



Everything Everywhere All at Once

If you feel like there is a lot to **take action** on these days, that's by design. The Trump Administration has publicly said it is using a "Flood the Zone" strategy. "Flood the Zone" means doing a lot of things all at once so that people can't focus on or advocate for any one thing. It's like making so much noise that people can't hear what really matters. By making a lot of rule changes, signing dozens of executive orders, and pushing the limits on what is legal all at the same time, it becomes really hard for advocates and the public to be heard.

Across the country, disability services and civil rights protections are facing serious threats at the federal level. From proposed funding cuts to court challenges that could roll back decades of progress, **it is a critical time to stay informed, organize, and take action**. This issue focuses on what you need to know—and what you can do. We hope this makes it a bit easier to focus on the things that matter most to you.

DID YOU KNOW?

15% of students in the US get support under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)?
\$600 per resident. Iowa spends well below the \$900 national average on Medicaid services.
1 in 4 people lost Medicaid insurance when Arkansas passed work requirements.

EDUCATION: Section 504 Challenged in Courts

A recent court case (Texas v. Kennedy) challenged Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. This is the law that says schools and other places that get federal money cannot discriminate against people with disabilities. The outcome could limit the federal government's ability to enforce accessibility requirements in schools, health care, housing, and transportation. Seventeen states (including Iowa) signed on to this lawsuit, asking the courts to rule Section 504 is unconstitutional. The [Disability Rights and Education Defense Fund](#) has been watching this court case closely. More than 300 Iowans have sent emails through our [Take Action Center](#) to ask Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird to drop out of the lawsuit.

As of early May, the states have backed off the push to declare Section 504 unconstitutional. Instead, they are focusing on changing the Biden Administration's updated rules. These rules modernize Section 504 guidance and were developed with input from the disability community.

Why It Matters:

Millions of people with disabilities could be discriminated against in their community, particularly in schools. Students with disabilities already say they are not getting the help they need to be successful in school. **This shows how important it is to have strong laws (and people to enforce them) to make sure students with disabilities are treated fairly.** You can read more about how Section 504 affects Iowa children at iowacompass.org/work/section-504-student-protections/.

EDUCATION: Department Eliminated by Executive Order

President Trump signed an [executive order](#) on March 20 to eliminate the US Department of Education. One of the department's most important jobs is to make sure schools follow the law, including laws that protect students with disabilities. While states may have dropped their request to declare Section 504 unconstitutional, it will not matter if no one is enforcing those laws.

The [US Department of Education](#) was created in 1979 to make sure equal educational opportunities were available to all students, especially those with disabilities. Since the department was created by Congress, it takes an act of Congress to eliminate it. **That is why a judge ruled the President did not have the authority to eliminate the Department of Education by executive order.**

The President also ordered a 'reduction in force' at the Department. That means thousands of people lost their jobs after the executive order was signed. **In fact, two out of every three department employees lost their jobs, including staff attorneys who defend the rights of students with disabilities.** Education Secretary Linda

McMahon also stopped funding and contracts for special education research, workforce development, and other student services. The judge's ruling also said the jobs need to be reinstated - but will they come back to work?

Why It Matters:

If the department is shut down or if there are no people there to enforce the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), it could be harder to protect the rights of students with disabilities. Families might struggle more to get services for their kids, from delays in evaluations to reduced support for individualized education plans (IEPs). There may not be a way for families' concerns to be heard and resolved if schools are not meeting their student's needs. **The result is fewer people checking to make sure schools are following the law and students with disabilities are getting the accommodations they deserve.**

Supporters say that local governments are in the best position to manage education and funding, instead of a large federal agency. This means states will need to provide more funding for education or cut programs and services. Currently, Iowa gets \$2,170 per student in funding from the US Department of Education. The amount per student varies by state.

EDUCATION: Funding at Risk

Congress is also considering big budget cuts to special education services. These cuts would mean fewer resources for classrooms, therapists, and support personnel. Following the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) depends on funding from Congress. Schools are already operating with flat or reduced funding due to the "continuing resolutions" that have funded our federal government over the past decade. The Trump Administration has now proposed a **15% cut (\$15 billion)** to the US Department of Education. Cuts to vocational rehabilitation services are also possible (it is in the US Department of Education's budget).

Iowa's vocational rehabilitation program gets most of its funding from the federal government. These services put people with disabilities to work through job development and training, starting with transition programs in high school.

Why It Matters:

Without funding and staff, the US Department of Education cannot do its job and make sure students with disabilities have access to "fair and appropriate public education." That's often called "FAPE." Schools may delay services, freeze hiring, or cut programs that support inclusive education. Families may see longer wait times for evaluations, reduced access to inclusion supports, increased placements in separate classrooms or schools, inconsistent enforcement of IEP services, and lack of access to services like speech, occupational, and physical therapy. Some rural districts, in particular, are struggling to find and keep qualified special educators.

Without strong federal pressure or accountability, students with disabilities may fall behind. This will make it harder for them to work and live independently when they are adults.

Bottom line for Education: These changes could make it harder for students with disabilities to get the support and equal access they are legally promised.

MEDICAID: Federal HHS Changes Could Hurt Disability Services

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has introduced a plan to restructure Medicaid, shifting more control to states. **While presented as a cost-saving measure, this approach could reduce coverage and services for people with disabilities.** This puts home and community based services (HCBS) at risk. The Administration for Community Living (ACL), the federal agency that funds disability and aging services, has been targeted for elimination.

The ACL oversees critical programs like state developmental disabilities councils (including the Iowa DD Council), disability rights organizations (including Disability Rights Iowa), university centers for excellence in developmental disabilities (including the University of Iowa UCEDD), independent living centers and family caregiver support. **If eliminated, states would lose coordinated federal support for community integration, self-advocacy and systems change.**

According to HHS, the restructuring will eliminate thousands of employees, including those with expertise on disability and aging. It also creates more bureaucracy by spreading these programs across other agencies, including Administration for Children and Families and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The ACL and the programs it oversees were set up to improve systems that help people with disabilities. They allow people to get services and have their rights protected.

Thanks to ACL's work, the number of people with disabilities moving from state-run institutions to community living went from **194,650 people to 18,807 people** in 30 years.

MEDICAID: Congress Working on Big Changes

Many people with disabilities depend on Medicaid for health insurance, personal care and help living independently. One in five Americans relies on Medicaid for their health care needs. **The President's proposed budget is now being considered by Congress - and it includes big cuts to Medicaid.** Iowa is expected to lose as

much as [\\$713 million](#) over the next ten years. This means:

- Fewer people will have Medicaid for health insurance.
- Fewer services may be covered.
- People might lose access to home care
- People may need to move into institutions if community services aren't available.
- Longer wait times to get approved for a waiver or receive waiver services.

This would be a step backwards. Many disability rights advocates have fought for years to help people live in their own homes—rather than in institutions. Medicaid, particularly the “optional” waivers, helps them do this. A diagram of the number of people living in institutions clearly shows a dramatic drop over the last 30 years, demonstrating the hard work Congress and various Presidents have made to move toward community living.

That progress could be erased if Congress acts on these changes to Medicaid.

On May 22, the US House of Representatives passed the President Trump's “[One Big Beautiful Bill Act](#),” which includes big changes to Medicaid and more than \$600 billion in funding cuts. The [Congressional Budget Office](#) estimates that 7.6 million Americans will lose Medicaid coverage if this becomes law. That means 7.6 million Americans will become uninsured. It is important to note that these changes apply mostly to the people who became eligible for a slimmed-down version of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. This is called the Medicaid “expansion population,” covering adults up to age 64 whose income is at or below 133% of the federal poverty level. For a two-person family, that is just \$28,130/year. The bill also:

- **Requires covered individuals work**, volunteer, or go to school at least 80 hours/month beginning in 2026. The Iowa Legislature passed an identical requirement this year for our expansion population (Iowa Health & Wellness Plan, or IAHP), with exceptions for some caregivers and individuals who meet the SSA criteria for disability. Half of the expected “Medicaid savings” comes from the work reporting requirement, meaning these individuals will lose Medicaid coverage.
- **Lowers the federal Medicaid match rate.** The Federal government currently pays 90% of the cost for this population. Lowering this match rate would mean Iowa taxpayers would pick up the extra cost (or end the program). Iowa's regular match rate is just over 64%, so the impact on our state budget would be dramatic.
- **Requires up to \$35 as copay for services.** Currently IAHP members do not have copays.
- **Adds more frequent eligibility checks.** Many advocates wonder how this will save money, since it increases administrative costs. Right now, states must check eligibility every 12 months. The bill requires checks every six months, beginning October 1, 2027. More frequent checks may increase Medicaid “churn” (losing coverage then reapplying within a year), which reduces access to care,

adds to enrollees' paperwork hassles, and increases administrative costs for state Medicaid agencies, health plans, and providers.

Overall, the Medicaid cuts are supposed to save \$625 billion. Joan Alker, Director of Georgetown University's Center for Children and Families, cut to the chase. "There are very big cuts to Medicaid here, and states will not have any good choices to make up these lost federal funds. States have to either raise taxes, cut people off, or restrict access and benefits."

That could make it hard to fund other Medicaid programs, including waiver services. For people with disabilities, Medicaid is far more than traditional health care. It covers supports that private insurance and Medicare do not, including personal care attendants, nursing services, respite for family caregivers, supported employment, housing-related services, transportation and therapies for children and adults.

These services are often what make it possible for people with disabilities to live in their own homes, go to school, work in the community and participate in public life. In Iowa, nearly 20% of the state's population relies on Medicaid, including over 80,000 Iowans with disabilities. Iowa already faces challenges with managed care, long waitlists for waiver services and workforce shortages. Any federal cuts or limitations would strain the system further.

The loss or reduction of HCBS funding could lead to increased institutionalization, family burnout and reduced independence for thousands of Iowans. Providers already struggle to keep their doors open. More cuts may mean fewer people provide these services.

All four of Iowa's US Representatives voted for the bill, which passed by only one vote (215-214). There is still time for changes - the US Senate must agree to these changes before the bill heads to the President's desk.

The time to advocate is now!

Contact [Senator Grassley](#) and [Senator Ernst](#) to share your story about what Medicaid means to you.

You can take action on any issue you read about in this issue at: iowaddcouncil.org/take-action-center

Carlyn's Corner

By Carlyn Crowe, Iowa DD Council Public Policy Manager

At the Iowa DD Council a big part of our work is focused on the Iowa Legislative Session. But there is a lot of work between legislative sessions. We reach out to advocates to listen and learn about changes they would like to see in Iowa. Our Council members and staff then develop public policy priorities based on your suggestions.

This means that our policy work and your advocacy work is a year-round job. It is actually more important to contact your legislators during the summer and fall. During this time they are listening to their constituents (you), gathering information and considering bills they want to introduce in the next session. When you meet or contact your legislators during this time, they have more time to listen to your story and consider whether the changes you want to see could be made into a bill.

And let's not forget our members of Congress—those we elect to go to Washington, D.C. to represent Iowa at the Federal level. Our Senators Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst, and Representatives Randy Feenstra, Ashley Hinson, Mariannette Miller-Meeks and Zach Nunn work year round. They spend most of their time in the nation's capital but return to Iowa regularly to meet with constituents and work in their district offices. As you may have already read here, the last few months have been full of proposed changes that could have a big impact on Iowans with disabilities.

If you are used to setting aside your advocacy t-shirt until the next legislative session, think again! This year it is more important than ever to be in contact with our members of Congress.

While the legislative session may be done for 2025, our work goes on in other ways and yours should too. I hope you will consider the issues outlined here and contact our Senators Grassley and Ernst and your member of Congress in the House and make your voice heard. We may work year round on advocacy, but **it is YOUR VOICE and YOUR STORY that makes the difference.**

Please use your voice this summer, and let us know how we can help.