891 to 985, representing an 11 percent rise in licensure activity. Additionally, the total number

of licensed services expanded from 2,987 to 3,410, a 14 percent increase. These gains reflect strengthened administrative capacity, enhanced provider engagement, and continued commitment to ensuring compliance and quality across the service network.

Housing Inspectors within this unit conducted 1,651 total inspections of residential homes where people supported in the 1915c waivers are receiving Supported Living or Semi-Independent Living services. Some of these homes are also Blended Homes, where individuals in the home may be in the ECF CHOICES or CHOICES programs receiving Community Living Supports (CLS) services. The number of inspections completed includes 163 initial inspections of new homes, 188 re-inspections, 685 continuing occupancy inspections, and 615 continuing occupancy re-inspections.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Human Resources carried a significant workload throughout FY26 and continued to support the day-to-day operations of the department. The team processed 9,951 HR transactions, including actions related to payroll, benefits, employee movement, classification and compensation, performance management, and employee relations.

A major part of HR's work centered on keeping the employee lifecycle moving. This included support for 237 new hires/rehires, 270 job openings, 592 timesheet corrections, and 1,642 payroll audit and assistance actions. These efforts helped supervisors and employees navigate key employment processes while maintaining continuity across the department.

HR also focused on improving internal processes and the employee experience. Key projects included the New Employee Orientation revamp, Exit Survey redesign, ZenDesk preparation, Retention Survey automation, and the Pincredible People recognition program.

Training

Staff Development played a major role in supporting employee readiness and required training across the department. The team supported 1,099 DOHR training attendees, 308 new hires, 94 DOHR classes, and trained 276 Relias administrators.

Relias continued to be one of the department's largest training systems. In FY26, the department managed 610,888 Relias assignments and 599,239 completions, with a 98% completion rate and 91% compliance rate. These numbers show the scale of training being managed and the strong compliance performance across the system.

Training also supported specialized program needs, including TN Strong Families and required certifications. This included 7,093 TNSF Relias completions, 416 employees trained in Handle w/Care, 512 employees trained in CPR/BLS, and a 100% annual audit result in all three regions.

Leadership Academy

The Leadership Academy continued to grow as a professional development resource for DDA employees. The academy included the Regional Leadership Institute, Supervisor Leadership Institute, Fall Leadership Conference, Lead & Read Book Club, and the Administrative Skills Training Series.

The results showed a strong impact. 92% of supervisors reported seeing a positive impact in employees' work after RLI, 68 employees participated in SLI, and 100% of Spring RLI respondents said they would recommend RLI to a colleague.

The Administrative Skills Training Series also became a practical learning opportunity for employees across the department. The series averaged 93 employees per Teams session and received a 97% average helpfulness rating, with topics such as Outlook, Adobe Pro, Word/Excel, Time and Leave, PowerPoint, and Hiring & Workers' Comp.

FY26 Lessons and FY27 Priorities

Several lessons from FY26 will help guide the work moving into FY27. The report highlights the need for onboarding to be interactive, supervisors to have targeted development paths, and systems to reduce manual work rather than add to it. It also emphasizes that retention starts with listening to employees early and that cross-department collaboration helps move projects forward faster.

FY27 priorities are organized around four themes: Launch, Modernize, Strengthen, and Expand. These include launching the revamped NEO and Pincredible People, implementing ZenDesk and LMS course review, strengthening retention survey data and Administrative Skills Training, and expanding the Leadership Academy and accreditation support.

COUNCILS

DDA oversees the work of several statutorily required advisory councils. These councils consist of various stakeholders, including people with disabilities and their families. The work done through these councils is valuable in helping inform the department of the effectiveness of services and supports, and identify areas and gaps where growth or assistance may be needed.

Planning and Policy Councils

The Statewide Planning and Policy Council (SPPC) has been actively working on providing quality recommendations to DDA Leadership over the past year. The council has concentrated on key areas such as program alignment, behavioral and mental health, and the Direct Support Professional (DSP) workforce. Workgroups were established to discuss these three specific topics, and regular workgroup meetings were held between council sessions. Apart from the workgroup activities, the council continues to prioritize the recommendation process, including those elevated to the SPPC by the regional sub-councils and the Developmental Disabilities Planning & Policy Council (DDPPC).

The East Planning and Policy Council (EPPC) has been actively working to address service gaps in specific areas, including high acuity needs, support for caregivers, and resources for individuals and families experiencing disabilities.

The Middle Planning and Policy Council (MPPC) has worked diligently to provide insight regarding an array of topics, such as: Healthcare for individuals with co-occurring intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and mental health diagnoses, resources for aging caregivers, and law enforcement training.

The West Planning and Policy Council (WPPC) continues to work on crafting substantive recommendations relevant and unique to the West Tennessee region, bringing awareness on a statewide level to issues such as the lack of housing options.

The Developmental Disabilities Planning & Policy Council (DDPPC) continues to collaborate on issues such as aging driver safety, law enforcement training, and the accessibility and efficacy of DDA service delivery and systems.

The Statewide Interagency Coordinating Council

The Statewide Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) serves as a guiding vision to support early intervention services for infants and young children with disabilities or developmental delays and their families. The council is made up of parents, providers, and other stakeholders and agencies connected to early intervention and children in Tennessee.

In fiscal year 2026, SICC focused on discussions around the ADA regulations for accessibility of state web content and mobile apps, the recent updates to Family Guided Routines Based Intervention (FGRBI) model, HOPE Family Survey, results monitoring, budget, and more. This fiscal year, SICC also discussed other opportunities for collaboration with external partners such as the Tennessee Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (TNAAP).

The Family Support Council

The Family Support Program is designed to assist individuals with severe disabilities and their families to remain together in their homes and communities. It is available to individuals and families regardless of age and income who do not already receive more comprehensive services provided under certain other programs. Services are flexible, responsive to families and their needs, and provided with the involvement of families, consumers, and volunteers at the community level. The Family Support Program is funded solely with state dollars and operates in all 95 counties to support Tennesseans with disabilities who desire to remain at home with their families. The maximum annual funding per person was \$6,000 in Fiscal Year 2026. As of July 30, 2026, 14% of the individuals supported have an intellectual disability and 86% have a severe or developmental disability other than an intellectual disability.

The Family Support program had many accomplishments this year. The Family Support Guidelines were strengthened by adding language stating families may receive Family Support Funding up until the date that the Home & Community Based (HCBS) services started to be delivered (vs. the date the person was added to the HCBS waitlist). Language was also strengthened in the Family Support Guidelines, requiring agencies to process applications and inform families about the status of their applications by the end of September.

The State Council approved a timeline for when services can be reimbursed for families, which reflects the date of the application approval. The State Council worked on the continuation of strengthening the service definitions, adding an additional definition for Special Needs Trust/Conservatorships/Supported-Decision-Making/Power of Attorney/Conservatorship/Guardianship. Forms were updated this year to make it clearer that either a person supported or a legal representative should be the only ones signing documents. Clarification was also provided on the ability for people to receive Family Support along with other state-funded programs, which is allowable as long as services do not overlap. This year, the Family Support Flyers and Brochures were both updated and distributed. Surveys went out to a 10 percent sample of families who received services, and over 130 surveys were returned, which provided valuable feedback on the impact of the program. Overall, the Family Support Program served more than 5,111 families across the state during FY26. The Council welcomed a new Chair, a new representative from TNCO, a new representative from the Centers for Independent Living and several new District Council members.

Council on Autism Spectrum Disorder

The Tennessee Council on Autism Spectrum Disorder (Council on ASD) is made up of 18 total members, 9 individuals- 3 from each grand division of the State- who either have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder or who are family members or primary caregivers of persons who do, along with 9 members from agencies and departments across State government. The purpose of the Council, as outlined in T.C.A. § 4-3-2711, is to “make recommendations and provide leadership in program development regarding matters

concerning all levels of autism spectrum disorder services, including, but not limited to, health care, education, and other adult, adolescent, and children's services." That work is done both in the Council's quarterly meetings and in the meetings of Committees created by the Council to further that purpose. The Council on ASD is vital given the growing number of Tennesseans with autism spectrum disorder. Findings from the Tennessee Autism and Developmental Disability Monitoring Network (TN-ADDM) showed that in 2022, 1 in 29 (or 3.4%) of children born in Tennessee had a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, an increase of 0.6% from 2020. Accordingly, on June 18, 2025, the Tennessee General Assembly's Government Operations Joint Evaluation Committee of Education, Health, and General Welfare voted to recommend that the Council be continued for an additional five (5) years to further its legislative mandate.

This year, the Council:

- Voted to approve orientation materials for Council members who are onboarding.
- Created an Annual Report, which was published in April 2026.
- The Council, in collaboration with the Tennessee Disability Coalition, has engaged in extensive discussions regarding the issue of informal removals of students—particularly those with autism—from educational settings. These removals can occur without proper documentation or due process, contributing to disproportionately high suspension rates. A significant barrier to progress is the lack of reliable data.
- Recognized the need for improved training for general education teachers in working with students with disabilities, the Council has long advocated for enhanced professional development. In response, the Department of Disability & Aging partnered with Trevecca University to launch a certificate program focused on exceptional education. Efforts are now underway to expand this program to include paraprofessionals, equipping them with the tools and knowledge necessary to effectively support students with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities. The program is free to licensed Tennessee teachers and is available to be completed via an online platform.
- The Council has been actively working to address housing challenges faced by individuals with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Two Council members participated in housing work groups led by the department, focusing on improving access to affordable and accessible housing. Key issues include a shortage of accessible units and difficulties navigating the Section 8 voucher process.
- The Council reviewed the limited availability of therapy services for adults, including occupational and speech therapy. Staffing shortages were identified as barriers to sustaining these services. The Council emphasized the need for continued advocacy to expand provider capacity and stabilization in the workforce. The Council strategized potential solutions to resolve the issue of rising housing costs in an effort to ensure equitable access to waiver programs. They also explored how assistive technologies can support greater independence.

- Improving autism-related training for first responders is a current priority. Council members met with staff from the Department of Commerce and Insurance to evaluate existing training programs and identify best practices for statewide implementation. They also engaged with the Tennessee Department of Health's Office of Emergency Medical Services, which oversees EMTs and paramedics. That agency expressed openness to enhancing autism training. Additionally, the TN START Team presented to the Council, offering insights into the training resources available through their program.
- Welcomed a new member from the West Region, a new designee from the TN Commission on Children & Youth, Department of Disability & Aging (DDA), Department of Commerce & Insurance, the Council on Developmental Disabilities, and Department of Children's Services.
- Presented the second annual Patricia Edmiston Award, which recognizes Tennesseans who are improving the lives of fellow Tennesseans diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.
- Collaborated with the DDA Communications and External Affairs team to produce videos and short stories published during April for Autism Awareness month. The "Proud to be Me" #IAmASDinTN campaign featured stories and videos highlighting Tennesseans with autism spectrum disorder in celebration of Autism Awareness Month. The videos and stories were shared on the DDA website and its social media pages.

Tennessee Commission on Aging & Disability (TCAD)

July 2026 marks the two-year anniversary of the merger of the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability (TCAD) with the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. This has been a period of transition, of change, and of opportunity.

The commission is comprised of "persons who provide leadership in programs for the elderly and disabled in the state." (TCA 52-8-102). State department representatives, community members and legislators work together to fulfill our statutory responsibilities, including advising the department on matters relating to the development and execution of programs and services for older adults and adults with disabilities administered by the department, making recommendations to the governor, heads of state departments, and the General Assembly relative to the needs of older adults and adults with disabilities in Tennessee, and engaging in activities to identify and address the needs of older adults and persons with disabilities.

As a part of the transition to the Department of Aging and Disability, the commission crafted and adopted new bylaws. We have welcomed several new community members appointed by the Governor, and are adding additional new members now. The nature of the commission's relationship to the Area Agencies on Aging and Disability (AAADs) shifted with the merger. The planning process for the Older Americans Act programs has also changed. Commission members worked with the AAADs to better coordinate our efforts.

The commission revisited its committee structure and has made several changes to better integrate its work with the new Department. For example, the TCAD strategic planning committee has been integrated into the steering committee for the Multi-Sector Plan on Aging – Lifelong Tennessee. This provides for much better coordination of effort as we work together to achieve health, economic security, and community support for those 65 and older.

A survey of commission members and consultation with stakeholders resulted in the identification of three priority issues. Those are Housing, Workforce, and Caregiver support, especially respite. This has provided a framework for the commission's ongoing research, committee work, and recommendations. Solutions to these issues facing older adults and those with disabilities are not simple, but in collaboration with the state agencies represented on the commission, stakeholders, providers, and advocates, we are confident we can make progress.

A LOOK AHEAD

New Offices

In Spring 2026, DDA cut the ribbon on our new West Tennessee Regional Office! Construction on the East and Middle Tennessee Regional Offices continues, with ribbon-cuttings planned for fall 2026! These spaces will better house our growing department, and more importantly, provide an innovative and welcoming space for the people we serve.

These new spaces will include updated Tech Homes and Seating and Positioning Services within our Innovation Centers. We can't wait to be in our new spaces!

Aging Conference

In September 2026, DDA is hosting the inaugural Tennessee State Conference on Aging! This two-day event in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, is dedicated to advancing best practices, sharing innovative solutions, and addressing the critical needs of our aging population. This historic conference will bring together renowned experts and thought leaders from across the country, collaborating on some of the most pressing issues facing older adults.

