



Focus Group Insight Report Intellectual Disabilities/Autism (ID/A) Housing Pilot Spring 2026

The Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) started the Supportive Housing Pilot in February of 2024. The purpose of the pilot is **“to further the mission of Everyday Lives by developing an avenue that provides individuals with support to find and maintain homes and communities that are truly their own.”** The Housing Pilot is available in 10 counties and provides both financial assistance and individualized services to participants in the Home and Community-Based Waiver programs.

Background:

ODP’s Information Sharing and Advisory Committee’s (ISAC) Housing Subcommittee designed the Supportive Housing Pilot. The purpose was to develop and test processes and policies to support person-centered housing options that were accessible, affordable, and sustainable. On December 12, 2023, ISAC formally adopted the recommendations for ODP to implement the pilot. February 2024, the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) began the Supportive Housing Pilot. Two key features of the pilot were financial assistance to individuals through housing subsidies and access to services to find and keep their housing.

The PA Developmental Disabilities Council (PADDCC) partnered with ODP to support the work and collect qualitative data about the project. PADDCC engaged with participants, families, providers, supports coordinators, county officials, and state leads in the following ways:

- Hosted meetings with participants and families to provide a venue for them to talk, ask questions, and share experiences.
- Hosted meetings for Supports Coordination Organizations and Housing service providers to engage with one another.
- Collected data from all stakeholders through surveys.
- Tracked questions and drafted FAQ documents for the project.
- Conducted focus groups with professionals.

This report summarizes the focus groups held in December 2025.

Focus Group Participants:

PADDC invited Administrative Entities (AEs), Supports Coordination Organizations (SCOs), Housing Transition and Tenancy Sustaining (HTTS) and Supported Living service providers to three focus group discussions in December 2025. These professionals assist people in the pilot. That assistance may look like finding housing of their choice, helping to sustain housing while in the ODP pilot program or assisting them with services they need to support them in general. Each focus group answered five questions during a one hour zoom meeting. This report summarizes what we learned during these discussions with the 10 participants.

Key Findings about the Supportive Housing Pilot:

- The Pilot has exceeded expectations.
- Great opportunities that changed lives for each person involved.
- Provides individuals' autonomy in their lives.
- Solved problems that had been unresolved related to financial assistance with housing costs.
- Acted as safety net while adjusting to the community and when facing struggles such as change in employer, by having the funding subsidy available.
- Providers learned and shared best practices throughout the pilot.
- Built community connections with housers (private and public landlords).
- Increased support to keep participants happy, healthy and successful due to professionals being able to assist and act quickly when a barrier is presented.
- Individuals developed new life skills and flourished in their communities.
- Families and supporters see individuals grow and become independent and evolve in their own lives.
- Establishing a household can be costly and there is no good system in place to assist with those costs.
- Expanding the pilot would be smart.
- Saves money.

Questions Asked Summary:

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the pilot?

The one thing all focus group attendees agreed with was that the pilot has been a **fabulous opportunity!** It has “opened a whole world of new possibilities”, it has “led to a great deal of success for individuals”, and “it solved problems for individuals that didn’t have answers before.” Other feedback to note along these lines includes the following:

- “We’ve had great feedback from families.”
- “One individual is a best friend with her neighbor now and loves her community.”
- “It has helped a wide variety of individuals to meet the financial obstacle of having a home of your own – to have some income left over at the end of the month – to go out to eat or do something unusual or special, or even something ordinary that they couldn’t afford before.”
- **“Life was changed for every person in the pilot.”**

- “It is a blessing! Having it as a safety net has made such a difference. For the person that lost their job and income it allowed them time to get a new job and get back on track. Having the housing pilot meant they didn’t need to lose their home as well.”
- “This was the one thing that finally ‘fit the blocks together’...to have support and afford their own home.”

2. What were your initial expectations for the pilot, and did it meet them?

The feedback for this question can be summarized as it has been a valuable experience that the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) has allowed each of the first 10 counties, (including the Administrative Entities, Supports Coordination Organizations, Housing Transition and Tenancy Sustaining Service providers, and Supported Living providers) to work out the process through trial and error, discovering what worked best, and refining when they ran into challenges. **Everyone involved concurred how unique it has been to be given the freedom to test concepts and develop the program.** To be given the opportunity to create something new. To be creative and build their own path. And that their **expectations have been far exceeded.** As one person said, “It has been an amazing journey.” Another said, “It has been invigorating to know that we can still come up with ideas to make the system better.” More than one focus group participant mentioned looking to the future, that they hope to be able to guide and educate others with what they learned, if/when the pilot goes statewide.

While the housing pilot of course was meant to develop processes and policies specific to getting housing, there are additional opportunities that have started out of the pilot:

- A life skills program was developed, out of the needs of some individuals, that can now be used with others.
- Meet and greet sessions were created for applicants seeking roommates.
- A transition planning to a home of your own process grew out of the necessity to help people step into a more independent life, learn what to expect, and be prepared for having their own place.
- Outreach to landlords began, creating new community connections with our system.
- The system is **responding more quickly** to issues, because when people are supported by the pilot, we have our fingers on the pulse of what is going on with individuals. Mental health, bed bugs, losing a job, missing your friends – if we weren’t so involved with the pilot, we might have missed these support needs.

3. What is the best thing about the pilot?

The responses to this question varied:

- **People live the way they want to in the way they choose.** It is not cookie-cutter.
- The family who supports their loved one now gets to see them move out on their own. This is special. It is great to see parents on separate screens when on

virtual meetings. Parents are growing too. Parents can see that their kids are just like everyone else – moving forward in their lives.

- It is an opportunity for young adults to take the next step in life. The typical role of not living with their parents any longer, becoming an adult like everyone else.
- It is saving money. Even though we might be putting up \$600, \$800 a month for the pilot – what costs are we helping to push down? I'm sure it is making people use less doctor visits, mental health visits, less medication, etc. Maybe we can't quantify that amount, but I'm sure **the pilot is saving money** rather than spending money. It is peace of mind for everyone.
- It has **helped a wide variety of individuals to meet the financial obstacle of having a home of your own** – to have some income left over at the end of the month – to go out to eat or do something unusual or special, or even something ordinary that they couldn't afford before.

4. What is the largest challenge or most frustrating thing about the pilot? And how would you improve the pilot?

One of the best things about a pilot is learning the barriers that exist and figuring out how to remove those barriers. We would fail to maximize this opportunity if we didn't include how to keep improving the system. Again, there were a variety of responses given to these questions:

- I wish we could identify and assist folks to avoid moving into provider-managed residential settings and then having to move out. If the pilot could be used before they even need to go to residential settings that would be ideal. Most folks don't move once they move into residential.
- **Landlords are the largest barrier** – from we don't accept criminal backgrounds, no co-signers, no vouchers, extreme deposits, to you must use an electronic portal for transfer of funds, and more. We should develop a brochure of all the questions/barriers landlords bring up, and how to answer them so we have that reinforcement and backing when approaching prospective landlords.
- Is there a way to get the feds involved with some kind of match to the pilot funds? That would really boost the effort.
- The financial barrier for individuals is the most frustrating. It is a competitive market and so **difficult to find affordable units**. If the subsidy cap was increased for some counties it could help. Maybe the cap could be adjusted for each County as appropriate for fair-market values.
- There are people who aren't in the pilot even if the county is in it. The individuals may not be homeless or meet the other criteria, so they can't be in the pilot. Maybe the **criteria could be expanded**.

One barrier came up several times in the focus group discussions, and that was how to help with getting established in your new home. Here's what was said:

- Having some of the pilot funding for **start-up costs** would be great. Even if it was capped at a certain amount. Some people don't have anything.

- Add funding to cover set up cost of furniture and things you need for your apartment to get started. Some people just don't have tables, chairs, a bed, linens, etc.
- I would say the 'setting-up-the-home' cost is the biggest challenge for individuals. Especially if they were homeless. They have nothing to move in with.
- It's start-up costs. We are scanning craigslist, grabbing stuff we see for free and storing it to have ready to use for the pilot.

The concept most agreed upon as how to improve the pilot came down to one thing, **"...to end the pilot and have it statewide."** Some of the ways this was voiced were the following:

- It is frustrating to continue to think of this as temporary. I would like to hear the pilot ended.
- The counties are each doing different things. It would be much easier if the pilot was statewide with one set of processes and forms to follow with a unified approach.
- We do get concerned about if the pilot will end, because the people in the pilot losing that subsidy towards their rent will make it impossible for some of them to continue to live the way they want.
- One of the biggest discussions we have are those with the counties that aren't in the pilot. They wonder how they can tap into it.
- **Expand the pilot.** There are a lot of other people that would love to be in the pilot.
- It would be great to see it expanded. If we had other counties that were a part of it, we could have used it more.
- **Sustainability!** [All attendees agreed and shook their heads in agreement.]

5. **What else would you like to say about the pilot? Or what would you tell other entities (AEs, SCOs and providers not in the pilot) about the pilot?**

Any good focus group would be remiss not to allow people to just say what they think. We ended each of our discussions by asking what people should know about the pilot. Here's what they said:

- I'd ask, "what did we achieve on behalf of the individual by using this pilot? I'd like to have a report or data on what the individuals say it did for them."
- "The pilot is great to help people afford housing that is a good place to live, not just where you have to live."
- When you least expect it, the housing pilot could be there to help those people you couldn't help before. It came through.
- I was afraid at first that it might be too cumbersome, have too many forms, etc. But, we have met the spirit of the pilot. It is housing security for folks.
- Could we get feedback from others – individuals, families, other stakeholders? It would be great to hear from others about what they think about the pilot.
- You'd be foolish not to join the pilot if you can.

Conclusions / Recommendations:

It has been two years since the ODP Supportive Housing Pilot began and we have learned about the benefits and challenges of this approach. The data so far shows that this model improves outcomes for individuals, promotes self-determination and choice, addresses barriers, increases independence and skills, and saves money. Barriers are the restrictive criteria, set up costs, housing affordability and landlord challenges. Based on what we learned to date, PADDC recommends the following:

- Maintain funding in the current counties, while looking for innovative ways to secure federal matching funds and additional funding sources.
- Assess the process and procedures developed in each county and design a model for statewide expansion. Include pilot participants and professionals in design decisions.
- Expand the pilot with the goal of statewide implementation.
- Continue to build relationships with community housing resources.
- Consider ways to expand criteria to qualify for pilot, allowing more people to participate.
- Utilize the pilot to prevent residential and institutional placements, including for those with higher support needs.
- Build the structure and provide resources for set up costs such as furniture, household items, personal care items, etc.

Expanding the pilot will empower more people to choose their own home, separate from their services, reducing costs and reliance on residential providers. This model ensures waiver participants can exercise their rights, maximize their autonomy, make their own decisions, and enjoy positive, inclusive community experiences. Historically, it has been found that when individuals are satisfied with their lives, their overall quality of life improves including mental and physical health.

In conclusion, PADDC supports statewide expansion of the ODP housing pilot and investments in person-centered, individualized housing for all people with intellectual disabilities and autism.