



About Our Clients and Families

Harbor Regional Center provides free intake and assessment services to any person who is believed to have a developmental disability. Development disabilities include intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, and other handicapping conditions that are found to be closely related to intellectual disability or to require the same kinds of services.

The purpose of the intake and assessment is to determine whether the person is eligible for ongoing regional center services. To be eligible for ongoing services, the condition must have occurred before the age of 18, be likely to continue indefinitely, and constitute a “substantial” disability for the person. A disability is “substantial” if it affects three or more of seven major life areas (for example, a person’s ability to communicate or to learn).

The regional center provides early intervention services to infants and toddlers between birth and three years of age, who are developmentally delayed or have conditions that present an established risk of developmental disability. We also provide prevention services that include: assessment, evaluation, and case management for infants and toddlers at high risk (who do not otherwise qualify for early intervention services), and prenatal diagnosis and genetic counseling services to pregnant women who are believed to be at risk of giving birth to a child with a developmental disability.

A Closer Look at the Developmental Disabilities

Intellectual disability: Intellectual disability is a disability that affects peoples’ capacity to develop and use intellectual and adaptive daily living skills. As a result, development and learning are slower than average, and do not reach the levels of higher order reasoning that are found in typically developing individuals. The degree of disability that people can have ranges from *mild*, to *moderate*, *severe*, or *profound*. People with *mild* intellectual disability are generally able to learn many skills, although they learn more slowly, and they are generally less aware of how to interact socially. With enough support, they can live on their own as adults and hold down a job. About 90% of people with

intellectual disability are mildly disabled. People who have *moderate* intellectual disability are generally able to learn to care for themselves with special training and, as adults, can often develop some independence in their daily living skills, and work with supervision. People who have *severe* or *profound* intellectual disability exhibit more serious deficits in speech, coordination, and ability to learn, and they frequently have physical handicaps. Some of these people need constant care and supervision, but others can learn to perform useful tasks and many, as adults, can perform some types of work with supervision.

Cerebral Palsy:

Cerebral palsy is a group of conditions that affect the brain's ability to control muscle movement, coordination, and posture. The term "cerebral" refers to the brain, and "palsy" refers to impaired control of body movement. The disorder is caused by failure of the brain to develop properly, or by injury to the brain (not to the muscles or nerves), before, during, or after birth. Sometimes cerebral palsy shows itself only as a slight awkwardness of speech or gait. More often, there is a severe loss of muscle control in more than one area of the body. Some people with cerebral palsy can do only simple tasks related to self care and activities of daily living, while others achieve professional careers and lead independent lives. Cerebral palsy, or the injury to the brain, is not progressive – that means it does not get worse. However its effects on the body and some abilities, such as motor control, weakness of stiffness of the muscles or joints, and daily living skills, may become more impaired as the person ages. Although some people with cerebral palsy also have intellectual disability, most have normal intelligence.

Epilepsy

The term epilepsy applies to a number of disorders of the nervous system centered in the brain and is characterized by recurrent unprovoked seizures (that is, not provoked by fever, electrolyte imbalance, trauma, etc.). Seizures are episodes caused by abnormal electrical discharges of the brain leading to temporary disruption of brain function, and involve uncontrolled muscle movements, altered consciousness, mental confusion, change in behavior such as a 'blank stare', or disturbances of bodily functions such as spots before the eyes, ringing in the ears, dizziness or loss of control of bowel and bladder. The frequency of epileptic symptoms varies widely across individuals. Some people with epilepsy have

many seizures each day while some can control their condition with medication, diet or other environmental adaptations, and go for months or even years without a seizure.

Autism

Autism is a developmental disorder that affects how the brain functions and usually becomes apparent by the time a child reaches the age of three. Characteristics of this disability include impairment of social interaction and communication skills, and usually include restrictive, repetitive, or unusual patterns of behaviors or interests, and activities. Some people with autism also have intellectual disability, while others have normal intelligence. People with autism can learn if they receive appropriate structured educational, environmental and family supports.

A person may have more than one developmental disability. More than half of Harbor Regional Center clients have intellectual disability, and many also have a second developmental disability - such as epilepsy. People with developmental disabilities also may have conditions such as heart defects, allergies, and mental health problems.

Some regional center clients have serious medical conditions in addition to one or more developmental disabilities. Some of these people depend on technology to support certain body functions. Examples are clients who require a mechanical ventilator to help them breathe and people who are fed through a tube inserted in the stomach.

About Our Clients

Harbor Regional Center currently provides services to more than 11,000 people with developmental disabilities and their families. About 15% are between birth and 2 years of age and are served under our early intervention program. 37% are between the age of 3 and 18 years of age and 48% are adults over 18 years of age.

Most of our clients - about 83% - live at home with families. An additional 10% live in some type of licensed home in the community, about 7% live on their own with supports. Our clients are of all ages and all levels of disability. Increasingly, the regional center is serving families who are new immigrants to this country and speak a language other than English. We provide services in a culturally appropriate manner, and provide information in the family's primary language as much as possible.