

Good morning, I'm Arzu Forough and I'm the president and CEO of Washington Autism Alliance & Advocacy. I live in the 45th legislative district. I am a parent of 2 adult sons on the autism spectrum, level 3 and level 1.

What is the role of WAAA?

We expand access to healthcare, education and services for people with neurological disorders including autism in Washington State.

Washington State has an estimated 130,000 children, youth, adolescents and adults living with ASD - nearly half of them are from low-income families.

WAAA provides a range of advocacy services to help adults, youth, and children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other neurological disorders throughout the State of Washington gain access to health, educational services, and other needed supports.

What are the biggest challenges facing children and adults with autism and their families?

Access to care and services to ensure individuals grow up to their full potential and live productive lives in adulthood. This is especially true in rural areas and for low income families, even in urban areas.

Supported Employment services are dismal.

<https://washingtonautismadvocacy.org/employment-and-community-inclusion/>

In 2018, the **Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC)** staff analyzed client data and found that Individual Supported Employment accounted for:

- 82% of total service expenditures (\$54.7m) on Developmental Disabilities

- 80% of working age adults with developmental disabilities are not employed (only 6885 individuals with developmental disabilities were employed statewide at the time of the study)
- They worked an average of **46 hours per month** and earned an **average wage of \$583**.
- Only 672 people statewide earned a living wage (i.e., more than the federal poverty level). Those with high support needs worked an average of 13 hours per month or less.
- AND the supported employment agencies are earning an average of \$950 per year per person more than the person with the disability. That adds up to over 6.53 million dollars more in earnings for the agencies than the persons with disabilities.

Employment services help clients with Developmental Disabilities (DD) find and maintain jobs that match their goals and skills. Community inclusion helps clients develop skills, foster independence, and form relationships with non-disabled community members.

Reimbursement rate caps are structured in a way to incentivize individual employment over community inclusion:

Individual employment= \$75/hour

Community inclusion = \$35/hour

Additional funding and support services are available ONLY to clients enrolled in individual employment, but not Community Inclusion.

In addition, supported living agencies are often ill equipped to meet the sensory and behavioral needs of those with level 3 autism who need line of sight 24/7 support.

- What does WAAA see across the state as best supports for those who do not qualify for DDA services? What other ways are there to access services?

Health benefits are often overlooked. Parents, providers and advocates alike assume school services are the only entitlement program. Health benefits to access neurodevelopmental, behavioral and mental health services are often overlooked and not maximized.

- Do counties play a role in addressing unmet needs? Have you seen any creative ideas that should be replicated?

They could, especially with supported employment . Yes, King County's supported employment program, promotes hiring and retaining employees with developmental disabilities.

- Are there specific goals that should be met in high school to support a more positive transition to post-secondary activities?

Yes, starting the conversations early about employment, housing and transportation, and not during the senior year, to ensure there's effective

community based contextual learning to prepare individuals to live productive lives after graduation

- **What role do you think the Developmental Disabilities Council could play in addressing these challenges?**

Bringing stakeholders together to ensure there's consensus among

ABest practice guidelines recommend remediation programs that are effectively designed and delivered by the medical community, therapy providers, families, schools and other providers, working well together & achieving consensus.