

Paso del Norte Region IDD Coalition

Meeting Minutes

Date: Thursday, August 20, 2026

Time: 9:00 AM – 11:20 AM

Location: PdN Children's, El Paso, TX (in person and virtual)

Convened and facilitated by: Laura Marquez, Chief Programs Officer, PDN Children's

Attendees

- Laura Marquez, PdN Children's
- Adriana Casado, PdN Children's
- Araceli Urrutia, PdN Children's
- Madison Orozco, PdN Children's
- Sandra Day, Paso del Norte Health Foundation
- Gilda Gil, YMCA of El Paso
- Adam Tirres, El Paso Community Foundation
- Daisy Godfrey, Relentless IQ
- Brian Godfrey, Relentless IQ
- Margie Juchem, Relentless IQ
- Kristi Lai, Desert ADAPT
- Diana Serrano, Partners Resource Network
- Molly Reyes, The Arc of El Paso
- Betty Castorena, Angel's Mission
- Lourdes Torres, Children's Disabilities Information Coalition
- Camille Maldonado Rivera, Growing Together Developmental Center
- Josue Lachica, PdN Center, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute
- Gail Gale, Bridges Academy Bonnie Perez Ramirez, Partners Resource Network
- Salvador Chagolla, Emergence Health Network
- Diana Lara, Emergence Health Network
- Enrique Mata, PdN Center, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute
- Kimberly Griego, Autism Society of Texas
- Luis Chew, Volar Center for Independent Living
- Guillermo Yanez, Volar Center for Independent Living

Agenda

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Project background and Paso Norte Health Foundation strategic plan
3. Community listening session findings
4. Discussion: housing and independent living
5. Discussion: transportation
6. Discussion: communication, family support, and universal design
7. Coalition structure and next steps

Proceedings

1. Welcome and Introductions

Discussion

- Laura Marquez opened the meeting and explained its purpose: to share the work done with the Paso Norte Health Foundation over recent months and to align existing community efforts on youth with IDD with the Foundation's strategic plan.
- Each attendee introduced themselves, their organization, and their focus area. Many also described personal experiences navigating services.

2. Project Background and Foundation Strategic Plan (Sandra Day)

Discussion

- IDD has historically sat under the Foundation's mental health initiative. The long-term vision is to integrate IDD across every initiative or to make it a standalone focus.
- The Foundation commissioned a literature review from the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, which identified significant system gaps, and asked Laura to lead a local report.
- Site visits to San Antonio and to Treasure House in Phoenix showed strong models, but also El Paso's limited philanthropy and the high cost of private living centers. A living-center model is not being pursued for now.
- The goal is a professional coalition that supports existing networks, focused on transition-age youth.

Outcome

- The new strategic plan goes to the Foundation board in September 2026.
- An open call for letters of intent with explicit IDD language is expected around March 2027. Members were encouraged to sign up for funding alerts at pdnhf.org.

3. Community Listening Session Findings (Laura Marquez)

Discussion

- Three listening sessions gathered perspectives from youth, families, and providers. Partners included Autism Hope El Paso, Relentless IQ, and CDIC's Youth Leadership Forum helped host them.
- Key themes: the service cliff after leaving K-12, including the loss of peer connection; fragmentation across education, healthcare, workforce, and behavioral health; independence limited by employment, housing, and transportation; and the need for mental health and caregiver support.
- Transition begins long before age 14, so the work must include prevention and early intervention upstream.
- Laura will share the Meadows literature review with members who have not read it.

4. Housing and Independent Living

Discussion

- Treasure House costs about \$8,000 per month to residents (about \$10,000 total, with the gap fundraised), serves roughly 30–35 residents, and screens out people with co-occurring medical conditions.
- It was proposed to perform a housing market analysis. It would take roughly 6–9 months and could include partnerships with private developers. Mixed and inclusive housing was favored.
- Members raised other models: Virginia’s converting a family home into a group home through the waiver, New York’s neighbor check-in rent rebates, and New Mexico’s higher waiver cost coverage.
- Other issues: attendant wage shortages (Time to Care, ADAPT), SSI income limits that trap people in poverty, and the need for affordable, accessible, integrated, universally designed housing.
- According to Emergence Health Network, local families tend to prefer keeping relatives at home. EHN deferred detailed comment to its leadership.
- Better local population data is needed. District data is not disaggregated and leaves out students with disabilities who are not in special education.

5. Transportation

Discussion

- Paratransit is costly relative to SSI (about \$2.50–\$5 per trip), involves long waits and early pickups, and customer service is sometimes poor for callers with speech differences.
- Sun Metro declined to register students at a Region 19 ESC transition fair. Members agreed that pressure from the coalition as a group would carry more weight than individual agencies acting alone.
- Micro-transit pilots exist on the east side and in Socorro, but coverage stops at their boundaries. One participant noted that transportation gaps undermine Texas Workforce job connections.
- The ETA Paratransit chair described county service outside city limits and work with local school districts on bus stops near schools. The chair offered to bring agency representatives to the coalition.
- Members were invited to attend the transit committee’s virtual meeting on September 3 (10 AM and 6 PM sessions).

6. Communication, Family Support, and Universal Design

Discussion

- It was suggested to install AAC and communication boards in public spaces, and for continuity of supports from childhood into adulthood.

- Members described overwhelmed parents, transition plans missing at graduation, and the need to teach life and social skills, such as using a bus pass, much earlier.
- Members called for sensory and IDD training for city staff, law enforcement, and first responders, and for universal design that goes beyond physical access.

7. Coalition Structure and Next Steps

Discussion

- Sandra Day suggested starting the group as a council under the Behavioral Health Consortium, with its own action plan, and later moving it to a standalone coalition. Members were invited to review the existing council action plans online.
- Members stressed the need for a shared information hub and a neighborhood-level resource map to keep momentum going.
- Enrique Mata offered Meadows' technical capacity to host a landing page for reports, data, and minutes.
- Members agreed to form goal-oriented work groups for each priority area, not only an advisory committee, and to identify stakeholders who are missing.

Outcome

- Next meeting to be scheduled upon completion of the Health Foundation's Strategic Plan.

Action Items

#	Action	Owner	Due / Status
1	Share the Meadows preliminary IDD literature review	Laura Marquez	Open
2	Include IDD-specific open call for LOIs in next grant cycle	Sandra Day	March 2027
3	Explore setting up the coalition as a Behavioral Health Consortium council	Sandra Day	Open
4	Invite EPA Access paratransit and transit agencies to future meetings	Laura Marquez	Before next meeting
5	Encourage attendance at the transportation committee meeting	Diana Serrano	Sept 3, 2026 (held)
6	Create a landing page for coalition materials	Enrique Mata	Open
7	Send Doodle poll for next meeting	Laura Marquez	Contingent on release of Foundation strategic plan
8	Identify missing stakeholders (workforce, housing authority, Medicaid/day-hab providers, law enforcement, school transition staff)	All members	Next meeting

Next Meeting

Date: TBD

Location: TBD

Proposed focus: Confirm priority areas, form work groups, and review stakeholder gaps

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:00 AM