

WYOMING STATE PLAN: FIVE-YEAR GOALS (2011-2016)

Goal 1:

Promote the health and well-being of people with developmental disabilities in Wyoming.

Area of Emphasis: Health

Objectives / Strategies

Objective 1: Through interagency efforts and collaboration the Council will raise awareness of the health benefits of good diet and exercise for the proactive health of people with developmental disabilities.

Strategy / Activities: Work with the Department of Health and providers via multiple resources, collateral and activities to promote the benefits of good diet and exercise.

Objective 2: Promote effective and accessible health care services in the community for people with developmental disabilities through the development of partnerships with non-disability entities.

Strategy / Activities: Develop partnerships with non-disability entities to advocate for at least three policy recommendations that include optometry, dental services and integrated, patient-centered models of care.

Objective 3: Establish a baseline and explore opportunities to improve access to specialists for people with developmental disabilities.

Strategy / Activities: Collect data about the type of specialist(s) people with developmental disabilities may need to see for their health and well-being and determine what is actually available in Wyoming, with an emphasis on optometrists, mental health professionals and dentists. Raise awareness via media campaigns and outreach for medical professionals and emergency medical personnel on how to work with and talk to people with developmental disabilities.

Goal 2:

Put people with developmental disabilities to work in long-term, competitive, meaningful employment consistent with their interests, abilities and needs.

Area of Emphasis: Employment

Objectives / Strategies

Objective 1: Through various legislative resources at the state and federal level, advocate for systems change that requires employers to pay people with developmental disabilities at least a livable, minimum wage.

Strategy / Activities: Provide information to a minimum of 93 legislators at the state and federal level about the federally allowable gap in pay for people with developmental disabilities.

Objective 2: Double the number of people with developmental disabilities employed in long-term, competitive, meaningful work in Wyoming from 22% to 44%.

Strategy / Activities: Gather data from other states that have successful employment rates for people with developmental disabilities and who may have an employment-first waiver system in place. Provide this information to legislators and the Wyoming Integrated Employment team to implement and establish an employment-first waiver in Wyoming. Educate family members on work/Supplemental Security Income.

Objective 3: Increase awareness for business leaders of the value of hiring people with developmental disabilities.

Strategy / Activities: Define actual skills and talents for individuals with disabilities to be utilized in marketing efforts via media, printed materials and PSAs as educational tools for employers and the general public. Partner with current successful employers of those with developmental disabilities to share real-life, positive employment stories. Recognize disability employment friendly businesses.

Goal 3:

Children with developmental disabilities will be included in traditional classrooms and given equal educational opportunities in public schools.

Area of Emphasis: Education

Objectives / Strategies

Objective 1: Through Council initiatives, trainings and activities, parents/guardians and students will be knowledgeable, confident and empowered during the Individual Education Planning (IEP) meeting.

Strategy / Activities: Through various resources including the Department of ED, provide at least one training on the IEP process each year on parents' and students' rights. In an effort to reach parents of children transition from preschool to the public school system, Council will distribute information on the IEP process via the Special Ed Director during an activity at the beginning of the school year, IE Open House.

Objective 2: Through interagency efforts and collaboration the Council will improve the IEP experience.

Strategy/ Activities: Gather data regarding the IEP protocol and processes. Investigate policy and systems change to improve the IEP process for parents / guardians, students and educators. Train educators on what the IEP experience should look like with a focus on dispute resolution.

Objective 3: Students with intellectual disabilities will have the opportunity to pursue a post-secondary education in Wyoming.

Strategy / Activities: Collaborate with, promote and support the Wyoming Institute for Disabilities Think College initiative. Provide collateral to parents of students in high school with intellectual disabilities about the benefits of a post-secondary education.

Objective 4: Advance systems change statewide by supporting at least one project that demonstrates effective transition services and supports to successful post-secondary education, training and/or employment.

Strategy / Activities: Inform and educate legislators on the value of investing in state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation programs that assist students with developmental disabilities as they transition from high school to either trade school, post-secondary school or the workforce. Advocate for the addition of VR counselors who focus solely on transition.

Goal 4:

Cultivate awareness that full inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in their communities is a civil right and an investment in Wyoming's future.

Area of Emphasis: Formal / Informal Supports

Objectives / Strategies

Objective 1: Raise awareness of the rights and contributions of people with developmental disabilities.

Strategy / Activities: Develop and disseminate a minimum of four targeted messages to public officials each year through various media and outreach.

Objective 2: Support at least one activity each year that demonstrates the participation of people with developmental disabilities in civic and community services.

Strategy / Activities: Work with local advocacy groups and providers to develop civic activities during the legislative session each year.

Objective 3: Influence at least three proposed policies to ensure they are consistent with the tenets of a fully included life for people with developmental disabilities.

Strategy / Activities: Examine legislation to identify bills that may impact people with developmental disabilities and their leading a fully-included life. Educate state and federal legislators on the value of all people and how they can take into account how their legislative efforts may affect those with developmental disabilities.

Goal 5:

People with developmental disabilities will be empowered to lead, advocate for themselves and make choices about how they want to live their lives.

Area of emphasis: Quality Assurance/ Self-advocacy

Objectives / Strategies

Objective 1: Self-advocates will train at least 20 new self-advocates to influence public policy and increase participation in civic and other community activities each year.

Strategy / Activities: A self-advocacy organization will provide a training session lead by self-advocates at the MEGA Conference, Advocacy Workshop and through other Council activities. Self-advocates will submit articles for the Council magazine. Self-advocacy will be practiced via a self-advocacy organization's initiatives and through Council support. Council will work to facilitate one-on-one advocacy efforts with legislators and self-advocates.

Objective 2: Council will provide opportunities for self-advocates to participate in cross-disability leadership coalitions.

Strategy / Activities: Opportunities for various leadership opportunities will be examined via community resources such as the Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis and other organizations. All Council grantees must have a person with a disability in a position of authority. If the leadership position is appointed, educate those in power who appoint those positions. Collateral released during Disability Awareness Month that illustrates the community/customer base that includes people with developmental disabilities.

Objective 3: Peer-to-peer/self-advocacy efforts will be utilized throughout Council activities and goals determined by the Five-Year State Plan.

Strategy / Activities: Self-advocate Council members will educate and mentor through various Council initiatives, activities and publications.

Goal 5: (continued)

Objective 4: Council will strengthen a statewide self-advocacy organization.

Strategy / Activities: A self-advocacy organization will present to providers throughout the state on what they do as an organization to promote self-advocacy for people with developmental disabilities. Council will support these efforts by providing visuals and presentation materials as needed.

Objective 5: Council members will increase knowledge and skills relative to leadership so state plan implementation is effective.

Strategy / Activities: Additional days at meeting, trainings and other councils and committees are on. (Advocacy and advisory boards)

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Wyoming – Healthcare

Wyoming has many programs and agencies that provide various levels of healthcare to people with disabilities throughout the state. Programs such as EqualityCare, the waivers through the Developmental Disabilities Division, The Community and Public Health Division Continuum of Care, Children's Special Health and Wyoming Institute on Disabilities Medicaid Buy-In program are strong vehicles in providing care for people with disabilities. However in the big picture appropriate healthcare is not always accessible to those with disabilities due to a shortage of accessible providers and specialists and the rural make-up and size of the Cowboy state.

Very few specialists are located in, or willing to travel to, Wyoming and the cost of travel and time off from work to see specialists in neighboring states is expensive and burdensome for families. For example, Wyoming is the only state in the Union without a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit so premature babies (many who have delays and/or developmental disabilities) and those born with birth defects must travel to another state to receive treatment. In one county, those attending the forum brought up the high rate of teen pregnancy in their county (and throughout the state) and the number of babies born prematurely and/or with disabilities as a result of young parents not having the proper health information during pregnancy. These young parents often times must travel hundreds of miles to visit specialists and suffer hardship from being away from home and work.

In addition, there is no Trauma Unit in the state, so those wounded in accidents, particularly where a brain injury is involved, must also go to another state. Wyoming needs specialists and professionals that do assessments, prescribe specialized equipment, recommend specific therapies and provide other services.

Consequently, local doctors that are available often do not accept Medicaid coverage to treat people with disabilities. Medical professionals may be more willing to add people with disabilities as patients if they are better informed about how to work with and talk to people with disabilities.

During the community forums, many people with disabilities and family members voiced concerns about the growing issue of dual diagnosis and the lack of professionals willing to work with people with disabilities, particularly children. Parents voiced the need for support and counseling for families of children with disabilities. The added responsibilities and stress of caring for a person with a disability can be managed easier if the caregiver can receive advice and support. Currently Medicaid pays for family counseling in some instances but it is not currently a waiver-covered service.

Dental care remains a concern in Wyoming as most adults with disabilities on Medicaid are facing oral health problems. There is a lack of dentists who accept Title XIX and/or who can administer anesthesia without leaving the state. All dental care is not covered on Medicaid

and only extractions are available for decaying teeth; no preventative or post operative care is covered. The few dentists who take Medicaid patients are usually booked and most people wait for up to a year for an appointment. As with other specialists, if they need to see an oral surgeon people with disabilities have to travel outside of the state.

They face the same types of obstacles when seeing optometrists in Wyoming – there are few who will work with people with disabilities and while exams are covered by Medicaid, glasses and other eye needs must be covered by the patient. Most choose to go without or wait years in between visits.

People with disabilities want to take ownership of their healthcare, they simply need the tools and support to do so.

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Wyoming – Employment

Wyomingites with disabilities want to work. They want real, meaningful employment that pays at least a federally mandated livable wage. They want to work in and contribute to their communities. Unfortunately, only a small group of people with disabilities and their family members at the forums shared that they were working in their communities.

Many adults with developmental disabilities still work in sheltered workshop environments, earning pennies “per press of a button,” and are not transitioning into community employment. Nationally the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is 72%, in Wyoming it is 78%. Positions that seem to be predominantly available to people with disabilities include janitorial work, grounds keeping and fast food; there should be more emphasis on working with the individual on their skills and abilities and finding a suitable job match than simply putting them to work in a position that may or may not be their choice. Meaningful employment should do more than decrease the rate of unemployment, it should also increase their quality of life. The time for training people with disabilities on how to look for and apply for jobs is past, it’s time to put them to work.

The Wyoming Integrated Employment Group is a group of stakeholders from around the state working to improve the employment situation for people with disabilities in Wyoming via information and tools from the Alliance for Full Participation. The group includes representatives from the Wyoming Business Leadership Network, the Department of Employment, Developmental Disabilities Division, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Wyoming Department of Education, WIND and people with disabilities. The goal of the group is to double the number of people with disabilities in meaningful work in the next five years, raising the employment percentage from 22% employed to 44%.

Along with the working group there are many agencies, non-profits and initiatives in the state to help Wyomingites with disabilities go to work. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in particular has been focusing on supporting high school students with disabilities in transition. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) currently has three full-time counselors dedicated to transition in Cheyenne, Casper and Sheridan; the typical case load of each counselor is 150. Those sites without a dedicated transition counselor do have traditional counselors offering support; clearly there is a need for more transition-dedicated DVR counselors throughout Wyoming.

In addition to their work with transition, DVR receives a \$300,000 grant to use for supported employment for those with intellectual disabilities. However in addition to those already looking for meaningful work, particularly in the current economy, the number of people with disabilities looking to enter the workforce is growing and more job coaches and counselors are needed to meet their employment needs.

Another challenge Wyoming (and the country) faces in finding employment for people with disabilities is the hesitation on their part to enter the workforce because they fear they will lose their social security benefits and waiver eligibility. In addition to working with people with disabilities to raise awareness about the Medicaid Buy-In program (which allows for people with disabilities to have meaningful employment without losing their benefits) Wyoming should work toward building a waiver that is based on finding meaningful employment for people with disabilities, or an “employment-first” waiver. Other states have put an employment-first waiver in place, which puts the emphasis on working with waiver recipients on how to find meaningful employment first and foremost – it takes the focus off the res-hab / medical side and instead focuses on putting people with disabilities to work in jobs they want and deserve.

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Wyoming – Informal and Formal Services and Supports

Wyoming is working to build a more inclusive community for its citizens and a large part of building inclusion is played by the many informal and formal supports throughout the state.

The diversity and scope of services available throughout the state would not be possible without Medicaid's home and community-based waiver program. Medicaid is the largest source of funding for medical and health-related services for people with limited income. In general terms, the Medicaid waiver program allows individuals eligible for Medicaid who need the kind of long-term care and assistance provided by hospitals, nursing homes or intermediate care facilities (ICF/MR) to choose to receive care and assistance at home or in other community settings instead.

The National Family Caregiver Support program is a program that assists caregivers, of any age, get relief from their daily responsibilities of giving care to a loved one. The caregiver must be taking care of a care receiver who is age 19-59 with a disability or an individual who is 60 to be eligible for the program.

WIND: Consumer Advocacy assists individuals with disabilities with housing, employment, education, access to buildings, ADA, and self-advocacy.

The WIND Resource and Information Center contains over 2,000 books, multimedia materials and online sources that deal with disabilities, Alzheimer's disease, depression, and neurological disorders plus the education, employment, health and rights of people with disabilities. This unique collection is open to all Wyoming residents and is accessed through the online catalog. New disability resource notes and news can be found on facebook.

Wyoming Independent Living Rehabilitation: Wyoming Technology Access Program (WYTAP): Partnered with First Interstate Bank of Laramie to provide low interest loans to consumers for Assistive Technology who might not qualify for traditional loan. Loan interest is bought down to 2 % less than prime on loans from \$500 to \$25,000 with 60 months available to repay loan. Credit counseling is also provided. In 2009-2010 26 loans were approved in the amount of \$415,216.

There are over 700 providers in Wyoming ranging from one-on-one to larger organizations that work with and provide services for hundreds of people with disabilities. Many providers have clients who coordinate informal self-advocacy groups.

One new service available to Wyomingites is the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) was developed which was developed via legislation from the 2011 Wyoming Legislative Session. The ADRC is a one-stop shop for information important to those with disabilities and the aging.

While there are many agencies and organizations working to promote the inclusion and well being of people with disabilities, gaps for transportation and child care remain. As the state is very large and rural, transportation for people with disabilities and their families was a hot topic at each and every community forum – distance combined with the increasing costs of gas are definitely creating hardships for Wyomingites with disabilities. There are some efforts being made to address transportation but it remains an overall obstacle in the lives of people with disabilities.

Another topic mentioned quite frequently at the forums was child care, parents continue to struggle to find child care for their children with disabilities and often times will have to quit their jobs to care for their children.

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Wyoming – Interagency Initiatives

Interagency partnering and collaboration leverages resources, improves coordination and communication, avoids duplication of effort and helps agencies and organizations to serve more Wyomingites with disabilities. In a state like Wyoming where people with disabilities and their families may live hundreds of miles from services or supports they need interagency initiatives are invaluable.

The Council itself is a collaboration of many agencies working with people with disabilities and their family members and therefore every project or initiative from the Council is an interagency initiative. Projects like the MEGA Conference (largest disability conference in the state), the Youth Leadership Forum and the Advocacy Workshop, while facilitated by the Council staff, are driven by ideas brought forward by interagency initiatives.

The Wyoming Institute for Disabilities (WIND) leads statewide efforts to enhance emergency planning for people with disabilities. Executive directors of Wyoming Protection and Advocacy, the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Wyoming Department of Health's Developmental Disabilities Division, and WIND concurred with the need for a central statewide effort to assist emergency planners with efforts to ensure specific focus on people Unable To Self Evacuate and on other people with access and/or functional needs who would need help in an emergency.

In addition, WIND partners primarily with the Wyoming Office of Homeland Security (WOHS) and the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH), Public Health and Hospital Preparedness programs.

WIND Assistive Technology Resources (WATR) is Wyoming's Assistive Technology Act program, established through the AT Act of 1998, as amended in 2004, to increase awareness and access to assistive technology, devices, and services. WATR provides assistive technology training and technical assistance, public awareness, device loans and device demonstrations in the domains of employment, community living, and education for all ages throughout the state.

Wyoming Technology Access Program (WYTAP) -WYTAP is a partnership among WIND Assistive Technology Resources (WATR), Wyoming Independent Living Rehabilitation, Inc. (WILR), and First Interstate Bank of Laramie to provide a financial loan program for individuals to purchase assistive technology devices and services. WYTAP buys down the interest rate to lower than the current prime rate. Individuals who may not otherwise qualify for a loan are often eligible to participate in WYTAP. Loans can range from \$500 to \$25,000 with extended payback periods of up to 70 months.

Wyoming – Quality Assurance

Wyomingites with disabilities have the information, skills, opportunities and support necessary to live free of abuse, neglect, financial and sexual exploitation and violation of their human and legal rights and the inappropriate use of restraints and seclusion. The Council sponsors many initiatives that teach people with disabilities the benefits of self-determination and provides them with tools to advocate and lead for themselves.

One grantee of the Council is People First of Wyoming, which is the only advocacy group coordinated and facilitated by people with developmental disabilities. They focus on raising awareness about people with disabilities and self-determination.

The PADD (Protection & Advocacy for Persons with Developmental Disabilities) program may investigate problems related to the protection of certain civil rights of persons with developmental disabilities. Issues PADD may assist with include: abuse and/or neglect investigations, special education rights, appropriateness of placement, denial of due process in treatment, placement or review and the right to services delivered in a non-discriminatory fashion. PADD may also inform people with developmental disabilities about their civil rights and ways to enforce those rights, represent people with developmental disabilities in meetings, negotiation sessions, administrative and judicial proceedings.

The Parent Information Center is a statewide parent center for families of children with disabilities. PIC provides information, support and referrals to families on their rights and responsibilities under the special education law- the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). They help families understand their child's disability and support them in working as partners with schools and service providers to receive better education programs and services for their children. PIC staff can attend Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings with families and provide workshops, webinars and trainings on specific disabilities and other disability topics upon request.

Uplift encourages success and stability for children and youth with or at risk of emotional, behavioral, learning, developmental, or physical disorders at home, school, and in the community.

RESTRAINTS AND SECLUSION

Recently Wyoming passed important legislation developing rules and regulations around the use of restraints and seclusion in the public school system; before the passage of this bill Wyoming was one of only 19 states with nothing "on the books." The basis of this legislation is not only protecting children from improper use of restraints and seclusion, but to offer support, consistency and guidance to teachers, school personnel and districts as well.

Wyoming – Education

INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANNING

The Individual Education Plan is a main concern for parents in Wyoming. Parents from all across Wyoming stated they felt nervous about the IEP process and often felt left out of important decisions directly affecting their children. And while there are groups in Wyoming like the Parent Information Network and Uplift who can go in to the IEP and advocate on the parent's behalf, parents are looking to be empowered in this very important process and to be respected as the expert when it comes to their child(ren). Overwhelmingly, they would like to see the schools increase parental involvement.

INCLUSION

Many parents voiced concerns that teachers, specialists and school administrators are not addressing inclusion in to the classroom as well as school activities and recreational opportunities. Parents voiced that all teachers, not just special education teachers, should know how to work with a child with a disability in their classroom. In order for inclusive education to fully work, classroom teachers need support and information on how to accommodate their lessons and techniques to help all children learn. All children benefit from having students with various levels of ability participating in the classroom.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

The WIND initiative, "Think College" is addressing the possibility of post-secondary education for students with intellectual disabilities. The nine-month planning period will meet three goals, culminating in a strategic plan from which a pilot program can be implemented:

Goal I: Educate key stakeholders about inclusion, intellectual disabilities, and post-secondary education for students with intellectual disabilities.

Goal II: Gather input from potential students, families, and additional stakeholders through a series of listening sessions and a statewide web-based survey.

Goal III: Conduct frequent meetings of a key stakeholder group to evaluate the information gained in response to the educational and data gathering initiatives.