

NEW DISABLED SOUTH

Finding Imbalance of Treatment in Georgia's HCBS Waiver Waitlist:

What the New Options Waiver Program and Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program waiver waitlist can tell us about the imbalance of treatment in services for Georgians with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities.

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Introduction

Racial Disparity is a general issue in public healthcare. This is a difference of treatment between races. Research shows a difference of treatment between individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and non-disabled adults and children who are white versus people who are black.

Research shows that Black people with Intellectual and developmental disabilities have a higher rate of death (1.56) compared to White people (1.06).

Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disability who are in racial and ethnic minority groups experience increased exposure to harmful community determining factors of health.

To understand and advocate for fair policies and services, we must look at the intersection between race and intellectual developmentally disabled status, and how these factors impact a person's ability to receive proper services and care.

Most available research on difference in treatment among between races and ethnicities in children and adults with

Intellectual and Developmental Disability is conducted at the national level.

Thorough review of statewide activity is missing important details and facts, particularly in the southern region of the United States. We chose to examine the ethnic and racial difference in treatment for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities attempting to use public healthcare in the state of Georgia.

In the state of Georgia, Home and Community Based Services waivers is a critical lifeline for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. This waiver allows disabled people to stay in their own homes.

There are significant differences in treatment in the distribution and utilization of these waivers, more so in access and availability based on race. This report explores the experiences and challenges faced by various racial groups, with a focus on Black/African Americans, in accessing essential care and services. This report seeks to initiate informed discussions and advocate for a more just and inclusive approach to providing vital support to all Georgians, regardless of their racial background.

The Problem

Georgia's New Option Waiver Program and Comprehensive Support Waiver Program are Medicaid waivers to help assist with essential services to individuals in their own homes and communities. These waivers aim to promote an alternate way of receiving care instead of nursing homes and institutional settings. Currently, there is a waiting list of more than 7,000 people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities who might receive the necessary resources enabling them to live comfortably, independently, and within their communities. Among Georgians

with Intellectual and Developmental Disability who have a Medicaid waiver, 68.6% are receivers of the Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program, while the remaining 31.4% are enrolled in the New Options Waiver program.

There is a notable difference in the figures when studying the waitlist for New Options Waiver/Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program. 99% of individuals on the waitlist are awaiting a New Options Waiver, while 1% are waiting on a Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program waiver. Recipients of the Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program waivers are recognized by the state as possessing more severe disabilities and requiring a higher level of care, however, there is a significant difference in numbers. This is significant as we look into an examination of the breakdown of racial groups of both the New Options Waiver/Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program waitlist and the list of receivers.

Breakdown of racial groups of New Options Waiver/Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program

Note: The third largest group on the waitlist was grouped as "Unknown/Refused", representing approximately 25% of the remaining list. The remaining racial groups did not have a significant enough representation to conduct a complete analysis.

Evidence consistently shows significant racial differences in access to appropriate and fair healthcare services for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disability. Black people often encounter a range of challenges, including limited access to diagnostic tools, delayed identification of disabilities, and a lack of culturally sensitive care. These obstacles not only delay timely diagnosis and intervention but also delay the supply of individual

support and resources needed for successful management and improved quality of life.

Racial prejudices within the healthcare system can lead to unequal treatment, not enough attention to unique needs, and a lack of awareness about the cross section of race and disability. These systematic disparities reflect broader societal imbalances and require a stronger effort to address and fix the racial injustices within the field of Intellectual and Developmental Disability care.

During the more in-depth examination of the racial composition of the New Options Waiver/Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program waiver waitlist, specific restrictions were established for our investigation. For most of our analysis, we focused on racial categories that exceeds 5% of Georgia's population and more than 10% of the state's waiver receiver or waitlist population. As a result of the existence of an additional category labeled as "Unknown/Refused" which meets the criteria, our attention has been directed solely towards Black/African American and White/Caucasian people with Intellectual and Developmental Disability residing in Georgia.

We identified a significant gap of 15.28% between individuals of Black and White races who qualified for an Intellectual and Developmental Disability waiver in Georgia. While this finding is concerning, there is not enough data to show how far this difference shows itself within the waitlist.

One of the biggest concerns we have noticed regarding the New Options Waiver/Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program waitlist is the lengthy time individuals spend on the waitlist. Currently, more than 60% of the individuals on these waitlists have been on them since 2019 or even earlier. The state of Georgia recognizes that these services are necessary for individuals with Intellectual

and Developmental Disability so why is it that there is so many people waiting? It is true that at least 4,213 people requiring home and community-based services have been denied access to this right for a period of at least four years.

When looking at the specific groups of people on Georgia's waiver waitlist, you notice that there are 27.9% more Black Georgians waiting for waivers compared to white disabled people. The unequal representation of Black people on the waiver waitlist proves systemic hurdles within the public healthcare system that delay their ability to access and navigate necessary services.

With a large portion of the funding set towards the Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program waiver, most individuals on the waiver waitlist want to sign up for the New Options Waiver Program. A large amount of those who have received waivers are participants in the Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program. It is obvious that there is a higher representation of Black individuals both on the waitlist for a New Options Waiver and as receivers of New Options Waivers.

Black individuals consistently have a higher number of people on the waitlist compared to white people. The biggest difference is seen in the age groups of 25-34 and 34-44, with percentage differences of 44.5% and 67.6%.

White individuals account for a significantly higher percentage than Black recipients. For the age ranges of 25-34 and 34-44, there is a percentage difference of 13% and 4.5%. The percentage difference for the age range of 18-24, where there is a 40.63% advantage for white receivers. For the same age range, Black people are the majority on the waitlist with an 11.4% difference.

The state of Georgia does not have the intention of purposely withholding services from Black residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities. However, differences in treatment exist within the system. By acknowledging and addressing this, we can work towards creating more just policies and strategies.

Georgia currently has a \$10 billion extra in their state budget. A fraction of this extra amount, specifically less than 1%, would be needed to fund 1/3 of the waitlist. This extra amount creates an opportunity to give more to important public services and infrastructure. This confirms a higher standard of living for Georgia's residents. In theory, the state has the financial ability to cover the entire waitlist for less than 2% of this surplus, pointing out the possibility for investments in crucial areas such as healthcare, education, and social welfare.

The state's spending for New Options Waiver/Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program has grown every year since 2019. The state recently had an increase in spending on its Medicaid waiver program, allowing \$15 million to support close to 1000 waivers. However, it is not enough to meet the demand, despite the state's ability to invest more.

Also, it is important that we talk about the lacking pay amounts for our caregivers in the state. A major challenge faced by individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disability is the difficulty in finding a caregiver even after being approved for a waiver after years of waiting. This is mainly because caregivers in the state are currently being paid well below a fair and livable wage.

Currently, Georgia offers a pay rate of \$10 an hour for Direct Service Providers. However, the Bureau of Economic Analysis shows that the cost of living in Georgia amounts to \$43,482 annually, with housing costs ranging from \$1,084 to \$1,957 per month. Unfortunately, at a \$10 per hour wage, our Direct Service

Providers are earning only \$1,600 a month, assuming they can work full-time hours.

Disability justice advocates and organizations have consistently fought for a pay raise for Direct Service Providers to a minimum of \$18 per hour. This request, totaling a possible spending of \$91 million, represents less than 1% of the current extra budget money in the state of Georgia. Although it is good that the state has decided to put more funds towards making the waitlist smaller, it is important for the state to take a complete approach to this matter. This should include a wage that enables them to maintain a decent standard of living and promotes fairness in compensation.

Georgia could solve this issue by giving additional money to New Options Waiver/Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program within the state. Georgia has the necessary financial resources to sufficiently meet the needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.