

Biennial Assessment
of the Disability Services System
in Virginia

**VIRGINIA BOARD
FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**
The Commonwealth's Developmental Disabilities Planning Council

April 2008

Biennial Assessment of the Disability Services System in Virginia

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Preface

The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, Virginia's Developmental Disabilities (DD) Planning Council, is pleased to provide its *2008 Biennial Assessment of the Disability Services System in Virginia* (hereafter referred to as *2008 Biennial Assessment*).

Overview: Based on positive constituent feedback about the 2006 edition, the *2008 Biennial Assessment* is similar in content. This assessment focuses on services funded or operated by the Commonwealth that are available from multiple state and local agencies as well as local providers. It devotes a chapter to each of the basic types of services that may be needed by individuals with disabilities across the lifespan: early intervention, education, community living supports, and institutional supports, health and wellness, housing, transportation, employment, and advocacy. For each service category, it details the services provided, eligibility requirements, method of access, cost and payment sources, and quality assurance responsibilities. Following these descriptions, the Board presents identified areas of concern and recommendations for service system improvement with respect to that service area. A reference list, including Web site resources, concludes each chapter. An index is provided to assist readers in locating information on particular services or providers.

A few changes were made for the *2008 Biennial Assessment* as part of the update of material. To reflect growing concerns about government response to natural and other disasters, the Board added a new chapter on emergency preparedness. A list of acronyms for state agencies and programs has also been added. The Executive Summary provides an overview of systemic changes since 2005 by chapter as well as highlights of system progress and areas of concern. For comparative purposes, inclusion and analysis of program data was provided for Fiscal Years 2005 and 2007, whenever available, and in some instances for multiple years. Based on the data received and public comments, the Board updated the areas of concern and developed new or revised earlier recommendations for system improvement.

Scope and Methodology: While the *2008 Biennial Assessment* is more extensive in the breadth and depth of its coverage than the 2006 edition, it is not fully comprehensive and does not address all of the services and programs available to persons with disabilities in Virginia. Pursuant to its federal authority and areas of expertise, its focus is on the population of persons with developmental disabilities. The report does not address services specifically for those with mental illness or substance abuse or services provided to individuals with disabilities who are in juvenile and adult correctional settings. The Board recognizes that other gaps may be identified. Many of the service areas and systems addressed in the assessment, however, affect persons with a variety of disabilities as well, and the concerns and recommendations made in the report are relevant to the broader population of persons with disabilities.

Development of the Assessment began with a public comment process. Public comment was solicited both on the *2006 Biennial Assessment* and on the current state of the disability services system by a variety of methods over a ten-week period. Public comment by regular and electronic mail as well as by phone was solicited through the Board's newsletter, its extensive electronic digest, and its Web site from March 23 to June 1, 2007. The Board was also attentive, however, to public comments received after that time period. During April and May 2007, Board staff members conducted public comment events in six localities statewide: Petersburg,

Fairfax County, Winchester, Hampton, St. Paul, and Danville. A total of 83 individuals attended the public comment events; and of those, 40 provided additional comments by completing evaluation forms that provided the opportunity to identify priority concerns and recommendations about the service system. Written public comment was also received by mail from 15 individuals and 7 disability advocacy groups. Comments by phone were received from 3 other individuals.

To develop the chapter content, Board staff members conducted a comprehensive review of current programmatic, funding, and service information, available data for Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007; and changes in agency regulations and statutes since FY 2005. Information included in this Assessment was gathered from multiple sources, including, but not limited to: planning and performance reports, task force reports, legislative studies, state and federal laws and regulations, agency policies and strategic plans, and state agency and advocacy organizational Web sites. Data and information from major national reports were reviewed and included, as indicated. Letters requesting the most current data and information were sent to each state agency and ongoing contact was maintained with state agency representatives assigned to provide their agency's information and data as part of the Assessment.

The Board established an ad hoc committee to work with staff members throughout the Assessment process. This committee met four times and reviewed all of the public comment received as well as the information and data presented in the Assessment. Based on thorough review and discussion, the committee determined the areas of concern and recommendations to be presented for each service area; and the full Board revised and approved those prior to completion of this final report. Decisions regarding the concerns and recommendations to be included were consistent with the values and tenets of the Developmental Disabilities and Bill of Rights Act, which requires that Developmental Disabilities Councils engage in activities “*which contribute to a coordinated, consumer- and family-centered and directed, comprehensive system of community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that enable individuals with developmental disabilities to exercise self-determination, be independent, be productive, and be integrated and included in all facets of community life.*”

Acknowledgments: It is important for the Board to end this preface with appreciation to all those who contributed to the process and product. Information, assistance, and cooperation were provided by a host of individuals both inside and outside of government. The Board is especially grateful to the state agency officials and staff members who worked with the Board and responded to numerous requests for information, data, and content reviews. Their assistance in providing an accurate, comprehensive view of state-funded services as well as identifying areas of concern was invaluable. The Board also wants to thank all the individuals with disabilities, advocates, and others who provided public comment to us—your feedback is greatly appreciated.

Despite our collective best efforts, there may be undetected errors or important issues that have been left unaddressed. The Board encourages readers of this edition to call these to its attention. The Board will make every effort to correct any errors or deficits in future editions.

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