

HCBS Settings Rule: Physical Environment

What is the Physical Environment Requirement?

The physical environment requirement under the Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Settings Rule ensures that all settings where Medicaid-funded HCBS services are delivered are designed to promote the health, safety, comfort, and independence of individuals. The physical environment must enhance individual autonomy and provide a safe, inclusive, and accessible space for daily living and activities.



Key Requirements for the Physical Environment:

1. Accessibility:

- Settings must be physically accessible for all individuals, including those with mobility challenges.
- Features such as ramps, elevators, wide doorways, and accessible bathrooms must be available as needed.

2. Privacy:

- Individuals must have private spaces, including bedrooms and bathrooms, that are free from intrusion.
- Lockable doors must be provided for personal spaces, with keys accessible only to the individual and authorized staff.
- Individuals should have a choice of roommates in shared rooms.

3. Safety and Security:

- Settings must provide a safe environment with appropriate security measures.
- Emergency procedures, such as fire exits and evacuation plans, must be in place and communicated to individuals.

4. Customization:

- Individuals must have the freedom to furnish and decorate their personal spaces according to their preferences.
- Providers must respect individual choices regarding room setup and decor.
- Individuals should have the opportunity to practice their cultural, religious, and spiritual traditions in their living spaces.

5. Community Access:

- The physical location of the setting must support access to the broader community, such as proximity to public transportation, parks, and other community facilities.

Provider Responsibilities:

1. Conduct Environmental Assessments:

- Evaluate settings for compliance with accessibility, safety, and privacy requirements.
- Address barriers that limit individual autonomy or community access.

2. Implement Safety Protocols:

- Develop and communicate emergency procedures, including fire safety and natural disaster plans.
- Regularly inspect settings to ensure they meet health and safety standards.

3. Respect Individual Preferences:

- Allow individuals to personalize their living spaces, including furniture, decorations, and other personal items.
- Document and accommodate preferences in the person-centered service plan.

4. Maintain Accessibility:

- Ensure that common areas, entrances, and pathways are accessible to individuals with varying needs.
- Provide necessary adaptations, such as grab bars, wheelchair ramps, or adaptive furniture.

Examples of Compliant Practices:

- Installing ramps and grab bars to accommodate individuals with mobility challenges.
- Allowing individuals to choose wall colors, furniture, and decorations in their rooms.
- Ensuring that all emergency exits are clearly marked and accessible to all individuals.
- Locating settings within walking distance or accessible transport options to community services and facilities.

Benefits of a Compliant Physical Environment:

- Promotes independence and self-determination.
- Enhances quality of life by creating a comfortable and inclusive space.
- Improves safety and reduces the risk of injury or emergency incidents.
- Builds trust and confidence within individuals and their families.
- Aligns service delivery with federal and state standards.

Monitoring and Compliance:

1. Site Visits and Assessments:

- DCH conducts regular site visits to evaluate compliance with physical environment standards.

2. Corrective Actions:

- DCH may require corrective action plans (CAPs) to be developed and implemented by providers to address any deficiencies.

3. Documentation Reviews:

- Providers must maintain records of environmental assessments, adaptations, and individual preferences.

DCH Support for Providers:

1. Training and Resources:

- DCH offers training on designing and maintaining compliant physical environments.
- Resources include checklists and templates for environmental assessments.

2. Technical Assistance:

- Providers can access one-on-one technical support to address specific physical environment challenges.

3. Stakeholder Engagement:

- Collaborate with individuals and families to identify and address concerns related to the physical environment.

Resources for Providers:

- **CMS Guidance on Physical Environment Requirements:** <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/home-community-based-services/home-community-based-services-guidance/index.html>
- **DCH Provider Support and Compliance Materials:** www.dch.georgia.gov
- **Provider Training Materials:** [HCBS State Transition Plan Provider Guidance manual](#)
- **Contact Information:**
 - Email: hcbstransition@dch.ga.gov

