

## **Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council Meeting Minutes November 13, 2025**

### **Council Member Attendees:**

Eric Evans, Wendy Andersen, Rachel Bussan, Kevin Harris, Julie Bergeson, George Thompson, Daryn Richardson, Aaron Swartz, Kevin Harris, Caitlin Owens, Jayde Henry, Mike Dierdorff, Lori Trujillo Roush, Amber Gale, Charlene Wyatt Sauer, Joshua Lawrence, Diane Brenneman, Dakota Caldwell

**Virtual Attendees:** Kimberly VanBeek, Mike Hoenig, Nicole Nosbisch, Casey Wilkinson

**Council Staff:** Brooke Lovelace, Carlyn Crowe, Lindsay Hommer

**Council Members Absent:** McLissa Lawson, Andrea Maher

**Members of the Public:** Dawn Kekstadt – HHS, Tonya Heiman – Iowa Total Care, Brooke Watson - Iowa Medicaid, Christine Kayser – Molina, Laura Leise – HHS, Skylar Hoffman – UCEDD intern

### **Call to Order:**

Council Chair Thompson called the Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) meeting to order on November 13, at 10:30 AM. A quorum was established.

### **Welcome and Introductions:**

All meeting attendees introduced themselves.

### **Agenda Item/Approval of Minutes and Agenda:**

- Minutes from the September 11<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved. Wyatt Sauer made a motion, Nosbisch seconded.
- Agenda for the November 13<sup>th</sup> meeting was approved. Bussan made a motion and it was seconded by Andersen.

### **Executive Committee (EC) Report:**

#### **Actions and News Since September and Summary of What was Discussed at EC Meeting**

##### **Final Budget Summary and Current Budget**

- The Executive Committee discussed the impact of the government shutdown on funding, noting that they are operating on the 2025 award while awaiting the 2026 notice of award, expected by the end of November.

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- They reviewed the final 2025 budget, which exceeded the budget by \$30,000 due to high HHS and personnel costs.
- The 2026 budget is expected to have more accurate budget projections.
- The Council was \$58,000 below the Admin Cap in 2025.
- The committee also addressed the potential move to the Lucas Building, but no offer has been made yet.
- They concluded by explaining how federal funds are being drawn down and allocated between 2025 and 2026 budgets.

## January Meeting

- The executive committee voted to hold January meetings remotely to reduce travel expenses and enable advocacy at the Hill during the legislative session.

## State Plan Update

- The committee discussed plans for a reception on January 28th and a Disability Employment Awareness Night at the Iowa Wolves game on February 7th, encouraging council members to attend. Link for Wolves tickets: [Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council](#)
- Bussan raised concerns about the sensory challenges of holding events in the Capitol rotunda.
- Thompson encouraged people to show up early to the Legislative Reception to speak with legislators on January 28<sup>th</sup>.
- Lovelace announced that the State Plan Committee would meet next week to review draft goals, with a vote scheduled for March to allow for public comment, and emphasized the importance of a quorum for the July meeting to finalize the plan.

## Testimonials for Annual Magazine

- The committee also discussed the need for council member testimonials for the annual magazine.
  - Owens, Wilkinson, Nosbisch, and Gale agreed to provide testimonials.

## Mentor/Mentee Opportunities

- There will be mentorship opportunities for new council members.
  - The members that have joined since March will be contacted by a seasoned Council member.
- If anyone would like to be a mentor or mentee, contact Thompson or Lovelace.

## Workplan

- Challenges were discussed with the targeted disparity goal and advocacy training in rural areas, noting they were still seeking a host for these efforts.
- The meeting focused on rural outreach initiatives and advocacy programs for young adults with developmental disabilities aged 18 to 26.
- Brenneman, who is retiring in January, encouraged people to nominate others for the Iowa Family Leadership Training Initiative.

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- The Talent Bank system transitioned to a new accessible platform called iappoint.

## **Updates from Medicaid:**

### *Director Grossman – Medicaid*

- Lee Grossman, the new Iowa Medicaid Director, introduced himself and outlined his priorities, which include rural health transformation, cost containment, and the Home Project.
- He discussed the projected Medicaid budget shortfall for the next fiscal year, attributing it to the expiration of one-time federal pandemic funding.
- Director Grossman emphasized the need for additional state funding or tough decisions if it is not available, and encouraged the DD Council to engage with the legislature on their priorities.
- Director Grossman explained that while Medicaid funding may decrease due to the expiration of COVID-related funds, Iowa will maintain its waiver programs, which are essential to supporting people with disabilities in their communities.
- He outlined three key areas where funding reductions could occur: service rates, eligibility, and covered benefits.
- The Director emphasized that avoiding reductions is the preferred outcome and stated that Iowa submitted an application for the Rural Health Transformation program, which could provide \$100 million to \$200 million annually for five years to expand healthcare access in rural areas.
  - The program aims to incentivize workforce recruitment and retention in rural areas, use of innovative technologies, and development of regional healthcare partnerships.
- Wyatt Sauer asked if any of the funds will be used to improving provider access for people on Medicaid.
  - Director Grossman explained that the Healthy Hometowns initiative aims to improve healthcare access in rural areas, including for Medicaid recipients and people with disabilities, by encouraging partnerships between local organizations and focusing on provider availability rather than specific populations.
  - He clarified that the initiative is not intended to dismantle critical access hospitals, but rather to strengthen their sustainability and access.
- Lawrence raised concerns about the competition between critical access hospitals and private hospitals for healthcare providers, suggesting that private hospitals should also be considered for critical access status to address the state's loss of providers.
  - Director Grossman acknowledged these challenges and emphasized the goal of fostering regional partnerships to optimize healthcare delivery networks without making value judgments about hospital types.

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- Director Grossman discussed the challenges and considerations around funding for rural hospitals, including the impact of privatization and the potential for cross-state partnerships.
- He emphasized the need to balance state funding with the goal of maintaining rural hospital access.
- Wilkinson raised concerns about cancer patient barriers, and Director Grossman outlined efforts to improve cancer prevention and treatment, including increased screenings and access to technology.
- Director Grossman also addressed the Medicaid Employment for People with Disabilities (MEPD) program, highlighting recent legislative changes and ongoing efforts to improve the program, such as fixing the online payment system.
- Crowe and others raised questions about data collection for MEPD and processing delays for employee approvals, which Director Grossman acknowledged and said he would investigate further.
- Lovelace mentioned to Director Grossman that it was disappointing that Disability was not mentioned in the Rural Transformation Grant proposal. The Council would like to be part of any implementation plan if possible.

- **Public Comment:**

None

### **Make Your Mark Review:**

*Emily Koss and Heather Grillot – Capture Management Solutions*

- The Make Your Mark Conference, organized by Capture Management, was a success with 249 attendees, marking the highest attendance since 2019.
- The event, themed "Game On," featured various games and activities, and was sponsored by The Arc of Iowa, which handled hotel accommodations and food for the talent show.
- The conference included a full exhibitor space with positive feedback from exhibitors, and volunteers played a crucial role in its execution.
- Attendance patterns and registration data was discussed, noting an increase in attendance this year.
- Emily Koss stated that having the conference on Thurs/Fri instead of Wed/Thurs may have helped attendance.
- They reviewed the budget, which remained break-even, and highlighted increased costs for attendee shirts and the need to explore more cost-effective options for next year.
- The Arc of Iowa grant provided funding for various expenses, including dinner, snacks, hotel rooms, and Hoyer lifts.
- The team noted that the budget was similar to the previous year and the grant

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provided by the Arc helped cover costs.

- They discussed positive feedback about keynote speakers Matthew Shapiro and Zach Mecham, as well as successful breakout sessions including legislative panels and hands-on activities.
- The importance of incorporating family members with disabilities in presentations was addressed.
- It was discussed to provide handouts and digital copies of slides to reduce paper waste.
- It was noted that there was high satisfaction with speakers, topics, and inclusivity, while identifying areas for improvement such as providing printed notes and increasing networking time.
- They discussed plans for the 2026 conference, with Wilkinson, Bussan, and Kris Graves volunteering to be on the planning committee.
- It was discussed to offer incentives for survey completion.
- Exhibitors and sponsors gave positive feedback, though some attendees suggested more time for vendor interactions.
- The team discussed feedback from a recent conference, noting that while the layout was compact, attendees appreciated the close proximity to vendors and the good flow of the event.
- Emily Koss was praised for her organization of volunteer packets, and the team acknowledged areas for improvement such as having more staff assist with food service and providing clearer guidance for volunteers when sessions end.
- Bussan shared research indicating a significant interest in mental health and psychological care, particularly for individuals with developmental disabilities, and suggested exploring this topic further in future conferences.

- **Public Policy Update:**

- The Public Policy Committee discussed their focus areas for 2026, including employment, education, community living, healthcare, and voting, as well as study issues on abuse and neglect in long-term care facilities.
- They highlighted the "Let Us Work Campaign," which aims to educate lawmakers and change policies to allow Iowans with disabilities to work without barriers. .
- The campaign is divided into two phases: a Fall Blitz to contact every Iowa legislator by December and a Capitol Blitz to maintain a daily presence at the Capitol during the legislative session in January through March.
  - Phase 1 of the Let Us Work campaign is the Fall Blitz.
    - This is happening now – December and the goal is to reach out to every legislator and let them know what this policy change means for Iowans with disabilities.
  - Phase 2 is the Capitol Blitz.

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- This is happening January – March and the goal is for disability advocates to have a presence every day of the legislative session at the Iowa State Capitol.
- The team plans to start organizing phase 2 Capitol visits early December, and try to secure funding for transportation.
- The committee emphasized the need for widespread participation to advocate and educate lawmakers. .
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- Members of the policy committee met with Representative Austin Harris, the new chair of the Health and Human Services Committee in the Iowa House, and he expressed interest in working on what was “Work Without Worry” last session.
- Crowe and Hoening discussed the fiscal implications of a Medicaid-related bill, with Hoening expressing confusion about state costs and earnings limitations.
- Andersen explained that the state might need to request a CMS waiver and outlined potential costs, including implementation expenses and the impact on tax contributions.
- Bussan suggested involving large employers and industry groups in advocacy efforts.
- The group discussed plans for the Capitol Blitz campaign, including training sessions and materials for advocates meeting with legislators.
- One focus was on gathering stories of Medicaid denial by Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) to present to legislators, particularly Charlie Thompson who chairs the Government Oversight Committee.
  - Wyatt Sauer shared that Charlie Thompson expressed interest in investigating MCO denials after hearing from Rep. Josh Turek, and requested stories to determine if denials are happening in bad faith. Link to submit stories: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/XJBP3P5>
  - The group discussed strategies to collect these stories through a form, with 15 responses so far, and planned to promote the initiative through social media and advocacy networks.
- The meeting also covered updates on the state budget deficit, federal budget reconciliation, and upcoming legislative events including a reception on January 28<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 -4:00 PM at the Iowa State Capitol.

## **Update on Division of Aging and Disability:**

*Dawn Kekstadt – HHS*

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- Kekstadt provided an update on Iowa's disability services system, which went live in July.
- She highlighted key milestones, including the stabilization of call volumes, increased use of options counseling, and the formation of advisory councils at all disability access points.
- Kekstadt also mentioned that district plans would be finalized and published in December, with priorities taking effect on January 1.
- Advisory councils will be used to gather information and engage stakeholders across districts for policy development.
- Kekstadt explained how these councils help set priorities and provide accountability, with plans to meet monthly initially and transition to every other month as the system stabilizes.
- The discussion also covered the success of the new program, serving over 3,000 people, including almost 1,000 new clients in information and assistance.

## **State Partner Updates and Council Member Updates:**

- Evans provided updates on recent organizational changes, including a reduction in force followed by the creation of new positions, and shared positive developments such as Bussan's co-authored book on autism experiences and Hugh Kelly's recognition by the State Rehab Council.
- Dierdorff announced that a play, "Uncommon Sense," is being published.
- Owens discussed the availability of free 90-minute self-paced suicide prevention training. Lovelace will post the access code for the free training on the DD Council Facebook page.
- Lawson provided an update on the Department of Education via email. It reads "The Department is working on our continuous improvement process. A review of special education data is completed and districts are assigned a level on a scale of 1-3. The level 2 & 3 districts are required to develop and implement a plan to address the concerns identified in the data review. At this time all districts have been notified of their designation and we are working to schedule meetings with them to begin identifying and developing their plans."
- Wilkinson shared information about a wheelchair accessibility initiative led by Robert Fisher, inviting collaboration among professionals. Wilkinson can provide his email to anyone that requests it.
- Wyatt Sauer emphasized the importance of personal outreach to increase awareness about the Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council.

## **Public Comment:**

None

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## **Adjourn:**

Bussan made a motion to adjourn, and Gale seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM.

## **Action Items:**