

On Target

Informing Indiana About
Disability Issues

March | Volume 18 Number | Informing Indiana About Disability Issues

On Target is a monthly publication of the Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities.

We welcome your suggestions for newsletter content and ideas concerning the actions of the Council. *On Target* is made available in accessible formats upon request.

Suellen Jackson-Boner
Executive Director

Christine Dahlberg
Associate Director

Paul Shankland
Grants Manager

Pioneering advocates celebrate progress during Disability Awareness Month

This month, disability advocates from across the state are planning activities and events to celebrate Disability Awareness Month 2005. This year's theme is "Mix it up," and the poster and other collateral materials feature children, including one with a disability, working together at a neighborhood lemonade stand.

The Council sponsors Disability Awareness Month each year with the goal of increasing awareness and inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of community life. During the last 17 years, we have reached hundreds of thousands of Hoosiers through positive media coverage and a variety of grassroots awareness activities in schools, businesses, human services organizations and places of worship.

This year's theme encourages Hoosiers to involve many different types of people - including people with disabilities - in their communities. Alice Tinsley, a former Council board member and long-time disability advocate, has seen first-hand how Hoosiers today are more willing to "mix it up" than they were years ago.

"I had three children with disabilities, and people did not understand the challenges we faced. We

had to stand alone as parents and people with disabilities," Tinsley said. "But when people became aware of disability issues, they began to stand behind us, and we made progress."

Disability Awareness Month helps bring attention to what the Council and other advocacy organizations do all year long: educate Hoosiers about disability issues, change attitudes and behaviors about people with disabilities, and increase grassroots participation in disability activities. Increased awareness has led to tangible differences in the lives of people with disabilities and their families.

"Accessibility just didn't exist many years ago. Now, it's everywhere. Indiana has done a good job of making facilities more accessible and an outstanding job of reaching out to youngsters," said Muriel Lee, a former Council board member and pioneer of the Indiana disability rights movement.

Education advocate Amy Cook-Lurvey agreed. "Inclusion, independence and empowerment for all Americans with disabilities is now a recognized fact." As advocates move forward with new ideas and activities, there will also be new challenges ahead. But because of the progress that has been made in making Hoosiers aware of disabilities, no person should have to stand alone.

Tinsley said, "People with disabilities have learned to get out and start fighting for themselves - and that's the greatest thing I've seen."

Premature birth can lead to disability

About 25 percent of extremely premature babies win the fight for life. Of those who do survive, most grow up with some level of disability, according to research findings published in a

recent issue of the New England Journal of Medicine and reported by the Associated Press.

The British study, which examined children who had been born in the 22nd to 25th week of pregnancy, found that 80 percent had a disability by age 6. A full-term pregnancy is 37 to 42 weeks.

Premature births and their disability-related outcomes are on the rise nationwide as the average age of mothers increases and multiple births related to fertility treatments become more common. According to the March of Dimes, the rate of premature birth increased 29 percent from 1981 to 2002. One in eight babies is now born prematurely - about 1,300 premature births per day.

Digital appliances pose accessibility problems

In the last century, ovens, microwaves, washing machines and other appliances changed the way we live. Now, another change is taking place: Appliances are going digital. As technology becomes less expensive, flat-panel digital controls are replacing the dials and knobs previously found on appliances. While this new technology is popular, it also creates accessibility challenges for people who are blind or have vision impairments.

"With a microwave, you have a touchpad surface that you can mark with a tactile dot or contrasting color, but a dial is much easier," said Linda Scribner, senior blind services coordinator at the League for the Blind and Disabled in Fort Wayne. "In contrast, digital appliance displays are almost impossible to mark. And unless the display is really big or has a lot of contrast, a lot of folks just can't operate it."

The National Federation for the Blind recommends that people with vision impairments seek out the following features when choosing appliances with digital controls:

- Digital displays that can be navigated by touch or that include optional tactile overlays.
- Remote controls with tactile buttons.
- Buttons or controls that beep or make other sounds when pressed.

In development now - but not yet on the market - are voice prompters that link to appliances' central processors and speak each option aloud. As this technology becomes available, it may significantly reduce the accessibility challenges presented by digital appliances.

As you select Braille resources, start with Grade One texts and advance to Grade Two as your skills improve. Grade One Braille consists of the 26-letter alphabet and punctuation; Grade Two integrates contractions and abbreviations.

General Assembly considers disability-related legislation

During the first week of March, the General Assembly passed the halfway point of its session, when it is required to pass all bills out of their house of origin. Now, about 100 House bills are being considered in the Senate, and about 200 Senate bills are being considered in the House. Bills that were not passed in their house of origin are "dead" for this legislative session, but the language can be resurrected as amendments to other bills.

Commanding the most attention is the biennial budget bill, which passed the House along party lines and will determine funding for all state programs for the next two fiscal years. While the

bill does include appropriations for emergency waiver services for people with developmental disabilities, it limits Medicaid growth to 3 percent per year. In addition, the bill fails to provide funding to increase the number of Medicaid waiver slots available. There are currently more than 15,000 Hoosier families waiting to receive waiver services, according to the Arc of Indiana.

Other bills to watch

- Senate Bill 269 - Allows insurance companies to offer health insurance policies without complying with Indiana health insurance mandates. The bill, which was amended to apply only to businesses with 50 or fewer employees, passed the Senate 40 to 8.
- House Bill 1519 - Requires the Office of Medicaid Policy and Planning to adopt new rules concerning the criteria and process used to determine eligibility for developmental disability services. Although this bill died in the House, advocates are working to revive the language.
- House Bill 1188 - Calls for a review of the necessity and effectiveness of all state boards, committees, commissions and similar entities, including organizations that serve people with disabilities. The House rejected the bill 47 to 51, although the language could appear as an amendment to another bill.
- House Bill 1326 - Requires FSSA to develop new rules for home and community based care services, including more flexible waiver services. The bill passed the House 94 to 0.

The General Assembly has until the legislative deadline, April 29, to consider these and other bills related to disability issues. Visit www.in.gov/legislative for more information.

Federal issues include Medicaid, reauthorizations

The debate about changes to the Social Security program is dominating media coverage, but Congress is also considering other issues that will affect people with disabilities. In particular, proposed changes to the Medicaid program are commanding advocates' attention.

"Our main concern is that we want to make sure the idea of a Medicaid block grant doesn't gain momentum," said Kim Dodson, Arc of Indiana director of government relations and development. Block grants are opposed by many disability advocates because they would eliminate the federal entitlement to Medicaid.

In a recent speech, Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt said, "Some are concerned that we will propose a block grant system ... Not so. There will be no block grant system for Medicaid."

Leavitt also reaffirmed the importance of early intervention and home and community-based care for people with disabilities.

"We can ensure that seniors and people with disabilities get long-term care where they want it," Leavitt said. "Home care and community care can allow many Americans with disabilities to continue to live at home... Medicaid should not force these people to live in institutions. Just as importantly, we can serve more people."

The HHS secretary also said he is considering changes to the Medicaid program, including:

- Changing the way states purchase prescription drugs for Medicaid recipients.
- Closing loopholes that make Medicaid an "inheritance protection plan."

- Closing loopholes that allow states to shift costs to the federal government.

In addition to these proposed changes, disability advocates are watching congressional activity on important legislative reauthorizations, including TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and the Workforce Investment Act.

As these changes take shape, it will be important to maintain open communication with elected officials. If you need contact information, visit www.in.gov and click on the "Who's your legislator?" link.

Tax deadline approaching

The deadline to file tax returns is just weeks away, and resources are available to assist people with disabilities in filing their returns and applying for applicable tax credits.

Tax preparation assistance

If you need assistance in preparing your tax return or have tax-related questions, visit a Volunteer Information Tax Assistance (VITA) site in your community, often a local library. VITA volunteers are trained in the unique tax considerations of people with disabilities and can help you apply for the federal Earned Income Tax credit, if appropriate.

For more information about a VITA site in your community, call Helpline 2-1-1.

Indianapolis-area tax filers with disabilities this year will receive additional resources from the national TAX FACTS campaign. This national collaboration of public and private organizations is bringing financial education and tax preparation assistance to people with disabilities

at VITA sites in 26 cities, including Indianapolis.

Earned Income Tax Credit

The Earned Income Tax Credit is a federal income-tax credit for low-income workers. By reducing the amount of tax a person owes, the credit can lead to tax refunds. You may be eligible if:

- You have more than one qualifying child, and you earned less than \$34,458 (\$35,458 if married and filing jointly).
- You have one qualifying child, and you earned less than \$30,338 (\$31,338 if married and filing jointly).
- You do not have a qualifying child, and you earned less than \$11,490 (\$12,490 if married and filing jointly).

Relay Indiana creates Business Partners program

Relay Indiana, the statewide telephone service that enables people with hearing and speech disabilities to communicate with voice telephone users, has created the Relay Indiana Business Partners program to encourage businesses to make and accept Relay calls.

Relay Indiana Business Partners are listed in an online database and provided with educational materials explaining how to accept and make Relay Indiana calls. The program helps businesses communicate more easily with Hoosiers with disabilities. In addition, it gives people with disabilities a list of businesses that will be responsive to their needs.

If you are a Relay client, consider doing business with Relay business partners and encouraging business owners to sign up for the program. Visit

www.relayindiana.com to learn more.

Save the date!

The Annual Conference for People with Disabilities will be held Dec. 5-6, 2005.

Of Note

Register now for Attain conference Attain's 2005 conference, "Empowerment through Employment," will be held March 29 at the Indiana Convention Center. Activities will include a job fair, town hall meeting, educational workshops and a keynote luncheon with comedian Tanyalee Davis. For more information or to register, visit www.attaininc.org or contact Emily Dean at (317) 486-8808 (voice), (800) 528-8246 (voice) or edean@attaininc.org (e-mail).

Awareness Month evaluations requested

When your Disability Awareness Month activities draw to a close this month, please remember to complete and submit the evaluation form included with your materials order. The Council uses results from these evaluations to improve future Disability Awareness Month campaigns. Evaluations submitted by April 15 will be entered into a prize drawing. Please submit to Kim Dennison at (317) 631-6499 (fax) or 47 S. Pennsylvania St., Suite 500, Indianapolis, IN, 46204.

Indianapolis named runner-up in accessibility contest

Pasadena, Calif., has won the National Organization on Disability's fourth annual Accessible America competition. Indianapolis was a runner-up in the contest, which honors communities that serve as national models for their focus on disability issues and successful design of accessible programs, services and

facilities. For information about entering your community in next year's competition, contact Abbey Glenn at (202) 293-5960 (voice). The deadline is Oct. 31.

Indiana Governor's Planning
Council for People with Disabilities
150 West Market Street, Suite 628
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204

(317) 232-7770 voice
(317) 232-7771 TT
E-mail: GPCPD@gpcpd.org
Web site: www.state.in.us/gpcpd