



Disability Rights Texas Strategic Priorities Fiscal Years 2023-2026

Background:

Disability Rights Texas (DRTx), like many nonprofit and legal service organizations, has a big job to do with limited funds and staff positions. To be successful and achieve our mission, we must use every dollar and position in the most effective way we can.

That's why every four years the DRTx Board of Directors decides which strategic priorities will direct our work. We start by asking people in the disability community about what's important to them. We go to great lengths to get as much feedback from as many people and groups as we can. We learn from paper and electronic surveys, focus groups, listening sessions, and interviews with disability leaders and influencers from across the state.

In setting priorities, the Board weighs the significant problems identified by the disability community along with the activities that are most related to our mission. Federal law and our funders' requirements play a role, as we are required to serve a wide range of disability populations and offer different types of services. The final adoption of priorities is the result of many hours of serious thinking and hard work to find ways to offer the most effective services possible to the largest number of people with disabilities with the funding and staff we have.

What are our current priorities?

- Living in the Community
- Civil Rights
- Safety, Protection, and Support in Texas Institutions Access
- Health Care
- Going to Public School
- Housing
- Transportation
- Disaster Planning and Recovery
- Employment
- Voting
- Access to Government, Public Services, and Public Accommodations
- Protection and Support in Foster Care

Sometimes, unexpected things come up that have an impact on our service priorities (think pandemic, intersectional advocacy, winter storms). The Board reviews the priorities at least once every year—to make sure we’re putting our money and our work where it’s most needed.

What does this mean to the people with disabilities we serve?

As much as we might want to, limited staffing and funding means we can’t take every case that comes to us. In making the hard decision, we first look to make sure the case is within our strategic priorities. Beyond that, the Board asks staff to consider other things in deciding whether to accept a case:

- Is there a good chance of success?
- How much staff time, expertise, and expense will be needed?
- Given their current workload, can staff work on this case effectively?
- How does it fit with our funding sources and priority areas?
- If successful, how much would this case benefit other people with disabilities?

Does DRTx ever serve cases that don’t fall within the strategic priorities?

Sometimes. The DRTx Executive Director is allowed to accept a few cases that represent a historically underserved ethnic community or have other special circumstances. However, these cases can’t take up a lot of staff time or funding.

See the next page for more information on each of our priorities.

Disability Rights Texas Priorities with Goals

LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY

(ACCESS TO COMMUNITY SUPPORTS AND SERVICES)

Vision: All people with disabilities—including those with complex medical and behavioral needs—live in the community with their choice of necessary supports and services.

(CI – Community Integration = Living in the Community)

CI 1

Goal 1: People with disabilities can move from institutions to the community with all supports and services they are entitled to, that are:

- Timely and available when needed.
- Person-directed.
- Meaningful.
- Well-planned and carried out.

CI 2

Goal 2: People with disabilities can make their own life decisions about which community services and supports they need and want because they are supported to make their own decisions.

CI 3

Goal 3: People who are deaf, hard of hearing, unable to speak or have other communication needs—in institutions or the community—can express their own interests and preferences because they get communication accommodations, testing and assessments, technology, and supports and services that meet their needs.

CI 4

Goal 4: Make funds available for home and community-based services to support people with disabilities living in the community as a result of advocacy efforts to:

- Reduce waiting lists.
- Increase funding for more Medicaid Waivers for transition and diversion.
- Address complex needs.
- Ensure there are policies that keep home and community-based services (HCBS) providers and managed care organizations accountable.
- Ensure an adequate workforce.
- Downsize or close large institutions such as: Intermediate Care Facilities; and State Supported Living Centers.

CI 8

Goal 5: People with disabilities, including those who have complex medical or behavioral needs, don't have to be admitted or stay in institutions or general hospitals because they will receive quality, enhanced services in the community that will help them be as healthy and independent as possible.

CI 6

Goal 6: People with disabilities live in the community and are not at risk of being placed in an institution because they have all the supports and services they are entitled to, that are:

- Timely and available when needed.
- Person-directed.
- Meaningful.
- Well-planned and carried out.

CIVIL RIGHTS

ABUSE AND NEGLECT (AN)

Vision: People with disabilities are not abused or neglected—whether they live on their own in the community or in group homes, nursing homes, or other institutions.

AN 1

Goal 1: Claims of abuse, neglect, exploitation or other mistreatment by a caregiver or service provider are fully investigated in keeping with the law.

RESTRAINT & SECLUSION (RS)

Vision: People with disabilities are not restrained or isolated (separated from others) illegally.

RS 1

Goal 1: People with disabilities are not restrained, isolated (separated from others), or given emergency medicine in any way that is not allowed by law or best practices.

CIVIL RIGHTS (CR)

Vision: People with disabilities have the same rights given to everyone.

CR 1

Goal 1: People with disabilities are actively involved in planning for their treatment and do not receive treatment without agreeing to it.

CR 2

Goal 2: People with disabilities understand and know how to use their rights, including what to do if a service provider takes away their rights.

CR 3

Goal 3: The rights of people with disabilities are protected in the law enforcement, criminal justice, and juvenile justice systems.

CR 5

Goal 4: People with disabilities get due process (respect of a person's legal rights) and their civil rights are fully protected in judicial or administrative hearings.

CR 6

Goal 5: People with disabilities and the community are educated about alternatives to guardianship. People with disabilities are not placed under guardianship when they don't need it and unnecessary guardianships are removed. If a person is under guardianship, it is limited so that as few rights as possible are restricted.

SAFETY, PROTECTION, AND SUPPORT IN TEXAS INSTITUTIONS

Vision: All people with disabilities who live in institutions are safe, healthy, respected, treated with dignity, and supported to lead meaningful lives.

The following statement is included in DRTx Priority document, but does not have specific priority codes. Work done in institutions use existing priority codes that are aligned with the issue or problem being addressed. We do not identify specific institutions for monitoring in our priority document.

(Note: DRTx defines "institutions" as places that people with disabilities are confined to or go to live for short-term and/or long-term care or treatment—away from their own or family homes. Some examples, include but are not limited to, nursing homes, intermediate care facilities (ICFs), state supported living centers (SSLCs), and criminal or juvenile justice system facilities.)

Goal: People living in or receiving treatment at Texas institutions are protected from rights abuses, abuse, and neglect. People who live in any state-run institution know how to contact DRTx.

HEALTH CARE (HC)

(HEALTH CARE ELIGIBILITY AND ACCESS)

Vision: People with disabilities and/or severe and chronic illnesses – living in community settings or institutions – have health care that provides all

appropriate care and services.

HC 1

Goal 1: People with disabilities who are eligible for publicly-funded health and/or mental health services have timely access to and can obtain the care and long-term supports they are entitled to, including:

- Medicaid HCBS programs and services
- PASRR specialized services
- Health services.
- Mental health services.
- Assistive technology.
- Durable medical equipment.
- Other disability-related services

HC 3

Goal 2: People with disabilities understand and exercise their legal rights in receiving public health and/or mental health benefits, including their right:

- To be notified about changes to their benefits.
- To appeal (ask for a change) decisions that affect their health care or long-term supports.
- To a fair hearing (a person's chance to explain their case to a hearing officer).
- To fully understand their healthcare rights and entitlements.

GOING TO PUBLIC SCHOOL

FREE APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION (FAPE) FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Vision: Students with disabilities are successful in school because public schools:

- Follow all special education requirements.
- Use “best practices.”
- Are held responsible for student success.
- Provide parents with the information they need to be effective advocates for their children.

PP 1

Goal 1: The Texas Education Agency (TEA) enforces and monitors compliance with all laws, rules, and policies related to FAPE.

PP 2

Goal 2: Texas laws and regulations require public schools to give students with disabilities equal access to the services and resources that all students get in the least restrictive setting.

PP 3

Goal 3: TEA and public schools give parents, adult students, and advocates information, training, and short-term help with legal issues that affect students with disabilities.

UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS (US)

Vision: All students with disabilities from underserved groups (because of disability, economic, and/or cultural factors) get a free appropriate public education.

US 1

Goal 1: Underserved or marginalized students with disabilities in public schools are free from discrimination or disparate treatment and receive services to which they are entitled and need to learn and make progress on any and all goals.

CHILD FIND (CF)

Vision: All students with disabilities who need special education are identified and evaluated because public schools comply with federal “Child Find” rules.

CF 1

Goal 1: All public schools refer, evaluate and serve students who likely need special education services.

INCLUSION (IN)

Vision: Students with disabilities go to class with children who do not have disabilities and are given supports they need to socialize and succeed in regular education classrooms.

IN 1

Goal 1: Students with disabilities are included with students without disabilities in their age group in classrooms and lessons, to the greatest extent possible.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT)

Vision: Students with disabilities make progress in public school because they have the assistive technology they need and training to use it.

AT 1

Goal 1: Students with disabilities receive testing and evaluations to find out the best assistive technology devices and services for them, and students, parents, and school staff are trained on the right way to use the technology.

TRANSITION SERVICES (TN)

Vision: Students with disabilities leave school prepared for life as adults in the community.

TN 1

Goal 1: Students with disabilities age 14 and older have access to and receive transition evaluations, planning, and services that meet state and federal laws and include:

- Supported decision making.
- Self-advocacy skills training.
- Information about community supports and Social Security work benefits.
- Pre-employment training.
- 18 Plus Programs.
- Award of appropriate diplomas.

DISCIPLINE

Vision: Students with disabilities are given positive behavioral supports and interventions, and are not subject to restraints nor pushed out of school, not referred to law enforcement, and are not subject to bullying.

ED 1

Goal 1: Students with disabilities in public schools, regardless of setting, are given positive behavioral supports and interventions, as part of a free appropriate

public education (FAPE).

ED 4

Goal 2: Students with disabilities are not wrongly disciplined because public schools follow state and federal laws for discipline, including:

- Not using restraints (physical or chemical) or other aversive techniques.
- Not isolating students (separating them from others).
- Not sending students home.
- Not suspending students.
- Not removing students from the classroom or school.
- Not turning students over to law enforcement.
- Not assessing students as a risk or threat to school safety solely based on their disability.

HOUSING

Vision: People with disabilities are able to access affordable, accessible, and integrated homes or apartments where they choose to live.

HS 1

Goal 1: Through enforcement of fair housing and other laws, people with disabilities are protected from discrimination in living where they choose. People with disabilities living in or moving to community group homes are not discriminated against by local government, home owner associations, or others.

HS 2

Goal 2: Through development of public policy, safe, accessible, affordable, and integrated housing becomes available to people with disabilities. Architectural modifications (physical changes to a building), reasonable accommodations, and universal design (making a building usable by all people) are commonplace housing practices.

TRANSPORTATION

Vision: People with disabilities have full and equal access to public and private transportation.

TR 1

Goal 1: People with disabilities can use safe, reliable, and accessible transportation. Public transportation authorities, para-transit systems, and private transportation companies are in full compliance with federal and state discrimination laws and policies.

DISASTER PLANNING AND RECOVERY (DP)

Vision: Disaster planning and recovery services exist for the needs of people with disabilities, in a manner that is appropriate, accessible, integrated and equivalent to that received by others.

DP 1

Goal 1: Public and private entities which provide immediate, short-term and long-term disaster and emergency response and recovery services provide meaningful access for people with disabilities in the most integrated setting.

DP 2

Goal 2: Consequential issues related to disaster or emergency for disaster survivors with disabilities are addressed to provide meaningful, appropriate, and nondiscriminatory remedies.

DP 3

Goal 3: To mitigate potential harm and injury from disasters or emergencies, the needs of the Disability Community must be identified and planned for by the obligated entities through intensive planning processes and awareness/outreach to the Community.

EMPLOYMENT (EM)

Vision: All people with disabilities have the opportunity to work.

EM 1

Goal 1: Individuals with disabilities are supported in their employment goals, and are employed in integrated and competitive employment settings of their choice.

EM 4

GOAL 2: Federal and state employment and discrimination and civil rights laws are enforced so that individuals with disabilities are not discriminated against while at work or while trying to access employment, and workers with disabilities are paid fair and legal wages.

EM 5

Goal 3: Ensure that individuals with disabilities in sheltered workshops, segregated or subminimum wage employment receive properly calculated wages and services as required by law.

EM 9

Goal 4: Texas Workforce Solution-Vocational Rehabilitation Services complies with and implements all state and federal laws, rules, and policies, relating to vocational rehabilitation services.

EM 10

Goal 5: Recipients of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) due to a disability, as well as those in 1619(b) status or receiving extended Medicare, are supported in their employment goals, which may include obtaining information about work incentive programs through the Social Security Administration that will enable them to become employed in integrated and competitive employment settings of their choice.

EM 11

Goal 6: People applying for or getting independent living services from the centers for independent living (CIL), IL services administered by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, or Texas Workforce Solutions Older Blind Services program, know what their rights are and how to protect them.

VOTING (Voting Access – AC)

AC 4

Goal 1: People with disabilities are able to fully participate in all aspects of the voting process by having awareness of, understanding, and enforcement of federal and state voting and anti- discrimination laws and policies.

AC 6

Goal 2: Policy makers, the Texas Secretary of State, County election officials and workers publicize, enforce and monitor compliance of state and federal laws, rules, and policies related to the voting rights of Texans with disabilities.

ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT, PUBLIC SERVICES & PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS (AC)

Vision: People with disabilities have full access to all government buildings, programs, and services.

AC 2

Goal 1: Federal and state laws and policies about accessibility for those with disabilities are enforced so that physical and programmatic barriers, including technological barriers are addressed and governmental agencies or their agents, post-secondary educational institutions, or other organizations receiving government funds, and private businesses do not discriminate against people with disabilities.

PROTECTION AND SUPPORT IN FOSTER CARE (VO)

REPRESENTING CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE PROGRAM

Vision: Children with disabilities receive all the services they need when they are in the custody of the State.

VO 1

Goal 1: Children with disabilities get the educational, health, and community services they need when they are in the custody of the State because they have been abused or neglected.