



Office of Developmental Primary Care

Improving outcomes for people with developmental disabilities

Regional Centers

Background

The Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act is a California state law that states, “An array of services and supports should be established which is sufficiently complete to meet the needs and choices of each person with developmental disabilities, regardless of age or degree of disability, and at each stage of life and to support their integration into the mainstream life of the community.” § 4501. Regional Centers contract with the California Department of Developmental Services to fund and coordinate services and supports. All Regional Center services are voluntary. No services or supports are provided unless the client wants them. Every Regional Center client has a case coordinator. Once found eligible, individuals have a legal entitlement to remain clients of the Regional Center throughout their lifetime.

Eligibility

Under the Lanterman Act, a developmental disability is defined as: a disability that originates before an individual attains age 18 years, continues, or can be expected to continue, indefinitely, and constitutes a substantial disability for that individual. It includes intellectual disability (mental retardation), cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, and disabling conditions found to be closely related to an intellectual disability or to require treatment similar to that required for individuals with an intellectual disability.

§ 4512 (a).

A substantial disability means the existence of significant functional limitations in three or more of the following areas of major life activity, as determined by a regional center, and as appropriate to the age of the person:

- (1) Self-care
- (2) Receptive and expressive language.
- (3) Learning.
- (4) Mobility.
- (5) Self-direction.
- (6) Capacity for independent living.
- (7) Economic self-sufficiency. § 4512 (l).

Infants and toddlers with established risk conditions or who meet the eligibility criteria for developmental delay may be eligible to receive Regional Center services. In addition, anyone at high risk of having an infant with a developmental disability may qualify for certain preventative services.

Services

Clients of the Regional Center are entitled to a number of services aimed at supporting individuals with developmental disabilities in the community. § 4512 (b). Funded services are negotiated through the Individual Program Plan (IPP) process. Examples of services include, but not limited to: advocacy; behavior intervention; community living supports; environmental accessibility adaptations; respite care; and supported employment and prevocational services.

How to Refer for a Regional Center Eligibility Assessment

Referrals to the Regional Center should be made in writing and contain the following information:

- A statement of the diagnostic categories under which the patient qualifies.
- If a firm diagnosis has not been, or cannot be established, include supporting medical evidence of a condition that is like or may require similar treatment to that required for an intellectual disability.
- A statement that the disability is expected to continue indefinitely.
- Include information that supports the existence of the disability prior to the patient's 18th birthday. This may include school records, medical records, and/or, the names and contact information of individuals who can attest to the existence of a disability prior to the patient turning 18.
- A description of the three or more areas of major life function in which the patient has significant functional limitations.

Eligibility Timeline

After initial contact, the Regional Center must schedule an appointment within **15 working days**. Following the initial intake, the Regional Center has **120 days** to conduct any necessary assessments, which may include, but are not limited to, psychological, medical, and developmental evaluations. Eligibility determinations are made by a group of regional center professionals of differing disciplines, such as a psychologist, physician and social worker. Within **10 days** after a determination is made, written notification of eligibility is made. Once found eligible, the Regional Center must develop an Individual Program Plan (IPP) within **60 days**.

How to Access Services and Supports

Clients negotiate services and supports through the Individual Program Plan (IPP) process. An IPP team includes the client, a Regional Center case coordinator, and when appropriate, the client's parents, guardians, conservators, or authorized representatives. IPP team members may invite advocates or professionals. Based on assessments by qualified individuals, IPP teams jointly identify goals and measurable objectives. Goals should promote community integration, independent, productive, and normal lives, and stable and healthy environments. § 4646 (a). Taking into account the needs and preferences of the individual and caregivers, the IPP team identifies services and supports to meet the goals. IPP teams find assessments and recommendations from health care professionals very helpful. Among the assessments, IPP's shall include: a review of the medical, dental, and mental health needs, current medications, observed side effects, the date of the last review of medication, documentation of the health status and referrals. § 4646.5 (a) (5).

Appeal Process

The Regional Center is legally required to provide written notice of any denial of services. This includes: denial of eligibility, changing, reducing, or eliminating existing services, or denial of a requested service. To continue receiving disputed services during the appeal process, appeals must be filed within 10 days of receiving written notice. Otherwise, appeals must be filed within 30 days of receiving written notice.

For More Information

- California Department of Developmental Services: www.dds.ca.gov/RC/Home.cfm
- Disability Rights California: www.disabilityrightscalifornia.org/pubs/506301Index.htm#Current
- The Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act: www.dds.ca.gov/statutes/docs/LantermanAct_2009.pdf

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