

Understanding California's Regional Center Service System

An effective and growing system, serving hundreds of thousands of individuals

California's 21 regional centers are community-based non-profits funded with state and federal dollars. For more than 450,000 Californians with developmental disabilities, or about one percent of the state's population, their regional center is not merely the official point of entry. Their center is where service starts. Services for these individuals are coordinated by the regional center, making them the key link between individuals with developmental disabilities, their families, and the services they need.

LONGSTANDING HISTORY OF REGIONAL CENTERS SUCCESS: MORE INDIVIDUALS SERVED, EXPANDED SERVICES

The Lanterman Act (est. 1969) defined the rights of individuals with developmental disabilities and established a service system to meet needs of individuals and their families throughout California. Unique in the U.S., service access starts upon eligibility, based only on a diagnosis that significantly impacts the person. Many states have waitlists, with times ranging from two years (WA) to 6 years (TX) to 13 years (OK). The system continues to improve and expand individually responsive service options to help people lead full, integrated lives of their choosing. The primary role of regional centers is to identify, coordinate, and monitor a set of services uniquely matched to each person's needs, goals, and culture that provide quality outcomes to all people served.

In a recent National Core Indicators survey of 5,000 respondents, the vast majority of people served by regional centers say their experiences are positive, with over 90 percent of people reporting their services and supports through regional centers help them live a good life.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED

Businesses called "service providers" contract with regional centers to provide the many services and supports individuals need. Each person's needs, goals, and services are described in an individual program plan (IPP) or individualized family service plan (IFSP). Regional centers' most visible and important role is to identify, coordinate, and monitor those services, but also provide:

- Assessment, diagnosis, and referrals
- Assistance in finding and accessing community and other resources
- Payment for services included in the IPP/IFSP where other funds are not available
- Advocacy for the protection of legal, civil, and service rights
- Early intervention services (Early Start) for at-risk infants and their families
- Support to help ensure individuals can remain within their family
- Planning, placement, and monitoring for 24-hour out-of-home care
- Training and educational opportunities for individuals and families
- Development of new services to better meet individual needs

