Glossary of Terms & Acronym Decoder

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A plain-language guide to the terms and acronyms used most frequently in disability services, special education, government benefits, housing, and legal rights, organized alphabetically for quick reference.

Term / Acronym	Full Name	Plain-Language Definition
A		
ABLE Account	Achieving a Better Life Experience	Tax-advantaged savings account for individuals with disabilities (onset before age 46). Up to $100,000 is exempt from the SSI $2,000 asset limit. Washington's program: Washington State ABLE Savings Plan.
ABA	Applied Behavior Analysis	Therapy based on the science of behavior and learning, commonly used with individuals with autism to increase useful behaviors and decrease harmful ones.
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act	Federal civil rights law (1990) prohibiting disability discrimination in employment, public accommodations, transportation, and government services.
ADL	Activities of Daily Living	Routine self-care tasks used to assess independence: bathing, dressing, eating, toileting, transferring, and continence.
AFH	Adult Family Home	Licensed residential home serving up to six adults needing support with daily living, regulated by Washington State's Residential Care Services division.
ALJ	Administrative Law Judge	Independent judge presiding over administrative hearings — including DSHS benefit appeals and Social Security disability hearings.
Apple Health	(Washington Medicaid)	Washington State's name for Medicaid — free or low-cost health insurance covering medical, dental, vision, and behavioral health.
AMI	Area Median Income	Midpoint income for a geographic area used to determine eligibility for many housing and benefit programs.
B		
BFHD	Benton Franklin Health District	Public health authority for Benton and Franklin Counties — immunizations, WIC, early childhood programs, developmental screening referrals.
BOA	Board of Appeals	DSHS Board of Appeals — next level of review after an ALJ decision in a DSHS benefit dispute. Must be requested within 21 days.
C		
CARE Assessment	Comprehensive Assessment Reporting Evaluation	DSHS standardized tool used by DDA and HCS to evaluate functional abilities and determine what level of support services are needed.
CARF	Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities	International accreditation body certifying rehabilitation organizations. CAA is CARF-accredited.
CDC	Children's Developmental Center	Richland-based nonprofit providing early intervention, pediatric therapy, and ABA for children with developmental disabilities.
CES	Coordinated Entry System	Washington State's system for connecting people experiencing homelessness to housing resources.

Term / Acronym	Full Name	Plain-Language Definition
		Administered locally by Community Action Connections (CAC).
CLEAR	Coordinated Legal Education Advice and Referral	Statewide legal hotline by Northwest Justice Project for free civil legal help. Call 1-888-201-1014 weekdays, 9:15 AM–12:15 PM.
COLA	Cost of Living Adjustment	Annual Social Security benefit adjustment based on the Consumer Price Index. The 2026 COLA was 2.8%.
D		
DAC	Disabled Adult Child	Social Security benefit for individuals disabled before age 22, based on a parent's work record — even if the individual has never worked.
DAR	Dial-A-Ride	Ben Franklin Transit's door-to-door ADA paratransit service. Requires eligibility certification. Book 1–7 days in advance.
DCR	Designated Crisis Responder	WA State-certified mental health professional with legal authority to evaluate individuals for involuntary psychiatric hospitalization under the ITA.
DDA	Developmental Disabilities Administration	WA State's primary agency funding services for individuals with developmental disabilities — employment, respite, community inclusion, residential. Part of DSHS.
DDEFT	Developmental Disabilities Endowment Trust Fund	WA State trust fund providing grants to DDA-enrolled individuals for services not otherwise funded.
DSB	Department of Services for the Blind	WA State agency providing vocational rehabilitation and independent living support for people who are blind, Deaf-Blind, or have low vision.
DSHS	Department of Social and Health Services	WA State umbrella agency administering DDA, DVR, HCS, Medicaid, SNAP, and many other programs.
DVR	Division of Vocational Rehabilitation	WA State employment-focused agency for individuals whose disability creates a work barrier — counseling, job coaching, Pre-ETS, assistive technology.
E		
EBT	Electronic Benefits Transfer	Card system for distributing Basic Food (SNAP) and WIC benefits. Washington's card is the Washington Quest Card.
ECEAP	Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program	WA State's free pre-kindergarten program for income-eligible children, focused on school readiness.
ESA	Emotional Support Animal	Animal providing therapeutic benefit through presence. Not a service animal — no ADA public access rights, but protected in housing under the Fair Housing Act.
ESD 123	Educational Service District 123	Regional educational support agency serving 23 school districts in SE Washington — special education services, early intervention, school psychology.
ESIT	Early Support for Infants and Toddlers	WA State early intervention program for children birth–age 2. ESIT enrollment automatically enrolls the child in DDA.
ESY	Extended School Year	Special education services beyond the regular school year to prevent significant skill regression. IEP teams must consider ESY for every eligible student.
F		
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education	Core IDEA guarantee — every eligible child with a disability is entitled to a free public education designed to meet their individual needs.

Term / Acronym	Full Name	Plain-Language Definition
FCS	Foundational Community Supports	WA State Medicaid program providing supported employment and supportive housing for individuals with complex health needs — broader eligibility than DDA.
FHA	Fair Housing Act	Federal law prohibiting housing discrimination based on disability and other protected characteristics. Requires reasonable accommodations and modifications.
FPL	Federal Poverty Level	Annual income thresholds used to determine eligibility for benefit programs. Many programs use percentages of FPL (e.g., 150% FPL).
FUP	Family Unification Program	HUD Section 8 vouchers for families where housing instability is a child welfare factor, or for youth aging out of foster care.
G–H		
GAU	General Assistance — Unemployable	WA State cash assistance for adults temporarily unable to work due to disability who don't qualify for SSI or SSDI.
HCA	Health Care Authority	WA State agency administering Apple Health (Medicaid), Foundational Community Supports, and other state health programs.
HCS	Home and Community Services	DSHS division coordinating long-term care for adults with disabilities and older adults — personal care, supported living, in-home assistance.
HCV	Housing Choice Voucher	Section 8 rental assistance — tenant-based subsidy allowing income-eligible households to rent private market housing. Landlord receives subsidy directly.
HISA Grant	Home Improvements and Structural Alterations	VA grant for veterans covering medically necessary home modifications — up to $6,800 for service-connected disabilities.
HUD	Dept. of Housing and Urban Development	Federal agency overseeing Section 8/HCV, public housing, and fair housing enforcement.
HUD-VASH	Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing	Section 8 vouchers combined with VA case management for homeless veterans.
I		
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act	Federal law guaranteeing eligible children with disabilities the right to FAPE in the LRE. Governs IEPs, evaluations, and parent rights.
IEP	Individualized Education Program	Legal document outlining a student's special education services, goals, accommodations, and placement. Must be reviewed at least annually.
IFSP	Individual Family Service Plan	Early intervention plan for children birth–age 2 in ESIT, focused on family-centered goals and services.
IFS	Individual and Family Services	DDA waiver program providing limited services to eligible individuals — including Environmental Adaptations (home modifications).
ITA	Involuntary Treatment Act	WA State law governing involuntary psychiatric evaluation and hospitalization for individuals who are a danger to themselves or others.
L–M		
LIHEAP	Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program	Federal heating bill assistance for income-eligible households. Administered locally by Community Action Connections in Benton/Franklin Counties.

Term / Acronym	Full Name	Plain-Language Definition
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment	Core IDEA principle: students with disabilities must be educated alongside non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.
LTCRR	Long-Term Care Resident Rights	New DRW program (launched Jan. 5, 2026) providing free legal help to Medicaid recipients threatened with discharge from long-term care facilities.
NEMT	Non-Emergency Medical Transportation	Medicaid-funded transportation to health care appointments for Apple Health cardholders. Arranged through People For People in Benton/Franklin Counties.
NED	Non-Elderly Disabled	Category of Section 8 housing vouchers specifically for non-elderly households where the head, co-head, or spouse has a disability.
O–P		
OAH	Office of Administrative Hearings	Independent WA State agency conducting hearings for DSHS benefit disputes — separate from DSHS itself.
OEO	Office of the Education Ombuds	WA State office providing free, neutral, confidential support for families with school communication difficulties around special education.
OSPI	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction	WA State's primary K–12 education agency — oversees special education compliance, dispute resolution, and family guidance statewide.
P&A	Protection and Advocacy	Federally mandated nonprofit network — one per state — protecting rights of people with disabilities. Washington's P&A is Disability Rights Washington.
PABSS	Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security	DRW program supporting individuals with disabilities who receive SSI or SSDI and face employment barriers.
PAVE	Partnerships for Action, Voices for Empowerment	WA State's federally funded Parent Training and Information Center — free support for families navigating special education.
PCSP	Person-Centered Service Plan	Individualized DDA plan identifying goals, strengths, and specific services. Updated regularly with the DDA case manager.
PHA	Public Housing Authority	Local agency administering federal housing assistance. Tri-Cities: Kennewick Housing Authority (KHA) and Housing Authority of Pasco/Franklin County.
POA	Power of Attorney	Legal document voluntarily giving another person authority to make financial or medical decisions. Must be established while person has legal capacity.
Pre-ETS	Pre-Employment Transition Services	DVR-funded services for students with disabilities ages 14–21 — job exploration, workplace readiness, self-advocacy. No DVR application required.
PTI	Parent Training and Information Center	Federally funded centers providing free support to families navigating education systems. Washington's PTI is PAVE.
PWN	Prior Written Notice	Written notice schools must provide any time they propose to change or refuse to change a student's IEP-related identification, evaluation, placement, or services.
R–S		
Rep. Payee	Representative Payee	Person/organization appointed by SSA to receive and manage Social Security benefits for someone who needs help managing their payments.

Term / Acronym	Full Name	Plain-Language Definition
RCW	Revised Code of Washington	Washington State's compiled body of law. RCW citations reference a specific section of WA statute.
SAH Grant	Specially Adapted Housing Grant	VA grant for veterans with severe service-connected disabilities — up to $126,526 (FY2026) — for purchasing, building, or modifying a home.
SDM / SDMA	Supported Decision-Making Agreement	Alternative to guardianship — individual retains all legal rights and designates trusted supporters to help make decisions. Recognized in WA law since Jan. 1, 2022.
SHEAP	State Home Energy Assistance Program	WA State energy assistance funded through the Climate Commitment Act. Available regardless of immigration status. Administered by CAC.
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program	Federal food assistance program — called Basic Food in WA. Benefits loaded onto EBT/Quest Card for use at participating grocery stores.
SNT	Special Needs Trust	Legal trust holding assets for a person with a disability without affecting SSI, Medicaid, or other means-tested benefit eligibility.
SSI	Supplemental Security Income	Federal monthly cash assistance for low-income individuals with disabilities (no work history required). 2026 max: $994/month.
SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance	Federal disability benefits based on prior work history and Social Security taxes paid. Monthly amount depends on earnings record.
T–W		
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	Federal/state cash assistance for families with children who have very low income. Administered through DSHS in Washington.
TAP	Transitional Assistance Program	FCS Supportive Housing component — one-time funds for move-in costs (deposits, first/last month's rent) for eligible enrollees.
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation	State programs helping individuals with disabilities prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment. WA: DVR (all disabilities) and DSB (blind/low vision).
WLAD	Washington Law Against Discrimination	WA State anti-discrimination law — in many areas stronger than federal law, including protecting source of income (SSI, Section 8) from landlord discrimination.
WIC	Women, Infants & Children	Federal nutrition program for pregnant women, new parents, infants, and children under 5 meeting income guidelines. Available through BFHD and TCCH in the Tri-Cities.
WSHRC	Washington State Human Rights Commission	State agency enforcing WLAD — fair housing, employment, and public accommodation violations. File complaints within 12 months.

Quick-Reference: Most Common Acronyms

Use this table as a quick-reference card for the acronyms you'll encounter most often in meetings, forms, and conversations about disability services.

Acronym	Stands For	Quick Definition
ABLE	Achieving a Better Life Experience	Tax-advantaged savings account for people with disabilities

Acronym	Stands For	Quick Definition
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act	Federal disability civil rights law
DDA	Developmental Disabilities Administration	WA State's primary disability services agency
DVR	Division of Vocational Rehabilitation	WA State employment services for people with disabilities
DSB	Department of Services for the Blind	VR services for blind/low vision individuals
DSHS	Dept. of Social and Health Services	WA State umbrella agency for social services
EBT	Electronic Benefits Transfer	Card used to access food/WIC benefits
ESIT	Early Support for Infants and Toddlers	WA birth-to-3 early intervention program
ESY	Extended School Year	Special ed services beyond the regular school year
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education	Core IDEA guarantee for students with disabilities
FCS	Foundational Community Supports	Medicaid employment/housing program
HCS	Home and Community Services	DSHS long-term care case management division
HCV	Housing Choice Voucher	Section 8 rental assistance
IEP	Individualized Education Program	Legal special education plan for students
IFSP	Individual Family Service Plan	Early intervention plan (birth–age 2)
ITA	Involuntary Treatment Act	WA law governing psychiatric holds
LIHEAP	Low Income Home Energy Assistance	Federal heating bill assistance
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment	IDEA placement principle
NEMT	Non-Emergency Medical Transportation	Medicaid-funded rides to appointments
POA	Power of Attorney	Legal document granting decision-making authority
Pre-ETS	Pre-Employment Transition Services	DVR job exploration for students ages 14–21
PWN	Prior Written Notice	School's required written explanation of IEP changes
SDM	Supported Decision-Making	Guardianship alternative preserving individual rights
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program	Federal food assistance (Basic Food in WA)
SNT	Special Needs Trust	Trust protecting assets without affecting benefits
SSI	Supplemental Security Income	Needs-based disability cash assistance
SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance	Work-history-based disability benefits
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	Cash assistance for families with children
WIC	Women, Infants & Children	Nutrition program for qualifying families
WLAD	Washington Law Against Discrimination	WA State anti-discrimination law
WSHRC	WA State Human Rights Commission	State fair housing/employment enforcement

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