



Outlook

People First News, March 2026

From Office for People With Developmental Disabilities <NYSOPWDD@public.govdelivery.com>

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To Claudia Vidal <cvidal@esperanzacenter.com>

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Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month





We unveiled our ["Dare to Be You" campaign](#) for National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month last year to recognize the contributions and talent that people with developmental disabilities add to their communities. They are homeowners, writers, podcast hosts and more.

We were so impressed by everyone who took part in the campaign and helped us raise awareness that we're [continuing the campaign this year](#). Be sure to follow us on our social media channels to stay on top of the great things people are daring to do!

Dare to be YOU

Raising the Disability Pride Flag for Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month





We joined officials from NYS Parks and the Chief Disability Officer to announce construction beginning on a \$4.4 million project that will upgrade accessibility, parking, and site circulation at Saratoga Spa State Park's historic Lincoln Bathhouse. The funding was made possible by Governor Kathy Hochul who continues to commit to making state lands more accessible and inclusive to everyone through her "These Lands are for Everyone" initiative.

After [the announcement](#), Commissioner Baer had the honor of raising the Disability Pride Flag in front of the Bathhouse in recognition of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.

About The Disability Pride Flag





The original Disability Pride Flag was created in 2019 by writer Ann Magill, who has cerebral palsy. Two years later, with insight from people with photosensitivity, Magill released the new design pictured above, which is still used today. According to Magill, this design symbolizes the entire community because everyone came together to redesign it.

What the Colors Represent

Each color used on the flag symbolizes different aspects of the disability community:

- Red: Physical Disabilities
- Gold: Neurodiversity
- White: Invisible Disabilities and Undiagnosed Disabilities
- Blue: Emotional and Psychiatric Disabilities
- Green: Sensory Disabilities

The dark gray color used in the background represents mourning and rage for victims of ableism, violence, suicide, negligence, eugenics, and other forms of systemic harm experienced by people with disabilities.

Budget Testimony



Commissioner Willow Baer testified at a joint legislative hearing on the Executive Budget where she expressed her support for items included in Governor Kathy Hochul's proposed Executive Budget that would benefit the developmental disabilities community, including:

- A targeted inflationary increase of 1.7% for service providers
- Funding for new services
- A 5% Family Care rate increase
- \$15 million to build independent housing

She also expressed her support for the Governor's proposals that will affect all New Yorkers including the hardworking staff and Direct Support Professionals the OPWDD system relies on to deliver supports and services, including:

- [Putting New York State on a pathway toward achieving universal, affordable child care](#), by increasing funding by \$1.7 billion to provide care for children around the state
- [Cracking down on fraud](#) to lower vehicle insurance rates for everyday New Yorkers, and ensuring bad actors can't get large payouts
- Tackling rising home insurance costs by increasing accountability and transparency and expanding automatic discounts
- Helping New Yorkers put food on the table with additional investments in the Department of Health (DOH)'s Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) and tackling theft of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits
- Proposing key measures that would benefit the developmental disabilities community, including: expanding access to higher education through SUNY and CUNY by creating for-credit inclusive post-secondary education; advancing adaptive clothing for people with disabilities through New York's Fashion Innovation Center; streamlining access to American Sign Language (ASL) translation, and more.

See more of Commissioner Baer's testimony here: <https://on.ny.gov/4r9eIKZ>

Neurodiversity Celebration Week March 16-20





Above: New York State Neurodiversity Strength Flag, designed by Joshua Mirsky, self-advocate and member of the Autism Spectrum Disorders Advisory Board.

OPWDD will join people all over the world in observing [Neurodiversity Celebration Week](#). During this week we are reminded that New York has its own flag representing Neurodiversity, which originated from an idea raised by the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Advisory Board that gives guidance about ASD to New Yorkers and policymakers.

The flag is red and gold and features an infinity sign inside a diamond symbolizing strength and value.

This April, during Autism Acceptance Month, OPWDD will proudly be raising the **New York State Neurodiversity Strength Flag** at its office and other locations. Stay tuned!

NY Selected as 2026 NEON Core State!

National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network Designation Comes With Technical Assistance to Expand Employment for People with Developmental Disabilities

The U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) has once again named New York State a [National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network \(NEON\) core state for 2026](#), connecting us with targeted, ongoing technical assistance aimed at expanding job opportunities and improving the financial well-being of New Yorkers with mental health conditions, including those with co-occurring disabilities.

New York State has been a NEON core state since 2023, and OPWDD has already been working with other state agencies to increase [competitive, integrated employment](#) for people with disabilities, including people with developmental disabilities, significant disabilities, and people who have faced barriers to employment.

As we continue this work, we are strengthened by the support of Governor Hochul, who declared New York an [Employment First State in 2024](#). We know that employment and economic stability are key social determinants of health. We look forward to working with our state agency partners in expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities who want to work in their communities and earn a living.

Do You Know the Steps to Employment?

If you are a person with a developmental disability who wants to work or build a career, there are some things to think about as you set out to find the right job for you. An easy way to consider your options is to review and work through the Steps to Employment, a new section published on our website that is intended to help YOU think about your job goals, what skills and experience you have, whether you could benefit from an internship or apprenticeship, and how to go about finding and learning a new job.

We've also created a printable guide that can also help you work through the steps.

[Learn About the Steps to Employment](#)

Home-Enabling Supports

OPWDD recently awarded eight not-for-profit service providers with the approval to deliver Home-Enabling Supports (HES) services to people with developmental disabilities who are living independently and are enrolled in the OPWDD Home and Community Based Services Medicaid Waiver.

Home-Enabling Supports help address a person's needs in a way that promotes, maintains, or improves a person's abilities, improves interactions, supports meaningful relationships, and supports their ability to live independently and meaningfully participate in their community. Home Enabling Supports assist a person to be more independent and less reliant on physically present support staff.

Devices or supports received through Home-Enabling Supports may include but are not limited to: Assistive Devices/Technology, Remote Supports, and Health Assessment and Coordination Services (HACS).

[More Information About Home-Enabling Supports](#)

Could You Benefit from a Vehicle Modification? Know the Rules!

Vehicle Modifications or "V-mod" is a Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Waiver Service. They are defined as physical adaptations to a vehicle that are necessary to ensure the health, welfare, and safety of a person or enable that person to function with greater independence.

Modifications to a vehicle may include:

- adaptive equipment to enable a person to operate the vehicle (e.g. driver hand controls, adaptive steering devices, pedal modifications, swivel seats).
- changes to the structural design (e.g. repositioning of seats, installation of ramps/lifts, floor cut outs, extension of steering column).

There are steps that **MUST** be completed before you make a vehicle modification.

[Learn More About V-Mods](#)

Get Outdoors & Get Together Day is Saturday, June 13, 2026



Get Outdoors & Get Together Day events will be held at multiple locations across New York on **Saturday, June 13**. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (State Parks), in partnership with the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) and other state agency partners are hosting free or low-cost events to connect people to nature and provide increased access to the outdoors. More details will be coming soon!

[Find Out the Latest](#)

Find Out the Latest

The Museum of Disability History Has Reopened at the Viscardi Center!



Commissioner Willow Baer was on hand for the opening of The Museum of Disability History at the Viscardi Center

[Read About the Museum](#)

What's Ahead on the OPWDD Calendar?





- **March 16-20** Neurodiversity Celebration Week
 - **March 25** National Cerebral Palsy Day
 - **April** Autism Acceptance Month
 - **April 20** Developmental Disabilities Advisory Council Meeting
 - **April 22** Autism Spectrum Disorders Advisory Board Meeting
 - **April 2** World Autism Day
 - **June 13** Get Outdoors & Get Together Day
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