



Office for People With Developmental Disabilities



Front Door Process Report

February 2016



NYS OFFICE FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES FRONT DOOR

OPWDD was required by the New York Legislature to provide information about the agency's Front Door, to include the nature of information available on the agency's website, general information about the Front Door process, the extent to which the Front Door improves community education and available service options, and connects individuals to services and enhanced opportunities for self-direction. Information was also to be provided regarding the approach for determining priority residential placements.

Introduction and Overview

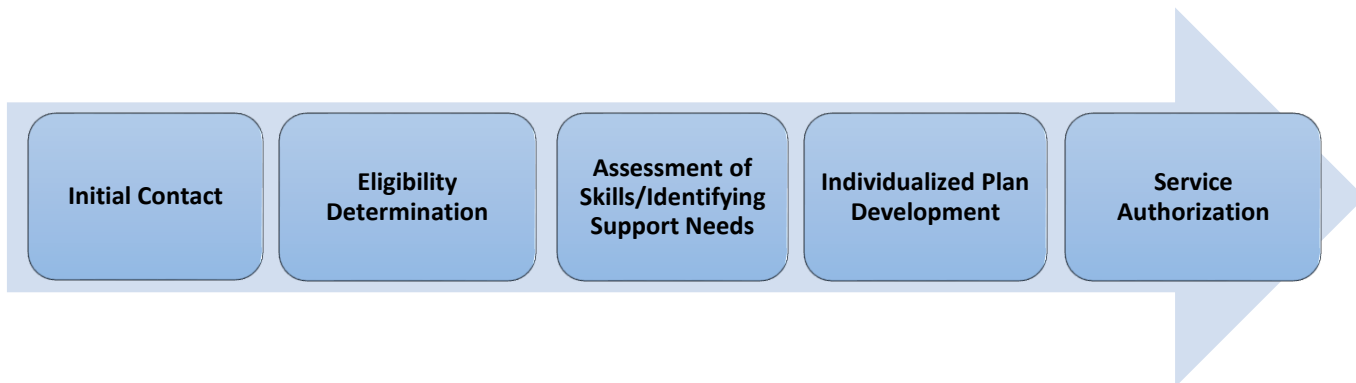
In June 2013, OPWDD launched the Front Door, a major initiative designed to provide a truly person-centered approach with individuals to determine their unique wants and needs. A person-centered approach has been found to enrich the lives of people with developmental disabilities. The ability to establish personal outcomes has resulted in individuals enjoying more meaningful relationships with friends and family, better health, personal growth, and more independence and community involvement.

Prior to the establishment of the Front Door, there was no centralized point of contact for OPWDD services, and no consistent state-wide approach to access services. The Front Door was established to create this consistency, and to adopt the more unified approach which is now defining most service delivery models.

The purpose of the Front Door is to promote self-determination and choice, and ensure supports are provided in the most integrated setting possible. The Front Door strives to improve the way people learn about OPWDD and available service options, better connect individual needs to available services, and give people as many opportunities as possible for self-direction. The Front Door encompasses activity from the point of initial contact through authorization of services. In the first year of implementation more than 16,000 individuals were assisted through the Front Door.

Figure 1. The Front Door Process

(Please also see Attachment A: Front Door Process Chart)



The intent of the Front Door is to offer a consistent, statewide approach so individuals have the same experience no matter where they start their inquiry. Staff, the individual and family members review information about eligibility and discuss the person's interests, skills, needs, and goals in order to help them identify the nature of the supports needed. A service coordinator from a voluntary provider agency is typically involved in these conversations. The individual may have already been working with a service coordinator prior to approaching OPWDD; if not, OPWDD provides a list of agencies which provide service coordination services, and the family can choose which organization they feel will best assist them. OPWDD staff explains potential service options and how they can meet the individual's needs. This includes self-directed service options, employment, housing opportunities and day programs, among others. OPWDD staff and the service coordinator help the person develop a service plan, and the service coordinator assists the individual in requesting the supports and providers that will best meet his or her needs. The services requests are reviewed by OPWDD. The individual identifies a provider for those services approved and enrolls.

Each OPWDD Regional Office has at least one Front Door Team comprising of individuals knowledgeable in intake, enrollment, self-direction, employment, housing, service planning, budgets/funding, and the wide array of non-OPWDD services available to the individual. Front Door staff received initial training prior to the implementation of the Front Door in processes and skills including: initial contact, eligibility, communication skills, assessing need, and self-direction.

Front Door Changes

Since its initial implementation, changes have been made to the Front Door process to better respond to the needs of individuals seeking services. Modifications were made in early 2014, and in June 2014 more than 100 OPWDD staff from across the state, including Front Door staff and staff from many other OPWDD units and divisions who interact with the Front Door,

attended a two-day training in Troy, NY. The purpose of the training was to review existing and updated Front Door procedures as outlined in a newly developed Front Door Procedure Manual and highlight critical topics such as eligibility, self-direction, assessment, and service approvals.

Throughout 2014, OPWDD continued to assess and refine the Front Door experience. A workgroup with representatives from provider associations was convened for the purpose of recommending additional improvements necessary to ensure a positive experience for those coming to the Front Door. This group has since been expanded to include representatives of provider agencies and continues to provide feedback to OPWDD about the Front Door. Based upon the recommendations of this original work group, as well as on the experiences of Front Door staff, changes were made to enhance quality, streamline Front Door processes and expedite delivery of services to individuals. In the fall of 2014, a series of training sessions were held across the state to introduce these changes to OPWDD Front Door staff in all OPWDD regions. In addition, information sessions about the changes were held for representatives of provider organizations.

Below is a summary of the key modifications and steps taken since initial implementation:

- Identification of several services that can be addressed through an abbreviated Front Door process;
- Development of and subsequent updates to a Front Door Manual providing comprehensive guidance to Front Door staff and including standardized forms and communication tools;
- Reorganization of the Front Door process into specific steps with identified, targeted time frames;
- Redevelopment and improvement of informational materials, including a new “Access to Services Manual” aimed at individuals and families, to ensure clear and understandable messages are provided;
- Transfer of the responsibility of developing some requirements previously managed by entities external to OPWDD (for example a preliminary service plan and part of the eligibility assessment) to the Front Door in order to reduce time involved;
- Development of a Service Amendment process so that individuals already receiving services, but seeking changes in those services, would not need to complete the more comprehensive standard Front Door process necessary for most individuals new to OPWDD;
- Development of a Front Door Video as a mechanism to present the content of the Front Door Information Session attended by individuals new to OPWDD. This video, which was developed with input and review by the Developmental Disabilities Advisory Council, will be launched in early 2016.



Improvements continue to be developed in data collection tools, metrics, and quality review in order to present a positive experience to individuals seeking support. A significant redesign of a tracking system, with enhanced reporting capabilities, was implemented in November 2015.

FRONT DOOR STAFF TRAINING AND PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

In order to ensure Front Door staff in all regions of the state have the knowledge and skills necessary to best support individuals and their families seeking services, various training methodologies and information sharing mechanisms are employed. Front Door staff regularly participate in local and regional staff meetings and trainings. Monthly state-wide conference calls are held to review issues and practices, and to provide informational or process updates. An internal e-mail box is available for staff to request information about specific situations or processes. In-person trainings have been provided, both regionally and state-wide. Based on feedback from the Transformation Panel, additional comprehensive in-person staff trainings to include such topics as Front Door processes, communication skills, and person-centered planning will be held in 2016.

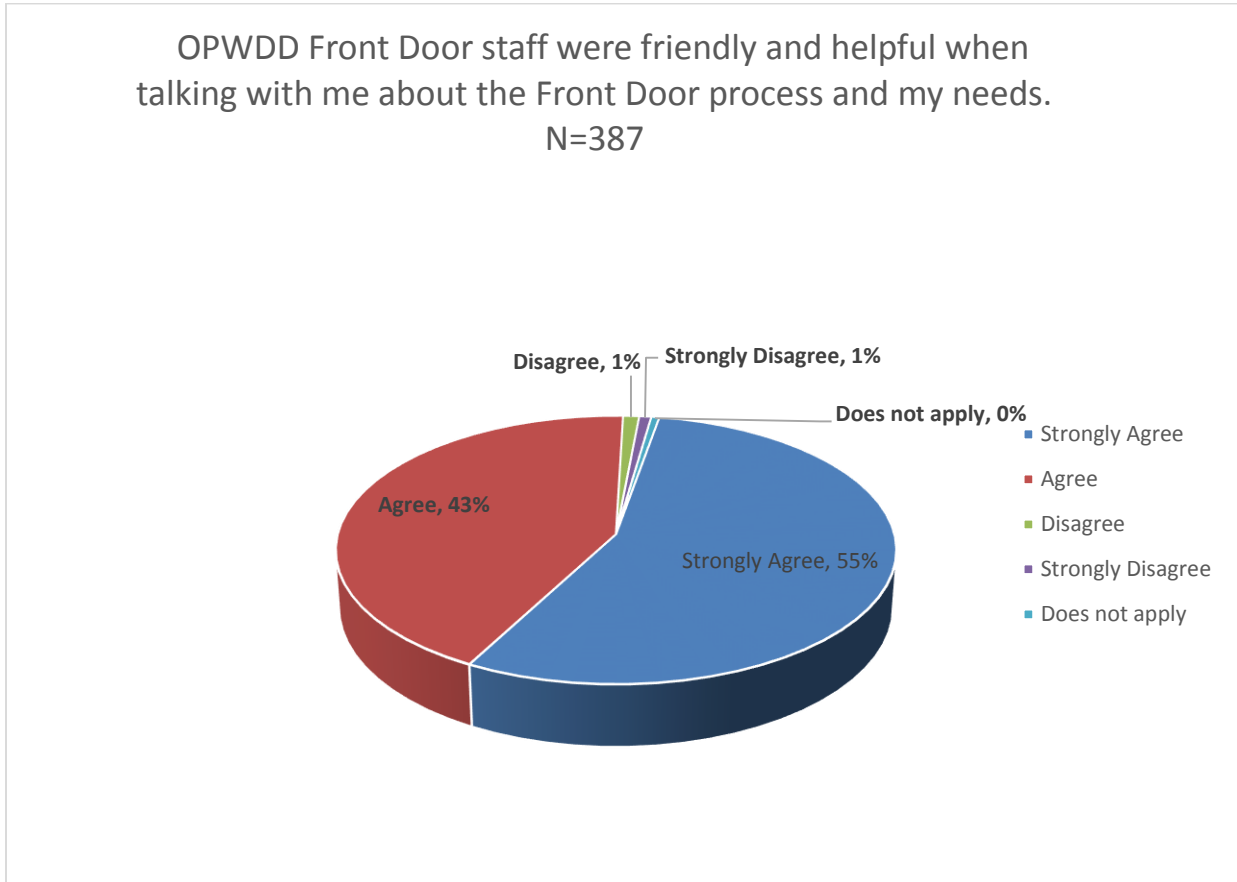
In addition to training for front line staff, a core group of regional Front Door leadership staff participate in a bi-weekly conference call to review policies and procedures and respond to critical topics. In an effort toward continuous process improvement, the Lean process improvement approach is being applied to the Front Door. A Front Door Feedback group, consisting of representatives from provider associations and agencies from across the state, has been established and meets quarterly.

FRONT DOOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

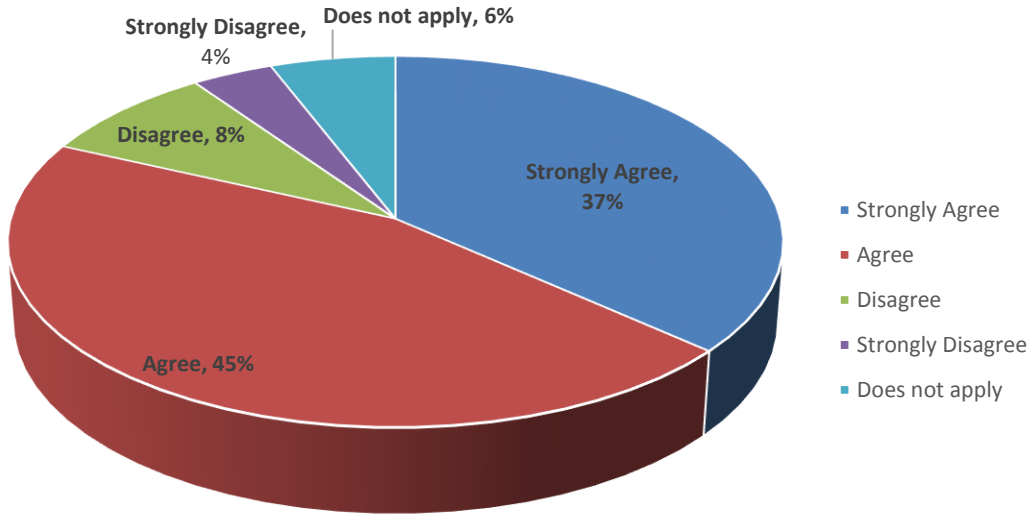
To ensure the Front Door is meeting the needs of individuals and families and offering them a positive experience, a customer satisfaction survey was developed. The survey was piloted in the fall of 2015 and will be administered on a regular basis to individuals and family members who have completed the Front Door process. Results from the pilot survey, which drew 394 responses from across the state, show general satisfaction with the Front Door. The survey included questions about helpfulness and timely response of staff, clarity of information, and satisfaction in regard to types and amounts of services authorized. A strong majority of respondents said Front Door staff were helpful, friendly, and responsive, and that they provided clear information about services and the process to secure them. According to



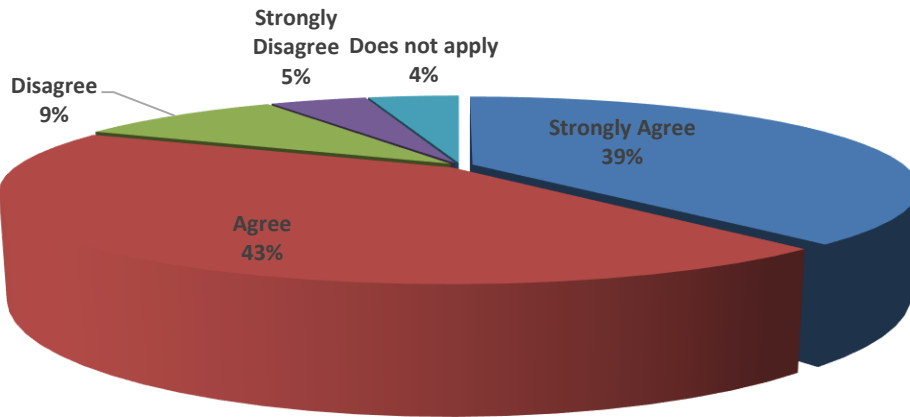
respondents, the initial services they were authorized by the Front Door are meeting their needs. Some sample questions and results:



I heard back from OPWDD Front Door staff in a reasonable amount of time when I had questions or needed help. N=391



The services and amount authorized to me will meet/are meeting the immediate needs I have. N=380



FRONT DOOR DATA

FRONT DOOR DATA		
Category	2014	2015
Individuals attending Front Door Information Sessions	12,366	9,947
Individuals new to OPWDD and seeking services for the first time	15,794	14,147
# of services authorized (Multiple services may be authorized for individuals.)	12,232	19,767

Front Door Education on Self-Directed Services

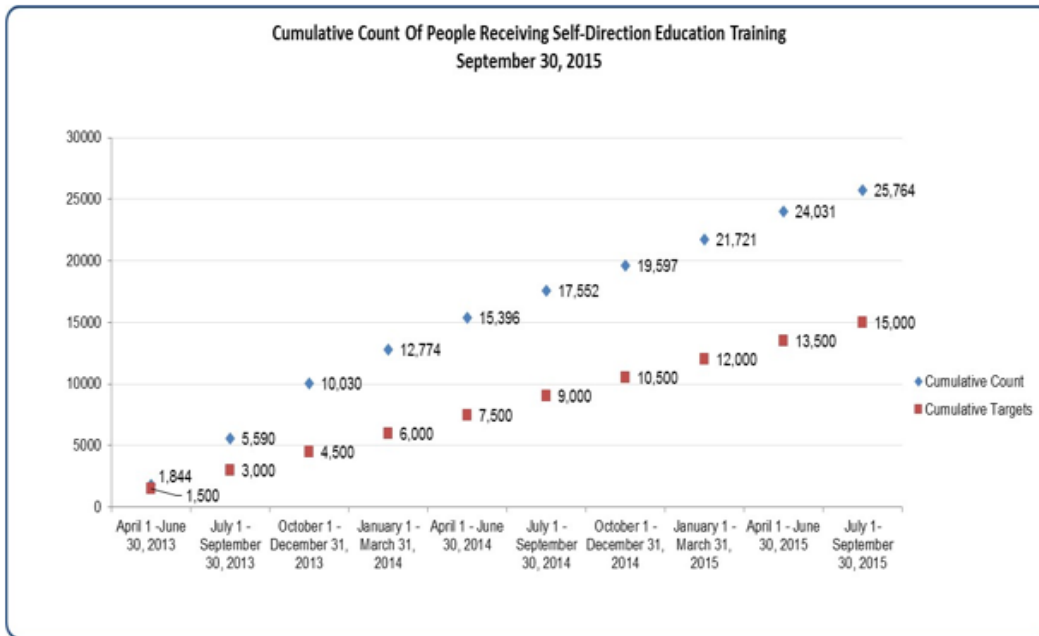
Promoting self-direction for individuals to employ in the delivery of their needed supports is a major goal of the Front Door. With self-direction, individuals can choose their services, choose the staff and organizations that provide the services, and develop a schedule that meets their needs. People have the flexibility to choose the mix of supports and services that are right for them.

People and their families receive education on the self-directed service delivery option through two primary sources – OPWDD Front Door Information sessions and Self-Direction Information sessions. These sessions present people with the full range of traditional and self-directed service options available to them. People and families can then choose to access traditional services, self-directed services, or a mix of both.

People entering the OPWDD service system for the first time primarily receive education on self-direction via Front Door Information Sessions offered in person or by telephone. Alternatively, people who currently receive OPWDD services are referred to Self-Direction Information Sessions by their Service Coordinator. These sessions are conducted by the Developmental Disabilities Regional Office (DDRO) Self-Direction Liaisons.

Figure SD-1 details the number of people who have attended and received education on self-directed services through Front Door Information Sessions. As demonstrated, the number of people receiving Self-Direction education has consistently increased, and OPWDD has exceeded quarterly education targets from Front Door inception in mid-2013 through September 2015. To date, more than 25,000 people and their families have been educated and offered Self-Direction as a service option.

Figure SD-1: Number of People Receiving Self-Direction Education through Front Door sessions



Front Door staff regularly interface with regional Self-Direction teams to ensure people obtain OPWDD eligibility and enrollment in the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver in a timely manner prior to provision of self-directed services. The streamlining of Front Door eligibility processes and education efforts have both positively contributed to tremendous growth in the number of people choosing Self-Direction.

Self-Directed Services Growth

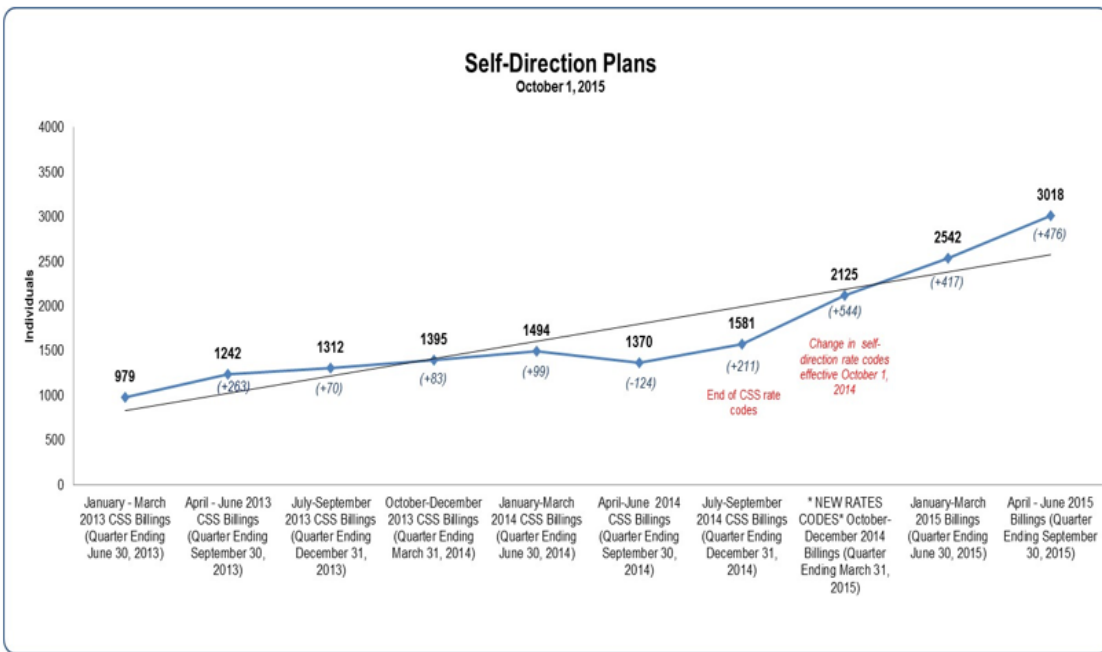
There has been significant growth in the number of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) choosing to self-direct their services (current total = 7,328). Front Door representatives provide people with education on self-directed service options including *Agency Supported Self-Direction* and *Self-Direction with Budget Authority*.

When people choose *Agency Supported Self-Direction*, they work with a provider agency to obtain Community Habilitation, Supported Employment, or Respite supports and exercise employer authority in directing those supports. The person and agency establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and work together to hire, train, supervise, and discontinue staff (if needed). Based on MOU data, OPWDD has demonstrated growth of this model -- from 176 people engaged in Agency Supported Self-Direction in June 2013 to 4,310 people in September 2015 (**Figure SD-2**).

Figure SD-2. Number of People Participating in Agency Supported Self-Direction



People can *Self-Direct Services with Budget Authority* when they decide how to spend the funding available to them in their self-direction budget and, if they choose to self-hire staff, how much to pay them. Self-Direction with Budget Authority continues to grow, with over 3,000 people currently choosing the budget authority option (**Figure SD-3**). **Figure SD-3. Number of People Self-Directing Services with Budget Authority**



In addition to the different types of Self-Direction described above, individuals may also opt to access their services in a more traditional way. A full range of services and options is available for those individuals.

How Do People Get Information About the Front Door?

Information on the Website

Many individuals and their families utilize OPWDD’s website to find information about services and eligibility. A dedicated Front Door page on the website provides comprehensive information and materials including:

- **Front Door Information Sessions** - Content, schedule, and links to registration for the Front Door Information Session, which individuals and family members are asked to attend, are available on the website. The Information Session provides an overview of the variety of services available, describes the steps in the application process, and highlights critical topics such as eligibility requirements and Self-Direction. Telephone sessions are available if attendance in person at a session is not possible for someone.
- **Front Door “Access to Services Manual”** - The “Access to Services Manual”, which is a companion document to the Front Door Information Session, can be reviewed on the website or downloaded. The manual describes the steps needed to apply for services and provides information about Self-Direction, eligibility, and services. It is written and presented in a user-friendly way for individuals, families, and advocates.
- **The Front Door Procedure Manual** - Although this manual has been developed for Front Door staff, it is available to the public on the website. It contains more detailed descriptions

of the information available in the Access to Services Manual, including a step-by-step description of how individuals access OPWDD services. Details are provided on Initial Contact, Eligibility, Assessment and Review of Needs, Development of Services, Waiver Application and Enrollment, and Service Authorization. Standardized letters and forms are contained in the manual's appendices, which are also posted on the website.

- **Contact Information** - Telephone contact information for all Front Door locations across the state is available on the website.
- **FAQs** - A list of common questions about the Front Door, and their answers, is posted on the website.

There are frequent visits to the OPWDD website and the specific Front Door web pages. In 2015 there were over 28,000 visits to the Front Door "Home" page. Individuals can also find information about and register for the Front Door Information Sessions via the web, and more than 12,000 individuals visited this section. People can find Front Door telephone contact information (12,947 visits), a Question and Answer page (8,422 visits) and the Front Door Access to Services Manual (5449 visits).

OPWDD CERTIFIED RESIDENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Matching Individuals and Available Opportunities

Many individuals coming to OPWDD's Front Door are seeking residential services. In May 2015, OPWDD formalized a protocol for responding to requests and managing opportunities available in certified residential settings. The intent of the Certified Residential Opportunities (CRO) Protocol is to respond in a timely manner to urgent needs, to understand and address the unique needs of each individual, and to apply consistent, state-wide standards that allow equal opportunity to service access. The approach involves a collaborative effort between the individual and family, OPWDD regional offices, service coordinators, and provider agencies. The Front Door refers individuals with residential needs to the CRO team, comprised of staff with the specialized knowledge and experience who can best assist them.

Where Can People Find Out About the Certified Residential Opportunities Protocol?

Information on the Website - Although individuals seeking residential opportunities are assisted by their service coordinators, who submit a request to an OPWDD regional office on their behalf, individuals and families can also find information on OPWDD's website, where the Certified Residential Opportunities (CRO) protocol is posted. This document describes the philosophy and approach to access certified residential opportunities, and includes descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of OPWDD regional offices and voluntary provider agencies in



assisting individuals in securing these opportunities. The protocol reinforces the principles of individual choice and the importance of helping individuals seek opportunities to live in the community in the least restrictive environment possible.

Priority Residential Placements - Included in the protocol are priority designations, which are applied in order to respond to the needs of individuals who are facing extreme circumstances. Priority designations are determined by the OPWDD regional office when a request for a certified residential opportunity is submitted, typically by a service coordinator working with an individual. A CRO (Certified Residential Opportunities) regional office team reviews the request and, based on the individual's circumstances, assigns a priority level. The regional office works with area providers, the individual and family, and service coordinators to secure a residential placement that will meet the individual's needs and preferences.

If an individual's circumstances change, the priority level is re-evaluated and modified as appropriate.

CRO and the Residential Request List (RRL) - It is important to clarify the difference between these individuals, identified as actively seeking a certified residential opportunity, and the individuals who are listed on the Residential Request List (formerly the New York Cares List). An individual's name is placed on the Residential Request List when they initially express their interest in securing a residential opportunity at some point in the future. Their need for a residential setting may be within a year or two, or it may be many years later. When an individual is ready to pursue the residential opportunity, they work with a service coordinator from a voluntary agency to submit a formal request to their OPWDD regional office. Maintaining the Residential Request List helps OPWDD understand future need and informs planning efforts. When the referral is received by the regional office, the CRO team assesses need and priority, places the individual's name on the CRO list, and begins the process described in the paragraph above.

(Please see the Report on the Residential Request List for more specifics on the 2015 outreach efforts related to the list.)

Below are the criteria currently applied to assessing the level of need an individual has for a certified residential opportunity.

Priority Designations:

Priority 1 Individuals: Any of the following apply:

- Abusive or neglectful situation constituting imminent risk of harm
- Presents an imminent danger to self or others
- Individuals with a court or legislative mandate
- Homeless or in imminent danger of being so*

- *includes OPWDD eligible individuals who are ready for discharge from a hospital or ready for release from incarceration who have no home
- **Priority 2 Individuals:** Any of the following apply:
 - Aging or failing health of caregiver/no alternate available
 - Living situation presents a significant risk of neglect or abuse
 - Medical/physical condition requires care not available in present situation
 - Presents an increasing risk to self or others
- **Priority 3 Individuals:** This includes all those whose need is current but there is no danger to the health or well-being of the individual or caregiver. Factors to consider for a specific residential opportunity would include:
 - Compatibility of the individual with available services
 - Compatibility with the other consumers in a shared living situation
 - Relative need for supports for daily living

The protocol also identifies some individuals as having a high priority because of special circumstances, for example they may be living in a setting that is no longer appropriate to their needs, but which is critically needed by others.

Priority 1 Special Populations: Individuals in the following categories:

- Aging Out of a Residential School/CRP
- Transitioning out of a Developmental Center
- Skilled Nursing Facility Residents

The number of individuals seeking Certified Residential Opportunities changes constantly, growing as new requests are received and shrinking as individuals are matched with a residential setting.

CONCLUSION

OPWDD's Front Door was established to better support individuals and their families seeking supports and services. Since the initial implementation, many changes have been made to enhance processes, improve communication, shorten time frames, and improve quality. Modifications will continue to be made as improvement opportunities are identified. OPWDD has welcomed and responded to recommendations from others, including families and



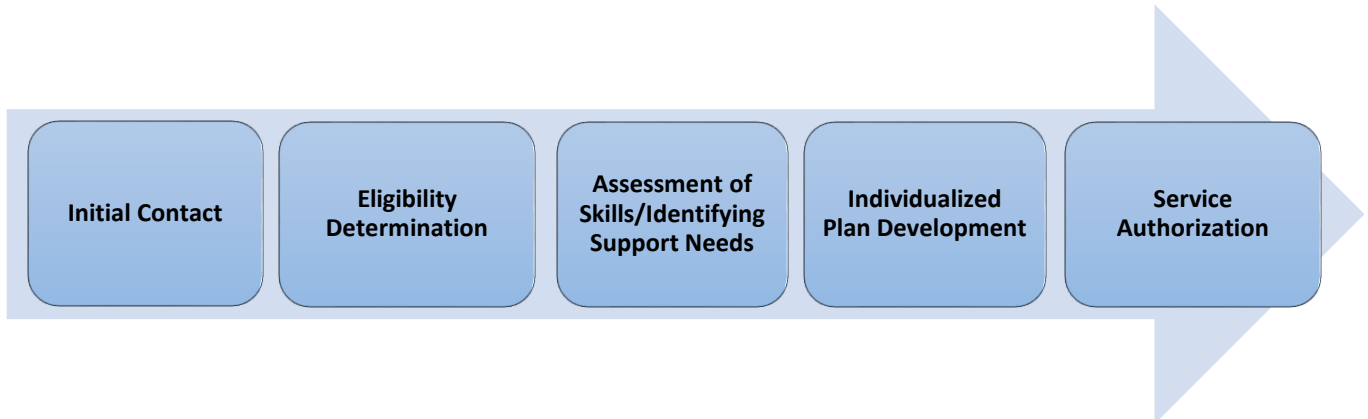
individuals, provider organizations, and the Commissioner’s Transformation Panel. OPWDD has requested input from the Developmental Disabilities Advisory Council and its state-wide Family Support Services committee on topics including the newly developed Front Door Informational Video and has established an on-going feedback group comprising representatives of provider associations and provider agencies to assist in continuous quality improvement of the Front Door. OPWDD is committed to providing the best possible experience for individuals and families who come to us for support.

The Certified Residential Opportunities protocol was developed to provide an effective, collaborative and transparent process that ensures a timely response to individuals seeking an available opportunity in an OPWDD certified residential setting. The intent of the protocol is to provide a response to the priority residential needs of individuals and provide a structure for the management of scarce residential resources. The protocol was developed with input from provider organizations, and feedback from consumers and providers continues to be integrated into the protocol. This feedback has helped to identify modifications being made to better respond to individuals who require adult services, but who remain at residential schools past their graduation dates because services are not available.

Recommendations from the Commissioner’s Transformation Panel will be used to provide further guidance as we consider how to ensure equity and access to opportunities for the many individuals living at home with caregivers encountering increasing difficulty in meeting the needs of their loved one. OPWDD is committed to supporting these and other individuals in need of residential settings.



ATTACHMENT A: FRONT DOOR PROCESS



INITIAL CONTACT
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Individual Expresses Interest in an OPWDD Service</i></p> <p>Individual contacts their local DDRO Front Door expressing interest in services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OPWDD staff meet with the individual and family, gather basic information, and provide information on process and next steps. • If individual is seeking an HCBS Waiver service they are referred to an organization providing service coordination services for additional assistance. • Information is provided about attending an Information Session to learn more about OPWDD eligibility, services and how to get services.
OPWDD ELIGIBILITY
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Establish Eligibility for OPWDD Services</i></p> <p>An individual’s eligibility for OPWDD services must be established:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Front Door staff will assist individuals in obtaining eligibility or confirm it has already been established
ASSESSING NEEDS AND GOALS



A Conversation About Needs and Interests

The individual, family members and Front Door staff review the individual’s needs, goals and current supports and begin to identify the elements of a service plan. This conversation includes a review of:

- Natural supports, current services, community resources
- Priorities, goals, desired services of the individual
- Interest in employment, desire for autonomy, interest in self-direction of services

Service coordinators and advocates may also participate in this discussion.

SERVICE PLAN DEVELOPMENT and CONFIRMATION

Preliminary Individualized Service Plan

A Preliminary Individualized Service Plan (PISP) is developed, reflecting the services discussed and agreed upon.

- The individual, family and service coordinator review the PISP, make final decisions about services desired, and submit a request for services to the Front Door.
- If services through the Home and Community Based Services Waiver are desired, the Waiver application is submitted to the Front Door at this time.

Waiver Enrollment and Service Authorization

- A final review of the service request is made by the Regional Office director
- An authorization letter is issued, and sent to the individual, family and service coordinator, along with the notice of decision (NOD) of Waiver enrollment if applicable

SERVICE ENROLLMENT

Providers selected by the individual finalize enrollment forms and submit to the Regional Office