

## March 2026

### National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

Every **March**, the [National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities \(NACDD\)](#) and its partners collaborate to lead Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month (DDAM), an annual campaign highlighting how people with and without disabilities form strong communities together.

DDAM raises recognition of people with developmental disabilities in all aspects of community life and is a time to address barriers to their meaningful contributions at the local and state levels.

#### History of National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

The first National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month was observed in 1987, following decades of advocacy and efforts to raise knowledge about developmental disabilities.

The event was officially created by Congress when it passed Public Law 99-483, which designated the month of March as “*National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month*” and authorized the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this event. When President Ronald Reagan signed the Presidential proclamation declaring March “*National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month*”, he wrote:

*“I urge all Americans to join me in according to our fellow citizens with such disabilities both encouragement and the opportunities they need to lead productive lives and to achieve their full potential.”*

This was an important step in bringing attention to the needs and potential of Americans with developmental disabilities including autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, epilepsy, intellectual disability, and spina bifida.

In the more than three decades since that proclamation, there have been a number of other significant events for the IDD community:

- 1987: March designated “*National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month*”.
- 1990: Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) signed into law, prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities in public life.
- 2004: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act reauthorized, ensuring all children with disabilities have access to a “free appropriate public education”.
- 2008: ADA amended, making it easier for an individual seeking protection to establish that they have a disability.
- 2014: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act signed into law, helping individuals with disabilities gain access to employment, training, and support services.

While Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month is a time to celebrate the progress which has been made, it’s also a time to acknowledge and address the work that still needs to be done.

Please direct any questions or concerns regarding the Office of Integrated Health Supports Network “Health Trends” newsletter to [communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov](mailto:communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov)

#### Creative Ways to Celebrate Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

1. Wear orange - Orange is a color symbolizing energy and positivity. It’s also the official color of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.
2. Share photos of 'a day in the life' - NACDD is encouraging individuals with lived experience to share photos of themselves in the community – whether they’re grocery shopping or grabbing a coffee. Submissions will be accepted until March 31 and added to a gallery to be revealed later this spring.
3. You can submit photos (with the individual’s permission, of course) to [media@nacdd.org](mailto:media@nacdd.org). NACDD has provided a release form for organizations wanting to share photos for the gallery.

Social media is a great way to connect with your community and raise awareness about developmental disabilities. By posting to social media channels, you can help amplify the voices of people with disabilities.

Here are a few ideas for social media posts to get started:

- Highlight the stories of individuals with developmental disabilities
- Share artwork created by individuals with IDD
- Use the copy from DDAM’s social media kit
- Promote resources in your community, such as employment services and day programs

You can also use DD Awareness Month to connect with agencies around the country. By liking, sharing, and commenting on other people’s posts, you can help raise awareness about developmental disabilities.

4. Record a video or podcast - During DD Awareness Month it’s important to give people with disabilities a platform. One way to do this is by recording a video or podcast. Invite people with DD to tell their stories about their experiences with education, employment, and community life. Or interview employers to learn what it’s like to hire someone with an intellectual or developmental disability — just remember to include people with disabilities in the conversation.
5. Advocate for individuals with DD - Perhaps the most important way to champion individuals with developmental disabilities is to advocate for their rights. This includes everything from promoting fair wages and employment opportunities, to ensuring people with DD are included in our elections and understand their rights as voters.

It also means supporting self-advocacy opportunities for people with disabilities. For more ideas to kick start your advocacy efforts follow this link: <https://set-works.com/beyond-voting-how-disability-service-organizations-can-make-their-voices-heard/>

#### References

1. [National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities \(NACDD\). \(2025, March\). March is developmental disabilities awareness month: History of developmental disabilities awareness month. Networks.blog, Direct Service Works.](#)

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### ABA Snippets ... Synchronous Reinforcement

If you are reading this then I bet you already know about positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement has been well established as an effective method to strengthen and/or increase behavior. “In general, the more a behavior is reinforced, the more predictable it becomes” (2). Chances are this is not new to you, dear reader. What may be new to you is that there are many ways we can provide reinforcement. This month I would like to introduce you to the concept of synchronous schedules of reinforcement (SSR).

In behavioral science a reinforcement schedule is a description of what must happen to receive reinforcement (4). These schedules can vary in a few ways. Maybe a behavior must happen three times before reinforcement, or you must work for two weeks before you get a paycheck.

In general, reinforcement is provided after a specific behavior. But what if that is not working? Here is where you could try SSR. Unlike other reinforcement schedules, SSR is when you provide reinforcement while a person is doing a behavior. It can be as simple as having a person’s favorite tv shows, video clips or movies available on a tablet that they can watch while they are brushing their teeth. In fact, McHugh et al. (3) were able to help 5 adults with IDD be successful with increasing multiple health-related behaviors such as toothbrushing, hair brushing, and tolerating wearing health related devices (pulse oximeter, GPS, and a helmet for falls).

In most cases they found that providing reinforcement while the person was engaging in a health-related task was enough to be successful. In some cases, it helped to have additional reinforcement directly after the tasks as well. “The science of behavior tells us that reinforcement works best when it’s frequent” (1).

Keep this in mind next time someone is struggling to complete a health-related task. Maybe providing reinforcement during the task is just what is needed.

You may contact DBHDS about these efforts via the following:  
[Brian.Phelps@dbhds.virginia.gov](mailto:Brian.Phelps@dbhds.virginia.gov)

#### References

1. Austin, J (2019). Blog: The Problem with “Employee of the Month”. <https://reachingresults.com/whats-wrong-with-employee-of-the-month/>
2. Daniels, A. C. (2014). *Performance management: Changing behavior that drives organizational effectiveness*. Performance Management Publications.
3. McHugh, C. L., Dozier, C. L., Kamlowky, M. E., & Simmons, B. A. (2025). *Synchronous reinforcement schedules promote tolerance of health-related routines for adults with disabilities*. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 58(3), 504–521. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaba.70020>
4. Williams, D. C., & Johnston, J. M. (1992). Continuous versus discrete dimensions of reinforcement schedules: An integrative analysis. *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior*, 58(1), 205–228. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jeab.1992.58-205>

### Best Practice Safety Standards for Transportation

Best practice standards for wheelchair transportation within a moving vehicle, (within the United States) are developed by the Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA), who has published a set of compliance standards based on the WC-19 safety rating.

RESNA is the premier professional organization dedicated to promoting the health and well-being of people with disabilities through increasing access to technology solutions.

#### Wheelchair Transport Safe Labels

A “transport safe” label means the wheelchair has:

- Been designed for use as a seat in a motor vehicle.
- Performed well and met established industry standards during motor vehicle crash tests.
- Complied with the strict WC-19 safety standards established by RESNA.



#### WC-19 Wheelchairs:

- Have features that make it easier and safer to secure with a 4-point strap-type floor securement and a 3-point lap and shoulder belt securement.
- Have been designed so the person securing the straps can do so easily with one hand.
- Have passed a standardized crash or sled test and survived with little or no structural damage.
- Have passed standardized tests and proven their ability to withstand the forces of a 30-mph/20-g change in velocity. (This is the same crash test that all automotive equipment must pass.)
- Have labeling for the 4 securement points so it is easily recognized as safe for use as a seat in an accessible vehicle.

If you are unsure if a wheelchair meets this standard, the manufacturer can provide more information about how the wheelchair performed in testing.

- You can check to see if a wheelchair is on the WC-19 compliant list [here](#).
- A checklist of criteria for complete compliance of WC-19 can be found [here](#).
- You can also contact the OIH Community Nursing Team at: [communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov](mailto:communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov) for assistance.

#### Reference

1. Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA). (2012). Checklist of criteria for compliance of RESNA WC-4:2012, Section 19 (WC19). *University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (UMICH)*, [Internet].