
Rhode Island Developmental Disabilities Council

Housing Café Conversation Key Findings

1/29/2026



Housing Café Conversation

Introduction

More than 40 individuals attended the Rhode Island Developmental Disabilities Council (RI DDC) quarterly meeting on January 21, 2026. Using a Café Conversation format, the Council—led by facilitator Ken Renaud—engaged members in identifying critical housing needs, policy concerns, advocacy priorities, and key goals for the RI DDC.

Guest Speaker

Michelle Brophy, Associate Director at the Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals (BHDDH), shared her perspectives on housing challenges in Rhode Island. She encouraged Council members to leverage their collective strength to raise awareness of housing needs across the state and to advocate for themselves and others who require accessible, affordable, and individualized housing.

Ms. Brophy emphasized the importance of understanding the role of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in supporting housing initiatives. She also promoted council members to think about the development of clear “talking points” to support Council members role as they advance their housing agenda and advocacy efforts. Additionally, she encouraged members to utilize her state funded housing support services through walk-in hours and virtual appointments.

Café Conversation Framework

Facilitator Ken Renaud guided the Council through the Café Conversation process to help identify critical housing needs, policy concerns, advocacy strategies, and priority goals for the RI DDC.

Ken shared the purpose of the Café Conversation:

“A Café Conversation is an opportunity for collective voices to be heard and recognized as we develop our strategic DD Council Five-Year Plan to address critical issues facing Rhode Islanders with disabilities.”

Council members received a Café Conversation worksheet that included Café Guidelines and a discussion menu for table group conversations. Participants were asked to take notes, share ideas, and select their top three critical housing issues for the Council to address in its 2026 State Plan.

Café Conversation Menu

Appetizer

Is housing a critical issue for individuals with disabilities?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Result:

100% of Council members agreed that housing is a critical need for Rhode Islanders with disabilities.

Main Course

Participants were asked to select three housing topics most important to them:

- **Build Awareness** – Public understanding of housing needs for people with disabilities must be strengthened to reduce stigma, encourage inclusion, and drive community and policy support.
- **Funding** – Sustainable and increased funding is essential to expand accessible housing options, support innovative solutions, and ensure long-term stability.
- **Capacity** – Adequate staffing, expertise, and organizational resources are necessary to effectively deliver, manage, and scale housing programs.
- **Subsidies** – Government-funded housing subsidies play a vital role in ensuring individuals with disabilities can access safe, affordable, and stable housing.
- **NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard)** – Community resistance and local opposition continue to be significant barriers to inclusive housing, highlighting the need for education, advocacy, and supportive policies.

Key Findings

Council members engaged in small-group discussions to identify housing issues, after which each participant selected their individual top three priorities. Each café table then reported out and summarized its discussion. Participants were given an additional opportunity to regroup, reflect, and identify any newly emerging needs.

By the Numbers

- 20 participants identified and shared their perspectives on critical housing needs
- 14 participants identified **Build Awareness** as the most imperative need
- 13 participants identified **Funding** as paramount
- 10 participants identified **Capacity** as vital

- 7 participants identified **Subsidies** as important
- 1 participant identified **NIMBY** as a significant challenge

Emergent Issues

A clear and consistently identified priority raised by Council members is the urgent need to strengthen housing advocacy and policy awareness related to people with disabilities. Members emphasized the importance of advancing policies that support person-centered housing models where individuals with disabilities can not only live, but thrive. These housing options must meet—or exceed—current and emerging needs related to accessibility, in-home medical supports, qualified professional staffing, and timely access to emergency and transitional housing placements.

Council members also identified a critical need to increase policy literacy and advocacy related to the role of HUD, including how federal housing programs can be more effectively leveraged to address disability-specific housing gaps at the local and community levels. Building broader community awareness of disability housing needs was highlighted as essential to driving systems-level change.

As a strategic advocacy action, Council members recommended convening cross-sector stakeholders through the development of a Housing Coalition and a Housing Summit. These efforts would serve as platforms to elevate policy priorities, align community partners, and advance coordinated solutions that influence housing policy, funding, and implementation for people with disabilities.

Participant Comments

“When the government gets involved, it makes things more difficult.”

“Support Innovative solutions- Everyone needs a plan; what does housing look like for me? Person Centered focus.”

“We are a small state with high needs.”

“We should identify the number of with DD and (how many have) housing goals.”

“A creative housing idea is to learn about the role of housing Authorities and meet with them,”

“We need to look at unused building as possible housing options in our state: like abandoned schools.”

“How about using the “Superman Building” it is a key location for Kennedy Plaza.”

“Require all new housing be accessible and adaptable.”

“Creative solutions and fact finding- conduct Community Surveys, address stigma of section 8 housing, collaborate and identify community resources and subsidies, add a question to annual ISP “How many folks are looking for housing?”

“Address Person Centered Capacity for complex medical and behavioral needs.”

“Need 24/7 support for unique needs even when brick and mortar and staffing are not available.”

“Attend Housing hearings and collaborate with the Housing Network in Warwick.”

“We don’t have many group homes that support high end tier E persons with medical and behavioral needs.”

“We need more group homes for those aging at home with no available options to support extensive medical and behavioral needs.”

“Suitable group homes with properly trained staff and paid personnel.”

“Create meaningful training for person centered housing.”