



## Introduction to the Independent Living Network

This technical brief provides a description of the Independent Living Network and how housing and service providers can partner with the IL Network in their state.

### **What is Independent Living?**

Independent Living is a movement, program, and philosophy. Independent Living is founded on the belief that people with disabilities should enjoy the same civil rights, choices and autonomy as those without disabilities.

IL believes that people with disabilities have the right to live in the community of their choice and have access to all necessary supports and home and community-based services to sustain living in the community. IL also believes that persons with disabilities are the best experts on their own lives and bodies and should have the autonomy to decide what services and supports work best for them.

Despite many advancements in the rights of people with disabilities, many people with disabilities still face barriers to housing including lack of affordable and accessible housing options, lack of direct care resources, discrimination from landlords, and navigating complex housing systems.

### **A Movement, Program, and Philosophy**

#### **A Movement**

The Independent Living Movement intersects with the broader Civil Rights and Disability Rights movement of the 1960's and 70's. With the deinstitutionalization of people with disabilities in the 1960s, the realization of community living options became essential. This is where the IL movement was born. It established the social model of disability, which was drastically different from the medical model of disability. This offered people with disabilities a new way of services and advocacy.

#### **A Program**

The Independent Living Program involves a network of people with disabilities, Centers for Independent Living (CILs), Statewide Independent Living Councils (SILCs), and Designated State Entities (DSE). The Independent Living Program is authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

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## **Centers for Independent Living (CILs)**

CILs are community-based, cross disability, non-profit organizations designed and operated by people with disabilities. CILs are hubs of disability information and referral, peer support, and advocacy. All federally funded CILs are required to provide five core services (discussed below).

There are over 350 federally funded CILs across the country and dozens of state funded CILs. To find a CIL near you, please visit the [ACL website](#).

## **State Independent Living Councils (SILC)**

Each state and U.S. territory is required to maintain a SILC. Every three years SILCs develop a three year strategic plan that creates a unified vision for the state on how to address barriers to independent living and other issues impacting people with disabilities.

## **Designated State Entity (DSE)**

Under the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL), the DSE receives, accounts for, and disperses funds received by the state based on the SPIL. They are required to sign off on the SPIL.

## **A Philosophy**

The Independent Living philosophy emphasizes consumer control, the idea that people with disabilities are the best experts on their own needs, having crucial and valuable perspectives to contribute and deserving of equal opportunity to decide how to live, work, and take part in their communities.

The Independent Living Network is federally required to be disability led. 51% or more of Centers for Independent Living board members, management team, and staff are required to have a disability. CILs serve people with all types of disabilities, regardless of age and income. This speaks to the belief that people with disabilities have a shared history and experience and can support each other. At the core of this work is the concept of dignity of risk. Dignity of risk believes that everyone, including people with disabilities, has the right to make choices and take risks in their lives, even if those choices might lead to failure or harm, as this is essential to personal growth, independence, and dignity.