



## 2025 Annual Impact Report



**PENNSYLVANIA  
DEVELOPMENTAL  
DISABILITIES  
COUNCIL**

# PADDDC MISSION AND VISION

## MISSION

The Council engages in advocacy, systems change, and capacity building with people with developmental disabilities and their families in order to:

- Support people with disabilities in taking control of their own lives
- Ensure access to goods, services, and supports
- Support communities so that all people belong
- Empower people with all disabilities
- Promote the understanding of the life experiences of people with disabilities
- Pursue equity for all people

## VISION

We envision a commonwealth where all people are valued and thrive.



**PADDDC**  
**PA Developmental Disabilities Council**

*The Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council's identity is inspired by the Sassafras tree, a native species found in wooded areas throughout Pennsylvania.*

*The Sassafras is a natural symbol of perfect diversity. Graced with three distinct leaf shapes, each leaf and each branch of the Sassafras is supported by the same root system and habitat...much like an inclusive community where each member is cherished, valued, and nourished to develop fully.*

# PADDC 2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

Developmental Disability Councils are known as conveners, collaborators, and problem solvers. In 2025, PADDC and our network relied on these strengths to understand and respond to changes in federal leadership and policy.

Our national partners and state connections proved vital during this difficult transition. This Annual Impact Report shows that PADDC continued to make progress to achieve our goals and overcome the challenges we faced.

PADDC does not work alone. State Councils, with support from our national association, worked together throughout the year. The National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities provided ongoing leadership, advocacy, information, and assistance to councils across the country. How did our national network support PADDC?

- Convened council leadership to provide regular updates on federal changes.
- Provided expert analysis of federal policy proposals.
- Led national grassroots advocacy efforts.
- Worked in coalition with other national disability organizations.

In addition, our state connections helped us understand how the changes made by Congress and the new administration would impact Pennsylvanians.

We joined monthly meetings with state Medicaid experts. The PA Disability Budget Coalition members provided information and updates from all corners of the state and helped to coordinate advocacy efforts. PADDC met with DD Network partners regularly and relied on the Arc of PA for policy updates and our *Slice of PIE* resource.

As you can see, our work is not done in isolation. We are proud to be part of a larger community of advocates and leaders. Each brings individual talents and strengths to the cause. All are dedicated to a shared purpose and mission – to support those with disabilities to live full lives in their communities.

I don't know what the future will bring, but I am certain PADDC will continue to rely on our relationships and will convene, collaborate, and problem solve; whatever may come.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa A. Tesler".

Lisa A. Tesler  
Executive Director

## GOAL AREA: SELF DETERMINATION

*Pennsylvanians with developmental disabilities and their families increase their knowledge in order to make informed decisions, exercise their rights, and control their own lives.*

### Self Determination: By the Numbers

88 promising or best practices created or supported.

673 people trained other than those with a developmental disability or family members.

Communities served were 55% urban and 45% rural.

Activities received a 91% overall satisfaction rating.

### Activity and Training Areas

**Supportive Decision Making Legislation**

**Fact Sheets**

**Guardianship Reform**

**Parent-to-Parent Support Groups**

**Virtual and In-person Trainings**

**Parent Resources**

## GOAL AREA: SELF DETERMINATION

# Community Inclusion for Young Children

Community Inclusion for Young Children helps new parents of a child with a disability gain support, connect with resources, and prepare to champion their child's needs.



**Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living** (LVCIL) used their PADDCC grant to provide free training, support, and other activities for more than 200 parents last year. Services include:

1. Parent Support Groups (Virtual Meetings) - Monthly meetings where parents can come together in a welcoming space to learn, share experiences, and connect with other families.
2. Individualized Support - One-on-one help navigating resources, early childhood systems, accommodations, and more.
3. Peer Mentorship - Connecting families with other families who have similar experiences, offering encouragement and shared understanding.

Support groups cover a wide range of relevant topics for parents, such as:

- Tips and tricks for engaging with your child through talking, reading, and singing in everyday activities
- Navigating travel
- Assistive technology
- Yoga and self care
- Cycle breaking: A father's involvement in disability and parenthood
- Water safety tips for parents
- IEP Power Hour: Navigating the school year
- Advocacy: How to speak up for your child, navigate systems, and feel confident in your voice

*"As a parent who was having difficulty with my daughter's 504 plan, I reached out to the Community Inclusion for Young Children program. After discussing my concerns, I received advice, information, and referrals to other organizations for further support. Within days, I received calls back and had a game plan. By the following week, I had a conference with my daughter's district to address the issues. Armed with knowledge and referrals, I felt confident in my requests. This program was instrumental in giving me what I needed to advocate for my daughter's needs and I can't thank you enough."*

*- Ashley P.*

## GOAL AREA: SOCIAL AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

*Change service systems and community resources so that they are more responsive, accessible, and flexible for Pennsylvanians with developmental disabilities.*

### Social and Systems Change: By the Numbers

13 policies or procedures created or changed.

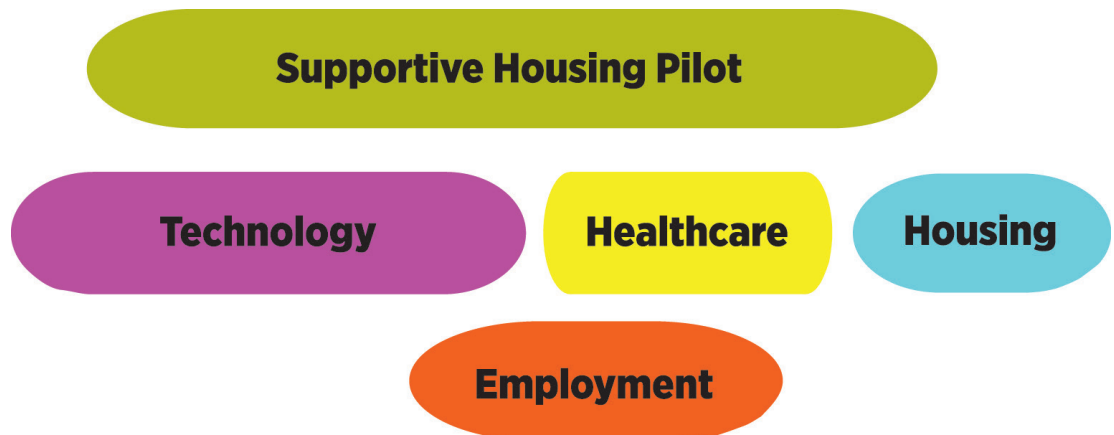


9 policy, procedural, statute, or regulation changes implemented.



502 community members trained.

### Policy and Training Areas



## GOAL AREA: SOCIAL AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

### Employment

People with developmental disabilities want to work, and businesses need education about promising practices to increase access to competitive integrated employment.

**Arc Human Services** used their PADDCC grant to create opportunities for people with developmental disabilities to find competitive employment. The project educated business owners about recruiting, hiring, and ADA accommodations. Employers also learned about supported employment services.



A symposium was organized for participants to attend sessions on resume building, interviewing techniques, and more. Employers and organizations who were previously engaged in employment discussions and educational opportunities participated at a high level by providing job seekers with information and opportunities to be interviewed. Examples of outcomes achieved include:

- **Strong interest and turnout validated the need:** With 200 attendees and participation from employers, vendors, providers, and job seekers with barriers to employment, the event confirmed that there is significant interest and a need for spaces that facilitate these connections.
- **Diverse stakeholder participation enhanced value:** The involvement of 40 vendors, 18 employers, and 14 agencies hosting breakout sessions, provided attendees with access to a range of resources, career opportunities, and professional insights, making the event more comprehensive and impactful.
- **Networking opportunities were a highlight:** Businesses connected directly with job seekers, and vendors connected with agencies and organizations, creating multi-faceted networking opportunities that were both personal and professional.



*Arc Human Services invited individuals they support to attend the symposium. One client, Barb, did not believe she could work competitively but volunteered to help. After being encouraged to visit the vendor tables (pictured left) and attend a breakout session, she began to think differently about employment. When Barb returned home, she began talking with her program specialist and within six months, had started the job development process with the PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. Barb is now competitively employed with Papa Johns.*

## GOAL AREA: COMMUNITY LIVING

*Empower communities to provide positive, inclusive experience for everyone, so that people with developmental disabilities and their families feel welcomed and supported.*

### Community Living: By the Numbers

25 individuals with developmental disabilities received training and information.

65 family members received training and information.

7,601 community members trained.

Activities received a 99% overall satisfaction rating.

### Training Areas

**Suspensions/Expulsions in Preschool**

**Making Friends**

**Civic Engagement**

**Home & Community Based Services**

**Accessible Farms and Gardens**

**Police Interactions**

## GOAL AREA: COMMUNITY LIVING

### Civic Engagement

Building on what was accomplished in PADDC's previous civic engagement grant, the Council wanted to expand opportunities for individuals with disabilities to take on active leadership roles.



**Integrate for Good** empowers individuals to lead as civically engaged members of their communities.

- Last year, more than 6,500 people received civic engagement training from, or participated in civic engagement activities, led by self advocates.
- The project supports people with disabilities to determine the areas of public concern they want to address and empowers them to address those concerns.

Integrate for Good partners with PECO Energy Company's Energy Force Ambassadors Program. The program trains adults with developmental disabilities to serve as ambassadors for PECO's Energy Efficiency initiatives. Energy Force Ambassadors engage PECO customers to educate and inform them about simple energy-efficient tips that can be implemented around their homes and businesses. This is a win-win outcome. The company gets dedicated, passionate ambassadors and provides an opportunity for people with disabilities to use their voice in a community work environment.



*Cara from Integrate for Good is photographed at her graduation ceremony from the PECO program in May 2025.*

## GOAL AREA: SELF ADVOCATE LEADERSHIP

*Support policy solutions, advocacy, and civic engagement led by people with developmental disabilities, their families, and allies.*

### Self Advocate Leadership: By the Numbers

309 individuals with developmental disabilities participated in activities.

485 family members participated in activities.

138 community members members trained.

31 promising practices supported and 14 promising practices created.

6 statutes or regulations created or changed.

### Activity, Training, and Policy Areas

**Technology First Initiative in PA**

**Skill Building**

**Legislative Visits**

**Collective Powerful Voices**

**Sharing Personal Stories**

**Advocacy Days**

**Public Policy Awareness**

**Leadership Activities**

## GOAL AREA: SELF ADVOCATE LEADERSHIP

### Leading the Way: Advocates and Allies

This project provided leadership development, capacity building, and support to individuals with developmental disabilities, their families, and allies, enabling them to organize community groups, achieve personal leadership goals, and drive meaningful change in their communities.



**Vision for Equality** organized a powerful day of advocacy, unity, and impact at the Pennsylvania Capitol on June 2, 2025. The event was called “Why Medicaid Matters” and invited speakers to share personal stories about the importance of Medicaid.

A total of 208 people traveled by car, train, and bus from all over Pennsylvania to make sure their voices were heard by lawmakers.

Speakers included four legislators, Sen. Amanda Cappelletti, Sen. Art Haywood, Rep. Maureen Madden, Rep. Dan Miller, three family members, and four self advocates—Gabe, Nicki, Ernie, and Jean. Their personal stories and concerns reached people across the state and were covered by 37 different news reports. This united effort was led and planned by people with developmental disabilities to protect services that help others like them live full lives. It showed how powerful everyday people can be when they work together to change policies.

By speaking for themselves, all the advocates who participated not only influenced policy changes, but also changed public ideas about people with developmental disabilities, showing they are active, informed leaders in their own advocacy movement.



*Advocates filled the steps of the Capitol Rotunda to express why Medicaid matters. Francine Hogan, Director, PA Family Network at Vision for Equality, is pictured at the speaker’s podium.*

## GOAL AREA: SELF ADVOCATE LEADERSHIP

### LEAF Scholarships



LEAF Scholarships provide support for self advocates and families to attend events that promote leadership, education, and self-advocacy, thereby enabling people with developmental disabilities and their family members to expand their knowledge and skills.

Last year, PADDCC supported 10 individuals with disabilities and 8 family members (mothers, fathers, and siblings) by providing funds—for travel, lodging, food, and conference registration fees—to attend 11 events.

One of those families were the MacLaughlins. Their youngest son, Declan, has Dup15q Syndrome and autism. Mom, Kiersten, shared, *“Since Dup15q Syndrome is such a rare disorder, it can feel isolating at times. We call this conference a ‘family reunion’ because not only do we get to hear and participate in the latest research, but we also get to be with other families that understand what we are going through day to day. It encouraged me to listen to the latest scientific developments and to take Declan out into the community, because there are places where he can be accepted. The biggest thing this conference gave me was hope. Hope for the future of Dup15q and autism, hope that Declan will be more included in his community, and hope that we will live a more inclusive life with our Duper.”*

*“I know that I am not alone and that there are other kids that have brothers with autism and Dup15q. I learned that having all of my feelings is okay. I learned that I can help with Declan.”*

*- Big Sister, Kaelyn*



*“On the last night of the conference, they throw a ‘birthday party’ for all of the Dupers since that’s something they don’t usually get to have like a typical kiddo. He loved dancing to Taylor Swift!”*

*-Kiersten MacLaughlin*

# 2025 PADDCC Policy and Advocacy Activities

PADDCC played a pivotal role throughout the year in driving systems change, strengthening cross agency collaboration, and ensuring that the perspectives of people with disabilities and their families shaped statewide decision making. Council staff serve on numerous committees, work groups, and coalitions to promote Council’s mission and champion advocacy issues. The Council also expanded its public presence through speaking engagements, leadership roles, and strategic partnerships.

## Key Activities and Accomplishments

### System Change Leadership

- **30 system change activities** across statewide committees, coalitions, and advisory bodies.
- Influenced laws, policies, and practices through:
  - ✓ Written public comments
  - ✓ Direct engagement with system leadership
  - ✓ Participation in cross agency workgroups
  - ✓ Coalition-based advocacy
- Key areas of impact: employment, Home and Community Based Services (HCBS), youth with complex needs, technology, housing, quality oversight, and community inclusion.

### Medicaid Advocacy: Statewide Mobilization

- Led coordinated **outreach to Pennsylvania’s congressional delegation** on the importance of Medicaid HCBS.
- Identified and **prepared advocates to meet with select members of Congress**, including:
  - ✓ Rural and underserved communities
  - ✓ People who do not use words to speak
  - ✓ Families and individuals from diverse backgrounds
- **Provided before, during, and after meeting support** to help advocates share personal stories effectively.
- Results: **stronger understanding** among congressional offices of how Medicaid policy affects real lives, **commitments from several offices to protect people with disabilities from harmful policy or budget changes**, and **participants gained confidence and long-term advocacy skills**.

### Collaboration & Advisory Engagement

- PA Employment First Cabinet
- **Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Coalition**
- **Blueprint Workgroup for Youth with Complex Needs**
- **PA Tech Accelerator Steering Committee**
- PA Brain Injury Advisory Board
- **Independent Monitoring for Quality Steering Committee**
- **Housing Advocacy Group**
- **Office of Developmental Program’s Information Sharing & Advisory Committee**
- InVEST Project Advisory Panel

### Public Speaking & Leadership

- Led the **Disability Budget Coalition** and produced shared budget priorities.
- Ongoing **Medicaid advocacy** with national and state leaders.
- Led planning for the **NACDD Executive Director Leadership Summit**, including awards ceremony for self advocates. First Lady Lori Shapiro and Department of Human Services Secretary Kristin Ahrens participated.
- Keynote panelist on the impact of **Independent Monitoring for Quality (25-year anniversary of project started with Council grant)**.
- **Testified at legislative hearing about Technology First initiative** and supporting the Technology Accelerator Blueprint for Systems Change.

# How PADDC Funding Works

All PADDC grant activities are governed by the Council’s federally approved state plan and by the procurement requirements of the Department of Human Services and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

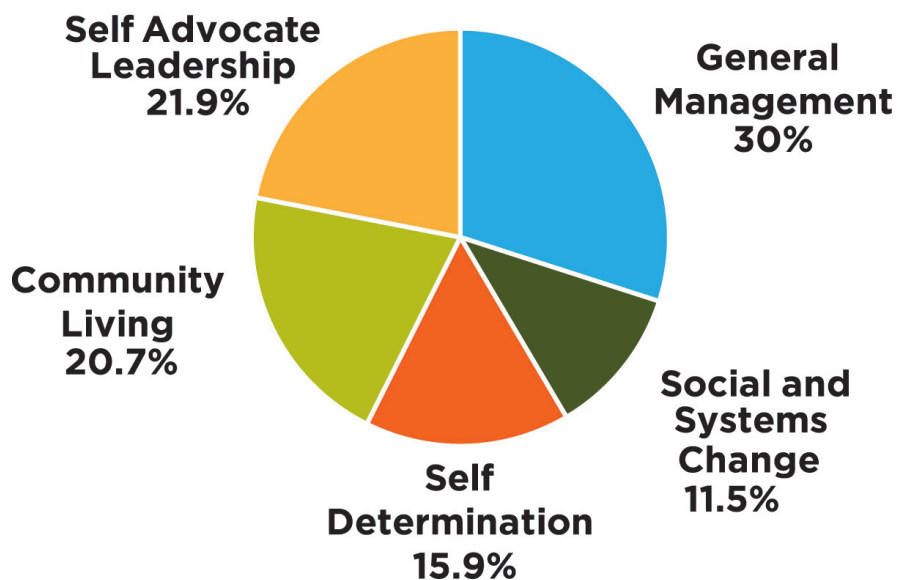
To achieve the goals in the plan, the Council funds grant applications from groups and organizations through a competitive bid process. The Council participates in creating a better future for Pennsylvanians with disabilities by:

- Funding short-term projects that show new and innovative ways for people with disabilities to participate as respected and valued members of our communities
- Empowering people with disabilities and their families to have a strong voice on Pennsylvania matters that affect their lives

- Advocating for improved public policies and services so that people with developmental disabilities may benefit from the opportunities and resources available to other citizens and community members
- Encouraging change in communities that embraces the diversity of the disability experience and confronts the stigma encountered by people with disabilities

The chart below shows how our resources were allocated to each goal and work area in 2025. Overall, the Council dedicated 70 percent to grant projects and 30 percent to general management.

## PADDC Expense by Category



2026

# PADDC Council Members

**Lisa Butler, Chair • Amy Mathewson Nieves, Vice Chair**

Christina Abernethy

Nicole Adams, *Representing the Secretary of the Department of Health*

Dana Barone, *Representing the Secretary of the Department of Labor & Industry*

Renee Benise

Heidi Champa, *Representing the Secretary of the Department of Aging*

Mary Kay Cunningham, *Representing the Institute on Disabilities at Temple University*

Jennifer Garman, *Representing Disability Rights PA*

Domonique Howell

Monique Lawrence

Rob Oliver

Karen Oosterhous

John Orr, *Representing Art-Reach, a Private Non-profit Organization*

Jamiel Owens

Karen Plummer, *Representing Voice and Vision, a Local and Non-governmental Agency*

Clark Queen

CJ Rine

Melissa Ringold

Lea Sheffield, *Representing the Secretary of the Department of Human Services*

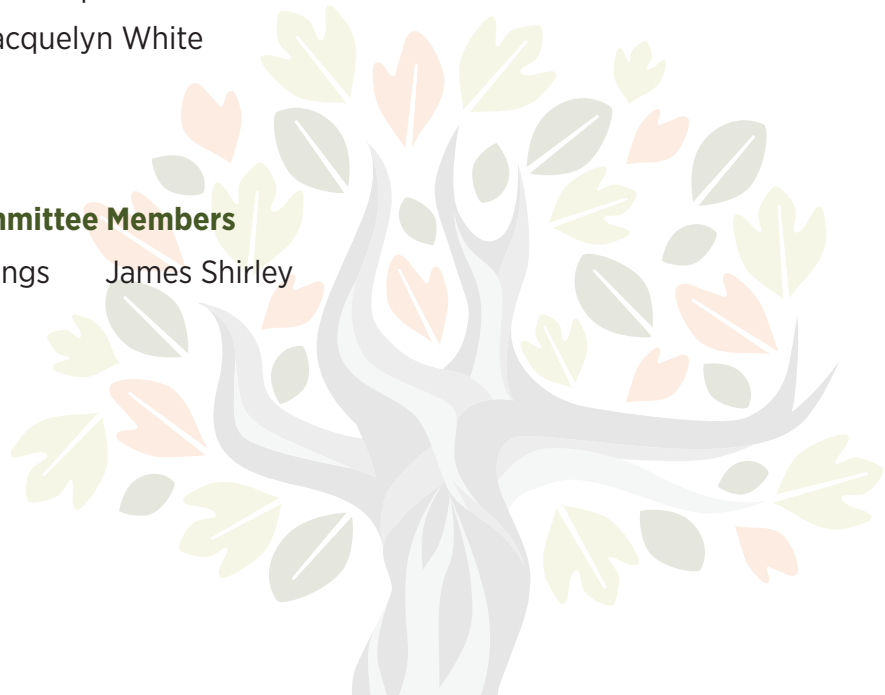
Lisa Sportelli

Jacquelyn White

## **Committee Members**

Robert Cummings

James Shirley





# PADDCC

PA Developmental Disabilities Council

Health and Human Services Building  
625 Forster Street, 2nd Floor  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

PRSR STD  
US POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
PITTSBURGH PA  
PERMIT #5592

## Connect with PADDCC on Social Media



paddcc.org



facebook.com/PADDCC



linkedin.com/company/paddcouncil



bsky.app/profile/paddc.bsky.social



**PENNSYLVANIA  
DEVELOPMENTAL  
DISABILITIES  
COUNCIL**



**To receive PADDCC news in your inbox each month, sign up for our email list.**

PADDCC sends **Spotlight**, our monthly update, to email subscribers. Sign up here:  
[www.paddcc.org/contact/mailling-list-sign-up](http://www.paddcc.org/contact/mailling-list-sign-up)

To view previous editions of *Spotlight*, visit our website: [www.paddcc.org/publications/spotlight](http://www.paddcc.org/publications/spotlight)