

Hope and Opportunities in Many Environments (HOME) Project HCBS System Improvements Underway

Since 2022, Iowa HHS has been hard at work to strengthen the state's Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) system through the Hope and Opportunities in Many Environments (HOME) Project. Iowa HHS and our partners at Mathematica did a complete evaluation of the HCBS system and spoke with many invested Iowans, including members, caregivers, advocates and providers. In 2023, we identified key focus areas for the HOME Project, such as improving case management capacity and quality, redesigning and simplifying the state's waiver structure, updating waiver waitlist systems and policies, using a standard and conflict-free assessment model, improving HCBS communications, and strengthening HHS' oversight.

In 2024, Iowa HHS started improving the HCBS system through the HOME project. Iowa rolled out standardized case management training and changed policies to lower caseloads, giving case managers more time to help waiver members. Iowa HHS also shared a report called a [concept paper](#) for the proposed needs-based waiver system and held listening sessions to gather feedback.

In 2025, we are continuing to make progress on HOME. Iowa HHS is improving the assessment process to make it more consistent, simple, and person-centered. This year, we are making assessors independent from managed care organizations (MCOs), because many members and families said they would feel more comfortable if MCOs did not handle assessments. From January to July, member assessments will gradually move from MCOs to an organization called Telligen, the Core Standardized Assessment vendor. HHS is also updating Intellectual Disability (ID) waiver assessments to use interRAI assessment tools. This will make assessments more consistent, since all of Iowa's other waivers already use interRAI tools. We will also update the questions on the Waiver Priority Needs Assessment (WPNA) so that members on waiver waitlists can share more information with HHS about urgent and changing support needs. HHS is also working to boost HCBS provider capacity and track and improve HCBS quality to make sure that members can access high-quality services and supports.

At the beginning of 2026, Iowa HHS is planning to combine a few similar waiver services to make them easier to use and help members find the right services to match their needs. The new services will offer the same level of support, even though the names will be different. In late summer 2025, we will have a public comment period about amending Iowa's existing waivers to make these service updates. This process makes sure the people in Iowa who might use the services, and their families and communities, get a chance to share their thoughts and concerns about changes to HCBS waivers. Anyone can provide a

public comment, and HHS will share information on our website about how to participate in the public comment period.

Iowa HHS is also working out the details of the proposed new waiver system, which would streamline Iowa's 7 waivers into 3 age-based waivers: a Children and Youth waiver, an Adult and Disability waiver, and an Elderly waiver. The Children and Youth waiver and the Adult and Disability waiver will be new, but the Elderly waiver will be the same as the current Elderly waiver. We will share more information on the proposed new waivers later this year, including details on new waiver services and processes, how the move from the current to the new waiver system will work, and how Iowans can give HHS feedback on the proposed new waiver system.

The federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) must approve changes to assessments and waiver programs for states to get federal matching Medicaid funds. Before we submit draft applications for the new waivers to CMS, Iowa HHS will publish the drafts for another public comment period. CMS feedback and approval timelines will determine when the new waiver structure would be ready for enrollment. Iowa HHS will roll out the new waivers in stages rather than all at once. People will transition to the new waivers gradually, based on the waiver they are currently enrolled in. Smaller waivers will move first, while the brain injury (BI) and ID waivers will follow at a later time. Iowa HHS is exploring the best way to implement this transition and will provide more details once the planning process is underway. Iowa HHS aims to start enrollment in the new waiver structure in late 2026 or early 2027 and will share updates as the waiver approval process moves forward.