

OPWDD Initial Eligibility Guide

This document is to help you understand what is required for Initial Eligibility for services through the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). This guide may be used to help you submit an application or understand why an application may have been denied.

Overview of OPWDD Eligibility Process

Generally, there are **2 steps** in the OPWDD eligibility process:

The first step is to submit an application for initial OPWDD eligibility. At this stage, the applicant must show they have a qualifying developmental disability.

The Initial OPWDD Eligibility application will include:

- Transmittal Form for Determination of Developmental Disability
- Evaluations measuring the individual's cognitive functioning (IQ), adaptive behavior and social/developmental history as well as other medical records.

The second step, once the applicant has been approved for initial eligibility, is to submit an application for the **OPWDD Home and Community Based Medicaid Waiver Services (HCBS)**. The second step is discussed in the OPWDD Waiver eligibility guide.

Once the Care Coordination Organization (CCO) submits the application – the OPWDD Development Disability Regional Office (DDRO) may approve the Initial Eligibility Packet. If the reviewers can't make a determination, the DDRO may request additional information and/or send the application to 2nd Step Review. If a decision can't be made, the DDRO should send a letter to the CCO and applicant explaining the next steps, including any deadlines for submitting requested documentation.

During 2nd Step Review, the eligibility packet is reviewed by psychologists who decide whether the eligibility criteria are met. Once a decision is made, they

will send a Notice of Decision (NOD), either approving or denying the applicant.

The NOD letter is important because it will give a reason for the packet being denied at this stage. For example, it will say it's because of "lack of qualifying diagnosis" and/or "lack of substantial impairment." The NOD letter also explains how to appeal the decision – applicants who are denied have **60 days from the NOD date** to request a conference, 3rd Step Review, and/or Fair Hearing. The instructions for how to request each are listed in the NOD letter. Applicants can also reach out to IDDO to discuss the options.

A conference is an informal conversation with the DDRO that can help explain why they denied the application and how to make changes to the application that may result in a successful outcome.

A Fair Hearing is a more formal appeal where the applicant will have an opportunity to present why they believe they should be eligible to an impartial administrative judge with the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), who will then decide whether the DDRO's decision was correct.

If a Fair Hearing is requested, the eligibility packet will automatically be submitted to 3rd Step Review, which will be reviewed by the senior psychologists in Albany, and another letter will be sent to the applicant either upholding or reversing the previous determination.

TIP: Have a conference first before a fair hearing.

A conference meeting not only allows you to better understand the reason for the denial but also allows you to submit additional documents to the DDRO.

Once approved for OPWDD Initial Eligibility, the participant and their family will have access services under Family Support Services (FSS), such as family reimbursement, respite, recreation/camp, behavioral support, etc. – up to \$3,000 per year. The CCO should help explain how to access these services.

If the applicant is approved for Initial Eligibility and needs more services, they can then move on to apply for the OPWDD Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver with the CCO's help.

If the participant also has active Medicaid coverage, they can choose to enroll with the CCO to receive care management. To do this the participant or their guardian must complete the CCO enrollment form (CCO1) so a care manager (CM) can be assigned. The assigned CM then works with the participant to develop a Life Plan and help them apply for the waiver, if necessary.

Step-by-Step Guide for Initial Eligibility

Step 1: Confirm Eligibility Prerequisites

To qualify, the individual must:

1. Have at least **one** of the listed **developmental disability diagnoses**.
 - a. Autism
 - b. Intellectual disability
 - c. Cerebral palsy
 - d. Epilepsy
 - e. Familial dysautonomia
 - f. Prader-Willi syndrome
 - g. Neurological impairments
2. Have proof the disability occurred before age 22.
3. Show substantial limitations in **at least three** of the following areas that are clearly attributed to the qualifying diagnosis:
 - **Self-care:** eating, dressing, hygiene, toileting on their own, helping with household chores
 - **Receptive/expressive language:** understanding and responding to others, social skills
 - **Learning**
 - **Mobility**
 - **Self-direction:** ability to initiate, plan, execute tasks on their own, make choices, manage their behavior
 - **Capacity for independent living:** manage their daily routines without assistance, maintain safety on their own
 - **Economic self-sufficiency:** understanding money concepts, budgeting

Step 2: Gather the Documents

A complete Initial Eligibility packet should include documentation of a qualifying diagnosis, as defined by New York State, an assessment of the individual's functional limitations, and demonstrate the individual's need for services.

To apply for Initial OPWDD eligibility, the following documents are needed:

- **Psychological Assessment**, with full IQ and Adaptive Functioning scores and "narrative" or a written summary explain the results, showing the individual has one of the qualifying disabilities listed above. The evaluation must be **less than 3 years old**. For full list of acceptable evaluations see [Document Eligibility Chart in the Appendix](#).

- **Social History or Psychosocial** – completed by clinician that shows disability occurred before age 22. This might be included in the psychological report or done with the school evaluations as part of the IEP process. This report must be ***less than 1 year old***.
- **Medical Report** – recent physical / general medical report from within the last 12 months.
- OPWDD may also ask for additional documents or evaluations, including an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

TIP: For school-aged children you may contact the child's school or district for help getting the necessary evaluations or assessments

Obtaining Evaluations:

If the individual receives special education services, the local school district may have some or all the reports they need to apply for OPWDD (this tends to be true for NYC). Parents can request their child's school records by contacting the school.

If the individual doesn't have the reports they need, they can often have them done at an Article 16 clinic. A directory of providers is on OPWDD's website that can be searched by county - [OPWDD Eligibility Assessment Providers](#)

Step 3: Check for Key Elements in Reports

- **Check that the documents are consistent** – meaning they list the same diagnosis and fact patterns.
- **Assess for functional limitations** – are they significantly performing below others their age in everyday life areas. For example, can they dress, eat, use the bathroom, wash up on their own?

Generally:

- If IQ less than 70, need at least 2 adaptive scores in “low range (i.e., 2 standard deviations below mean)
- If IQ above 70, need 3 or more adaptive scores in “low” range
- There is a clear diagnosis of a qualifying developmental disability for applicants over 8

- Note: children under 8 –must show substantial functional limitation associated with global or specific developmental delays but an actual diagnosis is not required.¹
- The IQ and Adaptive behavior scores are standardized and not an abbreviated assessment (The individual’s psychological evaluation will state the full name of the assessment and specify if the abbreviated version was used) See *Document Eligibility Chart in Appendix*.
- All evaluations and assessments are signed, dated and are no more than three years old.

Step 4: Contact Care Coordination Organization (CCO)

- The applicant needs to reach out to a CCO or service access agency in their area to assist with submitting the Initial Eligibility Packet. See CCO Map in the Appendix or visit IDDO’s page on CCO Coverage areas at <https://iddony.org/cco-coverage-areas>.

¹ [OPWDD Eligibility Guidelines](#) p. 12-13.

APPENDIX

1. OPWDD Initial Eligibility Document Chart
2. CCO Map (July 2024)
3. DDRO Map (July 2025)

Document Type	Assessment Tool or Scale	Date Completed
Psychological Evaluation with IQ & DSM-5 diagnosis	Accepted - Kaufman Assessment series - Leiter International Performance Scale (Leiter-3) - Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales (SB-5) - Wechsler series of Intelligence Scales (WPPSI-IV, WISC-V, WAIS-V) - Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Cognitive Abilities (WJ-IV) Not Accepted: - Abbreviated WASI & KBIT	No more than 3 years old
Adaptive Behavior Assessment	Accepted - Adaptive Behavior Assessment Systems (ABAS-3) - Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (Vineland-3 or VABS-3) - Scales of Independent Behavior-R (SIB-R) Generally: - If IQ less than 70, need 2 adaptive scores in “low range” (aka 2 standard deviations below mean) - If IQ above 70, need 3 or more adaptive scores in “low” range	No more than 3 years old

Psychosocial Assessment	Comprehensive Social/ Developmental History Completed by clinician that shows disability occurred before age 22	Within 1 year
Medical Evaluation	Recent physical / general medical report	Within 1 year
Autism Assessment	Comprehensive report from specialist with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder AND specific reason why diagnosis was given & specific behaviors that are present. Accepted: - ADOS - ADI-R Not accepted - CARS/GARS	
Additional Medical or Specialist Reports	For central nervous system disorders, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, you may need additional medical records (i.e. neurological reports, genetic testing) to support qualifying diagnosis	Within 1 year
Psychoeducational Evaluation	May be applicable in cases where a child has learning disabilities, ADHD, and other conditions that may impact academic performance.	Within 1 year
Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 Plan	Only applicable if individual has a plan.	



CCO Coverage Areas



833-MYACANY (833-692-2269)
<https://acany.org>

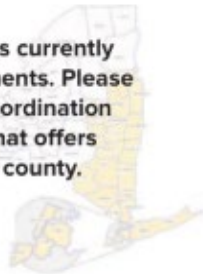


518-235-1888
www.caredesignny.org



Tri-County Care (TCC) is currently pausing any new enrollments. Please select another Care Coordination Organization (CCO) that offers services within your county.

844-504-5400
www.tricountycare.org



844-347-3168
www.primecareny.org



315-565-2612
<http://lifeplancco.com>



888-977-7030
www.personcenteredservices.com



607-376-7526
www.southerntierconnect.org



Office of Mental Health
Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

5 Developmental Disabilities Regional Offices

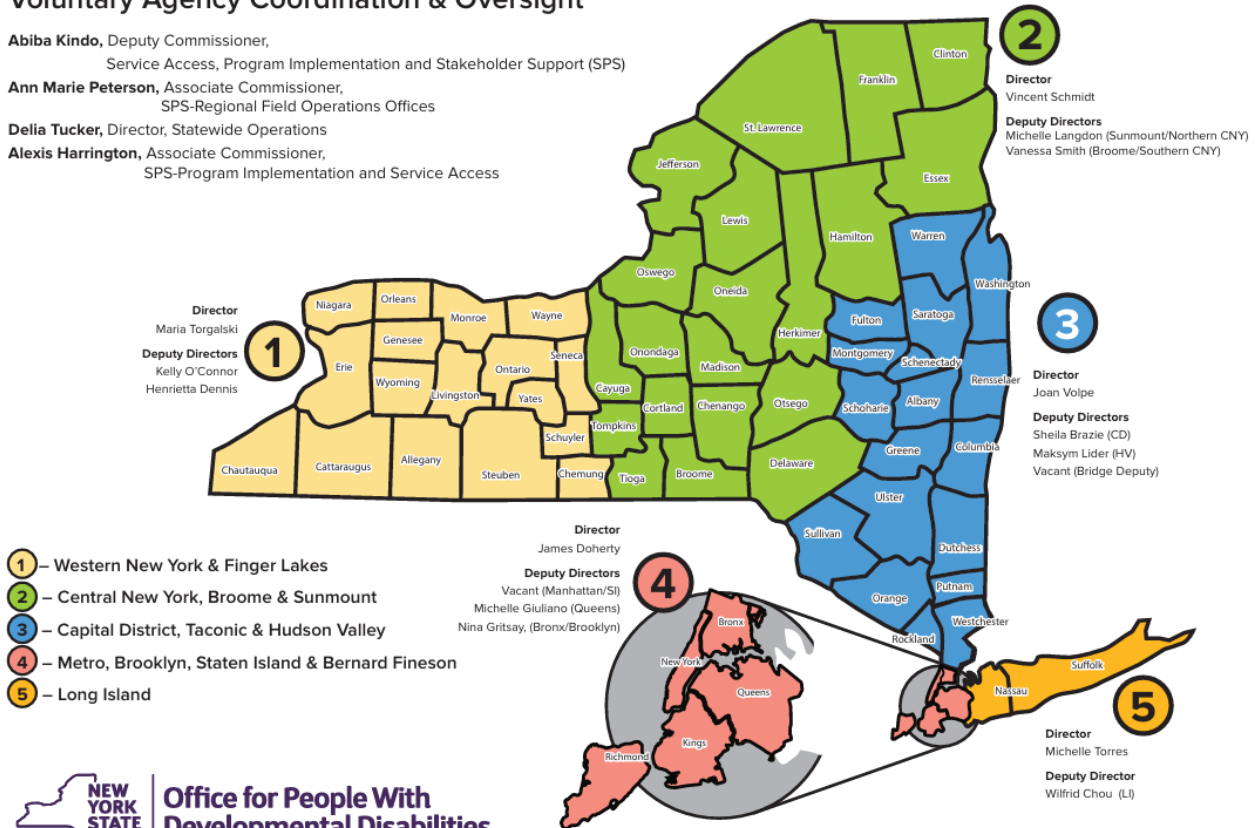
Voluntary Agency Coordination & Oversight

Abiba Kindo, Deputy Commissioner,
Service Access, Program Implementation and Stakeholder Support (SPS)

Ann Marie Peterson, Associate Commissioner,
SPS-Regional Field Operations Offices

Delia Tucker, Director, Statewide Operations

Alexis Harrington, Associate Commissioner,
SPS-Program Implementation and Service Access



About IDDO



Group photo of IDDO staff in the CSSNY office

The [Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Ombudsprogram \(IDDO\)](#) provides independent guidance and advocacy to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their caregivers and providers in New York State.

IDDO helps people navigate supports and services through the [Office for People with Developmental Disabilities \(OPWDD\)](#), a New York state government agency.

IDDO is a program of the [Community Service Society of New York](#) located at 633 Third Ave, 10th FL, New York, NY 10017





Contact the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Ombudsprogram (IDDO)

Call our Helpline: [1-800-762-9290](tel:1-800-762-9290)

Visit our website: <https://iddony.org>