

## **Pennsylvania Coalition for Inclusive Community**

The Arc of Pennsylvania | Disability Rights PA | Institute on Disabilities at Temple University | Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council | Vision for Equality | PA Waiting List Campaign

### **Community Integration Frequently Asked Questions (Revised November 2019)**

#### **1. What will the process be for individuals and families when Polk and White Haven close?**

Pennsylvania will follow a closure process similar to what was done when the State closed the Hamburg State Center. At Hamburg, each resident worked with their interdisciplinary team including family, the individual, staff and others invited by the individual to develop a person-centered plan that included identifying needed medical, residential, day and other supports. Placement options for each resident were developed on an individualized basis with input from the team. Most individuals and their families chose community settings with support. A few individuals chose other available institutional placements, including at other public or private intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The closure of Polk and Whitehaven is expected to take **up to three years**.

#### **2. Are other states closing their state operated institutions for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities?**

Yes, closure of State Centers is part of a national trend to increase opportunities for community living for people with significant disabilities, consistent with the demand for non-institutional options by people with disabilities and their families. This includes the 13,015 people with intellectual disabilities currently on the waiting list for services in Pennsylvania.

All states have closed at least some of their state-operated institutions as they have increased community options. Fourteen other states and the District of Columbia have already successfully closed all state-operated institutions for people with intellectual disabilities.

The national shift to community living relies heavily on person-centered planning that is individualized for each person. No two person-centered plans should look alike, just like no two people are alike. By focusing on the individual, Pennsylvania will work to ensure that each person's needs are met, regardless of complexity.

**3. Will people living at Polk and White Haven go onto a waiting list before they can receive community services?**

No. Resources have been allocated for those moving from State Centers to move into the community settings of their choosing without ever going on a waiting list.

**4. Are people with complex needs able to be supported to live in the community?**

People with the most significant support needs, including extensive behavioral or medical needs, can and do thrive in the community. Living in the community is not just for people with few support needs. There are many successful examples of people with significant support needs being supported well in the community in Pennsylvania. The State previously closed the Hamburg State Center and successfully helped residents transition into the community, consistent with each individual's person-centered plan. The Coalition is committed to working with the State and legislature to expand the capacity of services for people with the most significant disabilities in the community.

Community is not about one particular setting or place. Some people want to live alone. Other people want to live with one roommate. Other people want to live in a small group home. All of these continue to be options, even with State Center closures. Just like people without disabilities, people with significant disabilities should have these different options.

**5. People receive both residential and day services at the State Center. Are there day services available in the community?**

Pennsylvania offers a range of day services to people with intellectual disabilities, including people with complex needs. These range from community participation services, employment, day habilitation, and other day programs for people with complex needs. The person-centered approach as part of the closure process focuses on each individual's unique interests and needs to identify both residential and day service options. Transition to the community will provide individuals with increased options for how to spend his/her time during the day, with necessary supports.

**6. Will people currently living in Whitehaven and Polk be able to select institutional care if that is what they choose?**

Yes, if after learning about all the options, the individual or his or her family makes an informed choice for institutional care, it continues to be an option. Pennsylvania has both private and public intermediate care facilities for individuals with

intellectual and developmental disabilities. These will continue to be an option.

## **7. Will the health and safety for those people who transition from Polk and Whitehaven into the community be monitored?**

The transition of individuals from the State Centers to the community requires ongoing monitoring. As part of the transition process, the State will ensure that the services identified in the person-centered plans are provided. Pennsylvania has a robust system to monitor health and safety of people receiving community services that includes, among other things, licensing, supports coordinators, and a statewide quality monitoring process called Independent Monitoring for Quality (IM4Q). The Coalition encourages Pennsylvania to implement ongoing monitoring and data collection as part of the closure process, as it has with other closures. A wellness check will be done by an employee from the State Center who knew the individual well at 30, 60, 90, 120 and 365 days after placement in their new home.

## **8. What will happen to the employees at Polk and White Haven?**

This is a three-year process. During that time employees will be given every opportunity, and in some cases a priority, for other state employment opportunities. Some former employees of Hamburg took positions in the community providing services for the same individuals they cared for at the Hamburg center. Whatever an employee decides, the state will provide a number of resources to assist employees as they seek jobs either within other state positions or opportunities outside state employment. The employees of Polk and White Haven are being provided with:

- Individual meetings with the HR Placement Coordinator
- FAQs provided to all employees
- On-going staff meetings with updates on closure process
- Provider job fairs
- Polk and White Haven Center only job postings
- Early contractual placement
- Rapid response support from Careerlink and Unemployment Comp.
- Presentations on employment and financial planning

## **9. An issue is being made that there's a Waiting List for home and community services because of lack of funding. Why don't we allow them to enter the state centers?**

It is true that there is a lack of funding for home and community services. However, the over 13,000 individuals on the Waiting List made a choice to not enter a state center. When they enroll with their counties, they are given the choice on a

form. Each made the selection to wait rather than leave their homes and communities and enter a center. This is a result of many years of community integration and acceptance that began in Early Intervention and continued in their local school districts until high school graduation. Individuals and their families now want to continue to live, work, and play in their own communities.

**10. What will happen to businesses in the surrounding areas of Polk and White Haven that rely on the centers?**

People with ID/DD should not have to remain in state centers based on supporting an area's economy. Nor should the state maintain institutions no longer in demand, at increasingly high costs to state taxpayers. Under the *Olmstead* decision, Community Integration is mandated under the ADA as a civil right for all people with disabilities, including people with Intellectual Disabilities. Area businesses should rely on their politicians and commerce departments during this next 3 years to stimulate other business opportunities for their regions.

**11. Why is there a lack of funding for the Waiting List and how is that related to closing two state centers?**

Legislators say there is insufficient budget revenue to support everyone waiting for home and community-based services (HCBS). Because state center resident numbers have steeply declined, the cost per individual served in a center is 3 to 4 times higher than an individual in a community setting. As center numbers continue to decrease, this gap will only widen unless the remaining centers are consolidated and/or residents move to community-based services. The closings will eventually repurpose those funds first to the residents of Polk and White Haven and then the cost savings to individuals on the Waiting List for HCBS. The goal is that more people are served in the choice they want.

**12. Why is the opportunity to live in the Community important?**

Under the *Olmstead* decision, Community Integration is mandated under the ADA as a civil right for all people with disabilities, including people with Intellectual Disabilities. Also, the data speaks for itself. With regard to Dignity, Respect and Rights, Pennsylvania's 2017-2018 Independent Monitoring for Quality (IM4Q) data shows that people in public ICFs experience less dignity than any group in any setting, other than those residing in private ICFs, The data are even more troubling with regard to **choice and inclusion** *where the state ICFs scored significantly lower than any other setting.*

For specific questions, please contact:

Celia Feinstein

Executive Director, The Institute on Disabilities at Temple University

shoes100@temple.edu