

Career Paths Guide

Navigating Nursing in Oregon's Intellectual
and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) Sector



Career Paths Guide:

Navigating Nursing in I/DD: your pathway to a nursing career in Oregon's intellectual and developmental disabilities sector.

DISCOVER

UNDERSTAND

THRIVE

Nursing in the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) sector offers a rewarding career centered on building meaningful, long-term relationships with clients and seeing the direct impact of your care on their quality of life. It provides an opportunity to help individuals lead fulfilling lives.

For nurses who thrive on providing personalized, compassionate care and want to make a profound difference, working with individuals with I/DD offers a unique and impactful career choice.

This guide outlines the key I/DD nursing career paths in Oregon, with a focus on nursing roles in programs that are available through the Oregon Department of Developmental Disabilities Services (ODDS) within the Oregon Department of Human Services. It provides an overview to support career navigation within the I/DD sector, considering differences in work settings, pay structure, and the distinct advantages of various career trajectories.

Nursing for Individuals with I/DD - What is It?

Nursing in the I/DD sector is a specialty area of nursing practice dedicated to supporting individuals with I/DD (I/DD nursing). Nurses who work with individuals with I/DD (I/DD nurses) work across a wide spectrum of environments, including an individual's home and other settings, to provide essential health services tailored to the unique needs of people with I/DD.

Role of I/DD Nurses

I/DD nursing involves both clinical and holistic care approaches, addressing physical, mental, and emotional health needs. Nurses in this field often:



Manage Complex Health Needs: Some individuals with I/DD have chronic health conditions or require medical devices. Nurses working with individuals with I/DD provide direct care, monitor vital signs, administer medication, and may manage specialized equipment like ventilators and feeding tubes.



Support Daily Living and Independence: Beyond medical tasks, nurses in the I/DD sector play a key role in promoting clients' independence by supporting them to manage aspects of their health and daily routines, fostering a sense of autonomy and well-being.



Collaborate with Multidisciplinary Teams: nurses who work with individuals with I/DD often work with other healthcare providers, families, and support staff to create individualized care plans that address each client's specific needs, integrating physical and emotional care with social support.



Training and Advocacy: I/DD nurses often train caregivers and family members to support the client's ongoing needs safely. This can include advocacy for help managing their home medical needs and plans of care.

I/DD Nursing Services Available through ODDS

In Oregon, ODDS works with partners and the Developmental Disabilities community to provide services, support, and advocacy to empower Oregonians with I/DD to live full lives in their communities. Services include supports to assist an individual to live in their own home or in a variety of other ODDS funded service settings, including foster homes and group homes.

For some individuals with I/DD, varying levels of nursing services are required. ODDS offers nursing services intended to support individuals with long-term ongoing or intermittent medical support needs. There are three types of nursing services available through ODDS:

- a. **Private Duty Nursing (PDN)** are shift nursing services for children from birth to 20 years of age who have complex medical needs that require continual assessment and reassessment, supervision, nursing treatments, therapies and interventions. Services are delivered in the individual's home or foster home by an RN, or an LPN under the supervision of an RN. Nurses are performing hands-on activities exclusively throughout their shift.
- b. **Direct Nursing (DNS)** are shift nursing services for individuals 21 years or older with I/DD who have complex medical needs that require continual assessment and reassessment, supervision, nursing treatments, therapies and interventions. Services are delivered in the individual's home or a 24-hour residential setting by an RN or LPN (under the supervision of an RN). Nurses are performing hands-on activities throughout their shift.
- c. **Long Term Care Community Nursing (LTCCN)** services focus on a child or adult's chronic and ongoing health and activity of daily living needs in their own home or a foster home. Hands-on or shift type nursing is not delivered by nurses in this program. Services include nursing assessment, nursing care plan development, delegation, teaching, monitoring, and care coordination.

I/DD Nursing in Oregon: Career Paths

Nurses in Oregon can choose different employment models when starting a career in the I/DD sector:

a. Independent Contractor (Self-Employed) Nurse:

- **Work Setting:** Independent contractor nurses are self-employed, and can accept contracts from ODDS to serve specific individuals with I/DD. They manage their own schedules and often serve multiple clients, allowing for flexibility and autonomy. They typically work in community settings, providing direct care or on-going supervision in individuals' homes.
- **Compensation:** Independent contractors usually have higher earning potential than salaried employees. However, they are responsible for their own taxes and benefits, including health insurance, retirement, and liability insurance.
- **Potential advantages:**
 - More control over which clients you work for.
 - No requirement to work weekends or holidays.
 - Independence in developing a therapeutic relationship with the client.
 - Greater work-life balance.
 - Control over how you operate your own independent business.

- **Potential disadvantages:**
 - Have to navigate complex medical and interpersonal situations without direct oversight.
 - It may take time to build up a client base to work half or full-time.
 - The initial time to research and write care plan documentation may not be paid for.
 - More administrative responsibilities, such as managing billing, contracts, taxes, and your own benefits.

b. Agency Nurse:

- **Work Setting:** Agency nurses are employed by home health or In-Home Care agencies that contract with ODDS. They may be assigned to work in various community-based care settings, such as family homes, group homes, and foster homes.
- **Compensation:** While agency nurses may have less earning potential than independent contractors, they often benefit from the stability of working for an employer who assigns their shifts. Pay rates are typically determined by the agency, and can vary based on the nurse's experience, the type of care required, and shifts worked (e.g. days versus nights).
- **Potential advantages:**
 - Steady work assignments.
 - Training and skill development may be provided by the agency.
 - Some agencies may have nursing clinical supervisors who are available to mentor and provide feedback.

- Some agencies may offer financial incentives to continue higher education.
- Mileage for travel may be reimbursed.
- Benefits may be provided through the agency (e.g., health insurance, paid time off).
- **Potential disadvantages:**
 - Nurses may be asked to work a certain number of weekend and holiday days.
 - The working culture will be dependent on the agency's values and capabilities.
 - Need to navigate the agency's requests (for example, being asked to work overtime or to work irregular hours).
 - Less flexibility in choosing clients or work hours.

c. Additional Career Paths:

Throughout their careers, nurses have several additional options to consider in the I/DD sector, including:

- **Working in agency management roles:** Depending on the size of the organization, nursing agencies may have a range of supervisory and management roles that nurses can progress through during their career.
- **Starting your own nursing agency:** Nurse entrepreneurs can start their own nursing agency, providing services to individuals with I/DD either independently or by contracting with ODDS and other government agencies. As the agency owner, you have control over the financial structure, including setting the pay for staff nurses and determining the rates for services offered. Earnings are potentially higher, but so are the responsibilities and potential risks.

- **Working as a private contractor nurse:** Some nurses choose to work as independent contractors, but instead of contracting with ODDS, they can secure private agreements directly with families or individuals.

Considerations When Choosing a Nursing Career Path in the I/DD Sector:

- Autonomy and independence
- Stability
- Supports available
- Income potential
- Benefits
- Potential for career growth
- Opportunities to develop long-term, therapeutic client-nurse relationships