

**NORTH LOS ANGELES COUNTY REGIONAL CENTER (NLACRC)
9200 OAKDALE AVENUE, SUITE 100
CHATSWORTH, CALIFORNIA**

**MINUTES OF THE VENDOR ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
HYBRID – SANTA CLARITA VALLEY OFFICE / TELECONFERENCE
AUGUST 14, 2025, 9:30 A.M.**

MEMBERS:

Alex Kopilevich, Jaklen Keshishyan, Jodie Agnew-Navarro, Octavia Watkins, Masood Babaeian, Paul Borda, Andrea Devers, Ute Escorcia, Vahe Mkrtchian, Jen Pippard, Sharon Weinberg, Cal Enriquez, Jason Gillis, Tal Segalovich, David Ebrami, Ricki Macken-Chilvers

STAFF:

Angela Pao-Johnson, Silvia Renteria-Haro, Venus Rodriguez-Khorasani, Betsy Monahan, Evelyn McOmie, Belinda Abatesi, Lindsay Granger, Arezo Abedi

GUESTS:

Jessica Kyles

ABSENT:

Desiree Misrachi

1. CALL TO ORDER

There being a quorum present, and adequate and proper notice of the meeting having been given, the meeting was called to order at 9:32 a.m. Alex Kopilevich presided as Chair.

2. COMMITTEE MEMBER ATTENDANCE

Members were asked to identify themselves when speaking or making a motion. Committee members introduced themselves since this was the first meeting of the year.

3. SHARE IMPACT STORY FROM INDIVIDUAL SERVED

Angela Pao-Johnson shared an impact story from Steve Casselman.

4. PUBLIC INPUT

Ute Escorcia asked about the current status of the vendor portal and whether vendors without access would be able to regain it.

Angela Pao-Johnson explained that the current vendor portal has not functioned as intended and no further resources will be dedicated to fixing it. Instead, the organization is exploring a new platform, with a demo scheduled for the 26th. The new system is expected to perform more reliably.

Angela noted that while some vendors still have portal access, there are delays in authorizations appearing online. Vendors are advised to rely primarily on mailed authorizations, which typically arrive sooner than portal updates. The duplicative process of

portal and mail was acknowledged as burdensome, reinforcing the decision to transition to a new solution.

5. CONSENT ITEMS

On a motion made by Sharon Weinberg, seconded by Jaklen Keshishyan, it was resolved to approve the minutes of the Vendor Advisory Committee meeting held on June 12, 2025, as presented. Motion carried.

On a motion made by Masood Babaeian and seconded by Octavia Watkins, it was resolved to approve the agenda. Motion carried.

6. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

6.1 Orientation

- **Bylaws**
- **Committee Roster**
- **Committee Meeting Schedule**
- **Priority Issues/Goals**

Angela Pao-Johnson reported that the bylaws have been updated. A key change is that the committee will no longer forward applicants to the Nominating Committee; instead, the Vendor Advisory Committee (VAC) will select a panel of three to four members to interview applicants and submit recommendations directly to the Board of Trustees for approval. This aligns with practices at other regional centers.

Angela Pao-Johnson reminded members to submit renewal requests. After the first year (trial year), members must confirm if they wish to continue. At the three-year mark, members must submit a renewal form, available through Board Support. Sharon Weinberg confirmed her intent to renew, and staff will provide the form.

Attendance requirements were reviewed: three consecutive absences or five absences within a fiscal year result in vacating a seat. Attendance counts equally whether in person or via Zoom.

The meeting schedule was clarified: the committee is dark in July and October, but not in June, ensuring compliance with the bylaw requirement of nine meetings per year. Members were reminded to notify staff if unable to attend.

Priority issues and goals were reviewed, organized into three subcommittees. Jody Agnew-Navarro leads Early Start, Cal Enriquez and Paul Borda lead School Age, and Octavia Watkins leads Adult. Members were encouraged to participate in subcommittees, which typically meet monthly.

6.2 Update on Vendor Mentorship Program

Alex Kopilevich provided a brief update on the Vendor Mentorship Program. A small planning group has been meeting, including Alex Kopilevich, Ricky Macken-Chilvers, Andrea Devers, and Paul Borda. Paul Borda has volunteered to lead the program, as there is currently no designated leader. Alex Kopilevich will be reaching out to relevant points of contact to streamline communications and address vendor questions more efficiently. Proposed initiatives include creating a dedicated email for vendors to ask questions, connect with other

vendors providing similar services and receive information about VAC participation. The program aims to better inform and support vendors while reducing workload for regional center staff, including service coordinators and community services. Paul Borda confirmed he will coordinate directly with Alex Kopilevich and Arshalous Garlanian for next steps.

6.3 Self-Determination Update

As of August 1, the Self-Determination Program has 593 participants, with 13 transitions this month, totaling 118 since January. A local volunteer meeting is scheduled for August 21, from 6:30 to 8:30 PM, and information is available on the regional center website. DDS is seeking community input on upcoming changes to individual budgets aimed at making the program sustainable, with a meeting scheduled tomorrow from 2:00 to 3:00 PM. Feedback from regional centers, vendors, families, and consumers will inform the rollout of changes, anticipated by August 2026.

Participants discussed concerns regarding adherence to spending plans, particularly when parents deviate from the approved budget, affecting vendor payments. Sylvia confirmed that spending plans should be followed, and discrepancies can be addressed with the FMS agency. Questions were raised about which consumers benefit most from the program, with Sylvia noting it varies case by case, often when traditional service models do not meet individual needs.

Additional discussion addressed rate adjustments for services transitioning into self-determination, with benchmark rates applied when vendors are included in the spending plan. Participants also noted challenges with inconsistencies among FMS agencies. Sylvia shared that DDS is working to standardize processes across FMSs through a workgroup seeking feedback and alignment.

7. REPORT OUTS

7.1 Deputy Director Officer's Report

This report will be deferred until the next VAC meeting.

7.2 Chief Financial Officer's Report

This report will be deferred until the next VAC meeting.

7.3 Community Services Director's Report

Two North LA artists were selected for a paid internship with the Autism Service Branch, and their artwork will be used in disaster preparedness materials.

Jessica Kyles from Allswell presented on the DSP Internship Program. This program is a paid, three-month internship allowing entry-level candidates to work up to 30 hours per week. The interns do not have special needs. Their duties include basic personal care, activities of daily living, documentation, and socialization, but they are not permitted to manage medications, provide medical care, transport clients, or work overnight shifts. The program aims to promote DSP roles, increase hiring and retention, and streamline the process of sourcing and vetting candidates. Interns are primarily placed in day programs, community integration, and vocational services, which have shown the most success, but SLS, ILS, and residential settings are also supported.

The hiring process begins with a phone screen, followed by a video interview, provider review, and onboarding, which takes approximately two to six weeks, concluding with paid virtual training. Providers are expected to mentor interns, respond to communications within 48 hours, and provide feedback throughout the internship. The program is fully funded by the state, and providers may receive retention stipends of \$500 at six and twelve months if interns are hired permanently. The current conversion rate to permanent employment is approximately 35 percent, with non-conversions split between interns and providers. Interns may transition to other program types if their initial placement is not a good fit. Recruitment focuses on underserved and ethnic communities through job fairs, boards, and online postings. Interns are not eligible for health insurance during the internship, and SSI is not affected since the interns are individuals without special needs.

The DSP Collaborative Webinar will be held on September 23 from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. This platform allows providers to post DSP job openings and candidates to post resumes. Marketing efforts will cover all seven LA County regional centers.

The DSP University survey is available for providers to give feedback on DSP content and training. The survey takes approximately 25 minutes, and a discussion session will be held on August 18 at 10 a.m.

NLACRC will be hosting two Family Expos. The team confirmed details for the upcoming events and noted that registration flyers with QR codes will be posted soon. The Antelope Valley Expo will be held on September 27 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Palmdale Embassy Suites, and the San Fernando Valley Expo will take place at CSUN on October 12 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Senator Menjivar is scheduled to attend the CSUN event and participate in a breakout session. Providers interested in exhibiting can register, though space is limited to ensure a variety of services for attendees.

Both events will also include a dance for adults served, scheduled from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Flyers for dance registration will be distributed soon. The event is open to adults 18 and older, and providers were encouraged to promote participation among the individuals they support. Micro-enterprises will also have an opportunity to participate with a dedicated section at the expos, with sign-up information forthcoming.

An update was provided on Gallagher Verify, which is assisting with tracking provider insurance certificates. Some deficiencies being flagged are due to administrative issues, such as missing vendor numbers or incorrect addresses. Providers should respond directly to Gallagher emails, as they function as tickets for resolution. Auto-generated duplicate deficiency emails have been corrected, but providers should continue reporting persistent issues. A Q&A resource is being developed to address common concerns.

The discussion then turned to rate reform. The service acknowledgment deadline was May 31, and North LA has begun transitioning service codes to subcodes. Internal teams meet weekly to coordinate implementation, with some changes completed automatically and others requiring IPP planning. About nine service codes have transitioned so far. Retroactive billing adjustments are being processed, with some payments arriving in subsequent billing cycles depending on service type. Providers were reminded that daily, weekly, and monthly units must transition to hourly units by December 31, 2025, though final guidance from DDS is pending.

North LA is also working on unique cases, exemptions, and coordination with other regional centers for out-of-area vendors. Internal reference tools and live SharePoint resources have been created to support staff and service coordinators during this transition. Providers were asked for patience as this large systemic change is implemented.

7.4 Legislative Report

Belinda Abatesi reported that the governor's budget remains largely unchanged since June. The Direct Support Professional Workforce Training Program funding was restored, the Porterville Development Center budget was reduced by \$25 million, and Medi-Cal premiums for adults with unsatisfactory immigration status were set at \$30 instead of \$100. Asset limits for aged and disabled adults increased to \$130,000 plus \$65,000 per additional household member. Proposed cuts to In-Home Supportive Services were rejected.

Belinda Abatesi confirmed that Medi-Cal asset limits increased but Social Security asset limits remain at \$2,000. CalABLE accounts remain excluded. The State Council on Developmental Disabilities is hosting monthly Medi-Cal meetings for further updates.

At the federal level, Belinda Abatesi highlighted the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*, signed on July 4th, which will cut \$1 trillion from Medicaid and CHIP, \$490 billion from Medicare, and \$186–\$300 billion from SNAP. Medicaid work requirements of 80 hours per month begin in December 2026, with audits in 2027. A new Home and Community-Based Services waiver will provide very limited coverage, expected to assist only about 27 people per state. Other changes include shorter coverage windows, provider tax limits, and \$35 service copays.

Cal Enriquez raised concerns about impacts on regional centers and vendors. Belinda Abatesi stated that Regional Centers are still enrolling in the Medicaid Waiver Program, with the only confirmed update being the \$35 copay. Ute Escorcia requested clarification on waiver impacts, and Belinda Abatesi confirmed details remain pending.

Belinda Abatesi shared resources for communities impacted by immigration raids and introduced the Association of Regional Center Agencies' Voter Voice tool for advocacy. Belinda Abatesi also promoted the LA Metro Neurodiversity in Transit Project survey and noted collaboration with Lindsay Granger to share it with the community.

Upcoming Department of Developmental Services meetings include the Quality Incentive Program Meeting on September 15, the Rate-Setting, Cost, and Payment Methodology Workgroup on October 28, and the Interagency Coordinating Council Meeting on August 27th.

Community events include Assemblymember Nick Schultz's community coffee on August 16, Assemblymember Pilar Shiavo's Youth and Family Festival on August 16, Assemblymember Jackie Iron's sidewalk session on August 17, the Valley Industry and Commerce Association luncheon and Santa Clarita Division anniversary on August 28, and the Greater San Fernando Valley Chamber of Commerce State of the Valley event on September 6.

Belinda Abatesi concluded by encouraging members to review the legislative bills listed in the meeting packet, share advocacy resources, and stay engaged with community events.

7.5 Executive Director's Report

Angela Pao-Johnson provided key updates on North Los Angeles County Regional Center activities. She reported on the legislative breakfast at New Horizons, noting strong community interest and panel discussions on transportation, Medicaid, early intervention, and housing. The Regional Center podcast was highlighted, and community engagement was encouraged. Updates on the Self-Determination Program (SDP) included planned improvements by August 2026 and current cost comparisons to traditional programs.

Updates on the Self-Determination Program (SDP) included upcoming DDS engagement and planned updates by August 2026 on budgets, employee IDs for minors, and rate adjustments. SDP currently averages \$81–\$83,000 per consumer, compared to \$37,000 for traditional programs.

Caseload ratios have improved significantly since the special contract in July. Medicaid Waiver improved from 1:113 to 1:83, ages 0–5 from 1:78 to 1:61, and all others from 1:104 to 1:81. The special contract now focuses on caseload ratios, IPP satisfaction surveys, quarterly DDS meetings, and whistleblower reporting.

Recruitment efforts added 156 staff with reduced turnover, and new lead trainers, SDP coordinators, and Associate Service Coordinators were hired. The resource fair and the one-click satisfaction survey, as well as social recreation reimbursement updates to streamline processing were reported. It was noted that MIJI FMS referral processing takes about 4 weeks and open office hours help manage high-volume social recreation requests. Angela Pao-Johnson concluded by sharing upcoming events and encouraging participation.

8. OPEN DISCUSSION TOPICS

A comprehensive vendor survey is currently being finalized and will incorporate feedback from the vendor forum along with questions on self-determination and legislative updates. It was decided that one survey will be distributed to all vendors rather than separate versions for VAC members and the broader community. Surveys are scheduled to go out in August. Members were reminded to submit open discussion items early so agendas can be posted seven days in advance, and that agendas and packets are now posted on the website only, not emailed. Concerns were raised about inconsistent service termination practices, as allowing services to “run out” may hold funds, complicate audits, and delay new authorizations. The process will be reviewed and clarified. Additional concerns were noted regarding inconsistent in-person quarterly visits for individuals living outside the family home and documentation not always reflecting actual contact. Clarification was provided that only one in-person visit per year is required, with remote options still available, and that meeting formats should be decided collaboratively based on individual needs. Some agencies are also encouraging self-advocacy by supporting individuals to schedule their own meetings.

9. COMMITTEE WORK GROUP INFORMATION

9.1 Early Start Services

Jodie Agnew-Navarro reported that the Early Start Services Committee work group met in last month and discussed subcodes and the recent changes. The next meeting will be on September 18th.

9.2 School Age Services

Cal Enriquez reported that his group recently reconvened after a pause in July. The discussion covered topics including the portal, Medicaid waiver process, and self-determination. The group aims to ensure a smooth process for both families and vendors and plans to continue participating in support groups, particularly related to self-determination. Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month, typically aligning with the VAC schedule, and Cal Enriquez shared information for others to join the group.

9.3 Adult Services

Octavia Watkins reported that the group met on July 21st. A collaboration with the Valley Industry Association for the "Connecting to Success Conference" on July 30th featured activities on money management and budgeting. The Work Incentives Planning Assistance Program, which includes benefit counseling and connecting participants with employment resources, was noted. Belinda Abatesi provided an overview of California's Master Plan for Developmental Services, highlighting six key areas: equity, self-determination, service accessibility, accountability, workforce participation, and aging and dementia. The next meeting will feature Maria Sandoval, Outreach Specialist from CalABLE, as a guest speaker.

10. BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

10.1 Nominating Committee

The committee discussed board composition and open positions on the Board of Trustees. They decided to move the November meeting to September to address critical calendar concerns and plan for interviewing new applicants. Board applications are in a rolling acceptance period, and no deadline has been set for new applicants. The next meeting is scheduled for September 17 at 5:30 p.m. via Zoom.

10.2 Executive Finance Committee

The VAC representative did not attend the meeting, as they are not the designated representative. Attendance is allowed without voting rights. The meeting was a special session called to conduct business, including approval of conflict-of-interest disclosures for several board members and the board budget. It was discussed that Jacqueline Kashishian will continue attending as a non-voting member of the committee.

11. ANNOUNCEMENTS/PUBLIC INPUT

During the meeting, the committee discussed two main topics: Allswell, a resource for hiring interns, and the California Disability Services Association (CDSA), including its legislative advocacy efforts and annual Legislative Day. Public input included questions about joining committees and VAC membership. The application process involves submitting an interest form, review by VAC members, and an in-person interview. The deadline for applications is December 15. Committee members were encouraged to join subcommittees to become more involved. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 11 at 9:30 a.m., as a hybrid session at the Chatsworth office. Attendance requirements and sign-in procedures were also reviewed.

12. NEXT MEETING

The date of the next Vendor Advisory Committee meeting is September 11, 2025, at 9:30 a.m. at the Chatsworth office.

13. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made and carried, it was agreed that there was no further business to transact; the meeting closed at 11:57 a.m.