

Accessibility Progress Report 2024-2025

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General

About the Department of Social Services

The Department of Social Services (DSS), which is comprised of the administrative units of the NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), serves millions of New Yorkers annually through a broad range of services that aim to address

poverty, income inequality, and prevent homelessness. Through integrated management for HRA and DHS, client services can be provided more seamlessly and effectively. The city leverages shared service functions across agencies, which results in better day-to-day management and facilitates an integrated mission across agencies.

<https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/about/about-hra.page>

About the Human Resources Administration

The New York City Human Resources Administration/Department of Social Services (HRA/DSS) is dedicated to fighting poverty and income inequality by providing New Yorkers in need with essential benefits such as cash, food, medical care, housing and emergency assistance.

As the largest local social services agency in the country, HRA helps more than three million New Yorkers annually through the administration of more than 15 major public assistance programs, with more than 12,000 employees and an operating budget of \$12 billion.

Since the publication of our 5-Year Accessibility Plan at the beginning of 2024, HRA/DSS is proud to have taken significant steps towards achieving the goals of the plan and improving accessibility for our clients and staff.

These steps include:

- Rolling out additional training regarding disabilities to all Benefits Access Center and SNAP center staff;
- The implementation of a system for identifying clients for disability set-asides in supportive housing; and
- The finalization of a new system to fast-track and prioritize access to equipment and technology for staff reasonable accommodations.

The full list of our achievements is detailed in the progress update below.

Statement of Commitment

Local Law 12 of 2023 requires every New York City agency to develop and implement a five-year accessibility plan, in consultation with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD). The legislation mandates that the accessibility plans outline the steps agencies are taking to "ensure that the agency's workplace, services, programs and activities are accessible to

and accommodating and inclusive of persons with disabilities” by improving physical, digital, and programmatic access, and providing effective communications for persons with disabilities.

NYC DSS (HRA & DHS) is fully committed to an inclusive and equitable environment for people with disabilities, whether they be our clients or our workforce.

Disability Service Facilitator and Other Key Accessibility Information

Per Local Law 27 of 2016, each City Agency must designate a Disability Service Facilitator (DSF). The designated DSF for DSS/HRA/DHS is in the DSS Office of Disability Affairs as part of the Office of Advocacy. This Office is also responsible for preparing and updating this 5-Year Accessibility Plan. Information on filing grievances regarding claims of discrimination based on disability as well as the Agency’s website accessibility statement are located on the webpage indicated below. The DSF contact information is as follows:

Office of Disability Affairs (ODA)

Jennifer Shaoul

Executive Director of Disability Affairs / Disability Service Facilitator

Human Resources Administration

150 Greenwich Street – 42nd Floor

New York, NY 10007

Fax: 917-639-0442

Email: disabilityaffairs@dss.nyc.gov

Or you can call 718-557-1399.

Feedback Process

DSS Office of Disability Affairs welcomes feedback on the accessibility of its programs and services. If you wish to provide feedback, please email Jennifer Shaoul, Disability Service Facilitator (DSF) at disabilityaffairs@dss.nyc.gov

Progress Report

The below updates reflect steps DSS/HRA has taken from 1/1/24 – 5/1/25 to address action items that were identified in the Agency’s initial 5-year plan, as well as items we expect to accomplish from 5/1/25 – 5/1/26. For a comprehensive list of action items the Agency identified for improving accessibility, the full 5-year accessibility plan may be viewed [here](#).

Physical Access

As of May 2025:

- The issue of accessibility of door handles at two HRA locations has been remediated.
- HRA has begun the consolidation of three sites into our newest state-of-the-art facility at 2400 Fulton Street (Broadway Junction) in Brooklyn. 404 Pine Street has completed its relocation.

By May 2026:

- Two more sites (250 Livingston Street and 88 Third Avenue) will relocate to the new Broadway Junction site by the end of 2025.

Digital Access

As of May 2025:

- An inventory of webpages that need audio descriptions added to videos is underway; the recently onboarded Digital Communications Specialist in the DSS Office of Communications and Marketing (OCM) is leading this effort.
 - Concurrently, the Office of Technology and Innovation (OTI) has announced a planned web migration for nyc.gov scheduled for the summer. We are currently assessing the project scope of this migration to determine if the implementation of the inventory can be integrated into our workflow simultaneously.

- Preliminary vendor outreach is underway to assess the feasibility of integrating built-in audio descriptions and American Sign Language (ASL) into future video content, aligning with Agency-wide interest.

By May 2026:

- Following the completion of the nyc.gov web migration, OCM will be better positioned to assess the optimal structure for a plan, workflow, and timeline to address the development of a policy and guidelines for program areas on creating accessible digital content, including accessible documents and appropriate image alt text implementation. Subsequent training on this policy will be offered by OCM and the Office of Disability Affairs (ODA) as needed.
- DSS will continue to explore funding to develop a mechanism to allow documents to be uploaded directly to ACCESS HRA.

Programmatic Access

As of May 2025:

- In January 2025, after a pilot training in October 2025, ODA initiated monthly *Introduction to Disabilities Part 2* trainings which all Benefits Access Center (BAC) and SNAP Center client-facing staff will receive. This training covers how to support and provide reasonable accommodations for people with mobility, sensory, mental health, cognitive, health and invisible disabilities, among other topics. The reasonable accommodation process is covered at length.
- ODA has met with both Homebase and Child Support Services (OCSS) leadership to plan an adapted *Introduction to Disabilities* training and information session.
- Planning has begun on developing an online form that clients can use to submit a request for a reasonable accommodation.
- Within Domestic Violence Services (DVS), 9 ADA-accessible units were added in Queens in March 2024.

- DVS released an active open-ended solicitation in May 2025 to replace 94 emergency DV shelter beds for residential services. The solicitation required proposers to demonstrate their commitment to ADA compliance and how they plan to meet accessibility needs of shelter residents.
- The Office of Supportive/Affordable Housing & Services (OSAHS) added filters to the Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS) so that if an applicant indicates that they have a vision or hearing disability on the 2010e, they can be identified for the NYC Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) set-aside units for people with sensory disabilities.
- ODA has continued to host an Annual ADA Celebration Event. This year's theme was *Demystifying Special Education: Guidance for DSS/HRA/DHS and Provider Agency Staff*.
- This past year, ODA issued the *Disability Digest* Newsletter for client-facing Agency and Provider staff with topics ranging from housing for people with disabilities; special education resources; resources for people who are blind or low vision; epilepsy/seizure disorders; dementia/Alzheimer's disease; and sickle cell disease.
- ODA continued to host regular Lunch & Learns for Agency and provider staff. Topics included: *Untangling SSI and SSDI; Sensory Integration; Skip the Trip: Using ACCESS HRA to Help Clients Access Benefits Remotely; An Overview of Adult Protective Services (APS); Substance Use Supports: Recovery and Harm Reduction Resources at DSS-HRA-DHS; and All About Access-a-Ride!*
- Through a generous two-year grant from The Taft Foundation in collaboration with AHRC NYC, ODA now has a Director of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Complex Needs Initiatives embedded in the team, working collaboratively with DSS's Health Services Office to support people with I/DD in DHS and HRA shelters.
- Due to that initiative, ODA also launched a Lunch & Learn Series on

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, hosting the following events:

- *Unlocking Opportunities: Navigating the Service System for Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*
- *Unlocking Opportunities: Navigating the Service System for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*
- *"When They Lose It, You Don't Have To": Understanding Behavior as Communication—and Responding Effectively*

By May 2026:

- The Adult Protective Services (APS) brochure will be produced in Large Print and the Disabled, Aged, Blind (DAB) Medicaid Renewal form will be produced in Large Print in Spanish by December 2025.
- Homebase and client-facing OCSS staff will be scheduled to receive an adapted *Introduction to Disabilities* training.
- DVS will complete the review of the submitted Provider Accessibility Plans and provide guidance for improvements by Summer 2025.
- DVS continues to work with the Shelter Occupancy Residential Tracking System (SORTS) ITS support group to add the functionality to record clients' written language in addition to spoken language, as well as the ability to capture data on animals in DV shelters.
- On the housing provider side, OSAHS is working on an enhancement in CAPS that will capture which units are disability set-asides (and what kind), so that when these units come up for re-rental, we will be able to refer people who need those accommodations.

Effective Communication

As of May 2025:

- DSS has developed a communication tool (a "Communicard") that will be used by people in shelter who use sign language to communicate. Shelter residents will be able to use the card by pointing to images and simple phrases to indicate basic needs in the following

categories: Household, Toiletries, Maintenance, Food, Office, Health, and Requests. The card includes a pain scale, numbers and letters in ASL and a QR Code that will link to a video explaining how to use the card as well as downloadable versions of the card in different languages. Individuals who use sign language to communicate will be provided the card at intake. This card is not intended to replace ASL interpretation, but to allow shelter residents to be able to make urgent requests quickly, including the request for an interpreter.

This card has been through several iterations as we have conducted focus groups with people who are deaf who use sign language for communication— many with shelter experience — as well as with professionals who are deaf. We will conduct a soft launch of the card this summer.

- In the past year, DSS continued to collaborate with the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) in offering DSS/HRA/DHS and provider agency staff with 5-week, hour-long ASL mini-courses for four different cohorts. Students continue to be selected based on the value of the course to their day-to-day work and their ability to commit to the program. The courses have been very well-received and popular, with a waiting list of several hundred staff.

By May 2026:

- The Communicard will be provided to clients who communicate using sign language at all DHS shelter intake locations and available at DHS, DV and HASA shelters.
- DSS will seek funding for an additional staff member who can take videophone calls at ASL Direct.
- DSS will continue to offer ASL mini-courses to DSS and provider agency staff in collaboration with MOPD.

- DSS continues to advocate for additional funding for expansion of available alternative formats for notices and forms.
- The last formal accessibility testing for notices clients receive on ACCESS HRA took place in 2021, in coordination with OTI. Due to staffing and resource constraints, that work has not resumed. However, while a formal testing process is not currently in place, the platform ACCESS HRA platform is built on provides built-in accessibility features and conforms to WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards with each release. ACCESS HRA continues to evaluate these features as part of each deployment. Planning for how to resume formal accessibility testing for notices—including re-engaging OTI or MOPD—is expected to begin following the fall 2025 deployment. This work will focus on folding accessibility testing back into the QA cycle going forward.
- DSS has moved forward on making more notices accessible to people who are blind or low vision and use screen reader software, with improvements and upgrades to the Near Star system scheduled to be completed in July 2025.
- DSS is seeking funding for a Digital Inclusion Officer.

Workplace Inclusion

As of May 2025:

- In June 2025, the DSS EEO and ITS departments finalized a new system to fast-track and prioritize access to equipment and technology to improve access to RAs for DSS staff.
- DSS ITS has begun upgrading Visual Studio, which has programmer accessibility tools, to ensure digital accessibility of new and modified systems developed or supported by ITS to meet accessibility requirements for digital content.

- The Partnership for Inclusive Internships (PII), a program initiated with grant funding between NYC DSS and AHRC NYC, continues to grow citywide with current oversight and funding through NYC Talent. DSS continues to be an active partner, both in hosting and in subsequently hiring interns.
- DSS provided the *Creating a Mentally Healthy and Disability-Friendly Workplace* training twice in the past year through our Leadership Development Institute.
- DSS' Human Resources Solutions (HRS) and Office of Equity & Inclusion (OEI) are in the process of working on a Recruitment Plan that will include:
 - Engagement with MOPD regarding job fairs for people with disabilities and posting positions on the NYC: ATWORK job boards.
 - Updates to diversity recruitment resources to include disability access.
 - Updates to the interview and candidate confirmation letters and emails to include information on requesting reasonable accommodations.
 - A reference tool for hiring managers on how to arrange for accommodations for new hires and for interviews with applicants,
- DSS' OEI has conducted outreach regarding staff participation in a Disability Employee Resource Group (ERG) and has identified candidates who would like to participate.
- OEI added the phrase "*If you need a reasonable accommodation to attend this event, please email equity@dss.nyc.gov by (date)*" to communications about Agency events/activities. Accessibility symbols are included, as appropriate.

By May 2026:

- DSS ITS will continue the process of upgrading Visual Studio to meet accessibility requirements for digital content for our employees.
- The DSS ITS QA Testing Group will continue to seek funding for 1-2 full-time digital accessibility staff to enhance QA testing prior to production deployment.
- DSS ITS will work with ODA to identify digital accessibility training platforms for current IT staff in addition to those provided by MOPD.
- DSS will explore more opportunities to provide the *Creating a Mentally Healthy and Disability-Friendly Workplace* training to a broader range of supervisory staff.
- DSS' HRS and OEI Offices will complete and publish a Recruitment Plan that will include the previously mentioned items related to accessibility.
- By the close of summer 2025, the Absorb (training scheduling and management system) notice to staff will be revised to ask "Do you need a reasonable accommodation to attend this training?" with details regarding how to request an RA with a deadline.
- DSS' OEI will launch the Disability Employee Resource Group (ERG).

Consultations and Feedback

The Office of Disability Affairs (ODA) continuously improves its services by integrating consultations and feedback into its processes. Following the 2015 *Lovely H. v. Eggleston* settlement, HRA underwent a comprehensive review and overhaul of its accommodation systems for people with disabilities. This led to robust procedures that ensure meaningful access and equity.

To further enhance accessibility, ODA actively engages in the following:

Review of Complaints: Besides the cases and complaints that ODA receives directly, ODA regularly reviews complaints and issues related to disability that are received by the Office of Constituent Services (OCS). ODA responds to trends identified through these reviews, leading to remediation of access concerns, development of policies/procedures and edits to or additional training. These reviews informed the development of the 5 Year Plan and the development of subsequent projects and activities that enhance access.

HRA Disability Advisory Panel: Since 2015, HRA has hosted a quarterly Disability Advisory Panel. Members include advocates with disabilities and representatives from agencies that regularly assist people with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining HRA benefits.

MOPD Monthly Community Calls: The DSS Executive Director of Disability Affairs regularly provides updates and receives feedback at MOPD's Monthly Community calls.

Focus Groups: ODA has conducted several focus groups with the deaf community this past year in the course of developing the Communicard for people who are deaf in shelter.

Monthly Lunch & Learns: The Office of Disability Affairs offers informative sessions designed to educate staff and stakeholders about disability-related topics, ensuring continuous learning and growth.

Disability Digest Newsletter: The Office of Disability Affairs sends out a dedicated resource for sharing updates, research, and best practices in accessibility and disability services with DSS/HRA/DHS.

Conclusion

DSS/HRA looks forward to continuing our progress towards making our programs and services more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities as we build a more inclusive City for all.