



4/10/2024

PA Health & Wellness is partnering with the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) to assist our providers with removing barriers to accessibility at their practice by creating the Barrier Removal Fund program. The goal of this program is to increase the percentage of participating providers that meet the minimum federal and state disability access standards by providing grant funds.

We are excited to inform you that the Barrier Removal Fund is in its seventh year and is expanding to Pennsylvania. The following pages encompass the Request For Proposal (RFP), which will allow you to apply for grant funds for accessibility improvements at your practice.

PA Health & Wellness is committed to providing equal access to quality health care and services that are physically and programmatically accessible for our members with disabilities and their companions. "Physical access," also referred to as "architectural access," refers to a person with a disability's ability to access buildings, structures, and the environment. "Programmatic access" refers to a person with a disability's ability to access goods, services, activities and equipment. We appreciate all the efforts of every provider serving our members, while addressing areas of inaccessibility.

We look forward to receiving your completed RFP by June 14, 2024 for consideration. The determination for grant awards will take until early September 2024. Please note there are instructions included in the RFP regarding requirements and submission details.

If you have any questions about the Barrier Removal Fund or RFP, please contact Jenny Sichel, at: [jenny@ncil.org](mailto:jenny@ncil.org)

Sincerely,

PA Health & Wellness



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# REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) PA-04-24

## **Barrier Removal Fund (BRF)**

**Due 5:00 p.m. (EST), June 14, 2024**

# PA HEALTH & WELLNESS PROVIDER ACCESSIBILITY INITIATIVE (PAI) BARRIER REMOVAL FUND (BRF) REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

## I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

PA Health & Wellness is committed to providing equal access to quality health care and services that are physically and programmatically accessible<sup>1</sup> for our members with disabilities and their companions. PA Health & Wellness and the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) are pleased to announce the availability of grant funds to support the removal of physical and programmatic disability access barriers at PA Health & Wellness participating provider group practice/clinic/service locations where PA Health & Wellness members are seen.

## II. ELIGIBILITY

Participating providers that meet all of the following criteria are eligible to apply:

- In the Service Delivery Area of PA Health & Wellness
- See PA Health & Wellness members at a physical location; and
- Are accepting new PA Health & Wellness members; and
- Are in the PA Health & Wellness provider directory

*Non-participating providers with single case agreements or other contracts, and providers (par and non-par) located in hospitals, segregated environments, and institutional settings are not eligible.*

## III. PURPOSE OF THIS RFP

The purpose of this RFP is to increase the percentage of practitioner locations that meet minimum federal and state disability access standards by providing PA Health & Wellness participating providers access to grant dollars through the BRF program. Providers can apply and, if chosen as a BRF awardee, will receive training and technical assistance, an on-site Accessibility Site Review (ASR) and written ASR Action Plan, and funding to remediate priority disability access barriers from NCIL, the nation's preeminent disability organization run by and for people with disabilities.

Grant funds can only be used to cover the following general categories of disability access expenditures:

- Removal of architectural or other barriers necessary to ensure independent entry to, use of, and exit from the facility and/or equipment by individuals with disabilities.
  - \*Note that funds cannot be used for the cost of new construction; they can only be used for adaptations to existing facilities that are required to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

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<sup>1</sup> "Physical access," also referred to as "architectural access," refers to a person with a disability's ability to access buildings, structures, and the environment. "Programmatic access" refers to a person with a disability's ability to access goods, services, activities, and equipment.

- To purchase adaptive equipment that is *not already covered by another funding source*<sup>2</sup>, is in compliance with United States Access Board Medical Diagnostic Equipment standards<sup>3</sup> and is accessible to, and usable by, individuals with disabilities, including but not limited to accessible:
  - Examination tables and chairs
  - Weight scales
  - Mammography equipment
  - Imaging equipment
  
- Expenditures necessary to ensure programmatic access *that are not already covered by another funding source*,<sup>4</sup> including, but not limited to:<sup>5</sup>
  - Production of accessible formats of printed materials (i.e., braille, large print, audio recordings, pictures/diagrams of text, captioning, etc.)
  - Letter/word/picture/translator boards, assistive listening devices, or other assistive technology or equipment necessary to ensure equal communication access
  - Equipment to reduce auditory, visual, or tactile distractions and increase accessibility. Examples include
    - Noise canceling headphones
    - Color communication badges
    - Replacing fluorescent lights with circadian or natural lighting
    - Sound proofing walls
  - Items that make dental services more accessible to members with intellectual and developmental disabilities, specifically:
    - Weighted blankets and stuffed animals
    - Noise cancelling headphones
    - TV or DVD player for members needed sensory accommodations to watch while getting dental services
    - Replacing fluorescent lights with circadian or natural lighting

Applications are accepted that address any one of the above categories separately OR any combination thereof. Funding is available for the purposes described, and for no other purpose.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that funds cannot be used to purchase durable medical equipment or assistive technology for individual members.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards>

<sup>4</sup> The provision of American Sign Language interpreters or real-time captioning services are examples of programmatic access measures that are already provided by and funded through the health plan.

<sup>5</sup> Note that funds cannot be used for staff salaries. Staff/personnel costs can be reflected in your total proposed BRF budget (if applicable), but funds cannot be requested for those costs through this application.

#### **IV. FUNDING PARAMETERS AND REQUIREMENTS**

The specific number of BRF grants awarded and amount of each grant will depend on the total number of applications received, the impact applications will have on PA Health & Wellness disability access network adequacy, and the number of PA Health & Wellness members with disabilities impacted. Each grant will be a non-renewable, one-time only award.

#### **V. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS**

All applications submitted for funding consideration are subject to the conditions specified in this RFP and subject to the BRF Standard Grant Agreement and requirements and applicable state and federal laws.

PA Health & Wellness and NCIL reserve the right to reject any and all applications.

An applicant whose application is selected for funding will be notified of the award via email. Applicants who are not selected will also be notified via email. Instructions to finalize formal award packages containing additional information, such as the BRF Standard Grant Agreement, will be provided to successful applicants.

PA Health & Wellness and NCIL reserve the right to negotiate final budget and/or BRF project changes prior to making final awards.

#### **VI. HOW TO APPLY**

To be considered for a BRF award, please visit the NCIL website at [www.ncil.org/pennsylvaniabrf](http://www.ncil.org/pennsylvaniabrf) and complete the application provided.

Submissions are due before **5:00 p.m. (EST) on Friday, June 14, 2024.**

#### **VII. BRF GRANT AWARD AND IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE**

PA Health & Wellness BRF grants will be awarded according to the following schedule:

4/15/2024	RFP Posted
6/14/2024	RFP Deadline
6/15/2024 - 8/30/2024	Review of Applications (including Accessibility Site Reviews of some or all applicants who responded to the RFP.
9/3/2024 - 9/6/2024	Award Notices Sent Out
9/30/2024	BRF Standard Grant Agreements Due
10/1/2024	Projects Underway
12/31/2024	Grant Funds Must Be Spent

## VIII. REVIEW PROCESS AND REVIEW CRITERIA

Applications will be reviewed by the PA Health & Wellness BRF Committee based on the following review criteria:

1. Awardees must be PA Health & Wellness participating providers.
2. Grant funds can only be used to cover the following general categories of disability access expenditures (as outlined above in Section III: Purpose of This RFP):
  - a. Removal of architectural or other barriers necessary to ensure independent entry to, use of, and exit from the facility and/or equipment by members with disabilities or their companions who have disabilities.
  - b. To purchase adaptive equipment that is *not already covered by another funding source*, is in compliance with United States Access Board Medical Diagnostic Equipment standards and is accessible to, and usable by, members with disabilities or their companions who have disabilities.
  - c. Expenditures necessary to ensure programmatic access *that are not already covered by another funding source* (including assistive technology).
3. Consideration will be given to:
  - a. The impact proposed BRF projects will have on PA Health & Wellness' disability access network adequacy (i.e., geographic location may be given preference, as appropriate).
  - b. The number of PA Health & Wellness members with disabilities impacted or potentially impacted.
  - c. The overall organizational budget and whether paying for the proposed BRF project out of the organizational budget would impose an undue hardship.

## IX. ADDITIONAL SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please direct all questions regarding the BRF application and process to the NCIL staff member designated to discuss questions regarding this RFP, Jenny Sichel, at: [jenny@ncil.org](mailto:jenny@ncil.org). PA Health & Wellness staff will be involved in the review and selection of applications to be funded; as such, they cannot answer any questions related to the BRF RFP.

## PA HEALTH & WELLNESS PROVIDER ACCESSIBILITY INITIATIVE (PAI) BARRIER REMOVAL FUND (BRF) APPLICATION DETAILS

Information you will need to apply online for the grant include:

- Provider/Organization Name
- Name and Title (of contact person)
- Provider TIN
- Provider NPI
- Mailing Address
- City, State, Zip
- Service Location Address (where disability access changes will be made – if different from mailing address)
- City, State, Zip
- Do you have another service location? (If yes, please fill out a separate application for that provider site)
- Applicant Email Address
- Provider/Organization Website Address
- How did you hear about this grant opportunity?
- Overall Organizational Budget
- Application Category (Building Modification/Diagnostic Equipment/Programmatic Access)
- A brief description of your organization
- Number of PA Health & Wellness members total served by your organization in the past year
- Number of PA Health & Wellness members with disabilities served by your organization in the past year
- BRF Project Description:
  - New addition or a modification of something already existing
  - Describe the proposed BRF project (*What* you want to do, *how* you want to do it, how much it will *cost*).
  - How will this modification improve access to members with disabilities?
- BRF Project Budget
  - How much money are you asking for from NCIL?
  - What are those funds for? Provide an itemized list of what those items are, and the cost associated with each.
  - Is the amount you're requesting enough to cover the entire cost of the project? If not, will you request funds from other sources? If so, what are those sources?
- Any additional information that will help BRF Committee reviewers understand application

## **Provider Accessibility Initiative (PAI) and Barrier Removal Fund (BRF) General Overview/Frequently Asked Questions**

### **WHAT is the PAI?**

The goal of the PAI is to increase the number of PA Health & Wellness providers that meet minimum federal and state disability access standards by:

1. Improving the accuracy, completeness, and transparency of provider self-reported disability access data in all products and all markets nationwide by integrating “minimum accessibility” standards into the provider application, credentialing and directory processes; and
2. Giving participating providers in three pilot states competitive access to grant dollars through a Barrier Removal Fund (BRF). Providers that apply and are chosen for BRF awards receive an on-site disability accessibility review completed by a local Center for Independent Living (CIL) and funding to remediate priority disability access barriers.

### **WHO is responsible for administering the BRF?**

- PA Health & Wellness is proud to partner with the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) on the administration of the BRF. NCIL is the longest-running national cross-disability, grassroots organization run by and for people with disabilities.
- NCIL provides technical assistance to PA Health & Wellness and helps coordinate a local BRF Committee that selects BRF awardees. NCIL also coordinates with local Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to conduct the on-site accessibility reviews of BRF applicants, provide training, and distribute grant funds to BRF awardees to remediate priority disability access barriers identified by the local BRF Committee.

### **WHY are the PAI and BRF important?**

- It's the right thing to do. Studies show that Medicaid and Medicare beneficiaries with disabilities receive less preventive care due to inaccessible exam rooms and/or diagnostic equipment;<sup>i</sup>
- Federal laws and regulations require that MCO providers have disability access and that MCO provider directories include a complete and accurate description of provider disability access.<sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.cms.gov/About-CMS/Agency-Information/OMH/Downloads/Issue-Brief-Physical-AccessibilityBrief.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> The 2016 Medicaid/CHIP Managed Care Final Rule states that: 1. MCO providers must provide physical access, accommodations, and accessible equipment for consumers with physical or mental disabilities by July 1, 2018 (42 CFR Section 438.206(c)(3)); 2. Provider directories must indicate the following for all physicians, hospitals, pharmacies, behavioral health providers, and LTSS providers: linguistic capabilities, completion of cultural competence training, and whether the provider's offices, exam rooms, and equipment accommodate individuals with physical disabilities by July 1, 2017 (42 CFR Section 438.10(1)); and 3. State network adequacy standards must consider the ability of MCO network providers to ensure physical access, reasonable accommodations, culturally competent communications, and accessible equipment for Medicaid enrollees with physical or mental disabilities by July 1, 2018 (42 CFR Section 438.68(c)(1)).



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- Question: How do I submit a BRF application?
    - *Answer: Fill out the online application at [www.ncil.org/pennsylvaniaibrf](http://www.ncil.org/pennsylvaniaibrf).*
  - Question: Who is eligible to submit an application for Barrier Removal Funds?
    - *Answer: Participating providers that meet all of the following criteria are eligible to apply:*
      - *See PA Health & Wellness members at a physical location; and*
      - *Are accepting new PA Health & Wellness members; and*
      - *Are in the PA Health & Wellness provider directory.*

*Non-participating providers with single case agreements or other contracts, and providers (par and non-par) located in hospitals, segregated environments, and institutional settings are not eligible.*
  - Question: What is the deadline to submit the BRF application? Can it be extended for any reason?
    - *Answer: June 14, 2024, 5:00 p.m. (EST). PA Health & Wellness reserves the right to extend the deadline.*
  - Question: Will there be another BRF application in the future?
    - *Answer: We do not have information regarding future applications surrounding accessibility improvements at this time.*
  - Question: What if I miss the deadline for submitting my application?
    - *Answer: Unfortunately, we cannot accept additional applications beyond the deadline.*
  - Question: Can I change my BRF application response after I have submitted it?
    - *Answer: Changes or edits can be made through the final submission date of June 14, 2024, 5:00 p.m. (EST).*
  - Question: How will I know if my application was received?
    - *Answer: You will receive a confirmation email when you submit your application. You may also contact Jenny Sichel at NCIL at [jenny@ncil.org](mailto:jenny@ncil.org) or call 201-563-2342 or toll-free at 844-778-7961.*

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- Question: How will I know if I am chosen to be awarded funds?
    - *You will receive an email from Jenny Sichel at NCIL at [jenny@ncil.org](mailto:jenny@ncil.org). You will also be informed if your application was not selected for funding.*
  - Question: If I have a question about the BRF application, who should I contact?
    - *Answer: Contact Jenny Sichel at NCIL at [jenny@ncil.org](mailto:jenny@ncil.org) or call 201-563-2342 or toll-free at 844-778-7961.*
  - Question: How much will this award fund per submission?
    - *Answer: Award amounts will vary based on the specific number of BRF grants awarded and amount of each grant will depend on the total number of applications received, the impact applications will have on PA Health & Wellness disability access network adequacy, and the number of PA Health & Wellness members with disabilities impacted. There is no funding cap, however most grants to date have been in the range of \$500 - \$20,000.*
  - Question: Are there costs for which my organization is responsible?
    - *Answer: PA Health & Wellness will cover the cost of the accessibility site review, technical assistance, and approved modification(s). Any additional costs are the responsibility of the awardee.*
  - Question: Can I include multiple pieces of equipment or modifications?
    - *Answer: Yes, include all items for which you are seeking funding.*
  - Question: I have multiple sites; do I need to submit a BRF application for each site?
    - *Answer: Yes, please submit separate applications for each site where you serve members.*
  - Question: How soon can I expect award funding to arrive?
    - *Answer: This is a reimbursement grant, so grantees will complete purchases and improvements and invoice NCIL for actual costs incurred, up to the approved amount. If grantees cannot afford to pay for the work ahead of time, we will consider requests to pay vendors or contractors directly.*
  - Question: Will you grant dollars outside of my state, given that you have a national presence?

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- *Answer: BRF dollars granted by the PA Health & Wellness BRF Committee are for the participating providers in Pennsylvania only.*
  - Question: What happens if I choose to term with PA Health & Wellness?
    - *Answer: You must remain in the network (and in good standing) for 1 year following grant funding or full re-payment [or return of equipment] will be required. If you leave the network after 18 months, you will repay 50%. After 2 years, fully-funded, no repayment will be due.*
  - Question: What if the accessibility improvements cannot be completed by the timeline listed in the application due to reasons I cannot control (i.e., the part is on backorder, or the contractor is not able to start the work within the timeline)?
    - *Answer: Contact Jenny Sichel at NCIL at [jenny@ncil.org](mailto:jenny@ncil.org) or call 201-563-2342 or toll-free at 844-778-7961 to further discuss your concerns.*
  - Question: What happens if the accessibility improvement costs change after the contractor begins work?
    - *Answer: The initial decisions are final. The provider is responsible for any additional costs.*
  - Question: My question isn't listed. Who can I contact?
    - *Answer: Contact Jenny Sichel at NCIL at [jenny@ncil.org](mailto:jenny@ncil.org) or call 201-563-2342 or toll-free at 844-778-7961.*