

“What the heck is a waiver?”

by Sharon Blackmon

“Does that mean they have to waive their rights?”

“We don’t need that. My child is in school all day.”

“We probably make too much money to qualify.”

All these are questions and comments I get from parents and professionals alike when I bring up the Medicaid Waiver Program. Most have never heard of it, and nobody can really define it. And those who do know about it are under the impression that it is only for those who either already have Medicaid or fall below the poverty level with income.

That elusive and oft misunderstood “waiver” is actually the Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver Program, and it can be a vital piece in the puzzle known as raising a child with a developmental disability.

When my son was a tot and the case worker talked to me about all the services for which he qualified, I shook my head at this one. She explained that it would provide help in the home as well as assist with home modifications. At the time I was a single mom and we lived in an apartment. He was a medical nightmare but as a result received quite a bit of home health nursing care while I worked, so I didn’t think I needed it.

Fast forward ten years: Ernie had his trach removed (YAY!) and lost nursing care because he no longer qualified (uh-oh...). He was much healthier but I still needed supports for after school and other times. And it wasn’t like I could just hire a 15-year-old babysitter to take care of him. Not this guy!

Fast forward another eight years or so: Ernie is finishing high school! He will need supervision

and around-the-clock care still, and the waiver program (he has the NOW) gives us options for how he will spend his days. It will pay for helpers (aka “Direct Service Providers”) to be with him while my husband and I work, if that’s our choice. It will also cover job support if he goes to work, prevocational services, community integration and development, center-based respite, day habilitation, and other services. In short, it’s sort of a game-changer for us, allowing us to continue to work and provide for our family knowing that he will be safe and his daily needs met, and that his quality of life will be preserved.

Currently there are four basic types of waivers: Children’s Choice, New Opportunities Waiver (NOW), Residential Options Waiver (ROW), and the Supports Waiver. There is talk of combining the programs to create one waiver where the client chooses the services they need, but for now each program offers slightly different services and are chosen depending on the specific needs of the individual being served.

According to the Louisiana Department of Health [website](#), the Children’s Choice Waiver offers supports to children through age 20 who live at home with their family or with a foster family. Services provided by Children’s Choice include support coordination, family support, center-based respite care, family training, environmental accessibility adaptations, and specialized medical equipment and supplies. Specialized therapies, such as aquatic therapy,

art and music therapies, hippotherapy (therapeutic horseback riding) and sensory integration may also be provided through Children's Choice.

The New Opportunities Waiver, or NOW, offers home and community-based care to people 3 years and older with developmental disabilities who may otherwise require the care provided by an intermediate care facility. The NOW is intended to provide specific, activity-focused services rather than custodial care, and it is aimed at assisting people to live as independently as possible. The list of requirements for eligibility can be found on the Louisiana Department of Health website as well.



The Residential Options Waiver (ROW) is designed to assist adults living in institutions to transition to living independently in their own apartment or home. It is not intended to provide 24 hours a day of one-on-one support, but it can be combined with other services such as day habilitation or supported employment to ensure as much independence as the individual desires.

Supports Waiver participants, in addition to receiving support coordination and all medically necessary Medicaid benefits, have access to supported employment, prevocational training, day habilitation, and habilitation services. This waiver provides a minimal amount of assistance outside of daytime supports and is sometimes used emergently for individuals who have not accessed waiver services prior to exiting high school.

Support Coordination is provided through each of the waiver programs, as well as Medicaid benefits. To apply for any of the Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver programs, contact the [human services district or authority](#) in your parish.

The process for applying for waiver services has changed in recent years. The new plan, or Tiered Waiver, means that individuals with a greater urgency of need will now be prioritized for receiving the most appropriate home and community-based services. A screening administered by the human services district case manager considers what services and supports are already in place, whether or not the person is

eligible for Medicaid, the severity or complexity of the person's disabilities, what additional supports may be needed and any changes in an individual's life or living situation.

Each case is given a Screening for Urgency of Need (SUN) Score to determine the urgency of need for waiver services. There are five levels of need, or tiers:

- 4--Emergent: Supports will be needed in the next 90 days.
- 3--Urgent: Supports will be needed in the next 3-12 months.
- 2--Critical: Supports will be needed in the next 1-2 years.
- 1--Planning: Supports will be needed in the next 3-5 years.
- 0--Currently no unmet needs.

It is important to note that the SUN assessment can be repeated at any time the individual's or family's living situation or needs change. Simply call your case manager at your local [human services district/authority](#) and request a new SUN assessment.

Back in the day, my son waited for over 8 years to receive waiver services. Hopefully, with the new Tiered Waiver system, the days of the long waiting lists are permanently behind us. For more information on the Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver program, visit the Louisiana Department of Health website or contact your local Families Helping Families center.

Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities

An important first step to take after a child is diagnosed with a disability is to contact the local human services district/authority to apply for services your child may need at some point.

The Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities (OCDD) is responsible for providing services and supports to individuals with developmental disabilities in Louisiana. The human services districts/authorities serve as the points of entry for individuals to receive services. An assessment is conducted of people who request services to determine the person's eligibility for system entry. Eligibility is based on the definition of developmental disability contained in Louisiana R.S. 28:451.1-455.2.

Region 10 - Parish: Jefferson
Jefferson Parish Human Services Authority (JPHSA)
1500 River Oaks Rd West, Jefferson, LA 70123
504-838-5257
SYSTEM POINT OF ENTRY (East Bank)
Lee Taylor - 504-838-5429
SYSTEM POINT OF ENTRY (West Bank)
Jeffery Watkins - 504-371-0214

Region 1 - Parish: Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard
Metropolitan Human Services District (MHSD)
3100 General DeGaulle Drive
New Orleans, LA 70114
504-568-3130

Region 2 - Parish: Ascension, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberville, Pointe Coupee, West Baton Rouge, West Feliciana
Capital Area Human Services District (CAHSD)
4615 Government Street, Building 2
Baton Rouge, LA 70806
225- 925-1910 or 1-866-628-2133

Region 3 - Parish: Assumption, Lafourche, St. Charles, St. James, St. John, St. Mary, Terrebonne
South Central Human Services Authority (SCLHSA)
5593 Highway 31, Houma, LA 70360
985-876-8805

Region 4 - Parish: Acadia, Evangeline, Iberia, Lafayette, St. Landry, St. Martin, Vermilion
Acadiana Area Human Services District (AAHSD)
302 Dulles Drive, Lafayette, LA 70506
337-262-5610

Region 5 - Parish: Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, Jefferson Davis
Imperial Calcasieu Human Services District (IMCAL)
One Lakeshore Drive, Suite 2000
Lake Charles, LA 70607
337-475-3100

Region 6 - Parish: Avoyelles, Catahoula, Concordia, Grant, LaSalle, Rapides, Vernon, Winn
Central Louisiana Human Services District (CLHSD)
429 Murray Street, Suite B, Alexandria, LA 71301
318-484-2347

Region 7 - Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Claiborne, DeSoto, Natchitoches, Red River, Sabine, Webster
Northwest Louisiana Human Services District (NLHSD)
3018 Old Minden Road, Suite 1211
Bossier City, LA 71112
318-741-7455

Region 8 - Parish: Caldwell, East Carroll, Franklin, Jackson, Lincoln, Madison, Morehouse, Ouachita, Richland, Tensas, Union, West Carroll
Northeast Delta Human Services Authority (NEDHSA)
2513 Ferrand Street, Monroe, LA 71201
318-362-3396

Region 9 - Parish: Livingston, St. Helena, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, Washington
Florida Parishes Human Services Authority (FPHSA)
835 Pride Drive, Suite B, Hammond, LA 70401
985-543-4730