



# The No Wrong Door System & How Colorado Can Improve Its Own System

Hunter Nelson

The demographics of Colorado are shifting at a fast pace. [By 2050](#), the number of older adults aged 65 and over is expected to double to 1.7 million, making up 20 percent of the state's population. In Colorado, estimates suggest [roughly 70 percent of older adults](#) aged 65 and over will need some type of long-term service or support. [Long-term services and supports](#) (LTSS) help people perform daily activities essential to living that they can no longer do or have difficulty doing on their own, such as housekeeping, grocery shopping, and personal care. Currently, the fragmented LTSS system in Colorado makes it hard for families and individuals navigating these services, as many do not even know where to start. A more efficient system is needed for older adults and their caregivers to access LTSS resources, especially due to Colorado's growing older population. This is where the No Wrong Door System comes in.

---

## What Is the No Wrong Door System?

---

The [No Wrong Door System](#) (NWD) is a fairly new collaborative effort between the Administration for Community Living (ACL), the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) that began in 2012. The purpose of the NWD System is to simplify access to LTSS for older adults and those with disabilities, as well as for those planning their own future LTSS needs. The NWD System also provides both assistance and information to professionals seeking guidance on behalf of their clients. It serves as an entry point for LTSS that is publicly administered, including LTSS that is funded under Medicaid, the Older Americans Act, the VHA, and other state revenue programs.

The NWD System was started at the federal level, but states have also been given support to start their own NWD Systems. [At the state level](#), NWD Systems typically involve Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs), Centers for Independent Living (CILs), and state agencies such as state units on aging and Medicaid agencies. The federal agencies listed partner with the states to support their NWD efforts. [No Wrong Door sites](#) ensure all functions of a NWD System are being implemented effectively. This assures that communication and information sharing is cohesive among LTSS entry points. In a NWD System, anyone seeking LTSS services can contact any organization that is a part of the system through telephone, in-person, or online, for service access, information, and/or referrals.

### **Services and supports included in LTSS:**

- Care provided in the home, in community-based settings, or in nursing homes
- Care for older adults who need support due to age, physical, cognitive, developmental, or chronic health conditions
- A wide range of services to help older adults live independently, including eating, cleaning, managing medication, grooming and basic hygiene, cooking, driving, physical movement assistance, cooking, among other supports for daily activities essential to living.

## **Why Is a No Wrong Door System Important?**

Fragmented and hard-to-navigate LTSS systems make it extremely difficult for clients and their caregivers to access the services and supports they need to help them age in their community. [Many organizations that provide LTSS](#) use different and sometimes duplicative screening, intake, needs assessment, service planning, and eligibility determination processes. This often leaves older adults and their caregivers trying to access LTSS confused and frustrated, sometimes causing them to make decisions based on incomplete and inaccurate information. A No Wrong Door System simplifies and improves the accessibility to LTSS for those who need it. If someone contacts any organization that is a part of their state's NWD System, they are connected to the resources they need; therefore, there is [“no wrong door”](#) for access to LTSS regardless of the client's age, disability, and/or socioeconomic class. The NWD System encourages and essentially requires strong partnership and collaboration between multiple state agencies and organizations, thus strengthening the state's aging service infrastructure.

A key component central to an effective NWD System is [person- and family-centered practice](#). Person- and family-centered practice recognizes each individual and/or family has their own unique set of values, strengths, needs, and preferences. Therefore, it requires an interactive process that is led by families and individuals themselves to support decision making regarding LTSS. This is important, because LTSS is not a one-fits-all model. What is needed and works for one person may not work for another. The person-centered component of the NWD System ensures each older adult receives the best LTSS that fits their lifestyle, thus maintaining their quality of life.



## Best NWD Practices in Other States

The [2020 Long-Term Services and Supports \(LTSS\) State Scorecard](#) recognizes the NWD System as an important part of a high-performing LTSS system. The Scorecard assesses state NWD Systems upon:

1. [State governance and administration](#): The state plays a meaningful role in the design, implementation, and ongoing administration of a NWD System. [States score high in this category have a strong governance structure](#) have high-functioning multistate agency bodies that coordinate an efficient NWD System.
2. [Public outreach and coordination with key referral services](#): This allows the NWD System to be known by citizens and key referral services as a simplified, trustworthy way to access LTSS. States that score high on public outreach and coordination with key referral services effectively reach their target populations in need of LTSS to ensure all who need access are connected to the NWD System.
3. [Person-centered counseling \(PCC\)](#): PCC functions as the formal entry point into LTSS for older adults and their caregivers. Each individual is recognized for their own preferences, values, and needs when it comes to LTSS. States that score high in this category expand PCC training so that all staff can adequately serve the community.
4. [Streamlined eligibility for public programs](#): Improves the efficiency and effectiveness of eligibility determination for LTSS, and also creates an easier process for individuals trying to access public LTSS. States that score high in this category demonstrate effective enrollment and eligibility processes that reduce repetitiveness and duplication of information for those seeking LTSS.

These make up a state's NWD indicator score, which indicates the strength of their NWD System in the Scorecard. Therefore, there are some best practices in other states that exemplify these elements and can be used as models to improve Colorado's NWD System.

In terms of state governance and administration, [Ohio's NWD System](#) has built an admirable and strong governance structure. The governance team is charged with ensuring the NWD System is being implemented effectively, and ensures roles and responsibilities in the NWD System remain clear and coordinated. Strong governance matters because it determines the efficiency and effectiveness of the

### The LTSS State Scorecard

The AARP Public Policy Institute, together with The SCAN Foundation and The Commonwealth Fund, released the 2020 Scorecard. The purpose of the Scorecard is to provide state and federal policy makers, the private sector, and consumers the needed information to assess their state's performance relating to LTSS affordability and access, choice of setting and provider, quality of life and care, support for family caregivers, and effective transitions. Therefore, states can learn from others and improve the lives of older adults, people with disabilities, and their families.

NWD System. It ensures all functions of the system are being implemented in the way they are supposed to, and overall leads to a high-quality NWD System. Ohio's strong governance structure has made collaboration between state entities in their NWD System more coordinated, thus better serving Ohio citizens who need access to LTSS.

[The District of Columbia](#) established a NWD Interagency Manager's Workgroup aimed at building a network of collaboration for LTSS, which has proven to be an effective measure for increasing public outreach and coordination with key referral services. This has led to a more sustainable and efficient NWD System.

Regarding person-centered counseling/ person-centered practice, [Virginia](#) passed a state resolution in 2011 requesting the secretary of health and human resources adopt and implement person-centered practices in providing services to older adults and those with disabilities. The state of [Washington's](#) NWD System also adopted a set of statewide person-centered counseling standards that define what person-centered counseling covers, who delivers it and under what circumstances, and also tracks data and outcomes across the NWD system. [New Hampshire's](#) NWD System, also known as NHCarePath, is working on developing a state-based certification that includes person-centered training. Also, all staff with the State Health Insurance Program, Senior Medicare Patrol, Veterans-Directed Home and Community-Based Service programs, and those working with caregivers funded through the National Family Caregiver Support Program must be trained in person- and family-centered practices.

In terms of streamlined access to public LTSS programs, an [Alabama](#) executive order from the state governor designated the state agencies and entities involved in their NWD System, to collaboratively participate in the development and implementation of a joint eligibility and enrollment system for public benefits among these agencies. This means individuals do not have to go through multiple screening and eligibility processes for various public benefits; instead, they only have to do this once to determine which benefits they are eligible for and to be enrolled in these benefits simultaneously. The District of Columbia spearheaded two projects aimed at streamlining access to public programs, which are the LTSS Clinical Case Management System (CCMS) and Resource Portal projects. Public programs included Medicaid-funded LTSS. The LTSS CCMS is a unified LTSS system that engages clients at the "front door" in an efficient manner that allows staff to form connections grounded in person-centered practices. "Front door" alludes to the initial contact experience with the NWD System for someone seeking LTSS. The Resource Portal creates a condensed, easy-to-access LTSS online information hub.

---

## State Improvement Plans

---

Through the development and implementation of effective NWD Systems, some states have shared valuable lessons they have learned. [The District of Columbia](#) cited challenges in staff turnover, ensuring sustainability for their NWD System, and expanding outreach and engagement across the lifespan to ensure continued stakeholder engagement.

To address these challenges, D.C.'s system developed [concrete strategies](#) they could implement. For high NWD staff turnover, they planned to have all new team members trained in person-centered practice and to ensure they were adequately supported, and to involve them in stakeholder meetings to increase their depth of understanding of LTSS. To ensure sustainability for the NWD System, they identified three core NWD partner agencies committed to raising and contributing local funds and staff time to ensure sustainability of the Resource Portal, and successfully braiding current

agencies' services to the NWD System to ensure that NWD elements continue to be implemented in policies, practices, and structures. To expand outreach and engagement, they committed to building on the success of their Front Door Summit, which was an interagency event focused on enhancing the front door experience for D.C. residents in need of LTSS.

[South Dakota](#) was able to improve their NWD indicator score from 2017 to 2020 through launching an outreach campaign to promote their NWD System, enhancing training for NWD staff, and an executive order creating the Division of Long-Term Services and Supports, which betters the ability to reach older adults and those with disabilities in need of LTSS in the state. [Georgia](#) was able to improve their NWD indicator score by launching the ADRC Advisory Council to head their NWD System and developing a screening tool to aid in the streamlined access to public services.





## How Colorado Can Improve Its No Wrong Door System

In September 2015, Colorado secured a three-year No Wrong Door implementation grant from the federal Administration on Community Living. The purpose of this grant was to develop a model for implementing a statewide NWD System. [Four regional pilot sites](#) were launched in summer 2017, which included Colorado Access, Larimer County Department of Human Services, San Juan Basin Area Agency on Aging, and the Senior Resource Development Agency, and the pilot was completed by the end of 2019.

Colorado ranked the [12th lowest](#) for their NWD indicator score on the Scorecard. Funding ended up presenting as a major issue for Colorado's NWD System; therefore, the pilot sites never expanded statewide and in fact the NWD programs in Larimer County and at the Senior Resource Development Agency are no longer in existence. The need for a NWD System has not diminished though, and there are a few things Colorado can do to improve its NWD System so that older adults can efficiently access LTSS:

1. Increasing state governance: [A best practice identified in other states](#), such as Ohio mentioned previously, is increasing state governance for the NWD System. Increasing state governance can occur by forming governing bodies at the state level made up of key agencies and continuing to strengthen partnerships and relationships between these agencies. These governing bodies can hold advisory meetings to inform and guide NWD System development and implementation. Colorado's three state departments – the Department of Health Care Policy & Financing, the Department of Human Services, and the Department of Labor and Employment – were tasked with governance duties, yet no other local AAAs were mentioned in their [implementation plan](#) for state governance. [Ohio's](#) governance structure was strengthened when they included AAAs at the local level. By increasing state governance through including local AAAs, Colorado's NWD System can be more coordinated and organized statewide, thus leading to a more resilient system.
2. Increasing funding for Colorado's NWD System: As stated previously, limited funding for Colorado's NWD System presented as a significant barrier to the four pilot sites continuing and expanding their NWD functions. Limited funding prevented the pilot sites from being able to expand their NWD services, including engaging in outreach campaigns to reach older adults seeking LTSS. The project was funded through a federal pilot with no sustainable funding streams. The total grant amount from the Administration for Community Living was approximately \$2 million of one-time money over a three-year period. Colorado should prioritize funding for their NWD System, as the LTSS system are still fragmented and hard-to-navigate for older Coloradans and their caregivers. Expanding Colorado's NWD System through more funding would create a more resilient system.
3. Expanding public outreach and coordination with key referral services: [To ensure the](#)

[effectiveness and sustainability of a NWD System](#), the state should actively engage in education and outreach efforts to make sure citizens are aware of the NWD System and will be referred to the NWD System if they are in need of LTSS. In [Colorado's Three-Year NWD Implementation Plan](#), they detailed a plan to engage stakeholders and improve the existing referral process, yet much of the public is not aware of the NWD System. Therefore, older adults and their caregivers seeking LTSS were still confronted by a confusing and hard-to-navigate LTSS system because they were either unaware of the NWD or were not referred to it. Creating a NWD Interagency Manager's Workgroup similar to the District of Columbia's could be a potentially viable way to increase collaboration in Colorado's NWD System. [It is recommended](#) states implement an outreach and marketing plan focused on branding the NWD System and create a publicly searchable database designed to assist older adults and their caregivers in accessing LTSS options. Colorado is lacking both of these. Expanding public outreach and coordination with key referral services can help improve and ensure the sustainability of Colorado's NWD System, potentially leading to increased funding for more NWD sites.

As Colorado continues to age, it is important older adults and their caregivers can access the LTSS needed to continue to live a high quality of life. By improving Colorado's NWD System, older adults and their caregivers can access LTSS in a simplified and easy manner, therefore allowing them to determine how and where they want to age in their community.