



Outlook

People First News, July 2026

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

Date Tue 7/14/2026 10:00 AM

To Claudia Vidal <cvidal@esperanzacenter.com>

People First News, July 2026



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Happy Disability Pride Month! As we celebrate this month and all that we have accomplished and planned here in New York, our enthusiasm is tempered with a sense of concern and alarm by what is happening at the federal level. A U.S. Department of Justice opinion issued last month would narrow the scope of what is covered under *Olmstead v L.C.*, one of the most significant civil rights laws for people with developmental disabilities. While New York State has its own protections, this opinion is a reminder to all of us that we must remain vigilant about disability rights and unwavering in our advocacy. If you missed my message about this opinion, [you can read it here.](#)

In this issue you'll find updates about the New York State budget, our Regional Disability Health Clinics which are opening across the state, and news about how you can get involved and engage with us at our Future Forum events. If you're in the Westchester area or are up for a drive, we'll be traveling to take part in another New York State-

sponsored world Cup watch Party (the final this time!) in vainalla. Come see us and visit our new Sensory Tent, which was an incredible hit on Long Island last month.

As we celebrate summer and America's 250th birthday, I continue to be grateful to serve as your commissioner and to do such meaningful work every day. I love knowing that our work means that people with developmental disabilities are out in their communities and participating in events like Get Outdoors & Get Together Day, Pride Parades, 4th of July Celebrations, World Cup Watch Parties, and more. Thank you for your continued support and partnership as we keep our mission of helping people with developmental disabilities live richer lives at the center of everything we do.

Sincerely,

Willow Baer
Commissioner

Disability Pride at the Plaza Celebration



Disability Pride on the Plaza in Albany was an incredible day! We celebrated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), honored this year's annual advocacy award recipients, enjoyed music by [FLAME The Band](#), and were wowed by the variety of on-site crafters and vendors.

grants and vendors.

Most importantly, we were inspired by both the words and deeds of this year's honorees who advocate for themselves and others.

This year, Stephanie Speaker was presented with the Bernard A. Carabello Self-Advocacy Award, and Bin Feng was presented with the Willie Mae Goodman Family Advocacy Award.

Additionally, Commissioner Baer had the honor of presenting the first annual Edward R. Matthews Lifetime Advocacy Award posthumously to the family of the late Ed Matthews.

Thanks to everyone who made the day special. In light of recent federal challenges to disability rights, the day served as a powerful reminder that we New Yorkers will never stop championing disability rights for all.

On the right: OPWDD Commissioner Willow Baer talks with **Stephanie Speaker, the 2026 recipient of the Bernard A. Carabello Self-Advocacy Award**, at the Disability Pride on the Plaza Celebration in Albany.



On the left: OPWDD Commissioner Willow Baer meets with **Bin Feng, the 2026 recipient of the Willie Mae Goodman Family Advocacy Award**, and members of his family at the Disability Pride on the Plaza Celebration in Albany.

JOIN US TO HELP SHAPE OPWDD'S FUTURE!

ATTEND A FUTURE PLANING FORUM



Office for People With
Developmental Disabilities

We need to hear from you! Thanks to those of you who shared your thoughts with us about OPWDD supports and services at our forums so far. There's still time to share your voice at a forum and help shape the future of OPWDD services at one of our next upcoming or virtual forums. If you've attended our forums in past years, you'll find that these forums are more interactive. We hope to see you at one as we kick off our work on the next 5-year strategic plan.

- Buffalo: July 15, 5:30 -7:30PM
- Virtual Forum Day: July 14, 11AM - 1PM
- Binghamton: July 16, 11 AM - 1PM

- Enghamton, July 10, 11 AM - 11:10

[Learn More & Sign Up](#)

New Video Series: Cultural Perspectives on Living with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Culture shapes how people experience disability, seek support, make decisions, and engage with their communities. It is through this understanding that we can create services and supports that truly reflect the people we serve.

That's why we're pleased to share a new video series, "Cultural Perspectives on Living with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities," developed with our partners at the Georgetown University National Center for Cultural Competence. This exciting resource is one of the lasting outcomes of New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD)'s work with the National Center for Systems Change.

[Watch the Videos](#)

Beauty & Richness: Celebrating New York State's Disability Community - Nominations Are Now Open!

The New York State (NYS) Office of the Chief Disability Officer (OCDO) announced a project in partnership with [Positive Exposure](#) entitled ***Beauty & Richness: Celebrating New York State's Disability Community!***

The outcome of this project will be a book representing the beauty of New Yorkers with disabilities from throughout the state, with portraits photographed by Rick Guidotti, Founder & Director of Positive Exposure - an award-winning photographer, filmmaker, and advocate who has spent decades "collaborating internationally... to effect a sea-change in societal attitudes" toward people with disabilities, chronic diseases, and long-term health conditions. Accompanying the portraits of each project participant will be a mix of text to include quotes, brief biographies, life experience highlights, and more.

Nominations will be accepted **through August 14, 2026**, by completing the [Beauty and Richness Nomination Form](#) or by visiting the [NYS Office of the Chief Disability Officer's](#) website and scrolling down to the section that begins with "Beauty & Richness - Celebrating New York State's Disability Community" and clicking the "Nomination Form" button.

New York State Boosts Support for Developmental Disabilities

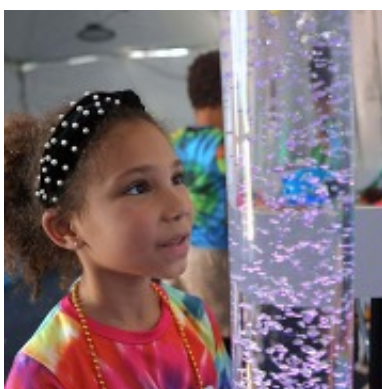
Services

New York State's Fiscal Year 2027 Enacted Budget marks a substantial commitment to people with developmental disabilities, **allocating nearly \$380 million in new resources**. This investment will **grow the State's spending on the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) to over \$7.9 billion, with total public funds supporting the OPWDD delivery system exceeding \$14 billion**.

Key initiatives include over \$190 million to address rising costs and support the essential frontline workforce of non-profit providers, ensuring they can recruit and retain dedicated staff. **This funding will provide a 2.7 percent Targeted Inflationary Increase** to reimbursement levels for many services and support minimum wage increases, including indexing to inflation for program staff. **Since 2022, New York has invested over \$4.7 billion in the non-profit provider workforce**.

The budget also **enhances Family Care rates by 5 percent**, invests in new service opportunities to meet growing demand, and commits an additional **\$15 million to develop much-needed housing, bringing the total investment in housing development to \$170 million since Fiscal Year 2016**. Further investments will modernize the Institute for Basic Research in Developmental Disabilities and establish regional health clinics to improve access to care. These comprehensive measures underscore New York's dedication to enhancing the lives and opportunities for people with developmental disabilities.

Come Visit the OPWDD Sensory Tent at the Final World Cup Watch Party!



We may not know who the contestants for the World Cup final will be on July 19th, but we DO know that the Watch Party at Kensico Dam in Valhalla is going to be spectacular!

It will also be ACCESSIBLE, and staff and volunteers from OPWDD stand ready to assist you and welcome you to our new **Sensory Tent** that we debuted on Long Island. This **FREE EVENT** is brought to you thanks to Governor Hochul and New York State and is all about giving people of all abilities an amazing experience.

Get Your Free Tickets !





**FREE TICKETS TO
2026 WORLD CUP
WATCH EXPERIENCE**



Regional Health Clinics Opening Across the State





Earlier this year, Governor Kathy Hochul announced 30 awards with a \$25 million investment to help address health equity for people with developmental disabilities who often find it difficult to find comprehensive healthcare that meets their needs. Commissioner Willow Baer recently traveled to Long Island to share the great news that Long Island Select Healthcare, Inc. was one of the award recipients, receiving a \$2.3 million Regional Health Clinic award for their Eastern Suffolk Integrated Healthcare Access Expansion. [Read about all the awards.](#)

Celebrating Inclusion and Togetherness at Get Outdoors & Get Together Day 2026



There's something special that happens when people with and without disabilities get together in New York's beautiful public spaces to enjoy the outdoors, learn about nature, and try new experiences together. Our differences seem to fade away in these moments, as we share smiles and celebrate all that New York State has to offer. This year the sun shone at all 21 locations, making the day extra special.

2026 marked our 5th Annual Get Outdoors & Get Together Day Celebration with our longtime partners at New York State Parks and the Department of Environmental

Conservation. If you missed this year's celebration, now's the time to mark your calendar for next year: **June 12, 2027**

Check for updates throughout the year as locations and activities are announced by visiting the Official Get Outdoors & Get Together Day website.

[Visit the Official Website](#)

Celebrating PRIDE Month All Around the State



Buffalo Pride Parade 2026

Inclusion is the heart of everything we do. 💜 🏳️‍🌈 During Pride Month 2026, Team OPWDD was proud to march alongside the LGBTQIA+ community all across the state. Thanks to everyone who marched with us and rolled with us. Team OPWDD was in Western NY, Central New York, Albany, Long Island and New York City!



Upcoming Public Meetings

- **July 21** Developmental Disabilities Advisory Council (DDAC) Meeting Public Meeting
- **July 22** Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Advisory Board

[See the Public Meeting Calendar](#)

Stay Connected with New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities:



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