

What to know before becoming an Independent Provider

The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) is a great resource for finding out what classes and certifications you have to have before completing the online application to become a Certified Independent Provider - but what else should you consider before deciding if it is right for you?

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

Nearly every aspect of being an Independent Provider will involve using the computer. The application, 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 the forms that you create on the computer, although we do have suggestions on what to include. Any and all official communication with DODD will be via email. And soon you will only be able to access necessary service plans through an online system.

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 are certified, you may have to wait to find a person to support and become authorized to provide this support. Once you have worked with the person and billed for the services, 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 will 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 different from working with someone with a physical disability or someone with mental health issues. The County Board has two office locations in Summit County (Barberton and Cuyahoga Falls) 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 customers just like self-employed contractors in other fields. Summit DD works to identify what supports an individual needs and then outlines these needs in a confidential online forum. It is up to you to respond to them and let them know why they should pick you. Summit DD does not assign providers; the individuals/guardian/Team are in charge of choosing who they want (Free Choice of Provider Process). Keep in mind there are many providers in Summit County, and we cannot guarantee you will 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 are “on the clock” for your loved one, you are a provider- even if you are still the parent, grandparent or sibling.

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 are 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? Do not worry- Agency providers all over the county are looking for people like you RIGHT now. Just check out www.dspohio.org to see who would love to have you join their team of professionals.