



# What to Know Before Becoming an Independent Provider

The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) as well as your local county board of developmental disabilities are great resources for finding out what is required of you to become a certified provider and what you must do prior to completing an application. However, there are other questions you need to consider before deciding becoming an independent provider is right for you.

## **Do you have a computer? Are you comfortable using it?**

You must have a computer (or access to a computer) and be comfortable using it in order to be a provider. The application for certification, searching for individuals to support, your billing, and your reviews are all completed online. Many training classes can be completed online too. All of your documentation will be on forms that you create on the computer, although we do have documentation templates available for your use. Any and all official communication with DODD will be via email.

## **Do you like the idea of being self-employed?**

Becoming a Certified Independent Provider means that you are now self-employed and will be expected to operate as such. You are not an employee of DODD or the County Board; you are essentially an independent contractor. This means you are responsible for paying for your own taxes, healthcare and other benefits, keeping proper documentation, and abiding by and staying informed of the state rules that govern DODD- which are revised at least every 3 years.

### Are you patient?

The process to become an Independent Provider can take up to a year, but will take at least 1-2 months to complete. There are classes to take, documents to gather and a background check to schedule- and that is before you can even complete the application. In addition, you need to pay all applicable fees associated with certification before it can be processed. After the application, it can take 30-90 days to process. Once you're certified, you may have to wait to find a person to support and become authorized to provide this support. Once you've worked with the person and billed for it, there will be at least a three week lapse before you are paid, as the claims are processed through a combination of DODD and Medicaid. Keep in mind that any changes to an individual's plan with freeze any billing until those changes are finalized.

### Do your homework!

Navigating the DD system can be confusing, but take some time to familiarize yourself as best you can. Supporting an individual with DD is not the same as working with someone with a physical disability or someone with mental health issues. The Lake County Board is located in Mentor on the Deepwood Campus and is governed by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, which is located in Columbus. The two agencies are related, but not the same agency. Lastly, you will most likely be providing services to someone who has a Home and Community Based Waiver meaning he/she lives in his/her own home and you assist the person to live life how he/she wants to live it- not the other way around. County Boards no longer open "group homes" or authorize providers to do so.

### Are you looking to serve a family member or friend?

If not, then it is up to you to find individuals to serve just like self-employed contractors in other fields. *LCBDD works to identify what supports an individual needs and then outlines these needs in a confidential online forum.* It's up to you to respond to them and let them know why they should pick you. **LCBDD does not assign providers; the individuals are in charge of choosing who they want.** Keep in mind there are many providers in Lake County and we cannot guarantee you'll be selected to work with someone.

If yes, then that's great news. We know you aim to take great care of your loved one. However, family members are not exempt from any of the rules or regulations that an unrelated provider would be. In order to be paid for your services, you need to adhere to all rules and laws governing service provision. When you're "on the clock" for your loved one, you're a provider- even if you're still the parent, grandparent or sibling. Note that if you are a parent/guardian of an individual that you want to serve, you are not able to be their provider (or work as their staff person through an agency) if they are a minor.

### **Are you still interested?**

Then, go for it! People with developmental disabilities need caring, responsible, outgoing people to help them live, work and play in the community. We're eager to support you to be the best provider you can be!

### **Do you love working with people with DD but feel like this might be a little too much to manage?**

That is okay! Agency providers all over the county are looking for people like you RIGHT now. You can check out [www.dspohio.org](http://www.dspohio.org) to see who would love to have you join their team of professionals. You can also use job search apps such as [indeed.com](http://indeed.com) to find local job postings.

You can also read reviews from family members /customers of DD provider agencies at [www.providerguideplus.com](http://www.providerguideplus.com). This can help you get to know DD provider agencies.