

# The Kelsey

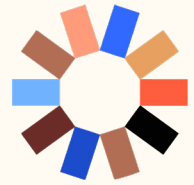
# Barriers to Housing for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD): Landlords and Builders Assessment

July 2024



**DENVER**  
THE MILE HIGH CITY

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# Section 1: Introduction

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## Laura's Story

Laura<sup>1</sup> and many other adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) in the Denver Greater Metro area wonder how they will find and stay in housing that supports their access needs and vital support services. Laura has I/DD and is blind. The Colorado Center for the Blind didn't have any resources to help her find housing but finally, through friends who gave her advice on how to get on a waiting list, she was offered an apartment she could afford. However, the apartment wouldn't let her bring her retired service dog with her, and so she couldn't move in. Eventually she found the place where she lives now and is grateful for a home she can afford.

Laura still faces numerous barriers. Her building doesn't have parking and so she struggles to find service providers because if they drive (and most do), then they have trouble parking when they come to support her. When one of the two elevators in the building is broken, which is often, it makes Laura feel stuck in her apartment. How bad is it? Laura is now considering moving to a group home just to alleviate some of these problems. Living in a congregate setting, even a small one, would result in a loss of her self-determination, as well as her own home and space. If Denver had housing where resident accessibility was a primary concern, Laura could stay in her own home and stay connected as our neighbor, co-worker and community member.

<sup>1</sup>Name changed to protect her identity



Laura's story demonstrates just some of the many hurdles people with I/DD face in getting and staying in housing that supports and serves them. The Denver Human Services Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Equitable Access to Services (IDDEAS) program within the City and County of Denver, manages local taxpayer dollars dedicated to funding services and supports for Denver residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Through a formalized competitive process, IDDEAS commissioned The Kelsey, a national non-profit organization advancing

renting and creating housing for people with I/DD. IDDEAS funded this assessment as a direct response to a recommendation made by their public advisory council, which has identified housing as a top priority for available funds. The Kelsey collected data, stories and knowledge from a range of stakeholders to understand the variety of barriers that exist for Denverites with I/DD looking to find and remain in housing that serves them. The Kelsey then analyzed these data and used them to create a set of actionable recommendations to make housing more accessible to Denver residents with I/DD.



**“The system is too much for people.”**

A developer of I/DD housing commenting on the complexity of the services and housing landscape for people with I/DD



## Summary of Findings

Through our research we heard from stakeholders about the numerous barriers adults with I/DD face to find and remain in their housing. Our research included residents with I/DD, property managers, developers, funders, government employees, family members, advocates, and service providers and revealed themes that repeated across stakeholder groups.

Residents shared the many barriers they've faced: It was hard to find a home that fit their needs and budget, the application and approval processes for affordable housing are complex to navigate and not designed to accommodate intellectual and developmental differences, and they encountered discrimination from housing providers due to their disability or other identities. When they moved into housing they found managers unwilling to complete reasonable accommodations who didn't know how to communicate and work with them on issues. Continued physical barriers in the design of buildings and units themselves combined with systems that don't prioritize matching accessible units with the residents who need them resulted in further challenges to residents with I/DD's housing stability. Later, due to their building's location far from transit or its lack of resident services, we heard residents found themselves isolated without the supports they needed or connection to community.

**To overcome each of these barriers, residents with I/DD need support and those without strong support systems are at increased risk of homelessness or moving to a congregate and/or institutional setting.**

Professionals in the housing ecosystem - developers, funders, and property managers - are aware of some of these barriers but because of mis-aligned incentives or policies in standard affordable housing systems, they do not always feel empowered or able to address them. Moreover, developers who want to create more I/DD accessible housing face barriers of their own - funding for affordable housing is also extremely complex and doesn't often account for meeting the needs of residents with higher support needs.

**While Permanent Supportive Housing<sup>2</sup> (PSH) and senior developments have established housing models that can be funded, a model for accessible and supportive housing for people with I/DD isn't well established. Those who want to build accessible, inclusive, and affordable housing find themselves trying to fit into a system not designed to finance and support it.**

<sup>2</sup>PSH Housing is meant to serve people experiencing homelessness and usually includes on-site, wrap around services specific to that population. <https://endhomelessness.org/ending-homelessness/solutions/permanent-supportive-housing/>

# Barriers to Housing



The rest of this report details the data collection goals, methodologies, and full data learnings that led to these findings. It concludes with recommendations that will begin to remove these barriers, so more people with I/DD can live and thrive in Denver in affordable, accessible, and inclusive homes.

## Thank You

The Kelsey acknowledges and deeply thanks the many people who contributed their time, knowledge, and expertise to make this report possible.

- IDDEAS program staff
- Our Steering Committee
  - Brian Be, Independent Consultant, Self Advocacy Coordinator at JFK Partners, and IDDEAS Advisory Council Co-Chair
  - Jenni Vester, Director of Residents at Skyline Property Management
  - Lauren Schevets, Managing Director of Development at Volker
  - Mackenzie Peterson, Denver Housing Authority
  - Tim Dolan, Principal at Dolan Community Advising, Consultant to the Inclusive Housing Coalition, and father to a young adult child with autism
- All the participants in our focus groups
- Everyone who attended our Houser Roundtable
- Each property manager who agreed to an interview
- Everyone who filled in our survey
- Everyone who talked with us about their experiences, spread the word about this project, or encouraged others to reach out

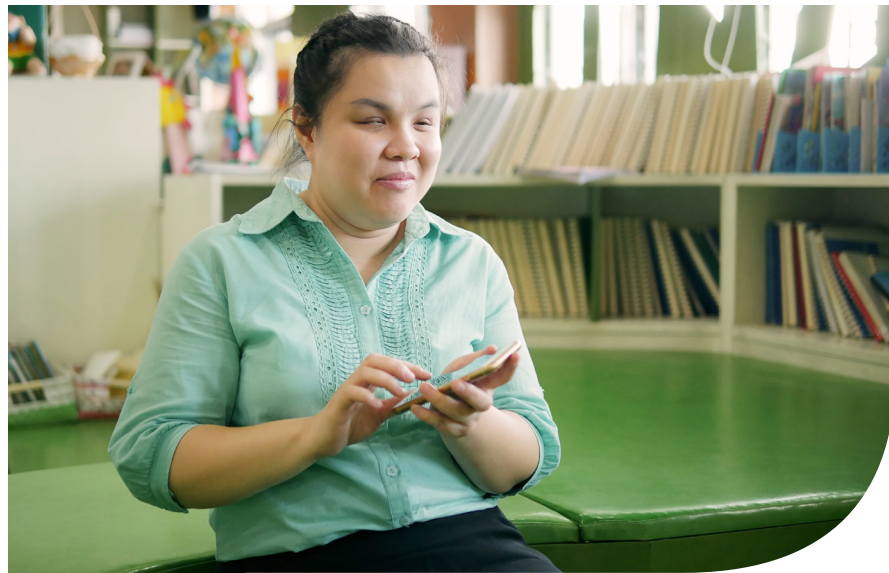
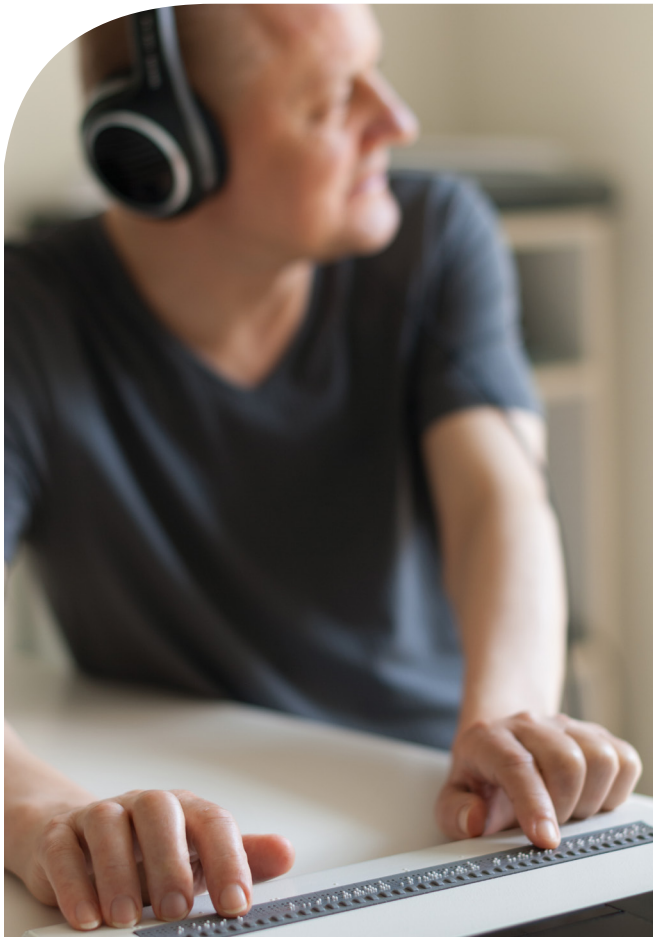
This work was made possible by all these individuals who supported us along the way.

## What is I/DD and what does that Mean for Housing?

I/DD is a term that encompasses a range of different disabilities that show up as differences in peoples' brains and the ways they interact with the world. People with I/DD may have Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, or Fragile X syndrome, be on the Autism Spectrum, or have some other disability. People with the same diagnosis may need different support services and have different access needs. Some people with executive function deficits may require assistance with grocery shopping, cooking, getting to doctors' appointments, or paperwork. Others may need 24-hour care from a support team. Some people with I/DD also have mobility or sensory disabilities in addition to I/DD, some do not.

Many of these supports and services are covered by Medicaid through the HCBS (Home and Community Based Services) Waiver System, which states that people with disabilities have the right to receive the care they need in their home ("in the community") and are not required to live in an institutional setting to receive services. This is important because it allows people to choose their home and service providers separately and to change either one if it doesn't suit their needs without losing the other. People may live with their family or in their own apartment and Medicaid will cover the cost of services and support that they need, but not housing costs such as rent. However, without housing that is affordable, inclusive, and accessible, people with I/DD are not able to make that choice. They must have access to an affordable home in order to access HCBS services.





In this report, the definition of I/DD is broad and encompasses anyone who self-identified as having an I/DD during the data collection and recommendation phases.

## Overview of the I/DD Community in Denver

IDDEAS currently funds services and supports for over 4,500 people with I/DD or developmental delay in Denver through its network of community providers that help individuals access and obtain services and resources that aren't already covered by Medicaid or other state or federal funding sources. IDDEAS also provided resources to assemble the Inclusive Housing Denver<sup>3</sup> report in 2021 which put together a market report about the state of the community of people with I/DD and their housing needs, challenges, and barriers. The report engaged community members using a range of data collection tools and revealed key understandings about the I/DD community and their housing needs. It highlighted that the total number of adults with I/DD within Denver County is unknown for several reasons. Many people who have I/DD are not in the system of supports where they can be counted. They are experiencing housing insecurity, they have not yet been diagnosed with I/DD, or they are not accessing supports through a state designated case management agency (CMA) or community centered board (CCB). The report estimated that between 2,035 and 7,788 adults in Denver County have I/DD. This is a large range due to reasons listed above, but it also highlights how many people these issues impact.

The report found that 73% of Colorado residents with I/DD lived and were supported by a family member. This has two severe implications. First, many caregivers are aging, providing uncertainty around the future of care and living arrangements for the individual with I/DD should their family member pass away or become unable to care for them. Secondly, those living with family mem-

<sup>3</sup><https://inclusivehousingdenver.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Inclusive-Housing-Denver-Housing-Community-Development-Report.pdf>



bers are considered housed and so don't get counted in surveys of affordable and accessible housing needs. Many residents with I/DD don't work or can only work part time and earn minimal income so must rely on government aid such as Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or the state-funded Aid to the Needy Disabled program (AND). The high cost of housing in Denver means that these individuals cannot afford their own home without assistance and have few options for their housing, but are not counted in metrics that cover affordable housing needs in the area.



The Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA) also commissioned a Neuro-Inclusive Housing white paper<sup>4</sup> in 2022 that explored the needs of and resources for the I/DD community across the state of Colorado. The report highlighted barriers people with I/DD faced when looking for housing including encountering units that were inaccessible or unsafe and the many levels of discrimination and stigma individuals faced while looking for housing. The white paper also identified that subsidized housing vouchers available for people with I/DD fall drastically short of meeting demand. Furthermore, there are shortcomings with the way that Colorado currently implements the Section 811 program, a United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), disability-specific voucher program. In Colorado, individuals leaving institutions and those at risk of homelessness are prioritized. This leaves adults with I/DD needing to wait until they are actively experiencing homelessness to find a solution to transition out of their family homes.

These two reports lay the groundwork for our research, highlighting the need for better housing solutions for people with I/DD as well as some of the barriers this community faces. Individuals with I/DD face successive barriers in finding the housing they need. While some people have the support of family members, many others don't and those that do cannot rely on them indefinitely. There is active work to be done to ensure all people who call Denver home can live in one that meets their needs.

## Where our Research Starts

We sit at a point in history where people with I/DD have more choices than previous generations due to landmark cases like the Olmstead<sup>5</sup> decision and policies like the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) settings rule<sup>6</sup>. Unfortunately for much of the past of the country, people with I/DD were institutionalized, forced to live separate from their communities in segregated hospitals, asylums, and clinics. Today there are many more options for people with disabilities to access the same choice of where they'd like to live as anyone else. However, people with I/DD still face many barriers to realistically be able to access those choices. Our research worked to

<sup>4</sup><https://www.chfainfo.com/getattachment/76f4c2c6-df9e-43af-8a76-c7823de487c8/Neuro-InclusiveHousingWhitepaper.pdf>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.oyez.org/cases/1998/98-536>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2014/01/16/2014-00487/medicaid-program-state-plan-home-and-community-based-services-5-year-period-for-waivers-provider>



understand what those barriers are, especially from the perspectives of builders, owners and managers of housing, so we can implement solutions that create true choices for people with I/DD within the Denver community.

## Section 2: Data Collection Goals

Before beginning our research we recruited a diverse steering committee to direct and give feedback on our research goals, methods, and results. This steering committee had representation from each of our main stakeholder groups: residents with I/DD, developers, and property managers, as well as a service provider and a I/DD housing advocate. This diverse and deeply knowledgeable steering committee provided us input from a range of perspectives on the shape and details of our research and helped us minimize any shortcomings.

People with I/DD face barriers at multiple points in their journey to access housing. These start in the search phase and continue through each step, resulting in an opaque and frustrating journey for them and their families. In our research we aimed to identify many of the barriers along that path. With the steering committee's help, we identified six main research goals to drive and direct our data collection.

### Goal 1: Collect data from Multiple Stakeholders

The housing ecosystem is made of many different stakeholders including property developers, local government officials, funders, property managers, and residents themselves who each play a role in building, maintaining and operating units. To understand the barriers in this ecosystem for the residents, we needed to collect data from each stakeholder group to understand their needs, motivations, and perspective. We focused most of our



work in this report on different types of housing providers and residents with I/DD while making sure we still had ways for service providers, family members, and other pivotal stakeholders to contribute their knowledge through a general survey.

## **Goal 2: Match Data Collection Methods to Stakeholders**

Each group of stakeholders has their own unique relationship to the questions surrounding housing for people with I/DD. We carefully matched each of our data collection methods to the needs of each stakeholder group.

## **Goal 3: Representation of Residents with I/DD**

We cannot discuss the barriers to housing people with I/DD without engaging and learning from residents themselves and their lived experience in finding housing. Our data collection included multiple ways to learn from people with I/DD about their housing journeys, paying close attention to ensure our collection methods addressed different access needs.

## **Goal 4: Understand the Property Manager Perspective**

Property managers are the front line gatekeepers and knowledge holders of the residential experience for residents acquiring and maintaining housing. They create and maintain the systems that attract, filter, and retain residents, and so are pivotal to our understanding of barriers within the space.

## **Goal 5: Understand the Developer Perspective**

Developers' work engages in many facets of the housing ecosystem, from design through resident experience. Our research sought to understand how the concept of disability inclusive housing enters their thinking and systems: how it is perceived, what are the conversations developers are having (or not having) around it, and what is driving their decision-making process.

## **Goal 6: Collect and Amplify Under-Represented Voices**

Through our stakeholder recruitment and research collection we took active steps to include and amplify under-represented perspectives. The history of housing people in the United States has been rife with explicit government policies that marginalized and denied opportunities to communities of color as well as people with disabilities. Our data collection methods explicitly sought out diverse experiences and voices including people of different racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, and people from communities that have experienced red-lining<sup>7</sup> and/or are at risk of displacement. When resources are constrained these marginalized groups are most impacted, and so our work strives for a more equitable future by bringing these voices into the conversation.

<sup>7</sup><https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/redlining>

# Section 3: Data Collection Methodologies

## Focus Groups with Residents with I/DD

We held two focus groups with the goal of capturing perspectives and knowledge from people with I/DD to understand their lived experience with housing. We wanted to learn about both the barriers they have faced in finding and staying in their own housing as well as what solutions they see to creating more housing that supports people with I/DD. Our research goal was to have at least four and no more than six people (plus their support people) at each of our two focus groups.



To provide multiple options for access we ran both an in-person and a virtual focus group. Some people have trouble engaging virtually and others have trouble with mobility or transportation so this gave participants different ways of attending based on what was most accessible for them. We sent a short survey before each session asking for any access needs and included in our outreach that participants were welcome to bring support people to help them engage.

One of our research goals was to make sure to include input from new voices and harder to reach populations. We worked closely with members of our steering committee to reach beyond individuals and family members who have already been involved in previous work and engage with people who haven't yet had a chance to share their stories. To achieve this we spent significant time recruiting our focus group participants, reaching out to residents who identify as Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Color (BIPOC) individually, following up with text messages and phone calls, and making sure any questions or concerns were addressed before the sessions. Because of the personal and directed reachout we had a relatively high response rate. We reached out to seventeen people in total, with twelve confirming attendance (although as you'll see in the results section below, we had a pretty high day-of drop out rate).

We also worked with a service provider from Denver’s Case Management Agency (CMA), Rocky Mountain Human Services (RMHS), who specifically supports clients with I/DD experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness. He took the time to drive his clients to the focus groups so that they could participate. Each of these outreach steps contributed to our research by ensuring our focus groups included new voices and input from people who have not yet shared their stories.



Our focus groups were facilitated by trained facilitators who asked a series of predetermined questions and guided the participants through “fill in the blank” exercises. The questions were reviewed in advance by a plain language consultant to ensure they were cognitively accessible. See Appendix 1 for a full list of the questions. Before and after the focus groups participants were sent short surveys to give them additional opportunities to share their perspectives. The Kelsey provided each focus group participant a \$50 gift card for one and a half hours of their time. It was important to compensate residents for the valuable input they contributed to this research.



## Property Management Interviews

Property managers are the frontline connection between residents and their homes. They review resident applications for approval, run the compliance process for affordable units, and ensure a property meets code standards, including accessible requirements. It was therefore critical to our work to understand the perspective of property managers- how they understand and relate to people with I/DD, what systems they engage with and where barriers exist in those systems, and where there is space to create more accessible practices. To engage with these stakeholders we conducted one-on-one interviews. This methodology allowed us a confidential space to share knowledge honestly and freely. All participant’s answers and contributions were anonymized before being analyzed and shared in this work.

To gather different perspectives for our research we recruited property managers at different levels of management, who managed a variety of different sized properties, and who managed both

affordable and traditional properties. Our research goal was to interview at least eight property managers. Again, we worked with our steering committee and partners at IDDEAS to find property managers within their networks we could reach out to personally for interviews. We also did cold reachout emails to large property managers in the Denver metro area. The warm reach outs, where a known person requested an interview, were a much more effective technique. Cold reach outs with no connection did not result in any responses. In total we reached out to twenty-five individuals and organizations, resulting in ten completed interviews. See Appendix 2 for a full list of questions we used in the research. Each participant had a chance to follow up with a short survey after the interview to add any additional feedback they might have.

## Developer and Houser Roundtable

Our methodology to collect in-depth knowledge from developers and other professionals providing housing was a two-hour long, in-person roundtable discussion which brought many voices to the table. The goal was to foster open dialogue among industry experts where they could discuss the challenges, barriers, and opportunities in developing housing for adults with I/DD.

The field of affordable housing includes many stakeholders from the public, non-profit, and private sectors and in recruiting attendees for the roundtable we made sure we invited attendees who represented a range of different organizations, roles, and projects. Our attendees came from both private and non-profit development companies, public housing authorities, public agencies on both the state and city level, progressive architecture firms, and service organizations who have forayed into small scale housing development to better serve their clients. Working with the steering committee we identified individuals with experience in different aspects of building housing and reached out to them by email. Our goal was to have a group of ten people attend the session. Of the fifteen people we reached out to, most responded enthusiastically. Three could not make the session and two did not respond. However, two responded and asked to invite another partner to the event, so we ended up with an attendance of twelve, representing ten different organizations or government agencies.

Our questions were designed to understand what these professionals would need in order to be successful in building accessible projects.





We encouraged stories from actual projects- both successes and failures, and finished the discussion with a question on opportunities, new ideas, or resources that could help produce more housing accessible to people with I/DD. See Appendix 3 for the questions we used in our facilitation plan for the event.

## Open Public Survey

Each of the research components listed above were designed to deep dive with individual experts from unique stakeholder groups to gain a depth of understanding of their perspectives. However, we also wanted to create a forum to collect information from a diverse range of participants who were eager to share their views with us and not otherwise represented in this work. To capture this information we created a publicly available survey so anyone could contribute their perspective.

The survey was designed with three groups of stakeholders in mind:

- residents with I/DD
- professionals providing housing (developers, property managers, funders, etc.)
- others with expertise working with or connections to the I/DD population (service providers, family members, advocates, etc.)

The first two stakeholder groups were also covered in our other research methods, but we wanted to give an opportunity for anyone who couldn't attend deep focused sessions to still provide their expertise. The third stakeholder group may not have as much depth of knowledge of housing specific barriers and opportunities (which is the focus of this work) but does offer a unique perspective on the variety of challenges the I/DD population faces, including housing, and has a lot to share on gaps and bridges that could be built between housing and other access needs of people with I/DD.

Our survey first asked participants to choose how they identified among those stakeholder groups and then pointed them to a set of questions directed at the stakeholder group they self-identified with. We included multiple choice, likert scale, and open-ended questions for each group to encourage a range of ways to engage from participants. See Appendix 4 for a full list of questions we used in the survey. The survey was live for four weeks to give ample time for participants to fill it out and advocates of our work to distribute it to their networks. We included instructions on the landing page how to translate the survey into Spanish but found no participants made use of that option (see more on this below in Section 5: Research Limitations and Opportunities for Further Research below).

# Section 4: Data Analysis and Findings

Note: We promised anonymity to all research participants. Any non-attributed quote in the report comes directly from someone we talked to but we have purposefully removed their name to keep them anonymous.

## Focus Group Findings

We hit our research goal and interviewed nine residents across the two focus groups with seven support people helping them attend. We had six people RSVP to our virtual focus group but three of them dropped out the day of- one had an urgent physical health need, one was too emotionally dysregulated to join that date, and the service provider for a third couldn't help him with virtual access due to inclement weather. This resulted in three participants in the virtual group. Our in person focus group had six attendees, although three of them couldn't fully confirm participation until the day of.

“It’s going to be hard to hear from folks and then when you do, you have to hear it.”

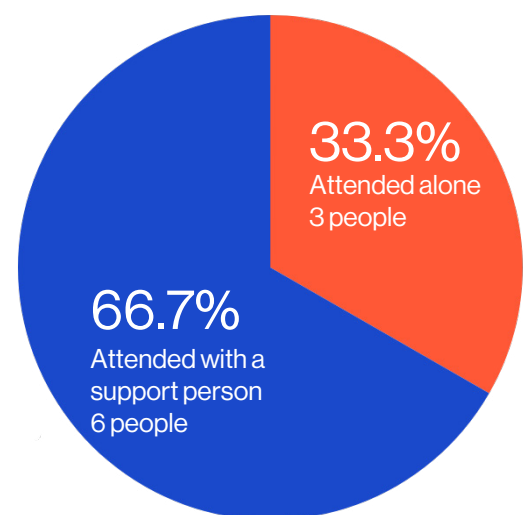
Brian Be, Autistic Artist Advocate

## Dependence on Support People

We explicitly invited our research group participants to bring support people with them if needed. Two thirds of residents had someone physically present with them to contribute to the research. Support, through family members, case managers, or other caregivers is pivotal for this population. No housing solutions can be discussed without understanding and incorporating how residents will be able to access their support systems.

Another key finding was 25% of our planned attendees had a day-of reason they couldn't attend for medical reasons or other last minute access barriers. Shifting access needs are a norm for people with I/DD and creating systems and infrastructure that can acknowledge that and respond to it is pivotal. (We were able to have one of the folks who couldn't make the first session join the second one instead.)

Residents Attending our Focus Groups





Participants lived in a range of housing situations- on their own, with a roommate, with their parents, with 24 hour caregivers- but almost everyone credited family and or services support in finding and remaining in their homes. People without strong family support who have not managed to find robust public services are unlikely to be able to access housing. Even those who lived alone told us explicitly that proximity to family members and community was vitally important.

**“Transportation is so important.**

And services nearby, a grocery store, and so on.”

### Transportation Access

A majority of the residents discussed how important it is for housing to be near transportation and community amenities so residents can be connected to their living needs. Denver holds a prominent place in Disability Justice history as the place where, in 1978, a protest against inaccessible buses by “The Gang of 19” resulted in Denver being the first municipality in the country to make its entire bus system accessible with wheelchair lifts. However, if housing is too far from bus stops, residents don’t have a chance to make use of those improvements. As we think about where to locate I/DD housing, we need to understand how residents will be connecting to the community outside their units.

### Importance of an Independent Home

Most residents expressed the need to have private space that is theirs- whether a full unit or a bedroom. Every participant that addressed personal space told us that space that was theirs alone was a priority in where they could live.

“I want to be able to plug in, and I want to be able to unplug. I want to be able to connect, and I want to be able to go be by myself.”

### Navigating Complex Housing Systems and Supports

We heard from both people with I/DD and their caregivers how opaque and complicated the paperwork and processes for finding affordable housing is. Many people had confusion about what the process is to get housing, as well as barriers within the process such as needing to get an ID, which had the additional barrier of needing a birth certificate because that specific resident was born in a different state. We heard a story from a caregiver of her adult brother that when their mom passed away she had to process all sorts of information to take over as his caregiver from her mother while she was also actively grieving her passing. Even within our focus group participants were swapping tips, providing emails and giving each other advice on how to help one another find housing. Formal systems are too complex to navigate without this type of informal support.

“It’s like hunting for a needle in a haystack. Except the needle looks exactly like hay.”

## Trouble Communicating with Property Management

Finally a few participants expressed frustration at and lack of understanding and connection to property management in their own and friends' previous housing situations. They shared with us stories of discrimination and lack of understanding of how to serve people with I/DD.

“A lot of people ...got kicked out of their place because the property manager wasn't too nice to them or wasn't really respectful of them as an adult.”

## Opportunities for Better Housing

When asked what could be done better residents emphasized:

- More housing in safe, low crime neighborhoods, connected by transit, near parks and greenspaces
- More income based (affordable) options
- Easier system to fill out applications at different places (applying to different affordable housing shouldn't be a separate parallel process for each building) and clarity on the process
- More accessible design in their housing (specific issues residents had encountered that interfered with their access needs included no braille in the laundry room, no parking for support staff, lots of noise through the ceiling and walls, and broken elevators)

## Property Manager Findings

We interviewed ten individuals in our one-on-one Property Manager interviews, surpassing our research goal of eight interviews. We aimed to collect data from a range of experiences, property types and neighborhoods. Our interviewees collectively had almost 300 years of experience managing housing, and were responsible for over 35,000 units. They ranged from managing a single, 52-unit property to a regional director whose reports were responsible for 15,000 units. Six of our interviewees managed mostly affordable units with a few market rate units mixed in, two managed only affordable units, one managed 90% market rate and 10% affordable, and the tenth interviewee managed only market rate properties. We interviewed property managers from the public sector as well as both private and non-profit organizations. The typology of the properties they managed was mostly multifamily, with some townhomes, garden apartments, and duplexes. From this depth of industry experience and breadth of properties some trends emerged.

## Filling Accessible Units

We asked property managers about the accessible units in their properties and how many were filled by people with disabilities who needed those units. Half said their accessible units were filled with people who had disabilities that needed the accessible features. The other half said the units were not. A variety of reasons were given for that including that they could never find someone with a disability who needed the units and that their processes for filling units didn't take access needs into consideration. Managers who used affirmative marketing for accessible units, meaning

they reached out directly to organizations who could help find residents who needed the accessibility features in those units such as disability service and advocacy organizations, reported more of their accessible units were filled with people who needed them.

“Our goal as a property manager is to keep the units full.”

Four of the property managers we talked to told us about an internal transfer process where disabled residents already living in the building could transfer to an open accessible unit before it was offered to the public. At first glance this seems like an accessible process but it means that by definition a resident with a disability would have to be living in a unit that doesn't accommodate their needs before being able to access one that does. The onus is on a disabled resident to live in a non-accessible apartment for an unspecified amount of time before getting the option of living somewhere that fits their needs. Some people with disabilities can suffer through that- for those who can't live in an apartment without the accessible features, it cuts them out completely.

## System Failures in Existing Housing Voucher Programs

A number of property managers had properties which included some Section 811 units, which have attached housing vouchers financed by HUD to be set aside for people with disabilities, often I/DD. We heard a lot of frustration around the management of the Section 811 system in Colorado. Two interviewees told us that their Section 811 units were filled with people from the Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH<sup>8</sup>) waiting list- who very deeply need housing- but are mis-matched with the systems set up to support 811 units. One property manager told us how the I/DD service provider they had teamed up with to support their 811 units couldn't help the residents who lived there because most of the referred residents weren't eligible for their I/DD services. The property manager had to find a new set of service providers to help the PSH population who ended up living in the units designed for residents with I/DD.

“Sometimes they try to shoestring us where it's like, okay, we're going to pull in anyone from the Section 811 waitlist. Okay, well, our case managers on-site specialize in developmental disabilities. Okay, well, we don't care. We're going to send you someone that has a drug addiction. You're not helping that person with drug addiction. You're not helping the other residents in the building. You know what I mean? It's just, yeah, that piece of it is broken.”

## Communication With Residents

Our interviewees had a range of practices when it came to communications with their residents. Every one of them expressed that their processes aimed to support and help the people who live in their buildings.

- “We're all in the same business of helping people have a place to live.”
- “We're in the business of keeping people housed.”
- “Residents are the most important thing- it's their home, I just work here.”

<sup>8</sup>PSH Housing is meant to serve people experiencing homelessness and usually includes on-site, wrap around services specific to that population.  
<https://endhomelessness.org/ending-homelessness/solutions/permanent-supportive-housing/>



Half of the property managers used written notices as well as email or phone calls to communicate. These managers thought about the ways their residents could best receive information and how to make it accessible to them. We heard stories of using a language line for translation in talking with residents who speak a language that isn't English, using counselors or other supports to help communicate with residents who might need it, and in general trying to get to know the residents personally, with more face-to-face time, so that all communication is easier. 70% of property managers we interviewed had an open-door policy where residents could stop in to talk at any time.

### Complicated Leasing Process

We heard a lot of feedback from property management about the difficulty of navigating the lease and other compliance paperwork. How long and arduous filling out the paperwork is. We also heard about all the ways residents had help filling out the application- case workers or family members helping, translation services, or the property manager themselves going over a plain language version of the paperwork to help the resident understand. All of these means of assistance in navigating the paperwork are helpful for many people but crucial for the I/DD population to navigate the system.

70% of property managers sit down to go over the lease with new residents in person.

“They get so much information at move-in. **Don't rush them with paperwork.** Take the time to listen and speak at a level they understand. They need to feel comfortable and understand what we're doing.”

### Trainings and Working with the I/DD Population

Most of the property managers we talked to had experience housing residents with I/DD at some point in their career, mostly not in I/DD specific units. Many felt like they wanted better resources to support those residents, since they had no training or background.

Everyone we talked to took Fair Housing laws seriously and had yearly training to educate staff on legal regulations. We heard from property managers that this was important, especially as rules and regulations change, to stay up to date on how to comply with them. This shows us that the property management industry has an established process for learning and incorporating new policy into their day-to-day. It means that connecting to property management through the training systems that are already in place could be a way to incorporate new knowledge and updated norms in the industry, specifically on how to work with people who have I/DD.

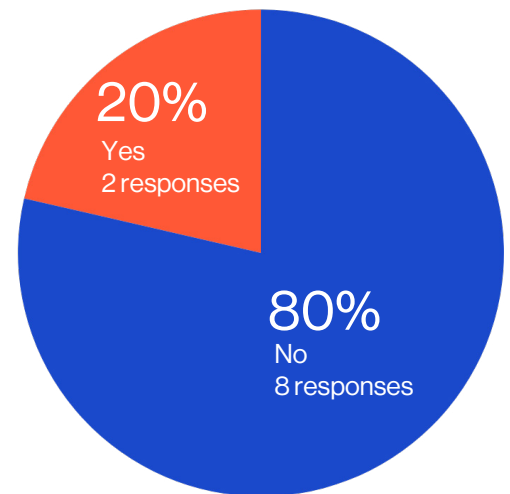
### Responsibility and Understanding of Property Staff Roles

Property Managers also talked about how there usually isn't a budget to cover a robust resident services program to support those residents. They wanted help from case managers and counselors but there wasn't funding for systems to make those connections. One property manager

brought up the system of PSH where the operations budget covers a case manager who can connect with residents as a version that works well and could be used as reference for a system to support residents with I/DD.

A final take away from our conversations was that the property managers and other on site staff have an understanding of the distinct roles of building staff (the roles of owner, property manager, resident services), but to the residents that isn't always clear. They don't always know who is responsible for what and how to connect. Knowing who to go to with issues and needs is vital to making a resident feel supported in their home.

### Have Property Managers had training to work with people with I/DD?



## Developer and Houser Roundtable Findings

For our Developer and Houser Roundtable we gathered twelve practitioners working on housing from public, non-profit, and private organizations. Our attendees represented funders, developers, designers, and operators as well as service providers who had moved into housing to support their clients. Their robust conversation revealed many important takeaways.

### Funding

All participants agreed that the complexity of funding I/DD-specific housing is enormous. Affordable housing that includes public subsidy already requires compiling a multi-sourced funding stack with a national average of 3.5 funding sources per project<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, each funding source has its own requirements for the project. Making these projects work is already hard and being able to set aside units for the I/DD population is often at odds with the requirements of the main funding sources available.



Layered on top of the funding needed to build a project, the I/DD population needs built-in-service support which is not part of standard affordable housing models.<sup>10</sup> Service support is an ongoing budget item during operations and even our participants who had built or are building I/DD specific housing couldn't find any existing, reliable, repeatable sources to fund it. Any project that will successfully serve people with I/DD needs to have connections to services as a key component of the project.

<sup>9</sup><https://nlihc.org/resource/complexity-lihtc-financing-increases-development-costs>

<sup>10</sup>However, there are population specific Affordable Housing models, such as senior housing or veteran housing which include services targeted at those populations.

There were other funding asks we heard from participants. Builders who wanted to create I/DD specific housing expressed a particular need for pre-development capital to get projects off the ground. They also asked for a dedicated I/DD voucher which would help get projects started. These types of early committed funding to a project are often the hardest funding sources to secure and can make the difference in which projects get built and which don't. We also heard that lots of funding sources evaluate a project on a "per-unit" basis and additional accessibility costs (including services during the operational phase) could therefore affect a project's competitiveness for public funding sources, which often want projects to reduce costs. One suggestion was to find a way to separate out the costs for extra accessibility and ensure disability-forward projects are not penalized for them when competing with projects that don't support accessibility. "We are not making it easy to house people with I/DD in our typical funding streams"



### Meeting Resident Needs and with Flexibility and Community

Since many of our roundtable participants had experience working with or housing people with I/DD, they had lots of knowledge on what is needed to provide successful homes for those residents. Matching people with I/DD to homes and services they need requires substantial resource navigation through affordable housing projects, vouchers, and waiver systems. To access those resources, residents with I/DD need to rely on the expertise of people who know the systems. Service providers often don't know how to navigate finding housing and folks working in the housing system don't have much understanding of the services people with I/DD have access to and their relationship to their housing needs. More connections need to be built across the affordable housing and service systems.

We asked about what kinds of projects best serve residents with I/DD and heard many voices at the roundtable say they believed integrated communities where people with and without I/DD can live together work best. As one participant said "Having a diverse population helps us provide the services people need." This also means in I/DD forward projects, project owners need to build in flexibility in how they serve their residents' access needs- access needs are different for each individual and change over time. Participants

"Community is really important and it can be one of the best supports in this type of building. So we need to make sure that there's space for that."

Mackenzie Peterson, Denver Housing Authority



also requested more community engagement resources to continue to learn and understand community needs. Organizations like the Inclusive Housing Coalition help stakeholders connect and learn together and can be recruited as partners in this effort.

## Government Opportunities and Actions

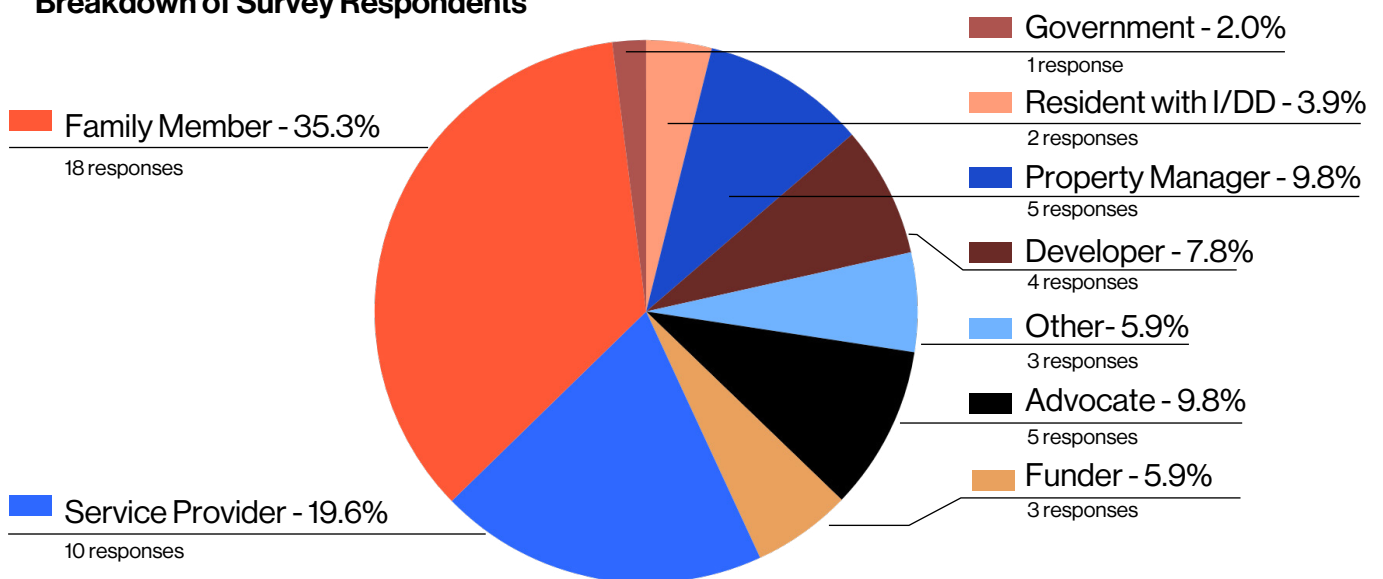
We heard a lot from our roundtable participants on actions that government entities could take to make building the kind of housing that supports people with I/DD possible. On a state level, one participant shared that the Colorado Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) does not understand I/DD housing and there is a need to educate the organization so it can even know how to help. One builder said pointedly “We need flexible resources that don’t have to fit the CHFA boxes.”

The participants also had specific ideas on how local governments could help them build. They requested flexible government resources- such as a city sponsored, 2% revolving construction loan for housing people with I/DD. We also heard from a local government official who suggested leveraging land the City and County of Denver already own as a resource for I/DD housing. Finally, another suggestion that many attendees agreed with was finding a way to attach a housing subsidy to the DD and SLS waivers, to connect support systems that are already in place for people with I/DD to additional housing support.

## Survey Findings

Our survey engaged with the widest range of stakeholders and covered a variety of topics related to housing people with I/DD. We sent the open survey out to many stakeholders and encouraged them to forward it along to others. The survey was open for about four weeks and we received 51 responses.

### Breakdown of Survey Respondents



## Residents

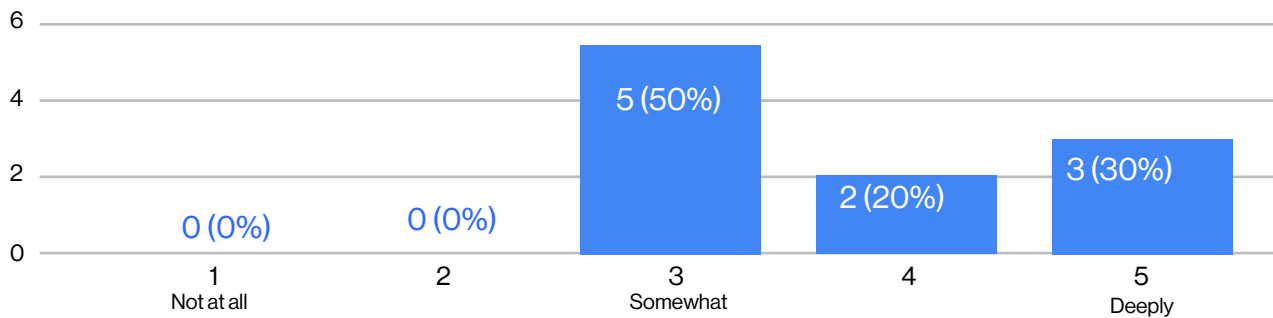
The first section of the survey was for people who identified as disabled. We received very few responses (see research gaps section) but from the responses we received we heard that the largest issues were the cost of housing and how far available housing was from their family. All respondents also reported they had experienced discrimination for being disabled when looking for housing.

## Housing Providers

The second section of the survey was for developers, property managers, and other housing providers. Most felt they had a pretty good understanding of I/DD access needs and half had attended I/DD specific training. As this was a self-selecting population who filled out the survey, we don't think this is representative of this community as a whole. It's important to note that even with stakeholders who considered themselves knowledgeable about I/DD, there were still many requests for additional training and resources.

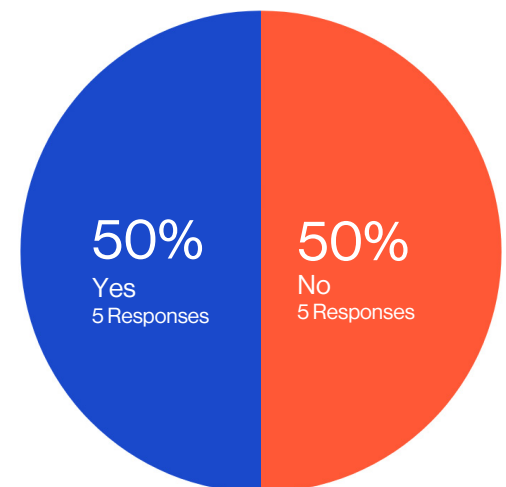
### I Understand the Access Needs of People with IDD for Housing

10 responses from housing providers



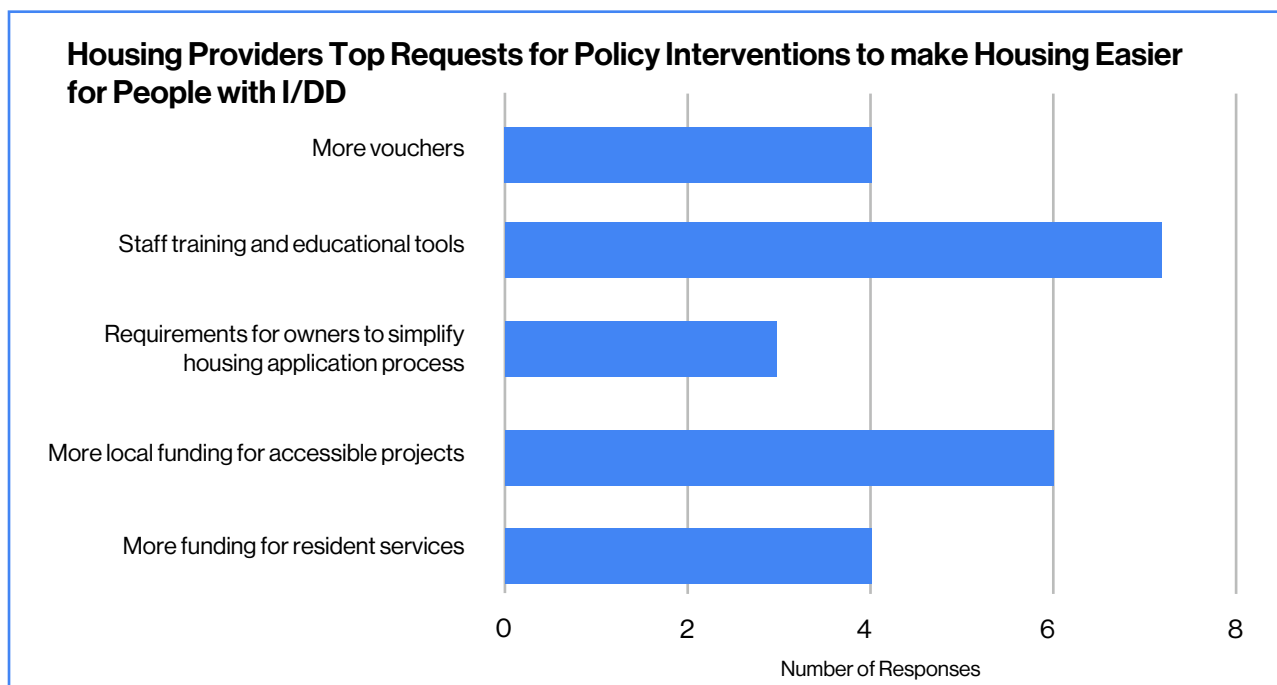
Reasonable accommodation practices varied widely. Reasonable accommodations are approved adjustments to a tenant's lease or unit to remove barriers they experience due to their disability, such as adding grab bars to the unit. Most respondents said they accepted reasonable accommodations "as needed." One expressed hesitancy to modify a rental unit which would increase the value for the landlord, even if it helps the tenant (because the tenant might move out). One supportive property set an example and had resident advisors available around the clock "to assist our independent living residents with any life needs."

### Housing Providers who have had Focused Professional Learning to Understand how to Better Provide Housing for People with I/DD





The biggest barriers respondents saw were a lack of understanding of the needs of the I/DD population and lack of soft funding<sup>11</sup> to allow for very low rents. When asked what interventions they'd like to see, local funding for projects that go beyond code and staff training and tools to support working with people with I/DD were the most requested resources. "It seems like both the housing world and the I/DD world work in silos, and when that happens, it's very difficult to recognize how they influence each other and/or how resources from both systems can be leveraged to support the highest level of housing stability for our most vulnerable clients."



## Service Providers, Family Members, & Advocates

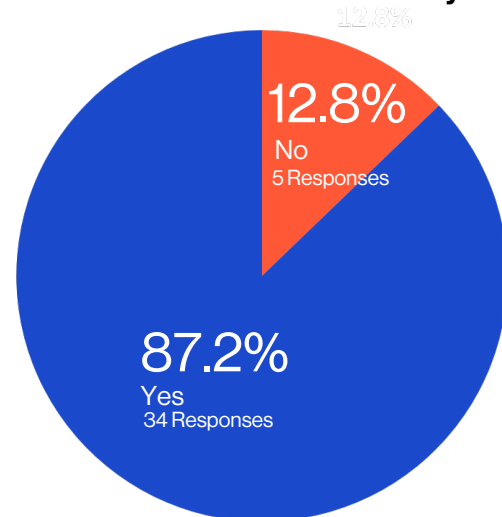
### Discrimination

The last section of the survey was for family members, service providers, local government, and other advocates. This population lives and works closely with people with I/DD and see a unique side of their experience navigating housing. 87% (34 out of 39) of our respondents had witnessed stigma or discrimination against people with I/DD because of their disability.

### Lack of Affordability

From this group we heard the issue of affordability coming up again and again as a top priority in housing people with I/DD. "The biggest challenge is really the lack of affordable and supportive housing in general."

Have you witnessed stigma or discrimination against people with I/DD because of their disability?



<sup>11</sup><https://siliconvalleyathome.org/resources/glossary/#:~:text=Soft%20Money%20E2%80%93%20Any%20form%20of,or%20a%20residual%20receipts%20loan.>

## Existing Systems Don't Work for I/DD

We also heard how the qualifications for assistance is complex and not designed to work for people with I/DD. There isn't a good housing model for this population, and so our support systems have trouble serving their needs. "The HCBS-DD waitlist impacts our participants in ways that are often harmful and dangerous. Housing is so hard to get and often times we're forced to find inappropriate housing models for people because the qualifications for Emergency DD are so strict that even our most vulnerable participants don't qualify."

"Section 811 vouchers alone will not fill the financial gaps."

"The paperwork is very demanding and the expectation is people fill it out independently, so unless there's very involved case management or another support/advocate, then people either struggle to get the paperwork done or sign off on things they may not understand."

Respondents also expressed frustration with complex and opaque systems- filling out endless paperwork, long waiting lists with no understanding of where someone is placed, difficulty finding service providers. They want better housing navigation services to help people through these processes and resources that cover more of the needs of their loved ones with I/DD.

There were a lot of requests for more supportive services in housing to help people with I/DD once they are housed. The data revealed the need for on-site support staff who can assist residents day to day in navigating their needs. We also heard requests for plain language resources to help residents understand their commitments to a rental. There was also a lot of frustration that there isn't a good system to connect people who need accessible units with the accessible units that exist. "The ADA units don't go to people who need them."

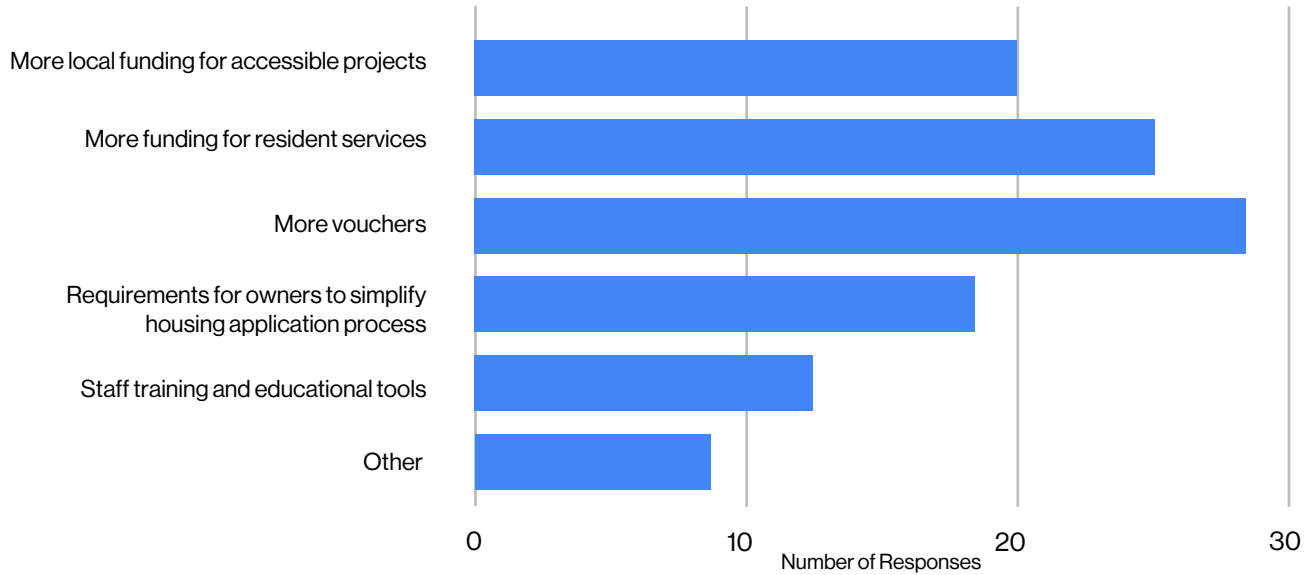


"Housing offers safety and dignity to people. Landlords working alongside case managers has been helpful as it eliminates communication gaps."

## Top Interventions

This group thought the most important interventions were more local funding, more vouchers, more operational funding for resident services that are not otherwise funded, and requirements for accessibility like plain language.

## Caregiver and Advocates Top Requests for Policy Interventions to make Housing Easier for People with I/DD



Finally, we heard feedback on what makes a good home for people with I/DD. It needs to be close to transportation, friends and family, and it needs to be a community where “people can develop bonds and support systems.” “Community is key.”

## Section 5: Research Limitations and Opportunities for Further Research

Throughout our research we worked to bring people into the public discussion about housing people with I/DD whose voices have not yet been heard. We designed our research methodologies and carefully planned our outreach to hear from new participant perspectives. While we are confident in our methodology and analysis, we also wish to acknowledge limitations in this work and where they might not generalize to all individuals across the very diverse community of individuals with I/DD. Here we’ll explore the gaps in our work and places that could be studied more in depth to expand our understanding.

In recruiting participants for our focus groups we aimed to invite participants who hadn’t contributed to this sort of research before. We made a point to reach out to BIPOC individuals and make sure people with intersectional identities had a voice in our work. We worked with Arnie Swenson, the Associate Director of Mission Supports at Rocky Mountain Human Services, who supports I/DD clients who are without a home where the needs and supports are even more complex. Arnie personally drove two participants to our in person focus group, going above and beyond in service to ensure that their stories and experiences made it into our work.

Each of the individuals who made it to our sessions did so because they had enough support to enable them to do so. The voices we can’t represent are the people who couldn’t make the sessions because they don’t have support systems which allowed them to. In our findings section above

we reviewed how 66% of session attendees had a support person physically present with them and 3 participants dropped out day of. These data highlight how each story we heard represented someone with enough support to be able to share it. The voices we are missing are those without any of that support.

Our property manager interviews aimed to collect data with respect to a range of building types, sizes, neighborhoods, and positions, however, much more research could be done to investigate further the relationship between property management and their residents with I/DD. We think an additional study on the occupancy of accessible units, how many are filled with people who need those units, and what best practices could be implemented to fill those units would be incredibly valuable. While accessible units don't directly target people with I/DD, often people with I/DD's access needs extend to physical space through mobility, auditory, or visual impairment, and so the issue of accessible units has a large impact on housing more people with I/DD in units that suit their needs.

Our roundtable participants were carefully chosen for their various viewpoints and experiences to create a robust and multifaceted discussion. However, we were limited by the size of the group. We didn't want a group of more than ten people to ensure we could hear abundantly from everyone in the two hours we had for discussion. Many of our participants had others they wanted to invite as well and we had lots of feedback after the session that more conversations like this are needed. So here, our limitation was research capacity for this work. After the session participants told us the roundtable was useful for their work, not just for us as researchers. Holding more of these sessions would accommodate more voices, instigate more conversation, and would create a deeper network of professionals working together to create the kind of housing people with I/DD are in need of in Colorado.

Our public survey aimed to collect a diversity of voices that didn't otherwise fit into our research. While we had 51 respondents and it yielded significant important data, there were a number of gaps. First of all, only two of the respondents were people with I/DD. While our focus groups gave

us a lot of information about the experiences of people with I/DD finding housing, we hoped to hear more voices of people with I/DD themselves through the survey.

In subsequent research we suggest putting significant resources into getting a survey like ours in front of more people in the I/DD community. We suggest offering people the option to have the survey presented in a format that best serves them, as a way of increasing the accessibility. We'd like to see researchers going





out to day programs and support services organizations to work in person with their clients to administer the survey. “It’s all about rapport, rapport and rapport. If someone they know asks them to do it,” says Brain Be, an autistic self advocate and member of our steering committee. This additional research work could fill in some of the gap we saw in responses by people with I/DD, who need more direct outreach and support to fill it out.

We also hoped that the survey could be a way for people who didn’t speak English to engage with our work, since the written form allowed for off-the-shelf translation. However, all the responses we received were in English. For future work we’d recommend including dedicated resources to translate the survey and pay community members to administer it in their communities in their native languages, so Non-English native speakers had equal access to share their experiences and contribute to the work.

Investing research funds and time in the next steps above would expand the scope of what we’ve already completed, and get more understanding of the lower resourced subpopulations of people with I/DD – those with fewer supports, or less ability to access existing resources because of language and other barriers.

## Section 6: Policy Recommendations

Through our research we’ve laid out many barriers that people with I/DD face in finding housing in the Denver Metro area. Below we lay out some solutions which will remove some of those barriers, ensuring more adults with I/DD will be able to live in housing that suits their needs.

### Increase Availability of Operating Subsidies to Support Service-Linked<sup>12</sup> Projects

The City and County of Denver can create new funding streams for housing programs that are service-linked and ready for people who need in-home support and services. Two ways to do this are through an operating subsidy which helps cover the operating costs of a housing project that serves residents with I/DD once it is built, or new project-based vouchers specifically for people with I/DD. This funding directed at service-linked housing would mean people with I/DD could live independently with support systems built into their housing to allow them to access the services they need and have help in navigating systems. There is a federal mandate for communities to divest from congregate and institutional settings<sup>13</sup>. To support that work and provide alternative housing options for people

“Vouchers are the biggest barrier. Vouchers targeted to this specific population are absolutely critical to getting this housing built in Colorado.”

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Lauren Schevets, Volker

<sup>12</sup> Service-linked and ready housing means that housing developments are equipped through design and operations to support tenants needing supportive services in their homes. This is crucial for people with I/DD but benefits neurotypical tenants as well, especially those relying on other government benefits.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/OLMSTEADGUIDN060413.PDF>

with I/DD, IDDEAS can collaborate with Denver’s Department of Housing Stability (HOST) or other city agencies to pilot projects that use the subsidies or vouchers, which would address the need for funding during the operational phase.

IDDEAS and its collaborators can also provide clearer guidance for developers and builders by publishing best practices and case examples of service-ready housing, particularly with the assurance that the tenants have full choice over the services they receive in their own homes, and that any new vouchers or funding would work as an addition to the Medicaid support people with I/DD already receive. This work supports the implementation of the federal Home & Community Based (HCBS) Settings Rule, ensuring Denver stays in compliance. Existing federal initiatives, such as the Administration on Community Living (ACL) & the Department of Housing & Urban Development’s (HUD) Housing Services and Resource Center can be resources for Denver Metro specific guidelines.

## Local Funding Incentives and Enforcement

In our research we heard from developers how hard it is to fund new housing for people with I/DD. The City and County of Denver can embed disability-forward incentives into its existing affordable housing programs during its regular updates to its programs and funding guidelines. Implementing new development initiatives, such as awarding developers an additional per unit subsidy for including accessible features in their project (meaning that developers would receive extra dollars to build each unit) incentivizes applicants to go beyond minimum levels of accessibility. This can be done by tying funding sources to the use of accessible standards such as The Kelsey’s Inclusive Design Standards<sup>14</sup> or Virginia’s Universal Design Standards.<sup>15</sup> The city already has incentives in place for very low income and family units therefore we recommend that such incentives be embedded within the existing system. This is an opportunity for the City government to collaborate with stakeholders such as the Denver Housing Authority (DHA) as well as non-profit and for-profit private developers to encourage more home builders to build inclusive, accessible units where more residents with I/DD can find housing.

“In my experience, there is a certain incentive for folks to do things if you bring a dedicated funding source for it as long as all the other funding sources work with it.”

Tim Dolan, Inclusive Housing Coalition

The City of San Jose, CA has implemented this type of measure and provides low-cost loans to affordable housing projects in a competitive application process. In their Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) released in December 2021, they noted projects that provide more accessibility than required by code are rewarded with additional points in the evaluation process. See the table below for the exact wording used in their NOFA.

### Increasing Accessibility for Disabled People

The Housing Department strives to ensure that every program, service, benefit, activity and facility operated or funded with federal, state, and local funds is fully accessible to, and useable by, people with disabilities. Housing Department staff welcome feedback on access needs and suggestions for improvement. We commit to seeking technical assistance and providing support to grantees as we strive to do better to meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as well as other federal, state and local access codes and disability rights laws.

Projects that are committed to increasing accessibility beyond the minimum ADA requirements and are open to feedback and input from people with disabilities may be eligible for bonus points. Please refer to Section 5.7 for specifics. For informational purposes only, applicants are encouraged to review the “Housing Design Standards for Accessibility and Inclusion” published by the Kelsey in September of 2021 (© 2021 The Kelsey® The Kelsey is a 501c3 nonprofit. EIN 84-2909645): <https://thekelsey.org/learn-center/design-standards/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://thekelsey.org/design/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.virginiahousing.com/en/partners/rental-housing/rental-financing-ae-proces>

Beyond funding incentives for projects that go beyond required levels of accessibility, the City and County of Denver can also issue guidance reminding all developers of their obligation to build accessible units and their obligation to make reasonable accommodations and modifications for tenants with disabilities, as well as to accept vouchers. This guidance can advance access to accessible units, which our research has identified as a driver of housing instability.

Cities like San Francisco do this by taking a conservative approach to their implementation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, a federal law. San Francisco has adopted their own building review of accessibility features to ensure all projects are Section 504 compliant including 5% mobility units and 2% sensory units.<sup>16</sup> The City of Denver can implement a similar procedure.

In addition to City incentives to support access and inclusion in housing, housing leaders can partner with and advocate to state agencies and policymakers to include disability-forward strategies within state funding programs. This could include advocating for increased accessible requirements in the state's Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP)<sup>17</sup> and engaging on the way Colorado's newly created Proposition 123 funds<sup>18</sup> will be spent.

## **Increase the Availability and Use of Vouchers to Support Integrated Housing**

When talking with residents with I/DD and their caregivers we heard they often did not know about or have access to available resources to help them pay for housing. At the end of our in person focus group the participants swapped email addresses so they could give each other advice on how to find a voucher to fit their own or a family member's needs. The City and County of Denver could create a city level tenant-based voucher for people who use HCBS services to promote integrated settings (where people with and without disabilities live in the same building). This would directly help residents with disabilities pay for housing while their other service needs are met through HCBS funding.

The City and County of Denver should also work in collaboration with DHA to ensure that the federal vouchers that already exist are fully utilized. The Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) Mainstream vouchers target low income and very low income people, many of whom are individuals with I/DD. As of the last HUD reporting in February 2024<sup>19</sup>, only 38% of Mainstream vouchers allocated to the City and County of Denver have been utilized. In addition, the Non-Elderly Disabled Voucher, another targeted Housing Choice Voucher program, had only been utilized at 58%. These are resources that already exist but need the pro-active, disability-inclusive work of local governments to improve program implementation, through forming partnerships with disability service providers, improving waitlist practices, accessible unit identification, or other means. This collaborative effort across City and County of Denver and DHA can adopt lessons learned from recent HUD Communities of Practice<sup>20</sup>, including with a particular focus on Mainstream Vouchers serving people at serious risk of entering or transitioning out of institutional settings<sup>21</sup>, many of whom are people with I/DD.

## **Create Navigation Support for Residents Applying for Housing**

The complexity of finding and applying for housing is a huge issue for people with I/DD. The City

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.disabilityrightsca.org/cases/independent-living-center-of-southern-california-et-al-v-the-city-of-los-angeles-et-al> and <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/cra-agrees-pay-31-million-resolve-alleged-misuse-federal-funds-inaccessible-housing>

<sup>17</sup> <https://housingmatters.urban.org/articles/who-gives-qap-why-non-housers-should-care-about-their-local-qualified-allocation-plan>

<sup>18</sup> <https://oedit.colorado.gov/proposition-123-colorado-affordable-housing-financing-fund>

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/public\\_indian\\_housing/programs/hcv/dashboard](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/dashboard)



and County of Denver can address this in a number of different and collaborative ways. First, training service coordinators and case managers who already serve people with I/DD to understand affordable housing, how to apply, and documentation needed, will give them tools to help guide their clients through the complex system of applying for housing. This should include training in the income certification process and understanding of the documentation needed.

IDDEAS and its partners at DHA, HOST and other housing-focused agencies can also work with an organization like Housing Connector which works with residents enrolled in its programs to create security for property managers such as rent guarantees and acting as the direct point of contact for any issues that may arise. With the backing of a program like [Housing Connector](#), residents with I/DD would have resources to both enter into and remain in housing through a resident centered model that works on their behalf to remove friction points. Property managers appreciate and trust the organization as a representative for its clients. “A letter of support for a resident from Housing Connector is a guarantee we’re going to accept them.” Jenni Vestor, a member of our Steering Committee and Director of Residents at Skyline Community Partners. It is important to note that IDDEAS recently implemented a housing navigation program<sup>22</sup> in partnership with a local non-profit, Bayaud Enterprises, focused on many of the tasks outlined above. However, IDDEAS could expand upon services already being covered that further fill gaps outlined within this report as well expand outreach for use of the program, as many residents we talked to had not yet found the program on their own.

A longer-term policy implementation would be to create a single point of entry to apply for affordable housing in the City and County of Denver. This would benefit all residents who need affordable housing but would especially allow residents with more specific needs for accessible units to be prioritized for those units as they come available across the city, removing the onus on the resident themselves to search for few accessible units on a property-by-property basis. Denver already has a coordinated entry system for people experiencing homelessness- One Home, operated by Metro Denver Homeless Initiative (MDHI), and the system could be expanded to serve anyone needing affordable housing in the region. While it is essential to prioritize housing for those within the coordinated entry system, many people with I/DD who are housing insecure or stuck in congregate settings fall outside of the coordinated entry system. Therefore, creating a universal entry system can assist in dual prioritization. The City of San Francisco has implemented a universal affordable coordinated entry system and has seen great success in matching resident needs to the units available as well simplifying and streamlining the process and paperwork for all residents who need housing.<sup>23</sup>

## **Educational support for property managers to understand and support people with I/DD in their communities**

We found in our research that property managers, who work day to day with residents and their needs, have little or no training in working with residents with I/DD, creating barriers for those residents to acquire or remain in their housing. The City and County of Denver should create a training program for property managers which could be incorporated with other yearly fair housing trainings, to provide education for property managers to understand their role in providing housing for people with I/DD. This could be coordinated as a statewide program with CHFAreach, the state

<sup>22</sup> <https://bayaudenterprises.org/housing-navigation>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.sf.gov/information/creating-online-affordable-housing-portal>



level multifamily property staff training program, or on a local level with HOST and DHA.

Furthermore, the City and County of Denver could work with larger property management companies to make sure their policies and processes (which the on site property managers are required to follow) are designed to work for people with I/DD. Notably, HUD's recent Guidance on the Application of the Fair Housing Act<sup>24</sup> includes direction on waiving certain screening requirements on applications and other adjustments if the reason an applicant could be rejected is a result of their disability. Making sure property management companies are aware of the guidelines and properly applying them would work to combat the discrimination people with I/DD often experience in finding or remaining in housing.

## **Require the Use of Plain Language in Leasing Documents for projects that receive Local Funding for Affordable Housing**

The City and County Denver can implement new policies that require projects receiving local funding to use plain language in their unit applications, explanations of leases, and other agreements or contracts. With each additional funding source, renters are required to sign additional leases or lease-riders which make the process even more confusing. During the financial close process, public entities should encourage the consolidation of lease requirements across funders that the end resident will have to sign.

IDDEAS can provide guidance on plain language, including providing more plain language examples and running online and in-person training on the importance of plain language use to any developers and property managers operating in Denver. Our research found that many property managers were already creating one-off versions of this, including "cheat sheets" in simple language for their leases. Providing guidance and resources would encourage and standardize this practice as well as expand its impact.

Currently, most leases used are written at a graduate school level. In contrast, plain language is geared toward audiences with cognitive disabilities and is typically at a 5th or 6th-grade reading level. Plain language benefits everyone, including but not limited to English language learners and people with low educational attainment. Affordable housing should be expected to develop procedures to ensure essential information is effectively communicated to all residents, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, whose accessibility needs may interfere with typical ways of reading and understanding content. The Kelsey has an online plain language guide<sup>25</sup> where stakeholders can learn more about plain language in housing.

## **Fund a I/DD Housing Pilot Project**

Many developers spoke to the need for better support developing disability inclusive housing. People with disabilities, family members, and service providers spoke to the gaps they face in finding housing that meets the needs of people with I/DD. In addition to the systemic solutions outlined above, one direct strategy could include funding a specific pilot community for people with I/DD to live in an inclusive setting. This community could both meet immediate needs, pilot some of the policies outlined above, and serve as a demonstration project for future I/DD inclusive communities in Denver, and statewide, in the future. Funding could be granted in the form of land, in-kind, as well as pre-development capital to ensure the project's success.

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/FHEO/documents/FHEO\\_Guidance\\_on\\_Screening\\_of\\_Applicants\\_for\\_Rental\\_Housing.pdf](https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/FHEO/documents/FHEO_Guidance_on_Screening_of_Applicants_for_Rental_Housing.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> <https://thekelsey.org/plain-language-leasing>



## Section 7: Conclusion

In conclusion, our research has shown that people with I/DD face a variety of barriers to acquire and remain in housing that suits their needs. These barriers create blockers at every step of the housing process, and each one could keep a resident from finding proper housing. Moreover, those with fewer resources, including family support, financial resources, and support from government service providers, have the least capacity to overcome each barrier, and are most likely to end up in housing that doesn't fit their needs or be left homeless. The City and County of Denver, along with professionals working across the housing sector, especially developers and property managers, can take active steps to create more housing that suits people with I/DD's needs while shifting the systems that govern existing housing placement to better match their needs. Implementing these impactful policy solutions could remove these barriers for people with I/DD, so more people can thrive in accessible housing that works for them.

# Appendix



## Appendix 1: Focus Group Questions

1. Where do you currently live?
  - a. How long have you lived there?
  - b. Who do you currently live with? Family or friends?
  - c. Who would you like to live with?
2. How did you find your housing? Did anyone help you find your housing? If someone helped, who was it - and how did they help?
  - a. Examples: My service provider found it, my parents found it for me, I found it through a government website.
3. Mad Libs Activity
  - a. Repeat activity for a private space and for a public space.
  - b. When I'm in \_\_\_\_\_, I need a place to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. Each participant will fill in their sheet, then we will share our answers with the group.
4. What do you like about your housing?
  - a. Your room, the unit, the building, the location?
5. What would you like to change to make your housing better?
  - a. Some areas that might be improved: access to transportation, location, cost, easier to use, more private space.
6. What problems have you experienced finding or staying in housing? What would make it easier to find or stay in housing?
  - a. Examples: It's too expensive, it's far away from my family or friends, I don't know where to look for housing, I don't know who to ask to help me find housing.
7. Fill in the blank: A favorite memory I have about my housing is \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2: Questions for One-On-One Property Management Interviews

1. What is your name, organization, and role?
2. How many years have you been managing properties?
3. How many units are you responsible for?
4. How many of those are affordable housing? Vs market rate?
5. What typology of properties do you manage? (Small, scattered, multi-family, conventional, affordable?)
6. What neighborhoods are the properties you manage located in?
7. How many of those units are accessible units? How many of those units house people with disabilities?
8. When an accessible unit becomes available, what is your process to fill it?
9. Have you ever managed property that houses residents with I/DD?



10. Do you have at least one person at your current property(ies) that has experience working with people with IDD and their support services?
11. if yes, please describe.
12. Tell us about how residents connect to property management. What do resident services look like in your property(ies)?
13. What is your role in providing support for your residents with higher needs?
14. Describe your communication style with residents. Do you feel equipped to work with residents with higher needs?
15. Do you have an open-office policy or do you require appointments?
16. Have you received training in intervention strategies such as trauma-informed care or motivational interviewing?
17. Tell me about your reasonable accommodation process if you currently have one.
18. Do you feel knowledgeable about local housing regulations, like the Fair Housing Act and Americans with Disabilities Act?
19. How do you ensure that your properties comply with relevant accessibility laws and regulations? What regulations are you familiar with?
20. Do residents with disabilities ever need assistance completing the application or move in process for your properties? Does your organization provide or allow for any assistance?
21. Do you have a process of going over the basic rules of the properties and important points of the lease before move-in? What is that process like?
22. Have you heard of plain language leasing? If yes, has your organization considered implementing it?
23. What are some of the problems that have arisen from residents not understanding their lease or the property rules? How have you handled them?
24. From your perspective in the industry, what are property managers/owners doing or not doing to support people with I/DD as potential residents in their properties?
25. What could property management companies do to better support people with I/DD living on their properties? What tools would you like to see?

## **Appendix 3: Questions for Developer and Houser Roundtable Discussion**

1. What do you consider when designing and constructing properties to accommodate people with disabilities, particularly people with I/DD?
2. What are the important considerations from design, funding, and services perspectives?
3. What barriers do you see to using universal or more accessible design in new-build market rate and affordable buildings?
  - a. Design barriers
  - b. Funding barriers
  - c. Policy or zoning barriers



- d. Knowledge or information barriers
- e. Other?
4. Do you have an example of a project for disabled residents that wasn't funded. What got in the way?
5. How do the funding processes impact the ability to build for residents with I/DD?
6. How do you navigate budget constraints when integrating accessibility features into buildings?
7. Are there funding constraints that make it difficult to build for people with I/DD?
8. Have you encountered funding that makes it much easier to build this type of housing?
9. How does the funding for operations impact projects?
10. If you haven't worked on a building that houses people with I/DD before, what do you think the barriers to doing so are?
  - a. What are the questions you'd ask to understand what building like that would take?
  - b. Where would you go for information to learn more?
  - c. What resources would you like to see that might incentivize you?
11. Where do or would you go to look for resources to build disability-forward housing or accessible housing that goes beyond basic compliance?
  - a. Do you know of city resources that exist? State ones? Federal?
  - b. What barriers exist to access those tools?
  - c. What tools don't exist but you would like to see created?
12. What do you think about when planning services for a project? How does that change if the project is specifically for I/DD or a different specific population (PSH, veterans, seniors, etc.)?
  - a. Are there policy or funding tools that could help on the services side of a project?
13. How do you stay informed about emerging technologies and trends?
  - a. What industry groups, conferences or publications do you make use of?
  - b. How do you learn new professional information?
14. What policy or funding interventions would help you consider building I/DD housing?
  - a. What resources can the city provide?
  - b. What regulatory environment would set up the right conditions?

## Appendix 4: Survey Questions

1. Why are you interested in housing for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD)?
  - a. I am disabled
  - b. I have a family member or friend with a disability
  - c. I develop or manage housing
  - d. I am a service provider, case worker, or social worker
  - e. I do advocacy or policy work
  - f. I work in local government
  - g. Other (please let us know)



2. Is someone helping you fill out this survey? Who?

## Part One: Questions for people with I/DD about their housing

3. What neighborhood of Denver or other city do you currently live in? If you don't have a home, where do you spend your nights?
4. What kind of home do you live in?
  - a. A house by myself
  - b. A house with only family members
  - c. A house with roommates or friends
  - d. An assisted living or independent living community
  - e. In a nursing home or hospital
  - f. Small apartment building (20 or less apartments)
  - g. Medium apartment building (between 21 and 100 apartments)
  - h. Large apartment building (more than 100 apartments)
  - i. I am homeless
  - j. Other (please explain)
5. Who do you live with?
  - a. I live alone
  - b. One or more family members
  - c. A guardian or care worker
  - d. One or more friends
  - e. I live with people I did not choose - for example, people in a nursing home.
  - f. I am homeless
  - g. Other (please explain)
6. How did you find the housing you live in now?
  - a. My parent(s) or family helped me find it
  - b. A government agency helped me - for example, the housing authority.
  - c. A case manager or social worker helped me find it
  - d. I found it by searching on my own
  - e. I do not have housing or I am looking for housing now
  - f. Other (please explain)
7. I have a good relationship with my landlord/housing provider.
  - a. True/False
8. My landlord/housing provider understands my disability.
  - a. True/False
9. My landlord/housing provider ensures I have access to all apartment features and amenities even with my disability.
  - a. True/False
10. My landlord is kind and patient with me when I have access needs.
  - a. True/False
11. Have you been through housing discrimination before? Discrimination is when someone gets



treated unfairly because of who they are. (You can choose more than one answer.

- a. Yes, because of my disability
  - b. Yes, because of my housing voucher or disability income
  - c. Yes, because of my race or ethnicity
  - d. Yes, for another reason (please explain)
  - e. No
12. What problems have you had in the past in finding and keeping housing?
- a. Housing costs too much money
  - b. Housing was too far from public transportation
  - c. Housing was not accessible to people with disabilities
  - d. No community or other support system
  - e. Could not find safe housing
  - f. Too far from family or friends
  - g. Other (please explain)
13. Tell us more about your housing. What do you like about it? What do you think could be better? For example, changes to the building like a ramp or grab bars? Services, like help cleaning your house or making meals? Any other ideas you can think of?
14. What tools or resources do you think would help create better housing for people with I/DD?

## Part Two: Questions for Developers, Property Managers and people providing housing

15. I understand the access needs of people with I/DD for housing.
- a. Likert scale 1-5 strongly disagree to strongly agree
16. What resources have helped you understand the needs of people with I/DD? What other resources do you think would help?
17. Do any of your projects have any physical designs, policies, or operational practices to accommodate residents with disabilities? Please share what they are.
18. Have you made use of any funding programs or policies targeted at housing people with I/DD? Which ones?
19. From your perspective, what are the barriers to providing accessible housing for people with I/DD?
20. What tools or resources would help you build accessible housing for people with I/DD?

## Part Three: Questions For Service Providers, Local Government, and Advocates

21. Can you tell us a bit about who you are and your experience working with or connecting to people with I/DD?
22. In your experience, what obstacles do individuals with I/DD encounter when trying to secure



or remain in suitable housing? What gaps currently exist?

23. What policy or government interventions would you like to see to make it easier for people with I/DD to find and remain in housing that supports them? (Choose your top 3.)

- a. More local funding earmarked for projects that go beyond code required accessibility standards.
- b. More vouchers targeted at people with I/DD to cover their costs
- c. More operational funding for resident services to support people with I/DD
- d. Tools for training or education of building staff housing people with I/DD
- e. Requirements that make the process of applying to housing easier, like plain language documents or single point of entry to apply.
- f. Other (we welcome your ideas!)

24. What do you think landlords and/or property managers could do to make their housing more accessible for people with I/DD? Have you seen any good examples? Please share.

25. I have witnessed disability stigma/discrimination when supporting clients in finding and keeping housing.

- a. True/False