

# DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SUPPORTS DIVISION NEWSLETTER

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## From the Director's Desk - Jennifer Zwally, Director

As we welcome the New Year, I would like to take a moment to sincerely thank each of you for your dedication, resilience, and hard work throughout the past year. Your commitment and partnership have been central to our achievements, and I am truly grateful for the passion you bring to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities every day.

The year ahead brings new opportunities and challenges, and I am confident that together we will continue to grow, innovate, and succeed. Let us move forward with optimism, collaboration, and a shared commitment to excellence.

A few exciting things to look forward to in 2026 include waiver renewals for the Developmental Disabilities and Medically Fragile Waivers, a revised Mi Via Waiver Service and Support Plan, continued bi-annual health and wellness visits, and continued efforts to expand our provider network and direct support professional workforce.

As our landscape continues to evolve, staying rooted in purpose while remaining flexible, open, and steadfast in our core values allows us to navigate change with integrity and impact.

I wish you and your loved ones a happy, healthy, and successful New Year.

*Jen*



## DDSD Mission Statement

To serve those with intellectual and developmental disabilities by providing a comprehensive system of person-centered community supports so that individuals live the lives they prefer, where they are respected, empowered, and free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

### To Act With:

- Accountability
- Collaboration
- Respect
- Transparency

### To Be:

- Person Centered
- Proactive
- Innovative
- Inclusive

## Developmental Disabilities Waiver Updates

**Contributor: Steven Fernandez, DD Waiver Program Manager**

### Updated 2026 Developmental Disabilities Waiver Renewal Dates

Tribal Notification - January 2026

Notice of Public Comment - February 2026

Public Hearing - March 2026

Submission of the Waiver Application to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) - March 2026

Projected Waiver Application Effective Date - July 1, 2026

Developmental Disabilities Supports Division is no longer accepting feedback for the DD Waiver Application.

### **DDSD is currently updating the DD Waiver Service Standards.**

DDSD is now accepting suggestions regarding the DD Waiver Service Standards.

To submit DD Waiver Standards revision suggestions, please use the link below.

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/5ebbf67a46ee420dad0ae56040d14d55>

## The Rate Study Is Complete

### Contributor: Joseph Tighe, Deputy Director

Thank you to all DDS staff, providers and stakeholders who participated in the process. The full Rate Study Report can be found at: [Rate Study Report](#)

### Highlights from the Final Report

For most services, the rate study recommends increasing payment rates, but rate decreases are recommended for a small number of services. However, DDS does not intend to adopt any rate reductions.

In addition to proposing rates that reflect current market conditions in New Mexico, the rate study recommends several related policy changes:

Rates for services with the same or substantially similar scope and qualification requirements should be standardized across waivers.

Rates for physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech language pathologists should be standardized, as should rates for physical therapy assistants and certified occupational therapy assistants.

Substitute care should be unbundled from the Family Living rate and be authorized and billed separately.

A payment floor should be established to ensure contracted Family Living homes receive no less than 55 percent of the Family Living payment rate paid to the Family Living provider agency.

Caseload maximums for case managers and Mi Via consultants should be reduced from the current 50 case maximum to no more than 35 cases to align the level of support received by participants with the rates paid to their providers.

These recommendations will be evaluated by DDS leadership and any decisions resulting from the recommendations are subject to review and approval by federal partners and HCA leadership. Any resulting rate or policy changes will be communicated at a later date. Thank you!

### Client Program Counts

PARTICIPANTS BY WAIVER AS OF 12/15/25	
Waiver	Participant Count
Developmental Disabilities Waiver	4,771
Mi Via Waiver	3,866
Medically Fragile Waiver	190
Total	8,755

## Implementing DDSD's New Grievance Reporting System

### Contributor: Claudia Rice, Constituent Supports Manager

In Spring 2024, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued the *Ensuring Access to Medicaid Services Final Rule*, commonly referred to as the "Access Rule." This rule is designed to enhance the quality, oversight, and person-centeredness of Medicaid-funded Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS), including those administered through the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division (DDSD) waiver programs.

In alignment with this federal directive, DDSD is pleased to announce the launch of its new grievance reporting system, overseen by the DDSD Office of Constituent Support (OCS). A grievance can be any expression of dissatisfaction or concern, whether or not a resolution is being requested. Grievances may relate to the State's or a provider agency's performance of person-centered planning, implementation of service plan requirements, or adherence to HCBS settings requirements. Person-centered planning and compliance with HCBS settings rule are essential to ensuring that individuals are empowered to live the lives they choose and to fully participate in their communities. For example, if you feel your person-centered plan is not being followed, your services are not delivered according to your preferences, you do not feel like you have full access to your community, or for other issues, report a grievance to DDSD. The purpose of this new grievance reporting system is to provide waiver recipients, their supporters, and other external stakeholders with a clear and accessible avenue to voice concerns and ensure they are addressed in a timely and appropriate manner.

This initiative not only fulfills the CMS requirements under the Access Rule but also reflects DDSD's ongoing commitment to accountability, transparency, and responsiveness.

**Online Submission:** Submit grievances online electronically:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/b2de329d2c5044e58b898f2dd52147fd>

**By Email:** Send grievances to either of the following addresses: [DDSD.Constituents@hca.nm.gov](mailto:DDSD.Constituents@hca.nm.gov)

**By Phone:** Call 505-699-6775

**By Mail:** Address written grievances to: **Developmental Disabilities Supports Division  
Constituent Support  
PO Box 2340  
Santa Fe, NM 87504-2348**

Constituents will never receive any retribution, retaliation, or be penalized for voicing their concerns or seeking resolutions to problems. The grievance reporting system is not for reporting abuse, neglect, or exploitation (ANE). All ANE must continue to be reported using current processes.

If you have questions about filing a grievance, contact Claudia Rice, Office of Constituent Support Manager, at: [Claudia.Rice@hca.nm.gov](mailto:Claudia.Rice@hca.nm.gov).

## Provider Enrollment Relations Unit Updates

### Contributor: Tammy Barth, Provider Enrollment Relations Unit Manager

The Provider Enrollment Relations Unit (PERU) remains committed to maintaining adequate provider capacity across New Mexico. Currently, six (6) newly approved providers by the Health Care Authority (HCA) are in the process of obtaining a Medicaid number to begin offering services under the Developmental Disabilities (DD) and Medically Fragile (MF) Waivers. These services include:

Case Management	Independent Living Transition
Occupational Therapy	Living Supports (Family and Supported Living)
Adult Nursing	Customized Community Supports (Group & Individual)
Non-Medical Transportation	Home Health Aide and Private Duty Nursing

Additionally, four (4) providers are undergoing HCA review for the following services:

Adult Nursing	Customized Community Supports-Individual
Mi Via Consultant	Customized In-Home Supports
Physical Therapy	Living Supports-Family Living and Respite

PERU continuously monitors provider capacity and actively recruits to ensure sufficient coverage for waiver services. Current service needs by region are outlined below:

#### Developmental Disabilities (DD) Waiver Needs:

##### Needed Services by Region

NE	Intensive Medical Living, Remote Personal Support Technology
NW	Environmental Modification, Nutritional Counseling, Socialization & Sexuality Education
SE	Environmental Modification, Nutritional Counseling
SW	Crisis Supports, Independent Living Transition, Nutritional Counseling

#### Medically Fragile (MF) Waiver Needs:

##### Needed Services by Region

Metro	Customized Community Group Supports, Individual Direct Goods & Services, Massage Therapy, Nutritional Counseling, Specialized Medical Equipment & Supplies, Specialized Respite Home
NE	Environmental Modification, Individual Direct Goods & Services, Nutritional Counseling, Specialized Medical Equipment & Supplies, Specialized Respite Home
NW	Behavioral Supports Consultation, Individual Direct Goods & Services, Nutritional Counseling, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Specialized Medical Equipment & Supplies, Specialized Respite Home
SE	Behavioral Supports Consultation, Individual Direct Goods & Services, Nutritional Counseling, Speech Therapy, Specialized Medical Equipment & Supplies
SW	Behavioral Supports Consultation, Individual Direct Goods & Services, Nutritional Counseling, Specialized Medical Equipment & Supplies

## Health and Wellness Visits Update

### Contributor: Scott Doan, Deputy Director

As we near the end of calendar year 2025, the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division (DDSD) remains steadfast in its commitment to completion of health and wellness visits, and our ultimate goal of eliminating abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation (ANE) from our system. As of this report, DDSD has completed 38,592 health and wellness visits. The following table shows the total number of health and wellness visits completed to date for FY26. Specifically, the table shows health and wellness visits completed from 7/1/2025, to 12/5/2025, including the total number and percentage of alleged abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation (ANE) reports made to the Division of Health Improvement, Incident Management Bureau.

<u>Period of Time</u>	<b>Total Number of Health and Wellness Visits</b>	<b>Total Number of ANE Allegations Reported</b>	<b>Percent of Health and Wellness Visits with ANE Allegations Reported</b>
FY26 (7/1/2025 through 12/05/2025)	6,801	25	0.4%

DDSD has found that health and wellness visits, in addition to being a key ANE prevention strategy, have proven to be invaluable in other ways. Health and wellness visits have allowed DDSD to directly engage with individuals in services, their families, and the Direct Support Professionals who work tirelessly day in and day out. These interactions are beneficial in allowing DDSD to hear and observe firsthand the concerns individuals may have, and to learn what issues or concerns may need additional follow-up to resolve.

If DDSD staff identify an issue or concern requiring follow up, these can be tracked internally using the DDSD Regional Office Request for Assistance (RORA) database. All RORAs related to health and wellness visit follow up are tracked until the concern is resolved. The table below reflects the total number of RORAs filed and closed from 7/1/2025 through 12/5/2025 as a result of health and wellness visits.

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Total Number of RORAs filed</b>	<b>Total Number of RORAs closed</b>	<b>Total Number of RORAs closed</b>
FY26 (7/1/2025 through 12/05/2025)	39	*56	*20

\*The total number of RORAs closed (56) exceeds the number of RORAs filed (39) during the July 1, 2025 to December 5, 2025 time frame because multiple RORAs were closed during for RORAs that were submitted prior to July 1, 2025. Of the 39 RORAs filed from 7/1/2025 to 12/5/2025, 20 remain open.

As we close out calendar year 2025, DDSD would like to thank each person who has participated in the health and wellness visits for your continued efforts and cooperation.

# Home Studies for In-Home Living Supports in Mi Via

**Contributor: Elaine Hill, Mi Via Program Manager**

## **What is a Home Study?**

A home study is not an inspection, but an assessment designed to understand safety conditions, feasibility of service delivery, and potential risk factors. Under the Developmental Disabilities Waiver (DDW), home studies are a longstanding requirement for Family Living (FL) providers and include evaluation of environmental safety, adequacy of supports, emergency preparedness, accessibility, and alignment with the participant's service plan. Another component of home studies is a self-assessment completed by the family at the time of application. The purpose of the application and self-assessment is to identify family culture, communication style and motivations that may assist in participant matching, especially for non-related subcontractors, as well as to assure the applicant is aware of the requirements to provide the service.

## **Who conducts Home Studies and at what frequency do they occur?**

Home studies are being considered for homes where Mi Via participants are receiving In-Home Living Supports (IHLS) through a vendor agency. While Mi Via is a self-directed model, IHLS providers are contracted with vendor agencies, who are reimbursed with State and Federal dollars, to deliver Medicaid services inside the participant's home making them subject to the same level of accountability and safety expectations as DDW In-home providers.

DDSD is proposing home studies occur at the following frequency:

- When IHLS services are initially requested and approved in the Mi Via Service and Support Plan (SSP)
- Annually, and
- Whenever there is a new risk, or significant change in the participant's needs or living situation.

## **Why Home Studies Are Being Considered – Benefits of Home Studies**

Introducing home studies to IHLS strengthens the service in several ways:

- **Parity Across Waivers:** Ensures that participants receiving living supports, regardless of waiver, receive the same quality of service and protection.
- **Program Integrity:** Enhances oversight of services funded with federal and state Medicaid dollars.
- **Vendor Accountability:** Ensures IHLS providers delivering services in the home meet consistent safety and living standards.
- **Safety Assurances:** Helps identify environmental risks and hazards, unmet needs, caregiver strain, or signs of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
- **Preventive Approach:** Supports early intervention rather than reactive response to incidents.
- **Better Support Planning:** Helps identify gaps in supports, opportunities for education, and areas where additional safeguards may be needed.
- **Ensures compliance with Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Settings Requirements:** Verifies the residence protects privacy, safety, autonomy, community inclusion, unrestricted access, and full physical accessibility based on the individual's assessed needs.

## **How Input Is Being Collected**

Stakeholder input is essential to shaping the final design. Feedback is being collected through written comments submitted to the Mi Via Program Manager, Elaine Hill at [elaine.hill@hca.nm.gov](mailto:elaine.hill@hca.nm.gov). Please submit comments by March 1, 2026.

## Medically Fragile Waiver Renewal Update

### Contributor: Melissa McBride, Clinical Services Bureau Chief

The renewal process for the Medically Fragile Waiver (MFW) continues to move forward according to the established timeline. Key milestones in the renewal process have already been achieved, with Tribal notifications successfully distributed on January 21, 2026.

Looking ahead, notices for public comment and the official newspaper release are scheduled to be issued on February 20, 2026. These notices will provide stakeholders and community members the opportunity to review the proposed renewal and offer feedback. A public hearing will follow on March 23, 2026, allowing for additional public input and discussion.

Following the completion of these engagement activities, the MFW renewal application is expected to be submitted to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) on April 1, 2026, or earlier if feasible.

In parallel with the renewal process, recruitment efforts are underway for a new Medically Fragile Waiver Program Manager. This role will support both ongoing operations and future initiatives associated with the waiver, helping to ensure the continued success and effective administration of the program. In parallel with the renewal process, recruitment efforts are underway for providers of new proposed services under Specialized Therapies: Music Therapy, Play Therapy, Hippotherapy, Biofeedback, Acupuncture, Chiropractic, and Naprapathy. Call for Providers with information on each service, provider responsibilities, and how to apply coming soon.

## DDSD Continues with Monthly Allocation Schedule

### Contributor: Nicole Hernandez, Pre-Service Intake, Bureau Chief

The Developmental Disabilities Supports Division (DDSD) continues to successfully implement its monthly waiver allocation schedule—an important step toward improving access, consistency, and efficiency in service delivery.

Launched in August 2025, the Pre-Service Intake Bureau (PSIB) sends out and processes approximately 70 waiver applications each month under the ongoing allocation framework, which eliminates a waiting list for developmental disabilities services. Offers are sent on the 15<sup>th</sup> of every month, providing a predictable and transparent timeline for individuals and families seeking waiver services.

For information on how to apply for waiver services, including Frequently Asked Questions and Contacts, please visit: <https://www.hca.nm.gov/eligibility-determination/>

## Employment First Webpage

### Contributor: Alix Dean, Statewide Community Inclusion and Employment Lead

DDSD is proud to announce the launch of the Employment First webpage, a new resource dedicated to promoting employment for individuals receiving home and community-based services (HCBS) waiver services.

The webpage highlights success stories of people supported by DDSD's programs who are thriving in the workforce, showing that meaningful employment is possible for everyone.

The following employment success story, called an Employment Tale, is now posted on the Employment First webpage:

"I enjoy my job because I can learn new things every day, and every day I work with my coworkers it makes me realize that we work together to make new strong work relationships, and they accept me for who I am by using good attitude towards other people. Working at this job is a great feeling because I can work together to finish it and share the best attitude with each other."-V.B.

Whether you are a person exploring job opportunities, a family member seeking guidance, or a provider supporting someone's employment goals, the Employment First webpage offers:

- Practical information and resources to get started with employment planning and support.
- Tools, tips, and inspiration to help people achieve their career aspirations and engage fully in community life.



Explore success, access resources, and start your employment journey today on the Employment First webpage:

<https://www.hca.nm.gov/employment-first/>

## Graduating From NMSU With Honors With Cerebral Palsy

### Contributor: Arcelia Mendoza

Despite facing skepticism from family and society due to cerebral palsy, I graduated from New Mexico State University with honors, challenging perceptions of success for those with disabilities.

During birth, a lack of oxygen damaged the motor system of my brain causing quadriplegia CP. I can't speak clearly, walk on my own nor handwrite, but I can think, learn and feel just like anyone else. Although CP limits my mobility, I can still live a fulfilling and successful life by using assistive technology.

For mobility, I use a power wheelchair to get around. Currently, I use an Accent 1400, an augment-



ative and alternative communication device, to talk and do my coursework. Throughout life, I had different AAC devices, which are digital tablets or iPads with a software that lets me type whatever I want to say and speaks it out for me. I access my Accent 1400 with a Bluetooth joystick, the same one I use to drive my wheelchair.

All this assistive technology, along with therapists, family, professors and support services, helped me be where I am today. After over nine years, slowly but surely, I earned a Bachelor of Arts with a double major in Journalism and Media Studies and Spanish.

College was challenging, but it empowered me to become independent, confident and find a sense of purpose in life. After enduring late nights, early mornings and heavy assignments, some of which were even published, I realized I aspire to be a bilingual disability advocate journalist.

Society, along with media, has indoctrinated us to think being disabled is something abnormal, making us feel less than others. As much as we

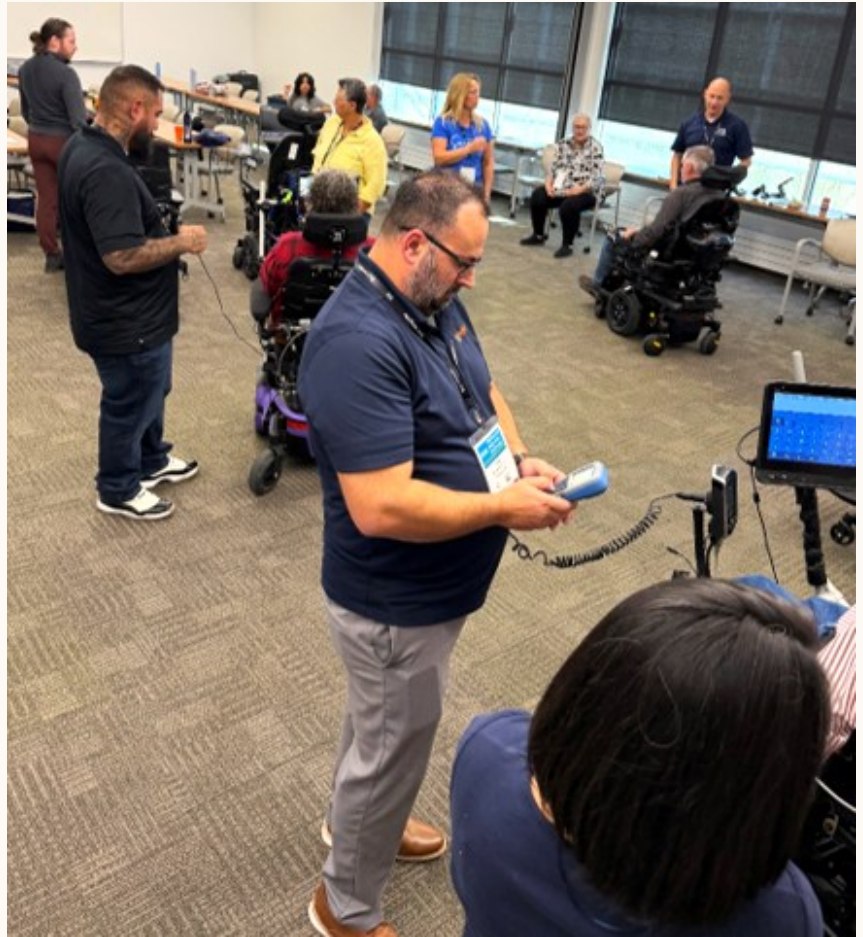
try to belong or fit within what society considers normal, we simply cannot because we are different. We are often seen as someone to feel sorry for, incapable, unattractive, and even asexual, excluding and stigmatizing us. Sadly, yes, the world was not created with us in mind, even though disabilities or, better yet, divers-abilities have always been part of society.

As a disability community member, I see myself contributing to normalizing divers-abilities in my future career. With my firsthand experience, journalistic and public speaking skills, I hope to create a lasting impact, changing the way disability is viewed. The world needs to stop stigmatizing disabilities and start embracing them.

## 2025 Mobility and Positioning Conference

### Contributor: MaryBeth Schubauer, Statewide Physical Therapy Consultant

In November 2025, over 160 people gathered at the APS Berna Facio Education Center to attend the DDS sponsored Mobility and Positioning (MAP) Conference organized by the Specialty Seating Clinic. The eleventh annual conference focused on wheelchair provision and positioning across the lifespan for people with intellectual and physical disabilities. Attendees included a wide range of professionals who provide services to children and adults with mobility challenges, including community based therapists, school personnel, and caregivers/family members. A number of individuals who utilize durable medical equipment products which were showcased at the conference also attended and participated in sessions. The annual conference provides a wonderful opportunity to recruit physical and occupational therapists to serve individuals receiving services on the waiver programs while earning the continuing education credits needed for licensure renewal. Education sessions were provided by representatives from local and national durable medical equipment manufacturers, therapists providing services to people across New Mexico, and DDS consultant therapists. Education and vendor sessions provide access to new modalities, technologies and equipment that benefit our community. One attendee commented they were “able to bring continued education and resources back to our local communities and re-educate, inspire, and find solutions.” We look forward to providing an even bigger and better educational experience November 5-7, 2026!



Manufacturer representatives provided power wheelchairs for conference attendees to learn about and trial, along with alternative devices to joysticks for driving wheelchairs.



Therapist trialing a power wheelchair with an eye gaze driving control during conference session.

## Prader-Willi Syndrome

**Contributor: Loretta Sesbeau, ARCA Nutritionist**

Established in 1991 through the New Mexico's General Services Department and the Health Care Authority's Developmental Disabilities Supports Division the ARCA Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS) Project has delivered specialized professional services to individuals with PWS and their families for more than 34 years across the state of New Mexico. As one of the nation's longest-standing initiatives of its kind, the project is committed to enhancing quality of life through education, training, case coordination, and nutrition consultation. The PWS Project actively promotes awareness of Prader-Willi Syndrome and advocates for individuals living with this unique disability.

Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS) is a rare genetic disorder characterized by an insatiable appetite, reduced muscle tone, cognitive and developmental delays, and a high risk of severe obesity with life-threatening complications. Through comprehensive services and community engagement, the ARCA PWS Project strives to address these challenges and empower individuals, families, providers and the community with the resources, training and education they need to thrive. The great news is that new therapeutic treatments for Prader-Willi Syndrome are currently being researched and developed, and with adequate supports, individuals with PWS can lead full, meaningful, and productive lives. If you would like more information about PWS or you would like to request a training for your agency please reach out to Vanessa Lucero, PWS Case Coordinator at (505) 550-1550 or email her at [valucero@arcaspirit.org](mailto:valucero@arcaspirit.org).



## StationMD DSP Spotlight Series

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“Caroline is always willing to jump in and help any individual get what they need. She goes out of her way to ensure our clients are well cared for.”

**Community Options, Inc. in New Mexico**

Kicking off our 2026 DSP Spotlight series, StationMD is honored to recognize Caroline Callan, a DSP at Community Options, Inc. in New Mexico, whose dedication to person-centered care exemplifies what it means to be an exceptional Direct Support Professional and earned her a second spotlight with StationMD.

Caroline's colleagues describe her as dedicated, reliable, compassionate, and someone who consistently follows through. She goes above and beyond daily, ensuring every individual receives not just care, but meaningful interaction and enrichment.

When asked what drives her excellence, Caroline emphasizes strategic planning, continuous skill development, and fostering collaboration by helping others and offering fresh perspectives. Her commitment to growth - both personal and team-wide - creates positive ripple effects throughout Community Options.

"Caroline is always willing to jump in and help any individual get what they need," her team shares. "She goes out of her way to ensure our clients are well cared for."

Caroline's partnership with StationMD has been particularly impactful. "I've used StationMD several times, and not once was I disappointed," she notes. Her preparation and advocacy during telehealth visits ensure individuals receive timely, quality care.

Beyond her professional dedication, Caroline brings creativity and balance to her life through sewing, cooking, and spending time outdoors.

Thank you, Caroline, for your unwavering commitment to enhancing lives and setting the standard for compassionate care!

#### **StationMD's DSP Spotlight Series**

StationMD's DSP Spotlight Series program is dedicated to celebrating and highlighting the exceptional dedication and contributions of direct care professionals. Through this initiative, our goal is to cultivate a culture of appreciation and recognition for the impactful work carried out by DSPs, showcasing and acknowledging their unwavering dedication to serving the population with I/DD.

## E-BLASTS

### **Contributor: Tammy Barth, Provider Enrollment Relations Unit Manager**

DDSD Document Distribution – December 2, 2025

DDSD Document Distribution – November 17, 2025

Community Inclusion Provider Survey Memo – November 5, 2025

DDSD Document Distribution – October 31, 2025

Revised - DDSD October 2025 Newsletter – October 17, 2025

Implementation of HB 357 - Mi Via Provider GRT – October 16, 2025

DDSD Newsletter for October 2025 – October 15, 2025

DDSD Document Distribution – October 15, 2025

Mi Via Waiver Renewal Approval Memo – October 2, 2025

DDSD Document Distribution – October 1, 2025

Service and Support Plan Sharing Memo – September 29, 2025

Budget Revision Clarification for Purchasing Agent/Fiscal Agent Services – September 19, 2025

Time Study and Survey Reminder – September 17, 2025

DDSD Document Distribution – September 15, 2025

DDSD Document Distribution – September 4, 2025

## NEW HIRES AND PROMOTIONS

### **Contributor: Joe Anaya, Human Resources**

Miguel Lucero, Training & Development Specialist III, Albuquerque, 10/11/25

Anita Marrujo, Senior Registered Nurse Roswell, starts 12/20/25

Cesar Leon, Senior Purchasing Coordinator, Santa Fe, starts 11/22/25

Susan Mattson, Sr Training and Dev Coord Albuquerque, 11/8/25

Jaekisha Lewis, Social Services Coordinator Albuquerque, 11/8/25

Andrea Grider, Supervisor, Social Services, Albuquerque, 11/8/25

Tashia Baca, OFFICE CLRK, GEN-O, Albuquerque, starts 10/25/25

Rosalie Mondragon, Social Services Coordinator Taos NERO, 10/11/25

Eryn Bailey, Training & Knowledge Management - Bureau Chief, A/O II Albuquerque, 10/11/25

Lori Spicer. Registered Nurse Level III Albuquerque, starts 9/27/25

## ABOUT US

**New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Supports Division is located at:**

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