

**Community Action Network**  
*Frequently Asked Questions About*

# Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities



This document provides an update to information in the *Community Action Network (CAN) Mental Retardation/ Developmental Disabilities (MR/DD) Community Assessment* report released in October 2001.

## Highlights

### Waiting List Crisis in Travis County

People with disabilities are waiting five to eight years for Medicaid waiver services.\* “Two advocacy groups sued...the State of Texas saying the legislature had failed to fully finance the services that allow people with mental retardation and other disabilities to stay in...their communities” (Austin American Statesman, September 6, 2002). Although some duplication may occur, projections show that approximately 1,000 people with mental retardation and developmental disabilities are currently awaiting services in the Austin area (CAN Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities Community Assessment Report, October 2001).

*\* Medicaid waiver services are federally funded community based services that are an alternative to institutional care.*

### Funding Remains Stagnant While the Population Booms

The Travis County population grew by 41% (Census 2000) with little or no increase in local funding for mental retardation/developmental disabilities services (MR/DD Planning Partnership).

### More People in Crisis

Persons with disabilities, their caregivers, and families are experiencing fewer resources with more need for crisis assistance (MR/DD Planning Partnership). Agencies that make up the MR/DD Planning Partnership are reporting an increase of as much as 50% in requests for assistance. For example, the East Austin Family Pantry reports that 25% of its consumers had a family member with a disability; 45% of consumers were temporarily out of work; and 12% of consumers have SSI as their main source of income.

### Overview

People with MR/DD experience discrimination, poverty, lack of meaningful relationships, social isolation, and threats to their safety. Inclusion becomes all the more challenging for people with disabilities due to the above factors. **People in Travis County who have mental retardation and other developmental disabilities can be productive, contributing citizens if they are offered services in the following areas:**

- transportation
- meaningful day activities
- housing
- qualified caregivers
- education
- therapeutic health care services
- child care
- recreation/community activities
- employment
- navigator services (Ombudsman) to provide cross agency access, support and advocacy

*Source: (CAN Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities Community Assessment Report, October 2001).*

## Frequently asked questions about Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities

### Q: What is Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities?

In Texas, **mental retardation** (MR) is legally defined as a condition that appears before age 18 in which intelligence is significantly below average, and personal care and social behaviors do not meet what is expected for the person's age and culture. It occurs during the developmental phase of life and is classified as one of the many developmental disabilities. **Developmental disabilities** are significant, chronic disabilities – mental and/or physical, occurring before the age of 22. Examples include: mental retardation, deafness, cerebral palsy, blindness, autism, epilepsy, mental illness, and various birth defects.



### Q: What causes MR/DD?

There are several hundred causes related to MR/DD. Most causes are categorized under: genetic conditions, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, birth conditions, early childhood diseases, trauma, environmental causes, and conditions often associated with poverty.

### Q: How many people have MR/DD?

#### Mental Retardation Estimated Prevalence Data

	Census 2000 Population	Total Population with MR	Mild	Moderate	Severe/ Profound
<b>Travis County</b>	812,280	22,094	18,926	2,274	894
<b>State of Texas</b>	20,851,820	567,169	485,847	58,385	22,937
<b>Prevalence Rate</b>		2.72%	2.33%	.28%	.11%

Source: Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation and U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

#### Prevalence of Some Developmental Disabilities

Disorders	Prevalence	Travis County
Autism	1 in 250 to 1 in 500	3,249 to 1,625
Cerebral Palsy	1 in 230	3,532**
Epilepsy	1.8% Of adults in Texas	14,621

\*\*is reported that this number could be as high as 13,000 due to unreported cases, the Austin State School, and the Austin area attracting people with disabilities. Source: Epilepsy USA, 2001

### Q: What are some of the impacts of MR/DD?

Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities can affect persons of any age, race, religion, culture, or income. Various impacts of MR/DD and key findings are as follows:

- Family/caregiver stress is high
- Community isolation is prevalent
- Transportation reliability, dependability, affordability, and inconvenience of long waits were the most mentioned problems from persons with disabilities in the Travis County area
- Unemployment rates for persons with significant disabilities approach 90 percent

## Frequently asked questions about Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities

### MRDD Impacts (Cont.)

- In 1995, Texas ranked 45<sup>th</sup> in the nation in the provision of integrated employment by state MR/DD agencies with only 7.3 percent of their clients receiving supported employment services.
- By the year 2008, the projected employment in the area of residential care for the state of Texas is expected to increase by 35 percent.
- The average monthly SSI benefit covered only 83 percent of the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment in Austin.
- In a 1997 report, 90 percent of people with disabilities were found to have experienced some form of sexual assault.

### Q: What is the impact of the economy?

While Travis County has experienced extraordinary growth, the prosperity that many experience is not trickling down to persons with disabilities. In a comparison of October 2001 through January 22, 2002, and the same time period of the previous year, United Way Capital Area's First Call for Help experienced a 28% increase in the number of callers. Local food banks have experienced a 29% increase in demand in recent months (CAN Frequently Asked Questions About Basic Needs). If this is the trend for the general public, it is magnified for individuals with MR/DD. Statistics from the East Austin Family Pantry indicated:

East Austin Family Pantry Utilization	
FY 2000	1271 Persons served
FY 2001	7222 Persons served (570% increase)
FY 2002	6000 projected (Numbers reflect limited access for walk-ins in FY 2002)

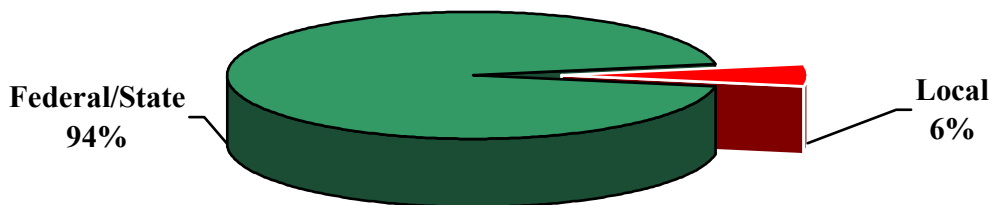
Source: East Austin Family Pantry

In January 2002, the pantry limited their access to "walk-ins" due to increased demand for food and clothing

### Q: What is being spent in Travis County on MR/DD Services and Supports?

- Over \$13.5 million a year is being spent by CAN Partners, federal, state, and local agencies. Ninety-four percent of the expenditures on MR/DD service in Travis County were funded by federal and state sources. While 6 percent was from local sources.
- In assessing the needs of persons with developmental disabilities, it is important to weigh the human as well as the financial costs. Supports and services are necessary and need to be tailored to assist people with MR/DD at home, work, school, and play.
- Children and adults who have developmental disabilities may require services that are individually planned and coordinated over an extended period of time – sometimes even a lifetime.

### Percentage of Federal, State, and Local Dollars Spent on MR/DD Services and Supports



Source: MR/DD Planning Partnership

**Of the total funding allocated for MR/DD services in Travis County, only six percent comes from local sources.**

## Frequently asked questions about Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities

### Q: What is recommended for our community?

- Decrease the number of people on MR/DD waiting lists in the Travis County area.
- Increase employment and volunteer options for persons with MR/DD.
- Increase opportunities for persons with MR/DD to participate in inclusive social, recreational, and meaningful activities within their communities.
- Increase resources and response time for persons with MR/DD who are in crisis.
- Increase supports and resources available for people with MR/DD and for their families, especially in the areas of respite options, affordable and accessible care, and specialized assistance.
- Improve consistency, availability, and quality of data within the community.

### Q: What can I do to help?

- Volunteer time at an agency serving persons who have MR/DD.
- Support legislation to increase services to persons who have MR/DD.
- Widely distribute this FAQ to educate community residents.

*Please see the CAN Urgent Issues Action Plan at [www.caction.org](http://www.caction.org) for additional information about specific and Community-wide approaches to addressing Mental Retardation/ Developmental Disabilities in our community.*

## Additional Information

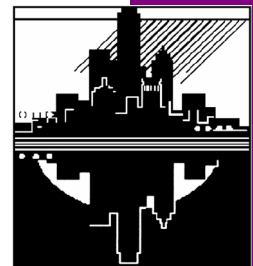
To access the Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities Community Assessment Report refer to: [www.caction.org](http://www.caction.org).

To obtain a copy of this document, The CAN Community Overview, or any other CAN report, please visit the CAN website, email Brenda Ahrns at [bahrns@austin.isd.tenet.edu](mailto:bahrns@austin.isd.tenet.edu), call 512-414-8203, or write to The Community Action Network, 1111 W. 6th Street, Suite B220, Austin, Texas 78703.

### This FAQ was created by members of the following organizations:

- The Arc of the Capital Area
- Austin Travis County Mental Health Mental Retardation Center
- Disability Assistance of Central Texas
- Easter Seals of Central Texas
- Goodwill Industries
- ARCIL
- Family ElderCare
- SafePlace

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**CAN Partners:** Austin Area Research Organization ~ Austin Independent School District~ Austin Area Human Services Association  
Austin Area Interreligious Ministries ~ Austin Travis County MHMR Center ~ Capital Metro ~ City of Austin  
Community Justice Council ~ Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce ~ Health Partnerships 2010 ~Higher Education Coalition  
Travis County ~United Way Capital Area ~ WorkSource-Greater Austin Area Workforce Board