

INvision

Indiana Division of Disability & Rehabilitative Services Newsletter

A message from the DDRS director

What does returning to a “new normal” mean?



Returning to a “new normal.” What does that mean? As I think about our strategic vision where individuals are the primary driver of their lives, their services and the system, it draws to mind that each of us defines “normal” differently. If the pandemic taught us one thing, it is that we are resilient and there are many means to living our best life. For many, the new normal is less cluttered and chaotic. We have reevaluated what is most important in our lives, and we are redirecting our time and energies.

We recognize our future will continue to include labor shortages and a generation of workers who desire flexible and remote-work options. This factor will challenge us to redefine our traditional service-delivery and support structure. Within DDRS, our new normal includes a redirection of focus from vaccine clinics and COVID reporting to efforts to better support individuals in achieving their vision for a good life, utilizing some of the lessons we learned through the pandemic. Some of those lessons we will carry with us are:

1. The significance and valued role of a direct support professional in supporting individuals and families.
2. The value of technology and technology access in supporting independence and establishing and maintaining relationships.
3. The importance of a team of committed individuals with a shared focused on an individual’s goals.
4. The primary role of family, friends and community in supporting individuals along the trajectory toward their best life.
5. The importance of creative, individualized and unique support strategies.
6. The crucial role of employment as part of a meaningful life.

DDRS is applying an intense focus on redesigning waivers, encouraging and supporting competitive integrated employment, improving and streamlining customer experience across the bureaus housed within DDRS, identifying creative service delivery strategies, increasing stakeholder/peer engagement and supporting self-direction, among many other initiatives. We are returning to the field to better connect with our customers and communities. We will partner with our stakeholders to navigate these new waters and design services and supports that compliment and augment existing strengths and resources. Whatever our new normal, it will continue to include a valued and strong partnership with individuals, families, providers and community partners.

Kelly Mitchell

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STORIES IN THIS NEWSLETTER

- **Bureau bits:** Updates from your First Steps, Bureau of Developmental Disabilities and Vocational Rehabilitation teams.
- **Making the LifeCourse work for you:** Navigating life in a post-COVID world and refocusing our attention back to the path to a good life.
- **News you can use:** There may still be some opportunities for summer camp options throughout Indiana. Indiana Disability Rights and Self-Advocates of Indiana have partnered with the Center for Youth Voice, Youth Choice and are actively searching for Youth Ambassadors.
- **Featured story:** Life after COVID looks different for each of us and should be driven by YOU.
- **Events you don’t want to miss:** The quarterly Building Bridges events create direct avenues for individuals and families to share their feedback.

Telehealth in First Steps: Lessons learned and a plan for the future

As the pandemic continues to affect our whole world, we've all had to learn to do things a bit differently in some cases. This was true with the provision of early intervention services in home and community-based settings.

In the months leading up to 2020, our staff was just embarking on learning what telehealth in early intervention could look like. We searched for articles on policies and procedures regarding telehealth and arranged meetings with a few folks who were already offering this new way of providing services.

And then POW! The pandemic hit and we were thrust into an incredible and quite massive "pilot study." As we were creating our policies to address what our services would look like during COVID-19, we intentionally wrote them to provide flexibility for our personnel but, most importantly, for the families with young children we serve. It was

up to the families, service coordinators and direct service providers to work as a team and decide what was best for everyone. Some families chose to have providers come into their homes throughout the pandemic while others chose to receive services virtually or through a combination of both.

Our state office is eternally grateful for the dedicated personnel and the wonderful families with whom we work for their thoughtful collaboration to ensure all the children in our program continued to receive the services they need and deserve.

Indiana First Steps has a responsibility to ensure that each child eligible for IDEA Part C receives the services written on their Individual Family Service Plan. Typically, eligibility determination team members, service coordinators and direct service providers meet the child in their natural environment whether that be in their home, grandma's home, at child care



or other community setting like the park or library. With the onset of the pandemic and certain quarantine stipulations, home- and community-based services needed to be reviewed and a variety of options offered. Beginning in March 2020, Gov. Holcomb declared a state of public health emergency. This public health emergency authorized that the essential services for children and individuals with disabilities could be provided virtually. This included physical, occupational, speech language and developmental therapies as well as service coordination, nutrition, psychology and social work services.

“As we were creating our policies ... we intentionally wrote them to provide flexibility for our personnel but, most importantly, for the families with young children we serve. It was up to the families, service coordinators and direct service providers to work as a team and decide what was best for everyone.”

On April 30, 2021, Gov. Holcomb signed Senate Enrolled Act 3 into law. This updated telehealth law did several things. It protects the option to continue to receive visits virtually and ensures telehealth visits will be reimbursed through Medicaid and private insurances.

As we move forward, we know that telehealth

and the option of providing services virtually, is here to stay. We now need to take all the data we have gathered during the pandemic and write new and appropriate policies and procedures to employ telehealth best practices so that we can provide coordinated training, information and resources to our early intervention personnel and the families we serve.

If you are interested in being a part of a telehealth workgroup, please [email First Steps](#). Your voice as a parent/guardian and/or another important stakeholder is crucial to what virtual visits look like and how they are provided. We welcome you to join us!

Vocational Rehabilitation

Vocational Rehabilitation helps eligible individuals with disabilities to achieve their employment goals. Participation is voluntary and at no cost to the participant.



Some things that Vocational Rehabilitation may be able to do for you:

- ▶ **Help explore your employment interests and skills**
- ▶ **Help find employment, maintain employment or advance in employment**
- ▶ **Help with educational or training needs**
- ▶ **Provide assistive technology to help meet educational and/or employment goals**
- ▶ **Provide support and advocacy when on the job**

COVID-19 changed the way most agencies conducted business and many of those changes have been incorporated into their current day-to-day operations. Vocational Rehabilitation is no exception. As a result, VR has been able to adapt the way they help individuals by utilizing available technology along with new technolo-

gy. VR counselors were able to conduct intakes and provide vocational guidance and counseling over the phone and virtually and were able to utilize postal mail, email and an e-signature platform to complete necessary paperwork.

With steps in place to help protect applicants, participants, staff and providers, Vocational Rehabilitation was excited to be able to start meeting with individuals in the local VR offices. However, VR has always tried to make its services accessible by meeting with people in their communities and this was much more difficult during COVID-19. VR is excited that many of the schools, libraries and other community agencies they utilize for meetings have opened back up and are welcoming them back into their facilities. VR is now able to provide its services however works best for the individual, whether it be face-to-face or virtually.

For more information, or to apply for services, call your local VR office.

Bureau of Developmental Disabilities Services

As we begin to transition back into society, it is important to think about how the last few years have impacted us and the people we serve. We had to learn how to adapt to help everyone continue to live their best life safely.

One program that adapted and responded extremely well during the pandemic was Indiana's Money Follows the Person program. Although the program has been around since 2007, during the pandemic, MFP was re-organized and has achieved new levels of success. MFP allows individuals to thrive more in a community environment with supports, rather than in an institutional setting. In 2019, Indiana was preparing for the expected end of the Money Follows the Person program and transitioned only nine individuals out of qualifying settings. After Congress extended the program and Indiana reversed course and began to re-energize its program, Indiana transitioned 139 individuals out of qualifying settings in 2020 and 288 in 2021. The transition includes helping locate a place to live, as well as arrange for needed funding for medical, rehabilitative, home health and other services in the community.

As you can imagine, during COVID it was not easy transitioning individuals back into the community, but teams were able to adapt and improve systems by critically thinking the best ways to serve them, including providing efficient online supports. In 2021, the Indiana MFP program began development of a peer-to-peer mentoring program

for MFP participants during their 365 days of MFP participation. The program, now called "My Friend and Peer," is currently in pilot and targeting statewide implementation in the 2022–2023 state fiscal year. As we continue to overcome obstacles and learn new methods, MFP will allow individuals to succeed within our communities moving forward.

There are specific requirements that must be met to qualify:

- ▶ **Must be eligible for and utilizing Medicaid prior to a planned transition into a qualifying community setting.**
- ▶ **Must meet the minimum requirements for a partner funding source such as HCBS waiver program or Medicaid rehab option.**
- ▶ **Must be a current resident of and meet institutional level of care in a qualifying Medicaid-funded setting (such as a skilled nursing facility or supervised group living) and must have been a resident for at least 60 continuous days. Must have needs that can be met safely through services available in the community.**
- ▶ **Must be in a facility for at least 60 days (was previously 90).**

For further information, FAQs and to see if you or someone you may know qualifies, please contact MFP Project Director Richard Propes at 317-234-2736; Division of Aging MFP Liaison Lisa Whitaker at 317-234-3112; or your local Area Agency on Aging or BDSS district office.



Making the LifeCourse work for you

Navigating life in a post-COVID world

Earlier this year, several DDRS staff joined other like-minded individuals with disabilities, family members and professionals from around the country for the annual Life Course Showcase in Kansas City, Mo. This showcase featured a refueling and a renewal to the commitment of the core belief that “all people have the right to live, love, work, learn and play in their community.”

The LifeCourse Framework includes many tools to help with planning for your good life. However, it is important to remember that the tools are not the reason we plan for a good life, but rather how the planning is done. The LifeCourse Framework is the philosophy, and the tools are there to help.

During the COVID pandemic, we had to shift our focus. Many people were simply trying to figure out how to survive and get through the day. We saw many businesses close their doors and the availability of many services dwindled in numbers. Beloved activities were sometimes put aside while many people figured out how to adjust to our new reality. As we certainly can still feel the effects of the pandemic, we are now at a different stage. Businesses are reopening, services are resuming in traditional and in new ways

and community events are taking place again. Now is the time to refocus our attention back to the path to a good life.

How can you do this? Start by asking two simple questions. What is YOUR vision for a good life? What don't you want for your life? Once you know these two things, you can start using the tools to identify the supports you already have, the supports you could put in place and the barriers which may exist and create your plan. If you go to www.lifecoursetools.com, you can find a wide variety of tools to help you work towards your good life.

When you access the LifeCourse Tools website, you can find the Foundational Tools section. This section will lead you to a core set of tools to use for planning, problem-solving and thinking about what you want and what you do not want in your life. These tools can be used by and for anyone, either on your own or with your team. There is no right or wrong way to use these tools. Keep in mind these tools are here to help you find your path to your vision of a good life..



Daily Life and Employment: What a person does as part of everyday life – school, employment, volunteering, communication, routines and life skills.



Community Living: Where and how someone lives—housing and living options, community access, transportation, home adaptation and modification.



Safety and Security: Staying safe and secure—finances, emergencies, well-being, decision making supports, legal rights and issues.



Healthy Living: Managing and accessing health care and staying well—medical, mental health, behavior, developmental, wellness and nutrition.



Social and Spirituality: Building friendships and relationships, leisure activities, personal networks and faith community.



Advocacy and Engagement: Building valued roles, making choices, setting goals, assuming responsibility and driving how one's own life is lived.

For more information on the LifeCourse framework and principles, visit: www.lifecoursetools.com.



NEWS YOU CAN USE

Youth ambassadors wanted

Center on Youth Voice, Youth Choice project

We are excited to share a new opportunity with you. Indiana Disability Rights and Self-Advocates of Indiana have partnered with the Center for Youth Voice, Youth Choice to promote less-restrictive alternatives to guardianship for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We are actively searching for youth ambassadors! Youth ambassadors will begin by learning about the self-advocacy movement, leadership techniques and alternatives to guardianship. Then youth ambassadors will share their own stories and create and implement a community advocacy plan of action. Youth ambassadors will receive a \$750 stipend.

Youth ambassadors are the most important parts of the Center on

Youth Voice, Youth Choice Project! Ambassadors are young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. They are messengers to help people with IDD make more of their own decisions. They will help teach people about supported decision-making and ways to avoid guardianship. They will work together with their state team to make changes that will help their state support people's right to make their own decisions.

Interested in learning more? If you are a Hoosier between the ages of 14 and 26 and have a developmental disability, we want to hear from you! Please visit our [Be a Youth Ambassador](#) website for more details. Also contact Ella Boyd (email: eboyd@arcind.org, phone: 317-224-0242) to let her know that you want to participate.

2022 summer camps throughout Indiana

There may still be some opportunities for summer camp options

Still looking for summer camp options? There may still be some opportunities! Check out these links below for more information.

Anderson Woods

Bristow (Perry County)

www.andersonwoods.org/summer-camp.html

Dates: June and July

Campers learn self-confidence, trust and responsibility through working together, caring for animals, tending the garden and enjoying the beauty of nature.

iD Tech Camp, Purdue University

Lafayette (Tippecanoe County)

www.idtech.com

Dates: June 6-July 22

Online and on-campus options. Code, game and create.

Dunes Learning Center

Chesterton (Porter County)

www.duneslearningcenter.org

Registration is open!

This camp will build skills and friendships that last a lifetime.

Camp Millhouse

South Bend (St. Joseph County)

www.campmillhouse.org

Camp is full but there may be cancellations. Please check the website!

A residential summer camp for children and adults of all ages with varying disabilities.

Virtual Woodwind Academy Online Camp

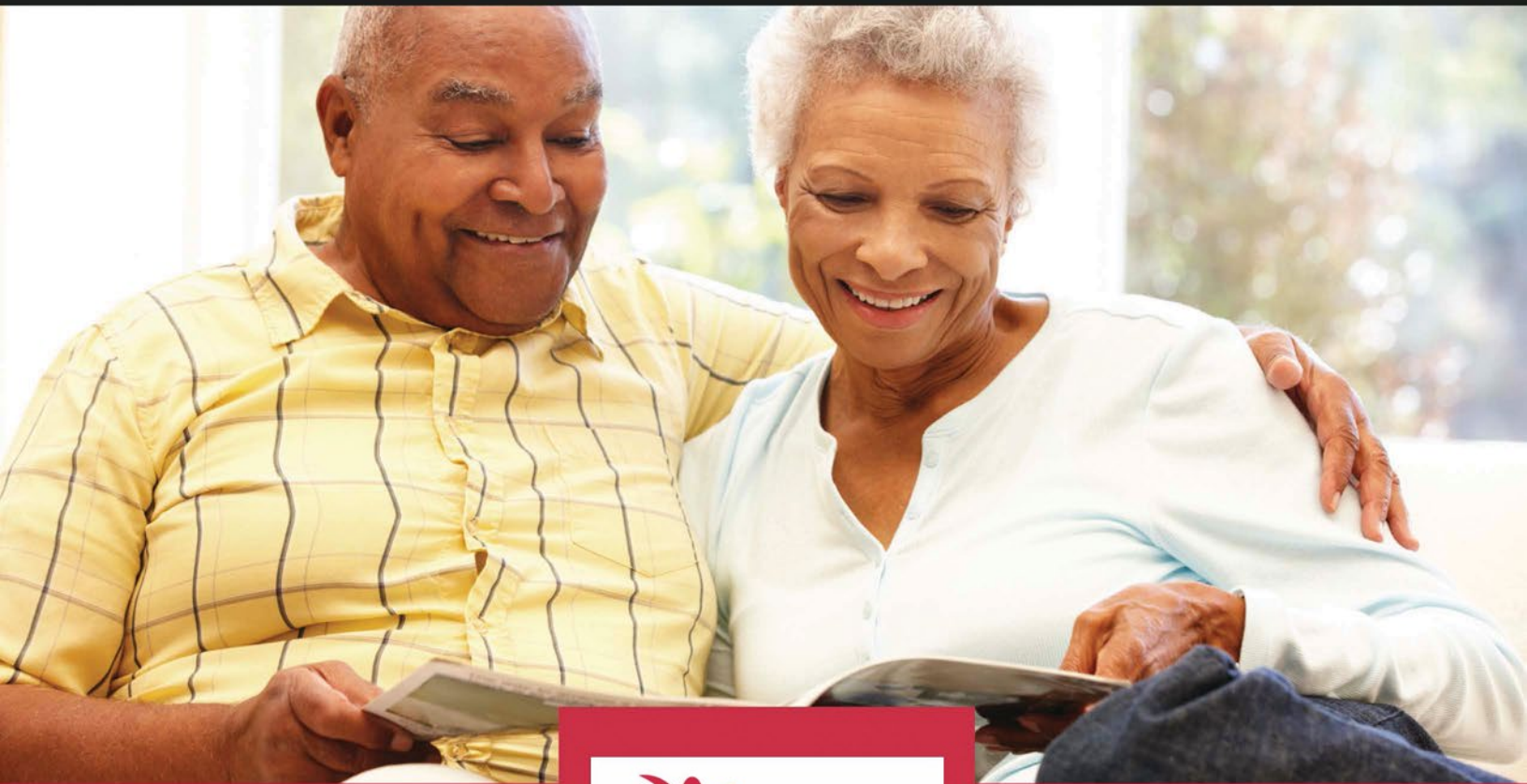
www.virtualwoodwinds.com

Provides students with private lessons, masterclasses, music, educational workshops and the chance to collaborate with like-minded peers.





Benefit Enrollment Center



Now serving Indiana

The Benefit Enrollment Center assists low-income, Medicare or Medicare-eligible Hoosiers due to age or disability in qualifying for the following benefits & more:



Contact us to learn more!

260.250.4154 or BEC@the-league.org

Life after COVID

This new era looks different for each of us and should be driven by YOU

COVID-19 has affected the lives of everyone around the world in a multitude of ways. Not all groups of people have experienced the pandemic equally. While we have undoubtedly not seen the last of COVID-19, we now have tools in our arsenal to help combat the severity of the virus. Testing has become easier to access, vaccines and medications that could decrease the severity and limit a person's time spent in the hospital. Over the past two years, we have had to shift the way we approach most things in our lives so, how has it changed our relationships, activities, health and how we spend our days?

The past two years have reminded us of the importance of human relationships. More than any other issue, the initial effect of the pandemic altered the way we engaged with friends and family. Even for an introvert, there is such a thing as too much isolation. The impact on relationships varied. Some found themselves in greater

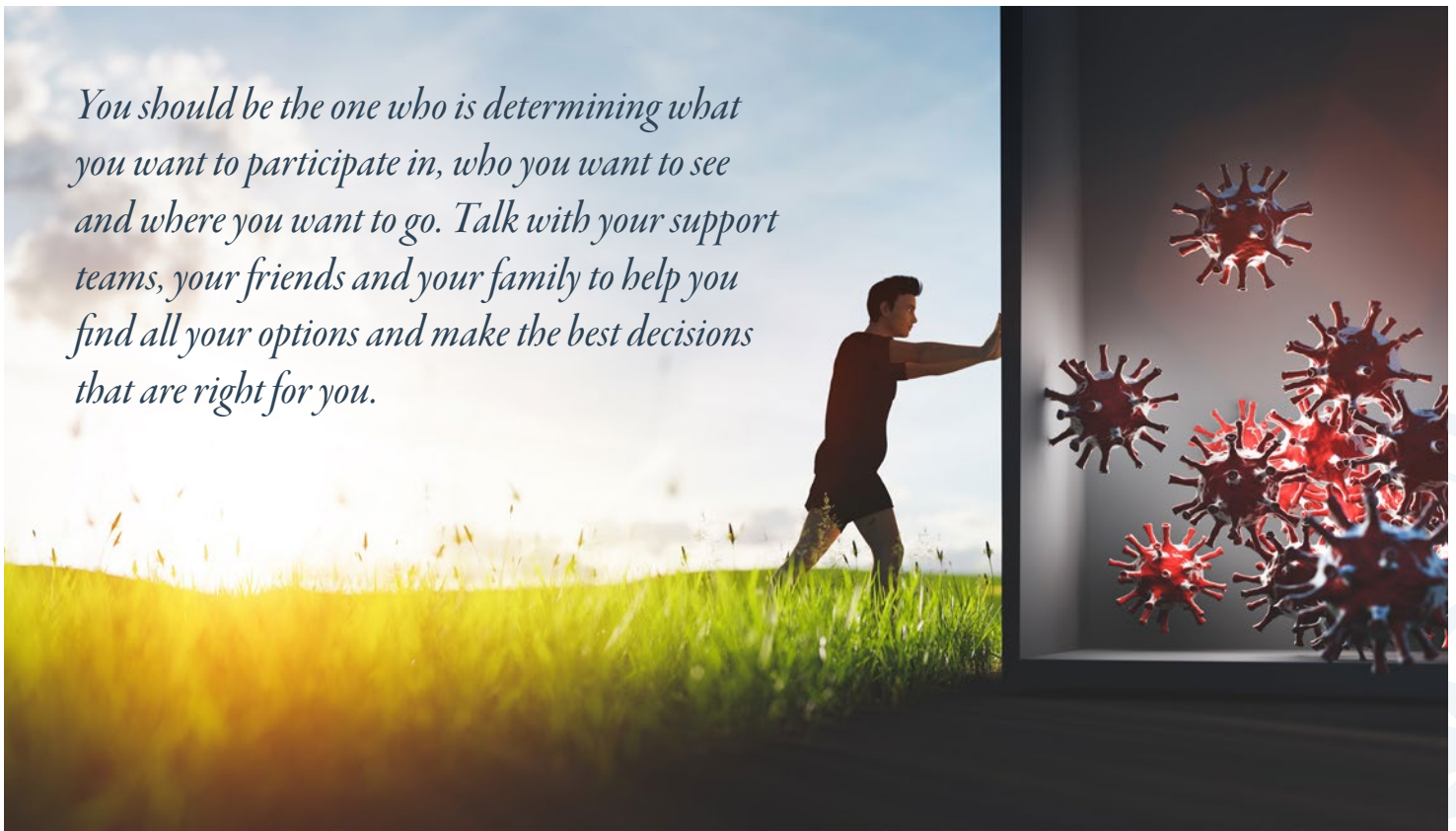
isolation missing their family and friends while others found stronger bonds with the people who are important to them. Some people experienced newly crowded living situations, strained relationships, or the tragic loss of loved ones. At the same time, some discovered positive impacts to their relationships, such as being able to spend more time with spouses, children or other family members. Nationwide travel even changed. Commuting to work or school went away. We welcomed the era of adapting to new technology. We learned we can succeed with telehealth and virtual meetings.

As you resume "normal" activities such as getting back to doing things you enjoy and spending time with the people who are important to you, you may find yourself still struggling in some aspects. It might be hard to find activities or events that interest you that are available, in-person or that you feel safe to attend. This new era looks different

for each of us and should be driven by YOU. You should be the one who is determining what you want to participate in, who you want to see and where you want to go. You may need to consider your current health conditions or the health conditions of those close to you. You may need to consider what is available in your community and how you will be supported to get there, participate and engage in the activities you enjoy. Talk with your support teams, your friends and your family to help you find all your options and make the best decisions that are right for you.

So, what does life look like after COVID-19? Well, it looks different ways to different people. Regardless of one's experience, the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services continues to provide supports that ensure that ALL people have the right to live, love, work, learn, play, participate and pursue their dreams in their community.

You should be the one who is determining what you want to participate in, who you want to see and where you want to go. Talk with your support teams, your friends and your family to help you find all your options and make the best decisions that are right for you.





Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services

Indiana Family and Social Services Administration
Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services
402 W. Washington St., W453/MS 26
Indianapolis, IN 46204

You can sign up to receive this newsletter by [clicking here](#).

For updated meeting information, as well as agendas and past meeting minutes, visit [the DDRS Commissions & Councils page](#).

The Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services is a program of the Indiana Family & Social Services Administration. If you have questions about DDRS programs and services, [visit us online](#).

Did you know that families can sign up to receive text messages and email updates from First Steps? Families will learn more about policy issues, how to become an effective advocate, how to be involved in your local planning and coordinating council, how to connect to events and groups, how to tell your family story and more. Go to [this site to sign up!](#)

EVENTS YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS

Following are the current commission, council and public meetings that you may be interested in learning more about and/or attending in the future. To find the most current information, including next meeting dates and locations, [please click here](#).



Building Bridges

These meetings are an opportunity for families and self-advocates to meet and speak with the Bureau of Developmental Disabilities Services state staff. These sessions are an important part of the Bureau's efforts to create direct avenues for individuals and families to share their feedback. These meetings are solely for families and individuals with disabilities to provide a forum for constructive and valuable conversations on successes or concerns, as well as suggestions or input regarding BDDS programs and services. Keep an eye out for notice of the next scheduled meeting!

INSILC public meeting

The Indiana Statewide Independent Living Council provides oversight of the Indiana State Plan for Independent Living and assists the Centers for Independent Living with the plan's implementation and coordination of services. For more information, visit [the Statewide Independent Living Council webpage](#).

DDRS Advisory Council

The DDRS Advisory Council was established to assist the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services in ensuring that individuals with disabilities are as independent and self-sufficient as possible. The council meets monthly, and meetings are open to the public. For more information, visit the [DDRS Commissions & Councils webpage](#).

ICC meetings

The Interagency Coordinating Council for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities is the state's federally mandated early intervention council. The council is charged with advising and assisting DDRS in its responsibility to develop an early intervention system of the highest quality, balancing family-centered services with fiscal responsibility. The council is comprised of parents, state agency groups, early intervention service providers, legislators and others. The meetings are open to the public.

Until further notice, all future ICC meetings will be held virtually over Zoom. Members of the public are encouraged to attend. A link will be made public prior to each meeting. Should a member of the public need access to the meeting link, special accommodations or interpretative services, please contact Janet Ballard at Jacball@indiana.edu at least two weeks prior to the scheduled meeting. The next scheduled meetings are set for:

- July 13, 2022, 10 a.m. EDT
- Sept. 14, 2022, 10 a.m. EDT

Commission on Rehabilitation Services

The Commission on Rehabilitation Services works with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services' Vocational Rehabilitation Services on matters such as the effectiveness and customer satisfaction with the services provided to individuals participating in the VR program. The commission is also involved in matters affecting VR policies and procedures, goals and priorities, and the state plan. For more information, visit the [DDRS Commissions & Councils webpage](#).