



**Policy Statement  
Revised in June 2006  
by Oregon Council on  
Developmental Disabilities**

## **HOUSING**

### **Summary of the Issue:**

Affordable, accessible housing is not readily available for many people with developmental disabilities in Oregon. People who need accessible housing often have trouble finding it or obtaining the funds to modify existing housing. Oregon also has a serious lack of affordable housing. Many Oregonians with developmental disabilities have SSI as their only source of income. SS payments will not cover market rent in most of Oregon, and there are long waiting lists for housing subsidies. Many individuals with developmental disabilities require some support services to enable them to live independently. For a number of reasons, it is frequently difficult to fund appropriate levels of flexible services to provide this support. In response to the long wait lists and system challenges, many people with developmental disabilities and family members are trying to combine private and public dollars to develop affordable, accessible housing options specifically for people with developmental disabilities.

### **Council Position:**

Adults with developmental disabilities should be able to live in safe, affordable, accessible housing in their community of choice and should have control over where they live and with whom. Necessary supports should be readily available and be of their choosing and under their control.

### **Background:**

In the past many people with developmental disabilities lived in congregate care institutions. Currently, most institutions have closed and services are community-based. Many people with developmental disabilities live in group homes and foster homes. Thousands of individuals with developmental disabilities continue to live at home with aging parents. With the move toward self determination and services that are controlled by the individual, many more people with developmental disabilities are seeking ways to move out of their group homes or family homes into housing in the private housing market.

Oregonians with developmental disabilities who need accessible housing have a difficult time finding appropriate units. Many developers, including developers of public

housing, are only willing to develop accessible units if there is specific demand at the time the units are built. While there are some programs run by housing authorities linking people with accessible housing, people with cognitive disabilities report difficulties using these services. Furthermore, landlords often are not willing to leave accessible units open for those who need them, and will rent those units to people who do not need accessible housing. These actions contribute to a shortage of accessible housing. Clients can request that units be retrofitted or made accessible. However, private landlords are not required to pay for these changes. There are few sources of funding for housing modifications, and what does exist is frequently not well known.

Even low-income housing is frequently too expensive for people with developmental disabilities who live on SSI. Section 8 Housing vouchers have provided the primary subsidy for very low-income individuals living in community housing. Unfortunately, decreasing support for low income housing programs at the local, state, and federal level have made the problem of finding affordable housing for people with developmental disabilities even worse.

While many individuals with developmental disabilities do not require a 24 /7 level of services, they often do require some supports to live outside the family or group home. It is frequently difficult to access funding sufficient to support the individual. State and federal rules make it difficult for individuals to combine resources to purchase supports together.

Families of people with developmental disabilities are responding to these problems by coming together, creating non-profit organizations, using private resources and applying for federal money through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This money is used to build or preserve apartment complexes to house family members with developmental disabilities. Support services to the individual tenants with developmental disabilities are sometimes provided through local support brokerage. Some individuals may continue to receive supports from their previous provider organization.

While these family-developed housing options are creative solutions to a difficult problem, they may not be the long term answer many families seek. Like anyone, the needs and wants of individuals with disabilities will change. Current levels of support may not be sufficient. An individual may no longer want to live in this location or around his/her current neighbors.

Many of these "family created" housing options have been originally developed for people with developmental disabilities only. Safety of the individuals involved is often cited as the reason. When the "DD Only" complexes increase in size to twelve apartments and more, advocates express concern about segregation in housing. How many is "too many" is a question that needs further discussion by families, self advocates, and funders.

**Possible Future Council Activity:**

- Housing Survey – Survey individuals and family members regarding their housing needs and analyze the results of a statewide needs survey (conducted by the Oregon ADD Network in 2005) that included questions about housing needs.
- Housing Work Group – Create a work group of Council Members, other advocates and housing experts to examine the issues and develop a white paper detailing the issues and making recommendations.
- Advocacy –The recommendations of the Housing Work Group should guide future advocacy, including development of a work plan for housing goals in the Councils Five-Year Plan.