



Realizing the Promise of Olmstead

A summary of research about the housing needs for
Georgians with developmental disabilities

Housing impacts health & well-being

For Georgians with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), housing is an issue of health and well-being, independence, civil rights, and finances. Unfortunately, for many, housing that meets their accessibility and health needs, and individual preferences is difficult to find or to afford. As a result, their health suffers, and they face consequences like reduced independence and unaffordable health care bills.



Intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD)

are differences in a person’s brain or other body systems that start before a child turns 18. They are lifelong and affect how an individual grows, learns, develops, and communicates.

About 240,000 Georgians live with IDDs.¹

1. S. A. Larson et al., “In-Home and Residential Long-Term Supports and Services for Persons with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities: Status and Trends Through 2016,” Minneapolis, MN, 2018. [Online]. [Available: https://ici-s.umn.edu/files/4pQ7Pt7HxF/risp2016_web.pdf](https://ici-s.umn.edu/files/4pQ7Pt7HxF/risp2016_web.pdf).



Background

Historically, most children and adults with IDD in the US were forced to live in institutional settings. The 1999 Supreme Court ruling known as the “Olmstead decision” determined that mass institutionalization of people with IDD was unjust, and required Georgia to provide community-based services in most circumstances. Though many Georgians with IDD live in their communities now, more housing and supports are necessary for all Georgians capable of living in the community to do so.



Currently in Georgia

Several factors contribute to housing challenges and shortages for people with IDD and their caregivers in our state:

- Universal shortages of affordable housing across the country
- Lack of access to long-term services and support (LTSS)² — people with IDD must have access to LTSS to support healthy, independent living. Medicaid can cover LTSS services through several programs. Georgia has two LTSS programs for people with IDD, called the New Options Waiver (NOW), and the Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program (COMP).

In 2022, over 13,000 Georgians were served by the waivers, **yet over 7,100 were still on the waiting list.**³

2. <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/long-term-services-supports/index.html>

3. <https://www.senate.ga.gov/committees/Documents/IDDFinalReport12.14.22.pdf>



Currently in Georgia

- Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSDI) benefits are often insufficient to cover the rising costs of housing – many people with IDD (but not all) receive some public income assistance which they use to pay for rent and other necessities. In Georgia, median rent can be anywhere from 70%-112% of an individual's monthly income, which means many Georgians with IDD are priced out of rental markets.

Examples of Long Term Services and Supports

include adult daycare programs, home health aide services, personal care services (like help with bathing or cooking), transportation, and supported employment.

The combination of these challenges forces people with IDD to remain in family homes or go to group homes.



What our research found

With support from the Georgia Council of Developmental Disabilities (GCDD), Georgians for a Healthy Future conducted research co-led by Georgians with IDD and their caregivers to better understand their current housing statuses, needs, and preferences. The leadership advisory group and GHF conducted two surveys — one for people with IDD and another for caregivers of people with IDD — and held focus groups with caregivers. We received valid responses from more than 1,600 people across 117 Georgia counties. Selected results below also include the results of focus groups held with caregivers.



FROM GEORGIANS WITH IDD *1217 survey responses*

- Majority of respondents (70%) live in community settings, others reported living in either a group/host home (16.6%), an institutional or medical setting (8%), or a school dormitory (4.76%).
- Four percent (4%) of respondents reported currently experiencing homelessness, which is **double** the proportion of Georgians experiencing homelessness in the general population (1.8%).
- The top three housing preferences reported were: safe and secure housing, living close to family, and affordability.



FROM GEORGIANS WITH IDD *1217 survey responses*

- More than one in four (27.4%) respondents said their income did not allow them to afford the housing they need.
- Only 1 in 5 people with IDD said they felt their living situation met all of their accessibility needs, and 56% reported that finding a home that fit their needs was somewhat or very challenging.



- 64% of respondents reported being either somewhat happy or very happy with their current living situation, 22.8% were neutral, and 12.5% reported being somewhat or very unhappy.



“I have certain requirements for the infrastructure of the living environment, but I don’t think it is difficult because it is a normal requirement for an adult. Who wants to live in a place where there are no facilities around, and it’s a long way from work?”

— *Respondent*



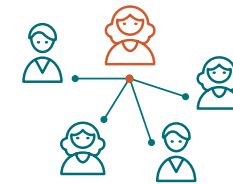
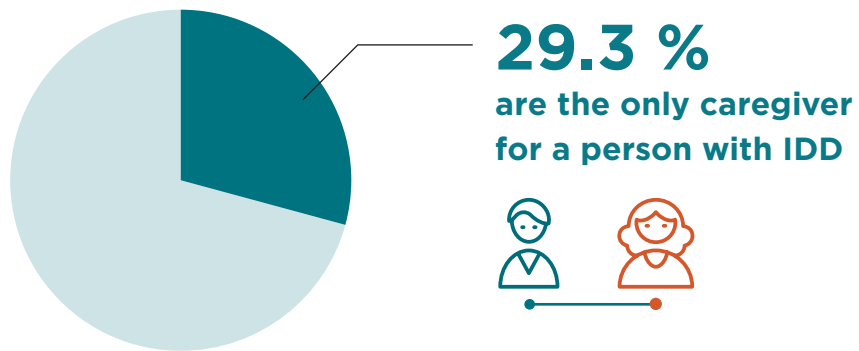
“In my dream house, I hope to have a convenient bathroom and a separate workshop. I want my house to be my own. I can have comfort and privacy. And there’s a little balcony where I can plant some flowers. The most important thing is that I can afford it.”

— *Respondent*



FROM CAREGIVERS *467 respondents*

- Almost three in ten (29.3%) caregivers reported being the only caregiver for a person with IDD. All others shared caregiving with another person.



versus those who
share caregiving with
others



FROM CAREGIVERS *467 respondents*

- Three out of four (74.3%) caregivers have considered transitioning the person they're caring for into another living situation in the future.
 - 84% of these caregivers were concerned the family member with IDD would need to move out because the caregiver could no longer care for them as a result of their own health and wellness needs or financial concerns. Aging parents struggle to support their children and consider current situations unstable.
 - Caregivers reported preferences for apartment-style living for their loved one with IDD, with roommates and some kind of supervision or support for activities and daily tasks.



FROM CAREGIVERS *467 respondents*

- In focus groups, caregivers cited lack of appropriate housing as the leading barrier to transitioning a family member with IDD to a different living situation.

“I want my child to be in a safe, supportive environment that helps him feel like he is part of a community and is a person in his own right. I want a place that will help him thrive, [not] just exist until he dies.”

— *Caregiver*



“There are not many options for my daughter. It is so sad that the caregivers are paid a wage that makes it impossible for them to live, so even if we can find a residential program, I am not sure that the caregivers will be available at the pay rate at this time.”

— *Caregiver*



Recommendations

GHF analyzed the research results above, conducted key informant interviews with policy experts, and completed a nationwide housing policy scan. The information we collected revealed policy opportunities that exist to address the housing needs and challenges of Georgians with IDD. These following recommendations are the first steps that Georgia policymakers could take to improve healthy, accessible, affordable housing for Georgians with IDD.



1

Convene a standing working group made up of relevant state agencies, Georgians with IDD, and caregivers to address the housing needs of Georgians with IDD.

The working group should examine available funding sources for housing, review current state policies, and study how new federal funding and policy opportunities could be leveraged in Georgia before making recommendations for state action, legislation, and funding.



2

Invest in supports that empower people with IDD who want to transition to a new living situation and their caregivers.

Parents and caregivers need immediate support and tools to transition their adult family members with IDD into their own homes (if that is the individual's preference). Caregivers and people with IDD reported a desire for independent living in our survey but lacked the tools and resources to do so. An investment from the state in transition-related tools and assistance (like family coaching or a housing needs assessment) could help relieve the burden on caregivers relatively quickly.



3

Pass legislation to require the Georgia Department of Community Affairs to set aside 10% of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit for housing for people with disabilities, including IDD.

The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is one of the most powerful tools for producing and preserving affordable rental housing in Georgia. Through the LIHTC program, private for-profit and nonprofit organizations receive a dollar-for-dollar reduction in their federal taxes in return for financing the rehabilitation or construction of low and very low-income rental units. This powerful tool could help to increase the housing available for people with disabilities.



Helpful links:

For complete research methodology, results, and our entire set of seven recommendations, please see our full study:

[*Realizing the Promise of Olmstead:*](#)

[*A housing study and policy recommendations.*](#)





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