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PROGRAM PERFORMANCE REPORT
HIGHLIGHTS



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Message from the Chair

It is my pleasure to share the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities' 2025 Program Performance Report Highlights. This past year has been one of meaningful progress, collaboration, and continued commitment to advancing inclusion across the Commonwealth.

Throughout the year, VBPD worked alongside self-advocates, families, policymakers, and community partners to strengthen systems that support people with developmental disabilities. Together, we have focused on improving access to information, expanding leadership opportunities, and advancing policies that promote equity, independence, and full participation in community life.

Our work reflects a simple but powerful belief: people with disabilities should have the opportunity to make choices, pursue their goals, and contribute their talents in every community across Virginia. From developing new leaders through our training programs to shaping policy conversations at the state and national levels, VBPD continues to elevate the voices and experiences of people with disabilities.

We are especially proud of the strong partnerships that make this work possible. Progress happens when people come together with a shared vision—and that spirit of collaboration continues to guide everything we do.

As we look ahead, VBPD remains committed to building on this momentum and advancing solutions that create lasting change for people with developmental disabilities and their families.



Thank you to our dedicated Board members, staff, and partners across the Commonwealth for your leadership, passion, and commitment to this important work.

With appreciation,

Allison Coles-Johnson
Chair, Virginia Board for People with Disabilities

Mission

To create a Commonwealth that advances opportunities for independence, personal decision-making, and full participation in community life for individuals with developmental and other disabilities.

Vision

Virginians with developmental and other disabilities direct their own lives and choose how they live, learn, work, and play.

The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities: Advancing Systems Change. Elevating Voices. Strengthening Virginia.

For more than 30 years, the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD) has worked to create a Commonwealth where people with developmental and other disabilities are valued, included, and empowered to live self-determined lives.

As Virginia's Developmental Disabilities Council, VBPD brings lived experience, research, and policy expertise together to strengthen systems and improve outcomes. We advise the Governor, General Assembly, and state agencies on ways to improve services, expand opportunity, and remove barriers to full community participation.

We advance change by:

- **Identifying gaps and recommending improvements in disability services and supports.**
- **Investing in innovative, time-limited projects that build sustainable solutions.**
- **Developing leaders through training and engagement initiatives.**
- **Raising awareness and promoting policies that advance inclusion and equity.**

Our 40-member Board includes individuals with disabilities, family members, and advocates from across Virginia. Their lived experience shapes our priorities and ensures our work remains grounded in the realities of everyday life.

Together, we are building a stronger, more inclusive Virginia—where people with disabilities can make choices, pursue opportunities, and fully participate in their communities.

1

The first goal is for people with disabilities to have better access to supports so they can live in the community.



The Board has four main goals in its State Plan. Every activity we do is linked to one of those four goals.

Strengthening Information Access Through Action and Partnership

In 2025, VBPD built on its FFY 2022 [Information Access Assessment](#) and the Information Access Champions initiative to deepen statewide commitment to accessible communication. The VBPD continued convening a multi-partner steering committee, promoting practical best practices—such as alt text, clear/plain language, and accessible formatting—and encouraging agencies and organizations to collaborate directly with people with developmental disabilities (DD) and their families when developing public-facing materials.

These efforts are translating into measurable change. Participating state agencies and partner organizations reported concrete improvements, including revising job descriptions to require plain-language writing skills, updating internal language access policies, strengthening PowerPoint accessibility standards, reformatting documents for improved readability, and incorporating evidence-based tools and lived-experience feedback into communications practices.

VBPD also advanced recommendations from George Mason University’s [assessment of Virginia’s Medicaid information ecology](#) by educating Centers for Independent Living staff and modeling language access through Spanish interpretation in a statewide webinar.

At the same time, VBPD strengthened its own communications strategy to ensure information is accessible, inclusive, and culturally and linguistically appropriate. Through the Information Access Champions initiative, VBPD disseminated resource booklets on accessibility, inclusion, and collaboration; launched a Constant Contact email series offering ongoing best-practice guidance; and produced a video campaign featuring “information access stories” from individuals with lived experience.

Together, these efforts continue to embed accessibility into everyday practice—moving information access from awareness to sustained systems change across the Commonwealth.

Goal 1

Advancing Equity in Healthcare Access: Geographic Disparities

Building on its [Assessment of Geographic Disparities in Access to Healthcare](#), VBPD moved from research to action in 2025—working to ensure that recommendations translate into meaningful systems change.

VBPD shared its findings with the Joint Commission on Health Care, contributing to legislation focused on strengthening telehealth provider training. VBPD also provided input to the Virginia Telehealth Network to help ensure that Virginia’s State Telehealth Plan addresses critical barriers identified in the assessment—particularly digital literacy challenges and the cost of accessing technology and broadband services.

These advocacy efforts helped shape the Virginia State Board of Health’s newly approved 2026–2030 State Telehealth Plan, which incorporates key recommendations aligned with VBPD’s assessment. The plan includes commitments to collaborate with community-based organizations, strengthen provider training, and promote person-centered accommodations that improve telehealth access for people with disabilities.

Through sustained engagement with policymakers and system leaders, VBPD continues to elevate the needs of people with developmental disabilities—helping ensure that healthcare access is not determined by zip code. This work reflects our commitment to advancing equitable, accessible healthcare across every region of the Commonwealth.

Driving Community Change Through Policy and Partnership

In 2025, VBPD deepened its role as a convener, advocate, and policy partner by working across systems to strengthen community supports for people with developmental disabilities.

Council staff actively participated in **nine statewide workgroups** focused on housing, DD waivers, brain injury, family supports, and community engagement. These collaborations generated practical recommendations and reinforced best practices, including authentic stakeholder engagement and integrating disability rights history into advocacy efforts.

Through these partnerships, VBPD helped advance tangible improvements—such as promoting adult-sized changing tables in airports, strengthening sensory accommodations, expanding service animal access, and increasing housing opportunities for people with disabilities.

VBPD also took strategic action to protect rights and strengthen public policy.

In 2025, VBPD:

- Submitted a letter to the Frederick County Office of Elections to correct misleading information about voter eligibility for people with disabilities.
- Convened a Medicaid Strategy Stakeholder Meeting and follow-up webinar addressing proposed federal Medicaid cuts.

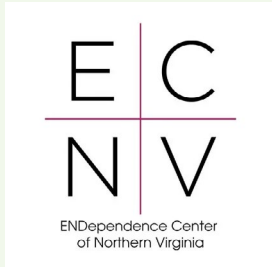
Goal 1

- Partnered with The Arc of Virginia and the disAbility Law Center of Virginia to send personalized letters to Virginia’s Congressional delegation, educating them about the impact of potential cuts to Medicaid.
- Submitted formal public comment opposing rollbacks to Section 504 regulations.
- Testified on four bills addressing web accessibility, public accommodations, direct care worker compensation, and the Information Technology Access Act—contributing to statutory changes that strengthen accessibility and community inclusion.

Together, these efforts reflect VBPD’s commitment to protecting rights, shaping policy, and ensuring people with disabilities can live, work, and participate fully in their communities.



1. ENDependence Center of Northern Virginia (ECNV)



VBPD gave \$300,000 (with an additional \$100,000 in matching funds) to the Bienvenidos Todos: Disability Inclusion project. Led by the ENDependence Center of Northern Virginia, this project ran from February 1, 2024, through the end of 2025. ECVN developed

information to help Latinos access disability services, supports, and opportunities.

As part of their activities, ECVN:

1. Partnered with organizations to deliver 18 webinars that 41 project collaborators, 30 individuals with DD, and 196 family members attended to learn about disability rights, services, and resources. The webinars were seen by about 18,667 individuals on social media.
2. Developed 4 information briefs on legal aid, disability acceptance, and disability rights, which were viewed 6,778 times on their website.
3. Provided 3 training and technical assistance webinars to service providers about organizations serving Latinos and the Latino population in Virginia. The grantee reached 8,290 staff from various organizations.

4. Held a conference called “Transition on the Road,” where people spoke about empowering the Latino community to access supports and resources for families and people with DD. 35 people, including 7 students with DD and 20 family members, attended the conference.

ECNV also shared information about the project on its website, through Spanish media, and social media, which got 170,815 hits and reached about 61,833 people. ECVN will prepare a final report in 2026 and continue to disseminate project resources.

2. Children's Assistive Technology Service (C.A.T.S.)

VBPD completed the final monitoring of an impactful grant project with Children’s Assistive Technology Service at Emory & Henry College called “Making Assistive Technology Accessible and Meaningful to Early Intervention Families in Rural Southwest Virginia.”

The project ended July 31, 2023, and the grantee continued reporting outcomes for two more years, through July 31, 2025. The grant aimed to help babies and toddlers with developmental disabilities and their families in southwest Virginia by providing assistive technology devices and teaching them how to use them. The goal was to help the children develop self-determination skills and to support the family in better meeting their child’s needs.

Goal 1: Grants & Investments

During 2025, the grantee:

1. Gave assistive technology devices to 24 babies and toddlers with DD and taught 24 family members how to use them.
2. Worked with early intervention coordinators at a Community Services Board (CSB) in rural southwest Virginia to understand what assistive technology the babies and toddlers and their families needed.
3. Maintained 25 pieces of equipment for their “Lending Library,” which adds to the collection of assistive technology and medical equipment that families can borrow.

94% of participating family members who took a survey said they were happy with the training, help, or device their child got. 94% also said their child started doing more things on their own, and they felt more empowered.

3. Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH)

VBPD continued funding a \$214,450 grant (\$86,821 in matching funds) to the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) for a project called, “Support Service Provider (SSP) Pilot Project,” which aimed to support the service provider workforce by training SSPs and deaf-blind people on how to use SSP services.

During 2025, VDDHH:

1. Worked with Reynolds Community College and the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired to implement policies for training SSPs and getting new deafblind participants.
2. Trained 3 deafblind people (1 with developmental disabilities) on how to use SSP services.
3. Trained 11 SSPs on how to interact with deafblind people.
4. Maintained a website for the project information and a list of trained SSPs.

One deafblind person with DD who took a survey said working with an SSP made them feel less isolated and improved their quality of life. 100% of SSPs who took a survey said they were more knowledgeable about the SSP role, and they were better prepared to serve in that role.

4. The Arc of Virginia

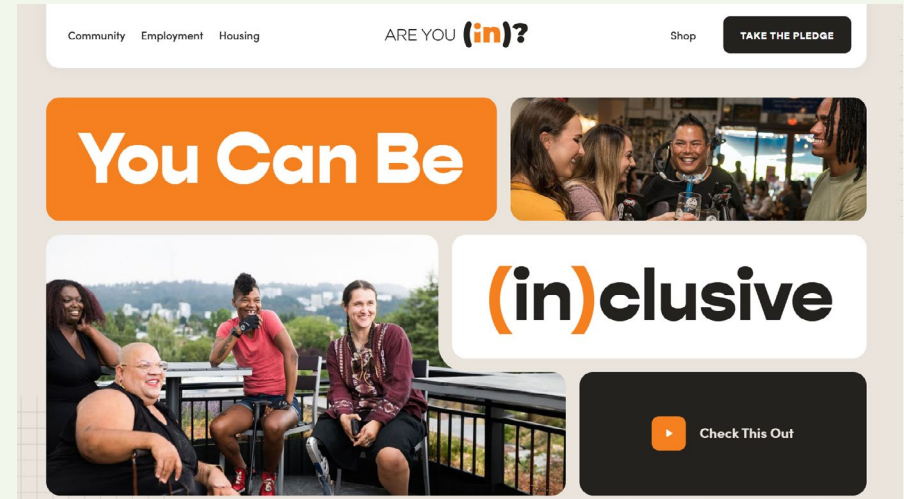


VBPD continued to track the success of the “Diversity, Inclusion & Visibility” project with The Arc of Virginia. While the formal grant period ended in early 2024, the project’s impact continued throughout 2025. This project uses real-life stories to show the public the incredible value people with DD bring to our communities.

Goal 1: Grants & Investments

During 2025, The Arc of Virginia maintained previously created resources on its website and reported:

1. 72 views of its 5 accessible videos on YouTube about the experiences of 4 people with DD. The videos were about inclusive neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities.
2. 1,680 people viewed the “Are You In” campaign materials on social media, including five accessible YouTube videos that featured four individuals with DD sharing their experiences in inclusive workplaces and neighborhoods.
3. 57 people took a pledge to be more inclusive, with 747 people in total having taken the pledge since the project began.



2

The **second goal** is for people with disabilities to have better access to services so they can be healthy and safe.



Advancing Healthcare Access Through Policy and Advocacy

In 2025, VBPD continued advocating for policies that improve healthcare access for people with developmental disabilities (DD). VBPD staff participated in **three key statewide workgroups** that shape healthcare policy and systems:

- **Advisory Committee on Health Disparity and Health Equity** (Virginia Department of Health)
- **Future of Public Oral Health Taskforce and Workforce Committee** (Virginia Health Catalyst)
- **Medicaid Managed Care Advisory Committee** (Department of Medical Assistance Services)

Through these collaborations, VBPD made **ten recommendations** to improve healthcare for people with disabilities. Several recommendations focused on strengthening data collection so health systems can better understand health issues affecting people with developmental and other disabilities, including substance use and disease trends. VBPD also recommended expanding dental workforce incentives, such as student loan repayment programs, and linking those programs to cultural competency training so providers are better prepared to serve diverse communities. Additional recommendations focused on improving safe public drinking water infrastructure and making health information easier to access and understand.

While these specific recommendations have not yet been formally adopted, VBPD's sustained engagement is already influencing practices. For example, a member of the Advisory Committee on Health Disparity and Health Equity reported adding disability status as a demographic factor in a community health assessment after VBPD highlighted the importance of disability data in public health planning.

VBPD also partnered with the Virginia Health Workforce Development Authority to strengthen oral health training for direct support professionals. Through this collaboration, VBPD helped develop curriculum content that teaches direct support professionals how to support oral hygiene—an important step toward preventing dental disease for people who rely on daily support services.

Goal 2

In addition, VBPD worked with Virginia Health Catalyst and the Augusta Regional Dental Clinic to present at the Virginia Health Catalyst Summit, where approximately **50 participants** learned about VBPD’s dental access assessment findings and recommendations. Post-conference surveys showed that 92% of attendees found the session informative, helping build broader awareness of oral health disparities affecting people with disabilities.

VBPD’s expertise on dental access was also sought by multiple organizations and policymakers during the year. VBPD staff provided guidance to Virginia Health Catalyst on improving outreach to families whose children with disabilities opt out of school-based dental programs, advised Hope House staff on strategies to secure dental care for individuals receiving in-home services, and educated a Virginia legislator’s office on policy options to improve access to dental sedation and anesthesia for people with developmental disabilities.

These ongoing efforts are building momentum. Virginia Health Catalyst has now identified access to dental sedation and anesthesia as a top advocacy priority for 2026, reflecting growing recognition of this critical gap in care.

Through policy engagement, education, and strategic partnerships, VBPD continues working to ensure that people with developmental disabilities can access the healthcare services they need to live healthy, full lives.

Strengthening Dental Access Through Collaboration

VBPD continued advancing its work to improve dental access for people with developmental disabilities (DD) by leading the **Dental Information Exchange**, a workgroup launched in FFY 2024 to bring together stakeholders from the dental and disability communities. This initiative supports one of the key recommendations from VBPD’s [dental access assessment](#)—strengthening collaboration across agencies and organizations to address barriers to care.

During the year, VBPD convened **four workgroup meetings** that engaged **51 dental and disability stakeholders**. These sessions helped increase shared understanding of challenges and potential solutions by highlighting topics such as Virginia’s Medicaid dental program, barriers to accessing dental sedation and anesthesia, and the experiences of disability service providers working to secure care for the people they support. The group also explored resources such as the National Council on Independent Living’s Barrier Removal Fund and the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services’ (DBHDS) dental program, while discussing emerging solutions like the Children’s Surgery Center as a potential option for expanded sedation services.

VBPD also partnered with the Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University and DBHDS to present at the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) annual conference. The session, “A Collaborative Approach to Understanding and Increasing Access to Oral Health Services for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Virginia,” highlighted the VBPD’s dental assessment findings and recommendations.

Goal 2

This national presentation helped promote several best practices, including strengthening Medicaid oversight, expanding continuing education on disability for dental professionals, and increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates to support provider participation.

Through continued collaboration, information sharing, and education, VBPD is helping build momentum for long-term improvements in oral healthcare access for people with disabilities across Virginia.



Advancing Safety and Quality Through Collaboration

In 2025, VBPD continued working with partners to strengthen systems that protect the safety and rights of people with developmental disabilities.

VBPD staff served on the advisory board for **Linking Outreach, Trust, Understanding, and Safety for People with Disabilities** (formerly the I-CAN! Accessibility Project), led by the Partnership

for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University. This initiative focuses on preventing and responding to domestic abuse affecting people with disabilities. During meetings, VBPD recommended developing a provider toolkit to address concerns within immigrant communities about accessing services—promoting culturally responsive supports. VBPD also encouraged expanded training for service providers on trauma-informed care, a recommendation scheduled for implementation in FFY 2026.

VBPD also participated in the **LINK Center Policy Academy**, which focuses on improving outreach and addressing systemic challenges related to the 988 crisis line. Through this work, VBPD recommended:

- Ensuring outreach materials use plain language and are available in multiple languages. Virginia’s developmental disabilities agency adopted this recommendation for its toolkit materials.
- Increasing transparency by openly discussing barriers affecting the 988 system with stakeholders.
- Tracking and analyzing inappropriate or misdirected calls to better identify unmet needs and inform future solutions.

During the Virginia General Assembly session, VBPD also educated legislators on proposed legislation that would have updated guardianship proceedings to allow a separate determination of an individual’s right to vote—supporting the principle of using the least restrictive options for people with disabilities. While the legislation was ultimately vetoed, the effort helped raise awareness of voting rights and guardianship reform.

Goal 2

Through these collaborations and advocacy efforts, VBPD continues to elevate the voices of people with disabilities while promoting safer, more responsive systems across Virginia.

Monitoring Oversight Trends in Intermediate Care Facilities

VBPD continued monitoring oversight trends affecting Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ICF/IIDs) in Virginia. As of October 2025, more than 95% of ICF/IID certification surveys were overdue, according to the federal Quality Certification and Oversight Reports database—placing Virginia among the states with the highest backlog of overdue surveys. These annual certification surveys are an important tool for ensuring that ICF/IIDs comply with Medicaid requirements regarding health and safety.

To help raise awareness and contribute to solutions, VBPD took several steps during the year:

1. Staff continued meeting with Virginia’s Medicaid agency to explore potential strategies for addressing overdue certification reports.
2. VBPD met with the disAbility Law Center of Virginia to coordinate efforts and identify additional strategies to raise awareness and support accountability.
3. VBPD developed and shared a [policy brief](#) that updates related findings and recommendations from the Council’s 2021 [assessment of ICF/IID oversight](#).

4. VBPD educated 25 members of a statewide health workgroup—including the State Health Commissioner, Virginia Department of Health staff, and nonprofit partners—about the purpose of ICF/IIDs, the importance of ensuring these facilities are included in efforts to strengthen oversight systems, and the opportunity to explore additional oversight tools, such as alternative remedies.

Although many of VBPD’s recommendations have not yet been implemented, the VBPD continues to monitor the situation and collaborate with partners to encourage stronger oversight and accountability—helping ensure the health and safety of people living in these facilities.



James Madison University (JMU)



VBPD continued to track the lasting success of the “Ability First” project with James Madison University (JMU).

This project transformed how rural communities in the Shenandoah Valley approach health and wellness for people with DD. By partnering with local organizations, JMU created inclusive wellness programs that helped both people with DD and their families lead healthier, more active lives.

While the initial grant ended in 2023, VBPD monitored the project through 2025. During 2025, JMU:

1. Continued to promote an awareness and advocacy guide, which aimed to educate people about inclusive wellness opportunities in their area. JMU gave out 13 printed copies and 1,125 electronic copies.

2. Received 39,158 hits to their website, which has resources about inclusive wellness programs, including training videos.
3. 189 wellness instructors used the videos. 93% of the instructors said the videos increased their knowledge, and they would likely create inclusive programs at their organizations. 86% said they began to offer inclusive programs.
4. 127 people with DD and 12 family members started new wellness programs in 2025.

After joining the programs, people with DD reported an average increase of 21% in cardiorespiratory endurance, 16% in strength, 28% in endurance, 77% in social-emotional health, and 98% in quality of life.

3

The **third goal** is for schools and employers to better include people with disabilities.



Promoting Inclusive Education

VBPD continued advocating for inclusive education by participating in **two statewide workgroups** focused on improving special education systems and student outcomes.

State Special Education Advisory Committee

VBPD staff participated in meetings that addressed several important topics, including state performance data, postsecondary success for students with disabilities, support for homeless youth, and Virginia’s special education dispute resolution process.

Commission on Youth – Dispute Resolution Advisory Committee

This committee examined ways to improve Virginia’s special education dispute resolution process. VBPD recommended stronger data collection to support accountability and evaluation, as well as better training for everyone involved in the dispute resolution process.

VBPD also engaged in legislative advocacy during the Virginia General Assembly session, educating **eight legislators** on key issues affecting students with disabilities:

- **Support for military families.** VBPD supported legislation to improve access to special education services for military-connected students. The bill passed.
- **Restorative schools pilot program.** VBPD supported a bill to establish a pilot program promoting evidence-based restorative practices in schools. Although the bill did not pass, the proposal helped advance the conversation about supportive school environments.

Through these efforts, VBPD continues working to ensure that students with disabilities have access to inclusive, supportive learning environments that help them succeed in school and beyond.

Reducing Barriers to Employment

VBPD continued working with partners to expand employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Goal 3

Virginia Ability – Community Advisory Council

VBPD staff participated on the Community Advisory Council for Virginia Ability, a business association that promotes disability inclusion in the workplace. Staff contributed to discussions on connecting employers with qualified candidates with disabilities and volunteered at an RVA Job Fair to share information about employment opportunities and resources.

Employment First Advisory Group

VBPD also participated in the Commonwealth’s Employment First Advisory Group, a cross-agency body that works to advance policies and practices supporting competitive, integrated employment for people with disabilities.

Project PEACE & Project EPIC Workgroup

VBPD took part in a collaborative workgroup focused on improving the transition from school to employment for young people with developmental disabilities. Project PEACE works to strengthen coordination among local systems so youth experience a smoother transition into the workforce, while Project EPIC focuses on eliminating subminimum wage for workers with disabilities. The workgroup explored ways to better align these efforts so students can connect with employment resources earlier and more effectively.

VBPD also provided public comment on a proposed federal rule regarding employment under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act. The VBPD emphasized that people with disabilities represent a strong and capable workforce and

supported efforts to phase out 14(c) certificates so individuals with disabilities have greater access to competitive, integrated employment.

In addition, VBPD staff testified in support of House Bill 1804, which directs Virginia Medicaid to seek federal approval to streamline eligibility determinations for the state’s Medicaid Buy-In program, Medicaid Works. This program allows people with disabilities to work while maintaining critical health coverage. VBPD educated eight legislators on the importance of the bill, which ultimately passed.

Through these partnerships and advocacy efforts, VBPD continues working to remove barriers and expand pathways to meaningful employment for people with disabilities across Virginia.

Strengthening Employment Pathways for Students and Adults

In 2025, VBPD released **two major assessments** focused on improving employment outcomes for people with developmental disabilities: [Pre-Employment Transition Services \(Pre-ETS\)](#) and [Competitive Integrated Employment \(CIE\)](#). The reports were widely shared through the Council’s email listserv, social media channels, and direct distribution to members of the Virginia General Assembly and other policymakers and stakeholders.

Assessment of Pre-Employment Transition Services

This assessment included **10 recommendations** to strengthen transition services for students with disabilities. Most

Goal 3

recommendations focused on improving information and training for families and school staff so they can better support students preparing for employment. Additional recommendations addressed the need for stronger accountability standards and expanded opportunities for students to develop job skills and gain real-world work experience.

Assessment of Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)

The CIE assessment included **7 recommendations** aimed at improving employment outcomes for adults with disabilities. Key themes included maintaining high expectations for employment success, strengthening collaboration across agencies to provide training and supports, and identifying transportation solutions that help people get to and from work.

To make the findings easy to understand and share, VBPD also created **two accessible infographics** in English and Spanish highlighting key recommendations from each assessment. These materials were posted on the VBPD website and shared through social media and the Council's email list to reach a broad audience.

Through these assessments, VBPD continues working to strengthen policies and systems that help people with disabilities prepare for, obtain, and succeed in meaningful employment.



Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services

Starting in late 2024, VBPD began funding a new project with the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). The \$339,680 (\$113,226 matching funds) investment allows more providers to be trained to offer Customized Employment (CE) services. The project aims to increase the ability of people with developmental and other disabilities to obtain competitive, integrated employment and other career goals and opportunities. The project will continue through 2026. During 2025, DARS:

1. Worked with a consulting firm specializing in CE service delivery for individuals with developmental and other disabilities, providing CE training to 12 employment specialists across 5 employment service organizations (ESOs).
2. Utilized an online portal to track 12 employment specialists who enrolled in and received proficiency mentoring services.

3. Actively recruited 9 employment seekers, 5 of whom have DD, to work with a trained ESO staff member to receive CE services.
4. Held 7 bi-monthly technical assistance sessions for participating ESO staff, to provide them with project-related support and assistance.

Next year, DARS will continue to provide mentoring services to the employment specialists at the participating ESOs. In addition, they plan to develop and implement an action plan with ESOs to expand and support best-practice CE service delivery as a core service to individuals with developmental disabilities.

While the formal grant period ends in September 2026, the work doesn't stop there. DARS will continue to track and report outcomes through September 2028.

4

The **fourth goal** is for people with disabilities and their families to be better able to advocate for themselves and others.



Building the Next Generation of Leaders Through the Youth Leadership Academy

VBPD hosted the **Youth Leadership Academy (YLA)** at Virginia State University, bringing together **19 young adults with developmental disabilities** for four days of leadership training, advocacy education, and personal development.

Participants learned from **25 presenters**, many of whom were people with disabilities themselves. Sessions focused on topics such as disability rights history, assistive technology, leadership development, career planning, and self-advocacy.

One of the highlights of the program was Capitol Day, where participants took part in a mock legislative committee hearing with bipartisan legislators, giving them a hands-on opportunity to practice policy advocacy.

Participants reported meaningful growth in knowledge and confidence after completing the program. Many said they gained a stronger understanding of disability rights, leadership skills, and how to speak up for themselves and others. Follow-up surveys also showed that many graduates are already putting these skills into action by participating in advocacy efforts and serving on boards, coalitions, and community groups.

The next Youth Leadership Academy will be held in 2027.

Training Alumni

VBPD continued engaging Training Alumni, which connects graduates of VBPD leadership programs, Partners in Policymaking and the Youth Leadership Academy, with ongoing learning and advocacy opportunities. The program keeps alumni engaged through regular communication, leadership opportunities, and continuing education workshops.

During the year, VBPD partnered with community organizations to host **six continuing education workshops** on topics important to people with disabilities and their families, including:

Goal 4

- Transition options for students and young adults with disabilities
- Financial and legal planning for the future
- The school-to-prison pipeline and disability
- Safeguarding people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Supported decision-making
- Navigating Virginia’s Medicaid HCBS waiver programs

These workshops attracted hundreds of participants from across Virginia, including people with disabilities, family members, advocates, and professionals. Participants consistently reported that the sessions increased their understanding of available resources and helped them feel more prepared to advocate for themselves or others.

VBPD also hosted its annual Training Alumni retreat, bringing together alumni and partners to strengthen connections, share experiences, and help guide future program activities. Participants reported feeling more connected to the disability community and energized to continue their advocacy work.

VBPD invests in leadership development to ensure people with disabilities and their families have the skills, confidence, and opportunities to advocate for themselves and their communities.

Leadership by People with Disabilities

A core principle of VBPD’s training programs is “nothing about us without us.” Whenever possible, people with developmental disabilities serve as presenters and trainers. This year, **15 self-advocates** helped lead trainings, sharing their experiences and expertise with participants.

Hearing directly from leaders with disabilities was especially meaningful for participants. Many reported feeling more empowered and inspired to pursue leadership and advocacy roles themselves.

Continuing the Work

VBPD’s leadership programs and activities are helping build a strong network of advocates across Virginia. Alumni are using the knowledge and skills they gained to participate in community leadership, influence policy discussions, and strengthen the disability movement throughout the Commonwealth.

VBPD will continue expanding opportunities for people with disabilities and families to learn, connect, and lead.

Goal 4: Grants & Investments

1. The Arc of Virginia



Between 2024 and 2025, VBPD funded a \$100,000 grant (\$48,750 matching funds) supporting the voices of Virginians with DD through the ALLY Alliance. In partnership with

The Arc of Virginia, this project was built on a prior grant to continue to build a network of self-advocates in Virginia as leaders in the DD advocacy movement. The Arc of Virginia provided leadership training for self-advocates with DD and for coaches who trained other people with DD.

During 2025, The Arc of Virginia:

1. Provided advocacy skills training to 81 self-advocates with DD, utilizing a previously developed training curriculum. The curriculum provided training on a variety of topics, including how to start, organize, and lead their local self-advocacy groups. 98% of self-advocates with DD who took a survey reported being happy with the training and were more knowledgeable on the training topics and better prepared to lead their self-advocate groups.
2. Coached 11 self-advocates with DD to lead, participate, and engage in self-advocacy work across the state. 100% of self-advocates who took a survey reported being happy with the coaching they received. 100% reported feeling more knowledgeable on how to build, lead, and sustain groups or advocacy activities, as well as more prepared to lead, participate, and engage in the work of self-advocacy across the state.

Because of the grant, six self-advocates spoke to General Assembly representatives about voting rights, provider capacity expansion, and protections for individuals with developmental and other disabilities in the legal system. 12 self-advocates met with 5 legislators to share personal stories about how changes to Medicaid would affect their daily lives.

One self-advocate got a leadership position on the Real Pay for Real Jobs EPIC Local Advisory Council, which advocates for higher pay and integrated employment for individuals with developmental and other disabilities. The Arc of Virginia will continue to track and report outcomes for two years.

2. The Arc of Virginia

VBPD released a new self-advocacy Request for Proposal and awarded a \$100,000 grant (\$48,750 matching funds) to The Arc of Virginia. The new project builds on the work of the ALLY Alliance that began in previous years by:

- Training local advisors,
- Expanding leadership tools,
- Improving access to inclusive materials, and
- Increasing self-advocate influence in policy and community life.

The 18-month project called “From Foundation to Future: Advancing Self-Advocacy Through Local Advisors,” began in October 2025 and will end in March 2027. VBPD will report more on this project next year.

VBPD participated on approximately 18 advisory councils, stakeholder groups and workgroups in FFY 2025:

- Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services No Wrong Door Resource Advisory Council
- Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Employment First Advisory Group
- Department of Education State Special Education Advisory Committee
- Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Provider Issues Resolution Workgroup
- Department of Housing and Community Development Interagency Housing Advisory Committee
- VCU Partnership for People with Disabilities Linking Outreach, Trust, Understanding, and Safety for People with Disabilities (formerly I-CAN! Accessibility Project Advisory Board)
- Virginia Department of Health Advisory Council on Health Disparity and Health Equity
- Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services Medicaid Managed Care Advisory Workgroup
- Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Community of Practice for Supporting Families
- Virginia Ability Community Advisory Council
- Virginia Health Catalyst Policy Committee
- Future of Public Oral Health Taskforce
- Virginia Brain Injury Council
- Community Engagement Advisory Group
- Link Center 988 Policy Academy
- Information Access Steering Committee
- Developmental Disabilities Waiver Advisory Committee
- Autism Advisory Council



**Virginia Board for
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