

# What California's Master Plan for Developmental Services Means for You

In March 2025, California released the Master Plan for Developmental Services: A Community-Driven Vision. It's a big deal — the most ambitious effort in decades to rethink how the state supports people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families.

But “master plan” is one of those phrases that sounds important without telling you much. So what does it mean for you?

This guide skips the policy language and answers the question most people really want to know: is anything going to change, and if so, when?

## The short answer

The Master Plan is real, and it has some teeth — California law now requires the state to report to the Legislature on its progress every year through 2036. But a plan isn't the same as a law or a guarantee. Many of its promises depend on future funding and political will. Some things are already changing. Others will take years. And a few may not happen at all.

## Where Did the Master Plan Come From?

Governor Newsom's administration started the Master Plan process in 2024. A committee appointed by the California Health and Human Services Agency (CalHHS) included people with disabilities, family members, advocates, service providers, direct support workers, and people from California's 21 regional centers.

The committee met for about a year and held more than 45 listening sessions across the state. The result was 167 recommendations, grouped into six broad areas.

People with disabilities — called self-advocates in the plan — played a big role throughout. That matters, because plans shaped by the people most affected tend to focus on what actually needs to change.

## The Six Areas of the Plan, in Plain English

The Master Plan is built around six big themes. Here's what each one really means:

1	<b>Fairness</b>	Making sure the system works the same way for everyone, no matter what language you speak, where you live, or what community you're from. Right now, where you live and who you know can change what services you get. The plan aims to fix that.
2	<b>Your Own Choices</b>	Making sure people with I/DD have real say over their own lives and services. This includes growing supported decision-making as an option instead of conservatorship, and making sure people have the tools and information they need to make their own choices.
3	<b>Getting Services</b>	Making it easier to get the services you need, faster. This includes cutting wait times, simplifying paperwork, and making sure regional centers connect people to everything they're entitled to, not just what they happen to ask for.
4	<b>Workforce</b>	Tackling the shortage of direct support professionals (DSPs) by improving pay, training, and working conditions. This matters a lot, because even a great plan doesn't help if there aren't enough people to provide the services.
5	<b>Accountability</b>	Making the system more open, so families, advocates, and the public can see whether regional centers and the state are doing what they say. This includes clearer information about what services exist and how decisions get made.
6	<b>Data</b>	Using better information to measure whether the system is working and where it needs to improve. Right now, California doesn't always have good data on whether services are making a difference in people's lives.

## What's Already Changing

Some of the work called for in the Master Plan is already happening. Here's what's real and underway right now:

### **A new case management system (LOIS)**

One of the state's biggest investments is replacing the old computer systems regional centers use to manage cases and track services. The new system is called LOIS — the Life Outcomes Improvement System. This isn't just a tech upgrade. The goal is that a better system will mean:

- You can access information about your services more easily
- Regional center staff spend less time on paperwork and more time helping people
- The state gets better data on how the system is performing

LOIS is still being built. The state plans to choose a vendor to build the system in 2027, with a multi-year rollout after that. The 2026–27 state budget keeps funding the project, so it's moving forward — but it will be a few years before most people see it.

### **Ending sub-minimum wage**

California has fully ended the practice of paying people with disabilities less than minimum wage. SB 639 made this illegal as of January 1, 2025 — so this change has already happened. If you or a family member is working for less than minimum wage anywhere in California today, that's no longer allowed.

This is a real shift, not just words on paper. It also means the service system needs to keep moving toward supporting people in real jobs, at real wages, alongside coworkers without disabilities. The Master Plan treats this as a priority, and a proposed budget change for 2026–27 aims to make it easier for people seeking work to get the right help figuring out who pays for what support.

### **Working toward more consistent intake and respite processes (SB 138)**

One of the most common frustrations families raise is that the regional center system feels inconsistent. Two families in different parts of the state — or even at the same regional center — can have very different experiences getting services, not because their situations are different, but because the process itself varies.

SB 138, signed into law in 2024, told the state to create one standard way for regional centers to handle intake (your very first contact with a regional center) and to assess respite needs. The law set a deadline of January 1, 2025, for the standard intake

process, and January 1, 2026, for regional centers to start using a new standardized respite tool.

### Where this actually stands

As of early 2026, the Department of Developmental Services still lists both of these as “in development.” The respite tool is being tested and rolled out through 2026. The standardized intake process is behind its original deadline.

This doesn't mean the law failed — it means the work is harder than the original timeline assumed. If your regional center experience still feels inconsistent with others, that's expected for now. It's reasonable to ask your service coordinator where things stand.

### Language access

The Department of Developmental Services is carrying out a Language Access Plan that requires important documents to be translated into multiple languages. If you or someone in your family has had trouble getting information from a regional center because of a language barrier, this work is aimed directly at that.

### Regional center accountability and board training

The state has proposed changes that would require regional center board members to have better training and clearer qualifications. There's also a proposal to combine the separate contracts regional centers have with the state into a clearer system for performance, incentives, and compliance. The goal is a system with clearer expectations and better oversight.

## What's Still in Progress

Much of the Master Plan describes where the state wants to end up, but the how and when are still being worked out. Here's where things stand on a few key pieces:

<b>Equity data and tracking</b>	The Department is building out tools to track differences in services by race, language, location, and other factors, through its Access & Equity initiative. A full public dashboard hasn't been published yet, but this work is active and ongoing.
<b>Defining “generic services”</b>	Regional centers are the “payer of last resort” — they only pay for things when no other source, like Medi-Cal or schools, is responsible. Figuring out who's responsible for what has always been confusing. The original deadline for a clear statewide definition was July 2025.

	As of early 2026, this work is still listed as “in development,” so it's running behind schedule.
<b>Supported decision-making</b>	The plan calls for more education about alternatives to conservatorship, like supported decision-making. This work is ongoing. Regional centers, schools, and courts all need better information about what options exist.
<b>Workforce investment</b>	The plan calls for real investment in training and pay for direct support workers, but this depends heavily on the state budget. Workforce shortages are still a serious problem, and reaching the plan's goals here will take steady funding over time.
<b>Early Start expansion</b>	The plan calls for protecting and growing Early Start, California's early intervention program for infants and toddlers with delays or disabilities, making sure it's delivered in culturally appropriate ways. This work continues, but Early Start has historically gotten less funding than the need calls for.

## What to Watch Out For

The Master Plan is a real effort to fix a system that's been frustrating and inconsistent for a lot of families. But it's worth watching how it plays out, rather than assuming everything will happen on its own.

### **Important: the plan doesn't make itself happen**

The Master Plan is a framework, not a law, a budget, or a guarantee. Many of its 167 recommendations need separate legislation, budget funding, or new regulations before they take effect. Some already have that backing. Many don't.

California's budget is under real pressure, and changes to federal Medicaid policy could shrink the funding that supports developmental services. Some of what the plan promises may be delayed or scaled back if the money doesn't come through.

A few specific things worth keeping an eye on:

- Whether LOIS gets the funding it needs and actually launches on a reasonable timeline
- Whether the equity tracking work turns into something the public can actually see and use

- Whether pay and training investments for direct support workers actually shrink the workforce shortage
- Whether families in rural areas and non-English-speaking communities actually feel the access improvements the plan promises
- Whether the Legislature funds the recommendations that don't have money attached yet. The plan must be reported on every year through 2036 — so there are built-in check-ins, but no built-in guarantees.

## What This Means for You, Right Now

If you're a person with a developmental disability, or a family member connected to a regional center, here's a practical summary of where things stand:

<p><b>If you need services in a language other than English</b></p>	<p>Regional centers are required to give you vital documents and communication in your language. If that's not happening, you have the right to ask, and the Master Plan makes this a priority.</p>
<p><b>If you've noticed inconsistency between regional centers</b></p>	<p>SB 138 is aimed directly at this, but it's running behind its original schedule. Ask your regional center how they're handling the new respite tool and standardized intake process, and what's changed so far.</p>
<p><b>If you want to work, or want a family member to work</b></p>	<p>Sub-minimum wage is now illegal in California. Your regional center is required to help with employment goals. If a job or work goal isn't part of your Individual Program Plan (IPP), it's worth bringing up.</p>
<p><b>If you're thinking about alternatives to conservatorship</b></p>	<p>The plan calls for more education about supported decision-making. Ask your service coordinator about options like supported decision-making agreements and authorized representative roles.</p>
<p><b>If you want to be part of the process</b></p>	<p>The Master Plan Committee keeps meeting, and there's a chance for public comment at every committee and workgroup meeting. The implementation tracking document is public and updated regularly. Your voice helped shape this plan — it can help hold it accountable too.</p>
<p><b>If you're worried about federal Medicaid cuts</b></p>	<p>That's a real concern. California's developmental services system relies heavily on federal Medicaid money. If Medicaid funding is cut nationally, the state would be under pressure to do more with less. The plan acknowledges this, and protecting the system's stability is a stated priority for 2026–27.</p>

## How to Stay Informed

The Master Plan process isn't finished, and there are real ways to stay connected:

- The CalHHS Master Plan website ([chhs.ca.gov/home/master-plan-for-developmental-services](https://chhs.ca.gov/home/master-plan-for-developmental-services)) has the full plan, meeting materials, and an implementation tracker that's updated regularly.
- The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) publishes an annual Master Plan progress report to the Legislature. The first one came out in March 2026.
- Your regional center service coordinator is your most direct contact. Ask them: what's changing in how you deliver services, and how is your regional center carrying out the Master Plan?
- Groups like Disability Rights California, the Statewide Self-Advocacy Network, and your local Family Resource Center can help you understand your rights and how to get involved.
- The State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) is another resource. It's an independent state agency that advocates for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

## A Final Word

California's Master Plan for Developmental Services is the most thorough attempt in a generation to rethink how the state supports people with I/DD and their families. That's worth taking seriously.

At the same time, a plan isn't the same thing as results. California's history with developmental services is full of good intentions that only partly came true — because funding didn't follow, because the rollout was uneven, or because people didn't have enough information to hold the system accountable.

The best thing you can do is stay informed, stay involved, and ask questions. You have real rights in this system. At its heart, the Master Plan is a promise to make those rights more real and more consistent for everyone. Keeping that promise alive is something every person and every family can help with.