

Eligibility, Autism-Only Diagnosis, & The Process

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Meet Patty

- Independent Service Coordination
- Suburban Access

Welcome & Learning Objectives

1

PUNS

Enrollment + category
+ annual updates

2

Eligibility

Diagnosis +
developmental impact
+ state criteria

3

Selection

Funding becomes
available; DDD sends
selection notice

4

After Selection

Clinical eligibility,
planning, waiver
enrollment



Who Is the Illinois DDD System Designed to Serve?

What is an HCBS Waiver?

A waiver is a program that provides services that allow individuals to remain in their own homes or live in a community setting, instead of in an institution. Illinois has nine HCBS waivers. Each waiver is designed for individuals with similar needs and offers a different set of services.

Who is eligible for a HCBS Waiver?

Individuals must be U.S. citizens or legal residents of the state of Illinois;

Individuals must meet Medicaid financial eligibility criteria as specified in each waiver;

Individuals must require an institutional level of care as specified in each waiver;

Individuals' service needs must be able to be provided in the waiver at a cost equal to or less than the cost for institutional care; and

Individuals must meet any other requirements, such as age or diagnosis requirements, specific to the waiver program.



What is PUNS?

- Statewide database used by IDHS DDD
- Identifies individuals needing services now (Seeking Services) or later (Planning for Services)
- Supports planning for developmental disability services
- Being on PUNS does not by itself mean that a person is clinically eligible for a waiver or that services have been awarded.

Getting on the PUNS List

Think of the ISC as a guide through eligibility, PUNS, planning, service coordination, and connection to the DDD system.

Important

The ISC does not guarantee funding. It helps determine eligibility, document needs, coordinate the process, and support informed choice.

IDHS PUNS FAQ: <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=85196>

HOW TO ENROLL:



<https://bit.ly/DDDISCAgency>

1. Contact an Independent Service Coordination (ISC) Agency

- Locate an ISC Agency by phone:
1-888-DD-PLANS (TTY: 1-866-376-8446).
- Use the online IDHS office locator:
<https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?module=12>
 - Office Type: Developmental Disability Services
 - Enter county (and zip code if searching in Cook County)

2. Meet with the ISC Agency

Staff from the ISC agency will help complete the PUNS forms for enrollment. They will ask about things such as disability, current supports, and what may be needed in the future.

PUNS

Planning for Services

- Future need
- Not currently seeking waiver supports
- Helps DDD plan for future demand
- Time in Planning does not function as the adult selection clock

Seeking Services

- Current need or desire for supports
- Active category for adult waiver selection
- Selection depends on funding and state process
- Keep information updated with the ISC



Why the Category Matters

Key question for families

“Which PUNS category are we in right now—and does it accurately reflect our current need?”

2026 snapshot

On July 10, 2026, DDD mailed 965 PUNS selection letters and selected eligible adults with more than 43 months in Seeking Services.

Remember

Selection activity changes. Do not use an old estimate as a promise of when an individual will be selected.

Understanding Autism-Only Eligibility

Autism-only does not mean “services automatically.”

Autism can be an eligible target subgroup. The state still looks at the person’s developmental disability, functional support needs, and required level-of-care criteria.

Remember

The diagnosis opens the conversation.

The assessment tells us whether the person meets the program’s eligibility requirements.

Diagnosis vs. Eligibility

1

Diagnosis

Clinical diagnosis
of ASD

2

DDD Eligibility

Developmental
disability criteria +
assessment

3

Level of Care

ICF/IID-level
needs are
evaluated

4

Waiver

Program-specific
requirements and
funding

Six Major Life Skills Areas

- Self-Care
- Language
- Learning
- Mobility
- Capacity for Independent Living
- Self Direction

**Think about “What support is needed?”
Then ask, “What happens without it?”**

**Missed routines or health risks?
Unable to communicate needs?
Wandering/unsafe situations?
Isolation or loss of participation?
Caregiver cannot sustain support?**

What Evidence Helps Tell the Story?

- Current diagnostic evaluation and developmental history
- Functional information: communication, adaptive/self-care, safety, mobility, behavior, community participation
- School/transition records when applicable
- Medical history, medication review, physical exam, and other assessments as requested
- Concrete examples of support needed across settings

Best practice

Use specific examples: “needs prompts and hands-on help with...” is more useful than “has difficulty with...”



A Simple Family Example: Maya

Maya today

17-year-old with autism-only diagnosis. Family provides extensive daily support.

Family's concern

"What will support look like after high school?"

- Document current functional support needs.
- Begin transition planning early.
- Ask the ISC what documentation is needed.
- Keep PUNS information current.



A Simple Family Example: Marcus

What changed?

The family's support capacity changed, and Marcus now needs formal supports.

Action

Contact the ISC and request a PUNS review/update.

- Describe the current need—not only the diagnosis.
- Ask which PUNS category reflects the current situation.
- Document the date of any category change.
- Keep annual updates and contact information current.

Selection: What Does the Letter Mean?

1

Selection Letter
DDD notifies the individual

2

Contact ISC
Begin the application/planning steps

Pre-Admission Screening (PAS)

3

Eligibility
Complete required clinical/level-of-care work

4

Planning
Develop the person-centered plan and service choices

PUNS

Tracks the person for DDD service planning and potential selection.

Medicaid

A separate eligibility requirement may apply to waiver enrollment.

Waiver

Pays for authorized HCBS supports under the applicable waiver.

Documentation

- Referral / assessment begins through the appropriate ISC/PAS process.
- Developmental disability and functional needs are evaluated.
- ICAP is required for waiver applicants.

It helps the system understand how much assistance a person needs in everyday functioning and planning for services.

- Medical review and other assessments may be required.
- The assessment supports a level-of-care determination and service planning.

Important Note:

PAS asks: "Does this person meet the state's level-of-care and eligibility requirements for the program being considered?"

Bring real life examples. Think about an ordinary week – not only the person's best day.

Suggested but not limited Document List

Always check with your PAS agent (ISC)

Apply for Medicaid

Social Security

Medical record that show diagnosis and age of onset (ID, DD, Related)

School records (example: Individualized Education Plan - IEP)

Psychological Evaluations as available

Psychiatric evaluations for people with Autism ONLY

Medication list and doctor's contact information as annual physical

Guardianship papers or Power of Attorney as applicable

After Clinical Eligibility: Person-Centered Planning

- Start with the person's strengths, preferences, goals, and routines.
- Identify support needs across home, work/day, community, and relationships.
- Consider home-based and residential options as appropriate.
- Explore providers only after identifying the support outcomes you want.
- Use informed choice: compare options and ask questions.

Guiding question

"What kind of life does this person want—and what supports would make that life possible?"



Examples of DDD Waiver Supports

Personal Support

Community Day Services

Supported Employment

Transportation

Assistive Technology

Home Modifications

Behavior Supports

Residential Habilitation

Caregiver Training

Therapy Services

Self-Direction

Temporary Assistance

Important

Services are based on assessed needs, the approved waiver, the person-centered plan, and program rules.



Crisis Situations: Don't Wait in Silence

If the situation is changing fast

Call the ISC and clearly say: "We believe this is a crisis situation and need to discuss the available process."

- Possible housing loss or imminent homelessness
- Abuse, neglect, or serious caregiver breakdown
- Rapid change in the person's support needs
- Other circumstances creating an immediate safety/support concern

Emergency ≠ PUNS wait

PUNS selection and crisis response are different pathways. Ask the ISC which pathway applies.

Common Myths—and the Better Answer

- MYTH: “Autism-only means automatic eligibility.” → FACT: Autism is an included target subgroup, but assessment criteria still apply.
- MYTH: “PUNS is the service.” → FACT: PUNS is the database used for planning and selection.
- MYTH: “Planning and Seeking are interchangeable.” → FACT: They represent different current/future needs.
- MYTH: “IEP = Medicaid waiver.” → FACT: School services and DDD waiver services are separate systems.
- MYTH: “Selection = funding is already active.” → FACT: Selection begins the next eligibility and planning steps.

1 • KNOW

PUNS category + ISC contact

2 • DOCUMENT

Needs + goals + records

3 • CONNECT

ISC + official resources



Questions Families Should Ask the ISC

- What category are we currently in?
- What is our recorded date in Seeking Services, if applicable?
- What documentation or assessments are still needed?
- What should we do if our family circumstances change?
- When is our next PUNS update?
- Who do we call after receiving a DDD selection letter?
- What should we be doing now to prepare for transition or selection?

Build a One-Page PUNS Face Sheet

Who is the person? What do they do well? What support do they need? What changes are coming?

Advocacy tip

Ask for important answers in writing when possible, and keep copies of your records.

Know your PUNS status. Document the person's needs and goals. Connect with your ISC and keep moving forward.



Transition Planning: Start Before the Last School Year

- Begin adult-service conversations before graduation.
- Confirm PUNS status and category.
- Ask the ISC what assessments will be needed.
- Explore employment/day and residential options early.
- Coordinate school transition planning with adult-service planning.
- Keep benefits and Medicaid planning on the same calendar.

Goal

No cliff at graduation: build the next chapter before the current one ends.



2026 Illinois PUNS Snapshot

July 10, 2026

965 PUNS selection letters mailed.

Selection threshold reported

Eligible adults with more than 43 months waiting in Seeking Services were selected.

Use caution

This is a point-in-time snapshot—not a promise of future selection timing.

Source

IDHS DDD Communication • July 16, 2026



Resources & Source Notes

IDHS PUNS FAQ: <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=85196>

HFS Adults with Developmental Disabilities HCBS: <https://hfs.illinois.gov/medicalclients/hcbs/dd.html>

HFS Children & Young Adults DD Supports: https://hfs.illinois.gov/medicalclients/hcbs/support_cyadd.html

IDHS DDD 2026 Communications: <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=179826>

Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities: <https://icdd.illinois.gov/>

Illinois Life Span / The Arc of Illinois PUNS Basics: <https://www.illinoislifespan.org/the-arc-of-illinois-fact-sheets/puns/>

Primary PUNS FAQ: <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=85196>

Helpline

1-888-DD-PLANS • TTY 1-866-376-8446

Questions & Conversation

Thank you to our presenter!

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Presenter note

Information is educational and may change. For an individual determination, work with the appropriate ISC/PAS agency and verify current state requirements.