

New Jersey Alliance for Safety and Protection Hosts Inaugural Prevention Summit

Nearly 200 Attendees from 80 Community Providers Gather to Share Best Practices in Preventing Abuse and Neglect

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ – On Monday, March 23rd, the New Jersey Alliance for Safety and Protection (NJ-ASAP) hosted its first-ever Prevention Summit, bringing together nearly 200 professionals from approximately 80 community providers across the state to address one of the field's most critical priorities: preventing abuse and neglect of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The landmark event marked the culmination of months of planning that began when NJ-ASAP first convened in July 2024. The Alliance—comprising volunteers from Bancroft, Sevita Health, Alternatives, The Arc of Atlantic and Ocean Counties, Ladacin, Devereux, New Jersey Institute for Disabilities, Autism-NJ, the New Jersey Association for Community Providers, and staff from both the DHS Office of Program Integrity and Accountability and the Division of Developmental Disabilities—came together with a shared mission: to learn, exchange ideas, and establish best practices for prevention across New Jersey's DHS-licensed community providers.

The event was sponsored by the New Jersey Association for Community Providers (NJACP), the Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities (ABCD), and The Arc of New Jersey.

National Expert Leads Morning Session on Culture of Safety

The day's featured speaker was Laura Hardin from Praesidium, a Texas-based organization specializing in preventing abuse within institutions that serve children and vulnerable adults. For over ten years, Hardin has supported Praesidium's social service clients, including residential and shelter services, foster care and child welfare, mental and behavioral health programs, and community-based programs serving youth and vulnerable adults. Additionally, she leads projects with foundations, healthcare, and education clients.

In collaboration with the Praesidium team, Hardin trains executive leaders and employees, conducts management systems reviews and risk assessments, and consults with organizational leaders to ensure ongoing protection from abuse. As a licensed master-level social worker, she brings extensive experience in youth development, mental health care, child welfare, and community research.

During the morning session, Hardin presented on building a Culture of Safety, drawing from Praesidium's eight operations of their Safety Equation and contrasting those principles with High Reliability Organizations. She provided attendees with concrete examples and frameworks for strengthening their prevention efforts.

Panel Discussion Fosters Peer-to-Peer Learning

Following her presentation, Hardin moderated a dynamic discussion panel featuring representatives from Devereux, Durand, Allies, Elwyn, and The Arc chapters of Atlantic, Somerset, and Essex counties. The peer-to-peer conversation among agency leaders serving adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities across New Jersey created an opportunity for candid exchange about real-world challenges and solutions.

"While each organization operates independently, we all share responsibility for strengthening safety, preventing abuse, and supporting the workforce that does this challenging work every day," Hardin noted during the discussion.

The conversation was designed to help attendees learn what's been attempted, what's worked well, and what's still evolving when it comes to creating and sustaining a culture of safety. Panelists explored multiple dimensions of prevention, including:

- **Data-Driven Oversight:** How organizations use data, oversight mechanisms, and workforce supports to prevent harm before it occurs
- **Safety Through Visibility:** Approaches emphasizing responsiveness and continuous learning, with strong focus on staying connected to day-to-day operations

- **Strategic Hiring and Staff Support:** How thoughtful hiring practices directly impact safety outcomes
- **Rounding for Outcomes:** Structured feedback and ongoing mentoring approaches that empower staff to provide safe, high-quality support
- **Integrated Prevention Strategies:** Methods for embedding abuse prevention into both policy and everyday practice
- **Learning from Incidents:** Reflecting on events and investing in workforce skills to strengthen safety and build organizational capacity over time
- **Technology Solutions:** Leveraging software and tools to enhance safety, identify risks, and streamline reporting—from programs that help staff practice in realistic environments to tools that monitor incidents

"Ultimately, the conversation reminded us that safety, accountability, and staff support are not isolated efforts, they are interconnected," Ms. Hardin noted. "They require intentional systems, thoughtful policies, continuous learning, and the creativity to innovate when needed. By sharing our successes, challenges, and lessons learned, we strengthen the field as a whole."

Poster Presentations Showcase Innovative Strategies

During the lunch break, attendees had the opportunity to view poster presentations from six organizations, each highlighting unique and practical prevention strategies being implemented across the state:

- **Alternatives Inc.** presented a "Stop Light Strategy" designed to identify and prioritize issues requiring immediate attention
- **Beacon Specialized Living** showcased enhanced oversight protocols involving clinical teams and Human Resources during the admission process
- **Caring Inc.** demonstrated the use of cameras to improve safety and services in both home and vehicle settings
- **Hudson Milestone** illustrated how quality assurance supports the prevention of abuse and neglect

- **Ladacin Network** provided guidance on proper wheelchair securement in vehicles
 - **The Arc of Monmouth County** presented "In Her Shoes," a sensitivity training program that addresses abuse, neglect, and rights violations
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Afternoon Presentations Highlight Proven Prevention Practices

The afternoon session featured four organizations sharing detailed case studies and training innovations that have produced measurable results in their prevention efforts.

The Arc of Morris County opened the afternoon with a compelling presentation describing their comprehensive plan to support an individual with complex needs. Their multi-faceted approach successfully reduced incidents and behavioral crisis hospitalizations through the implementation of an Enhanced Protective Oversight Plan, Level of Supervision Protocol, Risk Management/Incident Review Committee, Sensory Environment Initiative, and Wraparound Service Model.

Community Access Unlimited engaged the audience with a skit based on real-world examples that they have presented to staff at several trainings. The creative training approach has resulted in a reduction in substantiated neglect allegations at their organization.

J-ADD detailed their comprehensive nurse-led training on choking prevention and mealtime safety. Their program includes a hands-on component that allows staff to practice preparing different textured diets and thickened liquids, ensuring practical competency beyond theoretical knowledge.

Bancroft shared how they amended their incident review and investigation processes to include more timely investigations. The result has been a reduction in incidents due to quicker root cause analysis, demonstrating how process improvements can have immediate safety impacts.

Survey Results Reveal Field Strengths, Challenges, and Future Priorities

The day concluded with a presentation of survey results that asked attendees to identify strengths, weaknesses, and desired topics for future prevention summits. The findings painted a comprehensive picture of the current state of prevention efforts across New Jersey's provider community.

Key Strengths Identified:

Agencies self-identified their strengths in proactive prevention and crisis intervention, with staff training and accountability being the most frequently cited assets. Other identified strengths include robust incident management systems, individualized relationship-based care, and cultures of trust and transparency that encourage open communication.

Critical Challenges:

The survey results reflect the following persistent challenges:

- Chronic staffing shortages and concerns about Direct Support Professional (DSP) compensation
- Poor training retention despite comprehensive programs
- Difficulties managing complex behavioral and medical needs in the community
- Systemic accountability gaps
- Adversarial public perceptions that hinder collaborative relationships

Future Topics of Interest:

Looking forward, agencies expressed strong interest in:

- Behavioral supports training (top priority)
- Investigation best practices
- Technology and AI integration for prevention
- State data sharing on high-risk categories
- Guidance on sustaining safety practices

- Understanding the intersection of co-occurring diagnoses and mental health needs

Key Takeaways:

Participants valued cross-agency collaboration and learning from peers facing similar challenges, while emphasizing the need for greater state support, timely guidance, and inclusion of individuals served through a "Nothing about us, without us" approach.

Overall, the findings reveal a field committed to prevention excellence but constrained by workforce and systemic barriers that require coordinated solutions between providers, state agencies, families, and the individuals they serve.

Looking Ahead

The inaugural NJ-ASAP Prevention Summit demonstrated the power of collaboration and shared learning in advancing the safety and well-being of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities across New Jersey. As the Alliance continues its work, the insights gained from this event will help shape future initiatives and strengthen prevention practices statewide.