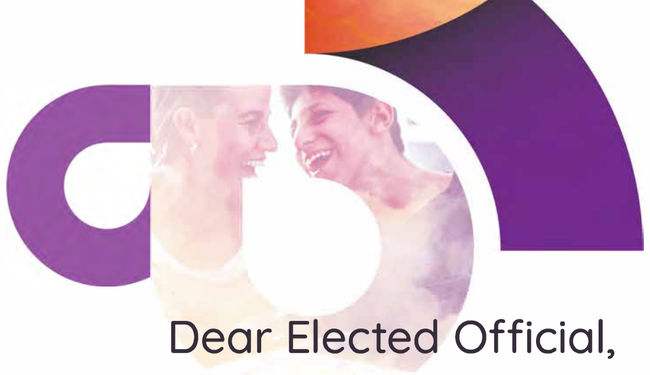
The Arc
of Florida

2026

ELECTED OFFICIAL BRIEFING BOOK

Building a Florida where people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the opportunity to live, learn, work, and thrive.



Dear Elected Official,

Congratulations on your decision to seek public office.

Whether you are new to disability policy or have worked alongside families and providers for years, we appreciate your willingness to serve Florida's communities.

For almost seventy years, The Arc of Florida has advocated for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), their families, and local chapters and providers to promote opportunity, independence, and inclusion.

As you meet voters throughout your district, you will undoubtedly encounter families navigating long waiting lists, workforce shortages, transportation barriers, housing challenges, and employment obstacles. These issues affect tens of thousands of Floridians and deserve thoughtful public policy solutions.

This briefing book provides an overview of Florida's developmental disability system, highlights key legislative priorities, and offers data-driven issue summaries. We hope it serves as a helpful resource throughout your campaign and your service in office.

Our team welcomes the opportunity to answer questions, provide district-specific information, or connect you with families and providers in your community.

Thank you for your commitment to public service.

Sincerely,



Summer Pfeiffer
President & CEO
The Arc of Florida

Kari Bates
President & CEO,
The Arc Jacksonville
Board Chair, The Arc of Florida



Executive Summary

Florida supports people with intellectual and developmental disabilities primarily through the iBudget Medicaid waiver, a federal-state program that funds services in a person's own home and community rather than in an institution. It works when it is funded and staffed.

This briefing book focuses on **6 priorities** where legislative action can strengthen that system:

1. **Sustaining the workforce through fair provider rates;**
2. **Fixing a broken transportation reimbursement structure;**
3. **Reducing a waiting list that has left thousands of eligible Floridians waiting years for services;**
4. **Building long-term safeguards into the shift to statewide managed care;**
5. **Expanding competitive integrated employment through proven training models;**
6. **Protecting family choice in supported housing.**

None of these pressures are unmanageable. Each has a path forward that other states have already walked, and the six issue briefs that follow summarize the challenge, the data, and The Arc of Florida's policy considerations for each. Also provided is a summary of Florida's Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities System including Challenges and Opportunities to consider.

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About The Arc of Florida



Who We Are

The Arc of Florida is a nonprofit, statewide advocacy and membership organization

working to improve the quality of life for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We work through education, awareness, research, advocacy, and support of individuals, families, providers, and communities.

We are a state office — a small legislative and advocacy team based in Tallahassee. The Arc of Florida does not provide direct services. Our local chapters and members do. They run the residential programs, the day programs, the employment services, the transportation routes, and the family supports that people rely on. Our chapters are voting members of our Board of Directors, which means the organization is directed by the people closest to the work.

We are affiliated with The Arc of the United States. Each chapter pledges to operate consistently with The Arc's Core Values and Guiding Principles, Position Statements, and Public Policy Agenda.

1953 — Parents and friends form the Florida Council for Retarded Children in Tampa, with J. Clifford McDonald as first president.

1957 — The Council affiliates with the National Association for Retarded Children.

1960s-70s — Working with parent groups, the organization helps establish local chapters, which open specialized schools to help parents teach their children daily living skills.

1964 — Becomes the Florida Association for Retarded Children

1977 — Advocates for and passes Florida Statute 393, shaping how services would be delivered in Florida for years to come.

1979 — Files a class action lawsuit to close Sunland Orlando, beginning years of work to move Floridians out of state institutions and into community settings. Sunland Tallahassee closes in 1983; the last resident leaves Sunland Orlando in 1985.

1986 — Now ARC/Florida, passes contested zoning legislation permitting groups of six or fewer individuals to live in single-family residential zones.

1988 — Passes landmark legislation prohibiting noxious and painful stimuli in training programs and expanding the Bill of Rights.

1993 — Helps establish Family Care Councils across the state.

1994 — Sponsors landmark legislation prohibiting the execution of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Our Mission

Working with local, state, and national partners, The Arc of Florida advocates for local chapters, public policies, and high quality supports for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to be fully included in all aspects of their community.

Our Vision

A Florida where people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the opportunity to live, learn, work, and thrive, fully included in all aspects of their communities.

How We Advocate

Annual Legislative Platform
Establishes statewide funding and policy priorities to strengthen services, expand access, and sustain Florida's IDD provider network.

Legislative Awareness #StepUp Program
Builds the advocacy skills and voices of individuals with IDD, families, and local communities.

Be Prepared, Be Counted, Be Heard
Provides accessible tools and information to help individuals and families understand issues, participate in elections, and make their voices heard. Available in English and Spanish.

Advocacy Meetings & Training
Monthly Advocacy Meetings, Lunch-n-Learns, Provider Forums, and other opportunities to stay informed, connected, and engaged.

School-Age Transition Resources
Helps students and families understand and prepare for the transition from school to adult services. Available in English and Spanish.

Legislative Updates & Bill Tracking
Provides timely updates on legislation, budget decisions, and policy developments affecting Floridians with IDD.

Advocacy Days
Our largest annual gathering, bringing together approximately 500 individuals with IDD, families, providers, advocates, and partners from across Florida.

2003 — Organizes and rallies more than 3,000 people to protest state cuts to residential and day training services.

2008 — Launches a statewide vehicle donation program to raise funds for local chapters.

2010 — Officially becomes The Arc of Florida, aligning with The Arc US; is added as a charitable-donation recipient on Florida driver's license renewals and vehicle registrations; hosts The Arc US national convention.

2012 — Begins a statewide dental treatment program after the board designates dental care a primary quality-of-life issue.

2013 — After three years of Arc-initiated advocacy to "End the R Word," legislation is signed removing the term from state statutes, effective July 1, 2014

2016 — ABLE accounts become available in Florida following Arc advocacy begun in 2010. The enabling legislation passed the Senate 38–0 and the House 117–0, allowing eligible Floridians with disabilities to save for qualified disability expenses without losing Medicaid, SSI, and other federal benefits.

2022 — Legislature provides significant rate increase to establish $15 minimum wage

2023 — ICMC Managed Care Pilot established by Florida Legislature

The Arc Network



Our Membership Across Florida

2422 Volunteers

2764 Full-Time & Part-Time Employees

10,226 Families Supported

8770 Clients with IDD served

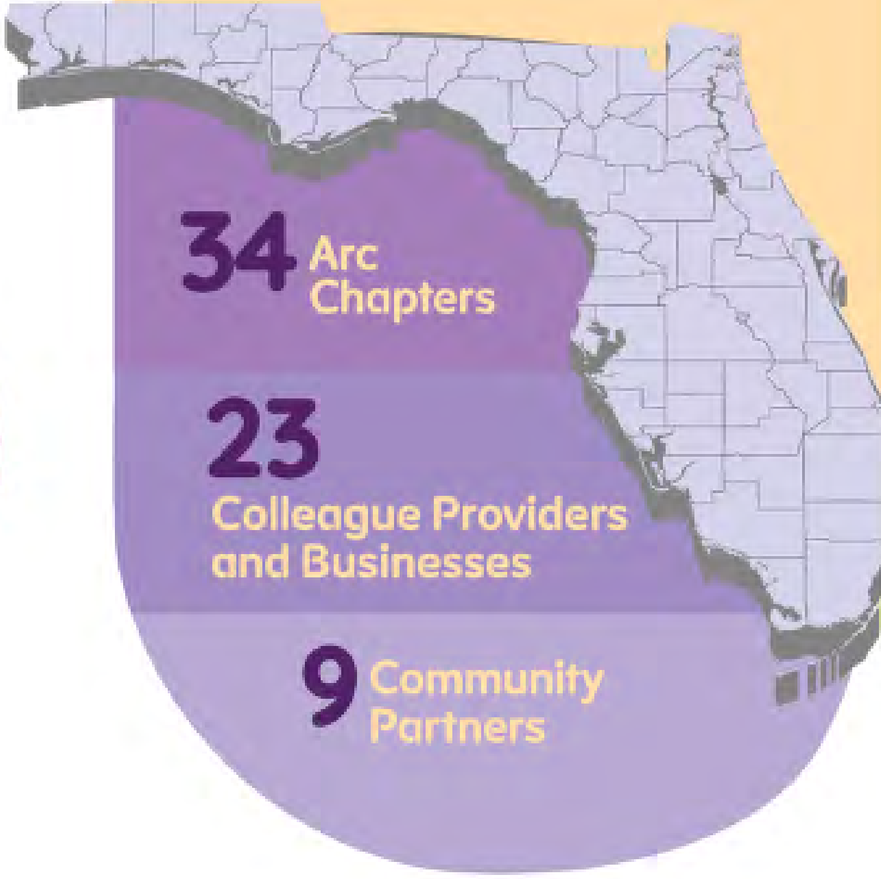
Source: The Arc of Florida Impact Data survey 7/26

What Our Chapters & Members Do

Across Florida, local Arc organizations and our Colleague members provide residential services, supported living, adult day training, supported employment, vocational rehabilitation services, transportation, early intervention, children's services, family support, behavioral health services, durable medical equipment supplies, billing services and advocacy.

Our Statewide Impact

Every figure in this section comes from The Arc of Florida Member Impact Survey (Fiscal Year 2025-26), which reports on the previous fiscal year. The survey is currently collecting responses. All figures below are pending.



34 Arc Chapters

23 Colleague Providers and Businesses

9 Community Partners

Florida at a Glance

Current Challenges

Provider Sustainability
Rising wages, insurance, training, regulatory, and operating costs are outpacing Medicaid reimbursement, threatening the stability and growth of Florida's provider network.

Workforce Shortages
Providers struggle to recruit and retain qualified direct support professionals, limiting service capacity and disrupting continuity of care.

Waiting List & Service Capacity
More than 15,000 Floridians remain in APD pre-enrollment. Expanding waiver access must be matched by enough providers and workforce to actually deliver the services authorized.

Transportation Barriers
APD lacks a consistent statewide transportation rate methodology, leaving many providers to deliver essential transportation at a financial loss.

Aging Individuals & Caregivers
People with IDD are living longer while the parents and family members who support them are also aging, creating an urgent need for sustainable housing and long-term supports.

Housing Shortage
Demand for safe, affordable housing with appropriate supports far exceeds supply, limiting independence and leaving families with few long-term options.

Rising Cost of Services
The cost of delivering quality services continues to increase without consistent mechanisms to keep reimbursement aligned with actual costs.

Employment Gap
People with disabilities remain significantly less likely to be employed, despite many wanting and being able to work with appropriate training and supports.

Opportunities

Strengthen Provider Capacity
Align reimbursement with the cost of quality services so Florida can retain providers, grow capacity, and meet increasing demand.

Build a Stronger Frontline Workforce
Invest in recruitment, retention, training, and career pathways for Direct Support Professionals.

Modernize Transportation
Create a consistent, transparent statewide reimbursement methodology that supports reliable access to services, employment, and community life.

Reduce the Waiting List and Build Capacity
Pair continued waiver expansion with the provider workforce and infrastructure needed to actually deliver authorized services.

Protect Access Under Managed Care
Establish safeguards for provider rates, continuity of care, individual choice, and quality as Florida's managed care system expands.

Expand Pathways to Employment
Strengthen specialized training and workforce programs that lead to competitive, integrated employment.

Expand Housing Choice
Support safe, affordable housing across a continuum of need and remove unnecessary barriers to innovative, federally compliant housing models.

Plan for Future Demand
Use demographic, education, and service data to anticipate growing needs—including individuals transitioning from school and aging individuals and caregivers—before families reach crisis.

Strengthen State Agency Coordination
Align APD, AHCA, Vocational Rehabilitation, housing, education, workforce, and other partners around shared outcomes for Floridians with IDD.



ISSUE BRIEF

Provider Sustainability

Why This Matters

Every service in Florida's developmental disability system depends on a provider and a qualified workforce to deliver it. When Medicaid reimbursement does not keep pace with the cost of providing services, providers cannot simply raise prices. They reduce services, stop accepting new individuals, delay expansion, or leave the system. A strong provider network is also essential to Florida's efforts to reduce the waiting list.

A waiver authorization only creates access if a provider has the capacity to deliver the service.

The Challenge

Wages, insurance, training, regulatory compliance, facilities, and other operating costs have risen while reimbursement has not consistently kept pace. At the same time, providers compete with other employers for a workforce responsible for supporting individuals with increasingly complex needs. **Florida provided an 11% rate increase in 2022 and a 1% increase in 2026,** but workforce vacancies and financial pressure remain significant.

Our Recomendations

Establish a sustainable approach to provider reimbursement that reflects the actual cost of delivering quality services and allows Florida's provider network to maintain and grow capacity.

Pair appropriate reimbursement with meaningful quality and outcome measures so Florida can ensure accountability for taxpayer dollars.

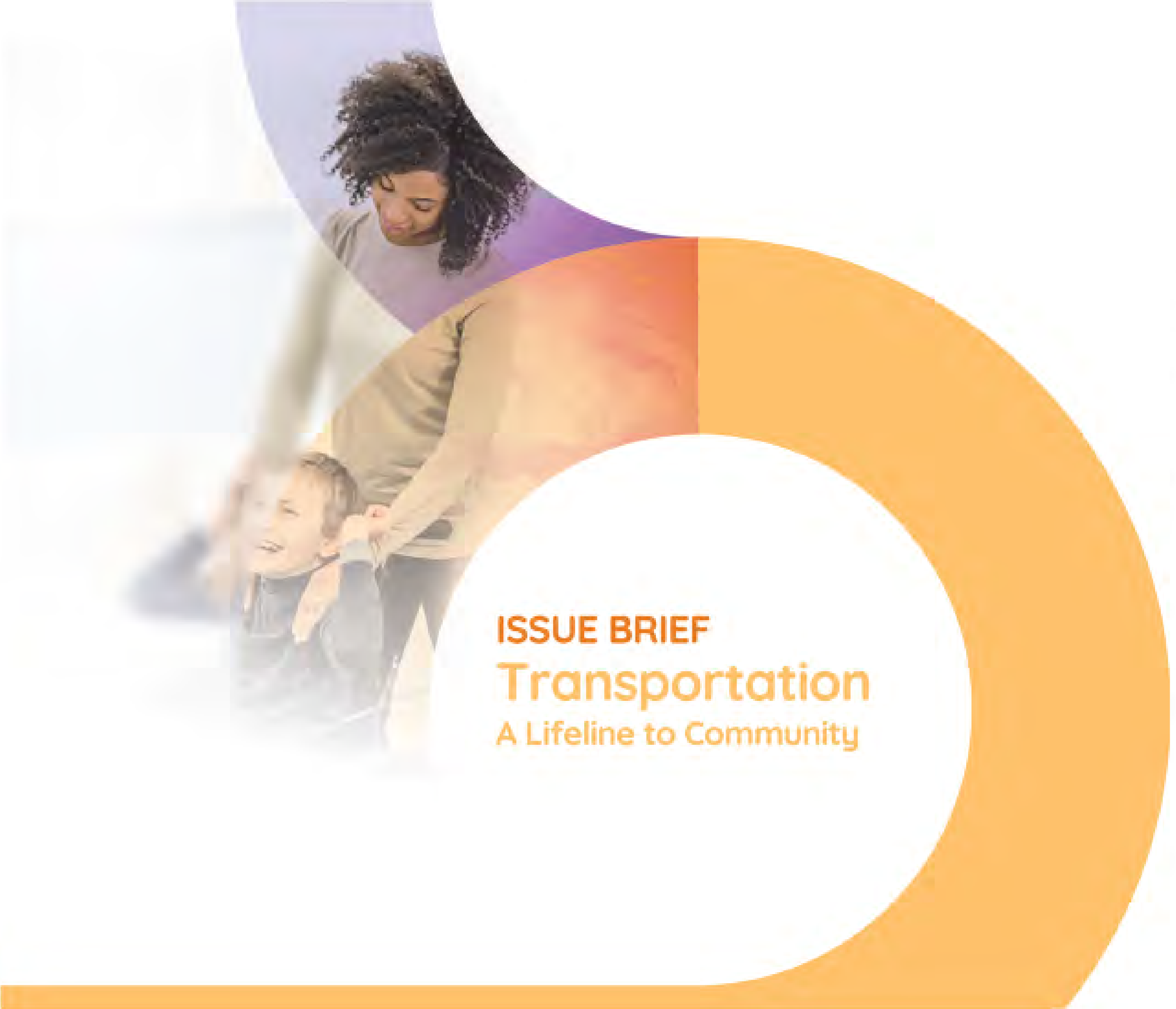
37,040
Floridian's
enrolled in the iBudget

Florida's Legislature has funded a
11% rate increase
in 2022 and
1% rate increase
in 2026

Direct Support Professional (DSP) turnover continues to hover around
40%
Nationally
(ANCOR 2025)

Minimum Wage increases to
$15/hr
on September 30th

Bottom line:
Florida cannot expand access without maintaining the provider network that delivers the services.



ISSUE BRIEF

Transportation

A Lifeline to Community

Why This Matters

Florida invests millions of dollars in employment, adult day programs, therapies and other community services for individuals with IDD. **Those investments only work if people can get there.**

For many individuals with IDD who cannot drive or independently use public transportation, specialized transportation is the connection to work, healthcare, services and community life. When transportation disappears, families often have to miss work to provide it themselves—or individuals simply lose access to services Florida is already funding.

The Challenge

Florida does not have a consistent statewide methodology for setting Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) transportation reimbursement rates. Rates are negotiated regionally, creating significant variation and leaving many providers delivering transportation at a loss. The inconsistency also translates from client to client on how much they can spend on transportation. In the counties studied, **APD paid an average of $13.76 per trip compared with $38.45 through Florida's Transportation Disadvantaged system**.



24 of 24
counties reviewed had APD reimbursement below the corresponding Transportation Disadvantaged rate.

Our Recommendations

Establish a statewide, transparent transportation reimbursement methodology using each county's Transportation Disadvantaged rate phased in over three years. Create a baseline so no provider is penalized for a higher negotiated rate.

A consistent methodology would improve predictability, accountability and access while replacing an inconsistent regional negotiation process that does not cover the cost of the service.

312,397
Total Trips Annually
with an average rate of
$13.24

179%
Transportation Disadvantaged rates averaged approximately 179% **higher than APD rates.**

72%
of surveyed Providers
reported a transportation deficit

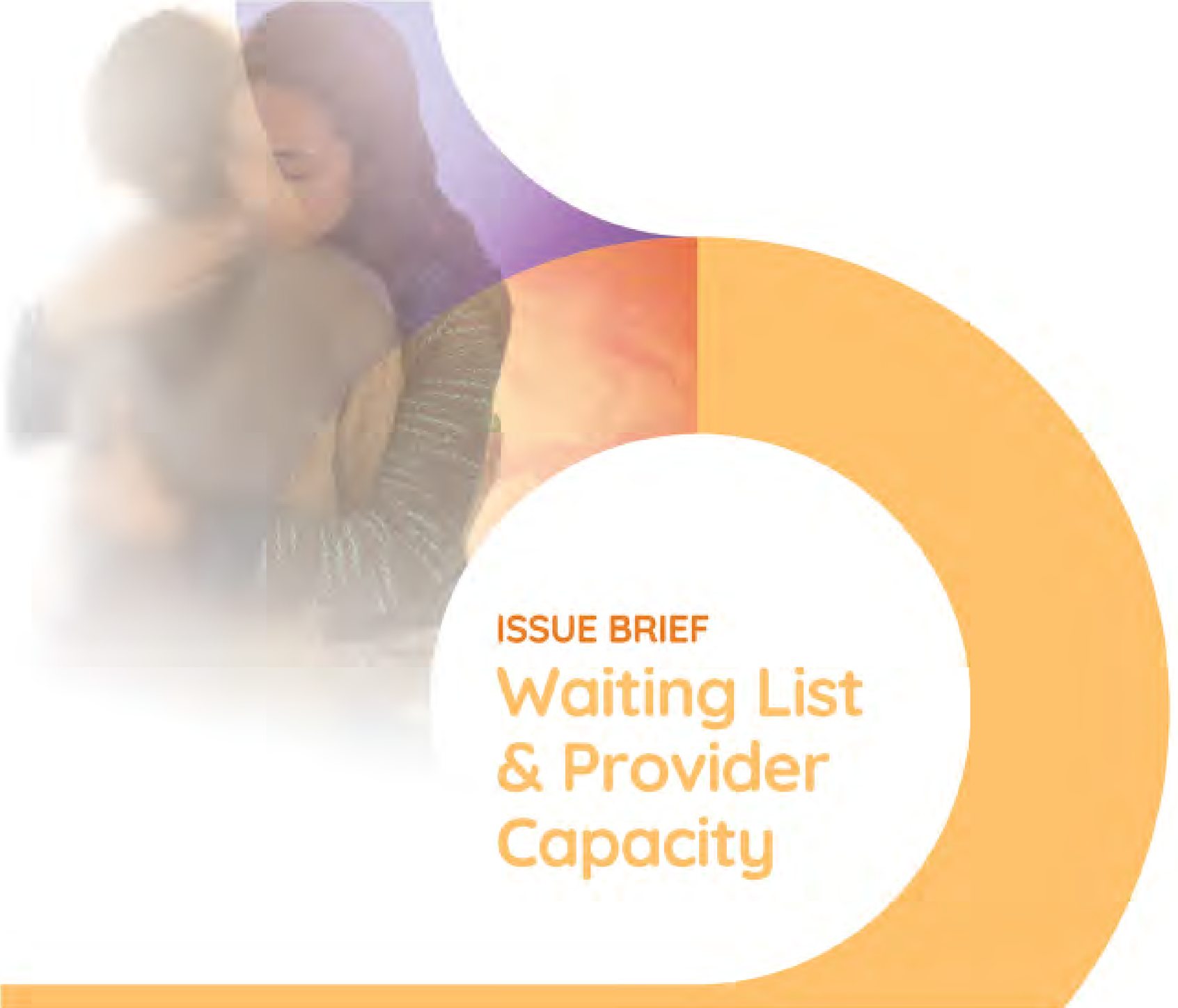
9% of trips NOT reimbursed

Bottom line:
Florida's transportation funding should be consistent, transparent, and sufficient to sustain access.

1ST Year **50%**

2ND Year **75%**

3RD Year **100%**



ISSUE BRIEF

Waiting List & Provider Capacity

Why This Matters

Florida has made meaningful investments to help individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities move from the waiting list into Medicaid Waiver services. But **a waiver authorization does not create a service — a provider does.**

Today, **14,255 Floridians remain in APD pre-enrollment**, including more than **7,500 who have waited more than 10 years**.

As Florida continues reducing the waiting list, it must also ensure there are enough qualified providers, staff, housing, programs, and other community-based services available when individuals become eligible.

The Challenge

Florida's provider network is already strained. Providers are facing workforce shortages, rising operating costs, and increasing demand. Some maintain their own service waitlists or have reduced capacity.

At the same time, future demand is growing as more young people with disabilities transition from school into adult services and individuals with IDD and their family caregivers age.

Reducing the waiting list without increasing provider capacity risks creating a new kind of waiting list — people who have funding but cannot find the services they need.

The current brief similarly recognizes that waiver slots alone cannot solve the problem and that provider capacity must grow alongside enrollment.

Our Recomendations

Develop a **multi-year statewide strategy that addresses waiver enrollment and provider capacity together**.

Use APD, education, demographic, and provider data to anticipate future demand, Identify regional service gaps, and strategically invest in the workforce, housing, facilities, technology, and community-based services Florida will need.

The goal should be to build **capacity before families** reach crisis, rather than waiting until services are unavailable.

37,040 **Individuals enrolled in the iBudget waiver (as of 2/1/26)**

14,255 **Individuals on Pre-Enrollment waiting list (as of 9/29/26)**

7,500+ waited more than 10 years

42% **Providers reported reduced services**

21% **Providers anticipate additional services reduction**

85% **Providers operating at a financial loss**

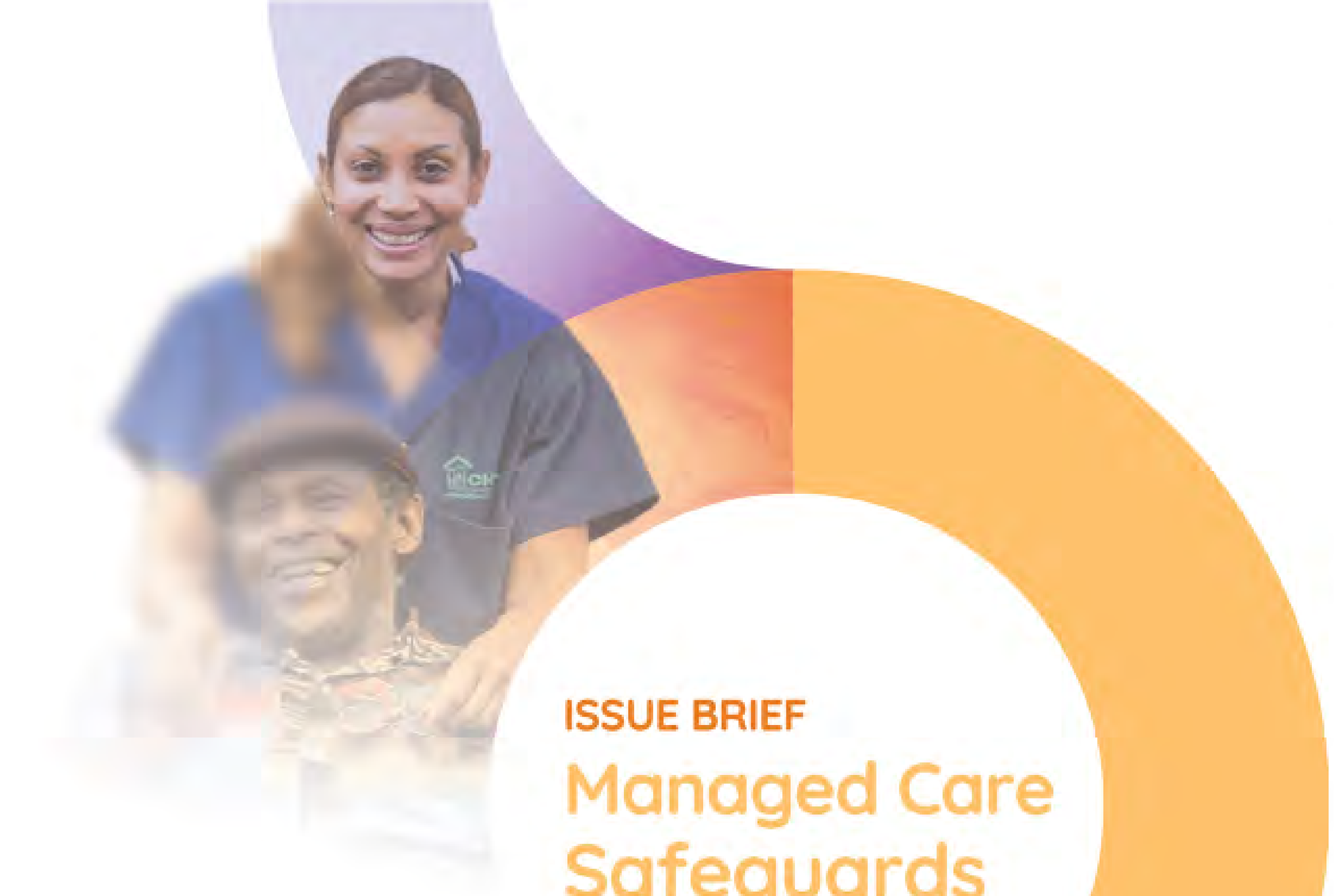
Arc of Florida 2025 Survey

Looking ahead:

Thousands of Florida students with autism, intellectual disabilities, and other developmental disabilities are currently receiving Exceptional Student Education services and will transition into adulthood in the years ahead.

Bottom line:

Expanding access only works if Florida builds the capacity to deliver it.



ISSUE BRIEF

Managed Care Safeguards

Why This Matters

Florida is undertaking one of the largest structural changes to its IDD system in years through the expansion of IDD Comprehensive Managed Care (ICMC).

Managed care can create opportunities for better coordination of healthcare and long-term supports. But for people with significant disabilities, **continuity of care matters enormously**. A provider may have supported an individual for years and understand how that person communicates, responds to change, and manages complex behavioral or medical needs.

The Challenge

Florida's provider network is already financially strained. If managed care plans in the future achieve savings by reducing provider rates or narrowing networks, Florida risks weakening capacity and disrupting established relationships.

Individuals with IDD often have less ability to absorb those disruptions than a typical healthcare consumer.

Our Recommendations

As managed care expands, establish long-term safeguards that protect:

Provider rates — prevent reimbursement from falling below appropriate established levels.

Continuity of care — allow existing relationships and authorizations to continue during transitions.

Individual choice — preserve reasonable access to trusted providers, including single-case agreements when appropriate.

October 2024 — ICMC pilot launched in seven counties

October 2025 — statewide expansion authorized

July 2026 — additional iBudget participants became eligible to choose ICMC

Bottom line:
Modernize the financing system without unnecessarily disrupting care that is already working.



ISSUE BRIEF

Employment & Workforce Training

Why This Matters

Many Floridians with intellectual and developmental disabilities want to work and can work. Employment provides income, independence, purpose, and the opportunity to contribute to Florida's workforce and economy.

But IDD is not the same as every other disability when it comes to preparing for employment. Individuals with IDD may need more hands-on instruction, repetition, modified curriculum, job coaching, and additional time to learn and generalize skills in a workplace.

The goal is the same — competitive, integrated employment — but the path to getting there may look different. The current briefing book recognizes this need for individualized instruction, modified curriculum, and integrated job coaching.

The Challenge

Vocational Rehabilitation serves Floridians with many different types of disabilities. Policies, timelines, training requirements, and reimbursement processes that work well for one population may not work equally well for individuals with IDD.

Across Florida, providers have developed specialized Alternative Training Programs designed around how individuals with IDD learn and prepare for employment. Some hold industry-recognized credentials and accreditations and partner with employers, technical colleges, and public agencies.

At the same time, providers must navigate approval, authorization, documentation, billing, and other administrative processes. When those systems become unnecessarily complicated or duplicative, provider resources are diverted from the work that produces the outcome everyone wants: preparing people for successful integrated employment.

Our Recomendations

Ensure Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) recognizes the unique training and employment needs of individuals with IDD while maintaining the expectation of meaningful employment outcomes.

22.8%

employment rate for people with disabilities nationally in 2025

Source: 2025 US Bureau of Labor and Statistics

Florida Arc organizations operate specialized employment-training programs, several of which hold recognized credentials or accreditation and have established partnerships with employers, technical colleges, and local government agencies.

Florida Should

- Recognize specialized, employment-focused training as a legitimate VR pathway for individuals who need it;
- Establish clear, timely, and reasonable processes for approving programs and curricula;
- Allow appropriate flexibility in training methods and timelines based on individual needs; and
- Streamline administrative, authorization, and reimbursement requirements so providers can spend more time delivering training and employment supports and less time navigating unnecessary processes.

65.2%

employment rate for people without disabilities

Bottom line:

The destination is employment. The pathway should reflect how each person learns and what they need to succeed.

Accountability should focus on outcomes that matter:
Are individuals developing marketable skills? Are they getting competitive jobs? Are they earning wages and retaining employment?

The existing brief already calls for a reasonable approval process that avoids service gaps and stronger collaboration between VR counselors and specialized training providers.



ISSUE BRIEF

Housing Choice & Independence

Why This Matters

Adults with IDD want what other Floridians want: **a safe, affordable place to call home, meaningful relationships, and the opportunity to live at their highest level of independence**.

Florida's innovative apartment-style communities provide another option along the continuum of housing and support. Although this model is relatively new and sometimes misunderstood, demand is strong: **nearly every Florida Housing Finance Corporation (FHFC) funded intentional community maintains a waiting list**.

These settings can allow individuals to live independently while receiving only the level of support they need. APD similarly describes supported living as assisting adults with developmental disabilities to reside in their own homes and develop the skills necessary to live independently.

The Challenge

Florida needs more housing options as individuals with IDD live longer, caregivers age, and families increasingly ask, "What happens when I can no longer provide care?"

At the same time, Florida's supported-living rules can restrict certain housing models even when individual rights and federal Home and Community Based Services requirements can otherwise be maintained. The current APD rule established in 2003 prohibits a supported-living provider from serving as landlord or having an ownership interest in the housing unit.

The goal should be to **protect housing options and individual choice,** not unintentionally push people toward more intensive settings than they need.

Our Recommendations

Protect and expand **safe, affordable, federally compliant housing options across a continuum of need**, while maintaining strong safeguards for individual rights, independence and choice.

Florida should ensure its policies allow individuals to live at their highest appropriate level of independence and preserve innovative housing models families are actively seeking.

8 FHFC-funded intentional communities in Florida
Nearly every community maintains a waiting list

Annual Medicaid waiver cost plan:

- **Independent/supported living: $25,000–$30,000**
- **Traditional residential, similar minimal-to-moderate support needs: $55,000–$73,000**

APD's waiver includes both supported living and residential habilitation as distinct service options, with services authorized according to individual need.

Bottom line:

Protect the options. Protect the safeguards.
Let individuals and families choose.

Florida's Intellectual & Developmental Disability System

Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) — the state agency responsible for serving Floridians with developmental disabilities. APD administers the iBudget waiver, maintains the waiting list (Pre-Enrollment List), enrolls and contracts with providers, regulates rates.

Developmental Disability — is defined in Section 393.063(11), F.S. "Developmental disability" means a disorder or syndrome that is attributable to intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, autism, spina bifida, Down syndrome, Phelan-McDermid syndrome, or Prader-Willi syndrome; that manifests before the age of 18; and that constitutes a substantial handicap that can reasonably be expected to continue indefinitely. HB 565 during 2026 Legislative Session adds: Tatton-Brown-Rahman syndrome to the statutory definition of developmental disability.

Intellectual Disability — is defined in Section 393.063(24) "Intellectual disability" means significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior which manifests before the age of 18 and can reasonably be expected to continue indefinitely.

Medicaid Waiver and HCBS — "HCBS" stands for Home and Community-Based Services. A Medicaid waiver lets a state use Medicaid dollars for supports delivered in homes and communities, rather than only in institutional settings. These services are the cornerstone of long-term support that helps people with IDD live, work, and thrive where they choose. There are 27 approved HCBS Services offered.

iBudget — Florida's IDD waiver is formally the Developmental Disabilities Individual Budgeting Waiver. Each enrolled person receives an individual budget, and that fixed allocation must cover all of their waiver services — residential supports, personal supports, day programs, employment services, therapies, and transportation. As of the most recent figure available, 37,040 Floridians are enrolled. Florida's waiver has no fixed enrollment cap; capacity is determined by annual legislative appropriations. In 2026, the Legislature appropriated an additional $10 million for new enrollees.

CDC+ — Consumer-Directed Care Plus, Florida's self-directed option, which allows individuals and families to manage their own budget and hire their own supports.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) — the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, housed in The Florida Department of Education, funds services that help individuals with disabilities prepare for, obtain, retain, advance in, or regain competitive integrated employment (CIE) — work in typical community workplaces, alongside people without disabilities, at competitive wages, with the same opportunities for advancement as anyone else doing similar work.

School Transition — Students with IDD can be served through their local school district until the age of 22 years old. The Arc of Florida publishes School Age Transition resources in English and Spanish and available on our website.

Managed Care — Florida has recently provided a new option for IDD services from fee-for-service into managed care. The IDD Comprehensive Managed Care (ICMC) pilot launched in October 2024 in seven counties, and statewide expansion was authorized for October 2025 and further expansion of any iBudget participant (18 years and older) can move to the ICMC plan starting July 1, 2026. This is the single largest structural change to Florida's IDD system in years.

Housing — Over the past decade the Florida Housing Finance Corporation has funded eight nonprofit organizations to develop apartment-style Intentional Communities designed for adults with developmental disabilities. Nearly every one of them maintains a waiting list.

Join Us, Like Us, Love Us

www.facebook.com/TheArcOfFlorida

www.instagram.com/thearcoffflorida

www.linkedin.com/company/the-arc-of-florida/

www.youtube.com/user/TheArcOfFlorida

Additional Resources

The Arc of Florida

Website: ArcFlorida.org

2027 Legislative Platform

Annual Report

School Age Transition resources (English and Spanish)

Be Prepared, Be Counted, Be Heard Awareness Initiative

Newsletters and legislative bill tracking

State agencies and data

Agency for Persons with Disabilities

APD Waiting List reporting or dashboard

Agency for Health Care Administration, IDD Comprehensive Managed Care

Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged

Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Florida Housing Finance Corporation

The Arc of the United States

Public Policy Agenda, Position Statements, and Core Values

Contact Information

The Arc of Florida

Summer Pfeiffer
President & Chief Executive Officer
The Arc of Florida
summer@arcflorida.org
(850) 921-0460

The Arc of Florida
2898 Mahan Dr., Suite 1
Tallahassee, FL 32308

The Arc of Florida is a resource to you as a candidate or elected official on any issue affecting Floridians with intellectual and developmental disabilities. If you would like district-specific information, a briefing for your staff, or an introduction to families and providers in your community, please contact us.