

Proposed Children and Youth Waiver Quick Guide

HOPE AND OPPORTUNITY IN MANY ENVIRONMENTS (HOME)

Updated: January 2, 2026

As part of the Hope and Opportunities in Many Environments (HOME) project, Iowa HHS is working to make the assessment process simpler and more person-centered. Iowa HHS plans to make a more uniform (or standard) way to assess all people on waivers or needing waiver services.

What is the proposed Children and Youth waiver?

The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is planning a **new Children and Youth Waiver**. This waiver would give extra Medicaid services on top of regular Medicaid for children and youth with disabilities, special health care needs, or mental health needs.

The waiver could help your child live at home with family instead of in a hospital or nursing facility. HHS is asking the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for permission to start this new waiver. This document explains HHS's plans for the Children and Youth Waiver.

What services will be available on the proposed Children and Youth Waiver?

The proposed services are described in the Phase 1 and Phase 2 Waiver Services Overview Guides on the [HOME webpage](#).

Will my child be eligible for the Children and Youth waiver?

This proposed waiver would provide home- and community-based services (HCBS) to children and youth ages 0 to 21. It would also serve a fixed number of people. Your child must be eligible for Medicaid to be eligible for this waiver (See [HHS' Medicaid reference guide](#) for more information on Medicaid eligibility). There also needs to be a space (or "slot") available for your child before they can enroll on the waiver and begin receiving services.

Eligibility criteria

To be eligible for a waiver, there are three rules:

1. Income and money (financial eligibility)
2. Health condition or disability (clinical eligibility)

The kind of care needed—called level of care or LOC—needed to perform for everyday tasks (functional eligibility). All three of rules must be met to be eligible.

Financial eligibility

Medicaid **will not consider parent income or resources** when deciding a child's financial eligibility for the Children and Youth waiver. If your child has income, it must be less than three times the current year's Federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) limit per month (See the [Supplemental Security Income website](#) for current information). This means to be eligible in 2026, your child must make less than \$35,788.38 per year (three times the annual limit of \$11,929.46).

When you apply for this waiver, you will work with someone from Iowa HHS who can answer your questions and help you understand the details of the waiver's financial eligibility requirements.

Clinical eligibility

To get the Children and Youth waiver in 2026, your child must have one of these conditions:

- Physical disability
- HIV/AIDS
- Developmental disability (including autism)
- Serious emotional disturbance
- Intellectual disability
- Brain injury

Children and youth with Intellectual Disability or Brain Injury can get services through the Intellectual Disability and Brain Injury waivers or the Adults with Disabilities and Children and Youth waivers starting in 2026.

In 2027, Iowa plans to end the Intellectual Disability and Brain Injury waivers and move everyone in those waivers to the Adults with Disabilities or Children and Youth waivers.

Functional eligibility

To qualify for the Children and Youth waiver, your child must need a level of care usually provided in one of these places:

- A hospital
- An inpatient psychiatric facility
- A psychiatric medical institution for children (PMIC)
- An intermediate care facility for people with intellectual disabilities (ICF/ID)
- A nursing facility (NF) or skilled nursing facility (SNF)

When a waiver slot opens for your child, an assessor will meet with you and your child to do a Level of Care assessment. Iowa Medicaid will use the results to decide if your child can get the waiver and to find out what support your child may need.

How do I apply?

If your child already has Medicaid, you will be able to apply for a waiver without filling out the entire Medicaid application again. HHS will share a mailing address and email where you can send a letter saying your child would like to apply for the waiver.

If your child does not have Medicaid, you need to start by filling out a full Medicaid application. The Children and Youth waiver application is included in the Medicaid application. In the “Appendix A for Health Coverage” section, check the boxes for “Services to remain in your home” and for the Children and Youth waiver.

You can apply in a few ways: online through the [Benefits Portal](#); by mail, email, or fax using a paper application, or in person at your [local HHS office](#).

If your child already has Medicaid, you can apply for the waiver without filling out the full Medicaid application again. HHS will give a mailing address and email where you can send a letter saying your child wants to apply for the waiver.

Waiver waitlist

If your child is already in the **AIDS/HIV, Physical Disability, Health and Disability, or Children's Mental Health waivers**, they will automatically be enrolled in the **Adults with Disabilities waiver** or **Children and Youth waiver**, depending on their age. They will **not** have to go on a waitlist.

If your child is already on a waitlist for the **Physical Disability, Health and Disability, or Children's Mental Health waivers**, they will automatically move to the waitlist for the **Adults with Disabilities waiver** or **Children and Youth waiver**, depending on their age.

If your child is **not currently on a waiver or waitlist**, they will be placed on the **Children and Youth waiver waitlist** after you apply. There are only a limited number of waiver slots.

People on the waitlist can fill out a **Waiver Priority Needs Assessment (WPNA)** form to tell HHS about your child's needs. This form is optional, but it helps HHS decide who should get a slot first. Each month, some slots go to people with the greatest unmet needs, and the rest go to those who have been waiting the longest. You can fill out the WPNA again if your child's needs change while waiting.

Even while waiting, your child may be able to get other Medicaid services. **In Lieu of Services (ILOS)** are one example. These services are available through your child's **Managed Care Organization (MCO)** while on the waitlist. Talk to your child's doctor or MCO about any concerns—they can help connect you to services that can help.

What happens when my child reaches age 21?

Iowa is planning an **Adults with Disabilities waiver** for adults **21 and older**. About **six months before your child turns 21**, the case manager will check if your child wants to move to the Adults with Disabilities waiver and if they qualify. Some youth who qualify for the Children and Youth waiver might not qualify for the adult waiver. If that happens, the case manager will help find other options, like the 1915(i)-habilitation program, so your child still gets needed services.

If your child is eligible, the case manager will help with the application, disability determination, and updating their service plan for adult needs. There will be special slots in the adult waiver for youth turning 21, so they won't have to wait and can move directly into adult services. Case managers will support youth during this transition.