

January 2024

National Autism Coordinator Update

Committees, News, and Events



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White House Updates

Vice President Harris announces \$285M to boost mental health counselors in schools

- Vice President Harris announced that the Biden administration is investing \$285 million to help schools hire and train more than 14,000 mental health counselors. The \$285 million comes from the Safer Communities Act, which is the bipartisan gun violence prevention legislation President Biden signed into law in June 2022. The funding will be “the single largest investment in student mental health in history,” the VP Harris said. Read the [White House transcript of remarks here](#). (Read: [article on The Hill](#))

American Rescue Plan Investments in Home and Community-Based Care Services for Millions of Seniors and Americans with Disabilities Reach About \$37 Billion Across All 50 States

- The White House is announcing actions and new data reflecting this administration’s commitment to expanding access to long-term care and investing in our direct care workforce. A pandemic relief package that was expected to funnel \$12.7 billion to states to bolster Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS) actually distributed nearly three times that much in extra funding. In 2021, Congress approved a temporary funding bump for HCBS as part of the American Rescue Plan, a \$1.9 trillion bill passed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The extra dollars came in the form of a 10% rise in the federal government’s share of spending on the program between April 2021 and March 2022. About \$37 billion has been distributed across all 50 states for the Medicaid program, which many people with developmental disabilities rely on for support to live in the community. This decision to expand access to home-based care and invest in care workers underscores the need for the President’s proposed investment of sustained funding to improve and expand HCBS. Read [White House Fact Sheet here](#).

A Proclamation on International Day of Persons with Disabilities, 2023

- On December 1, 2023, President Biden issued a Proclamation on International Day of Persons with Disabilities, where the Biden Administration recommitted to building a world where disabled people everywhere are treated with the dignity and respect that

they deserve and are afforded an equal shot at achieving their dreams. [Read full Proclamation here.](#)

Federal Committees Updates

Interagency Committee on Disability Research (ICDR)

Managed by the Administration for Community Living

- An all-federal committee established under the 1973 Rehabilitation Act to promote coordination and collaboration among federal departments and agencies conducting disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research programs.
- Recent activities include:
 - ICDR's Executive Committee met on December 5, 2023, and discussed topics for the 2024 Lunch & Learn Webinar series. The committee also heard updates from the Government-Wide Inventory/Interagency Rehabilitation and Disability Research Portfolio work group and the Subcommittee on Disability Statistics. A meeting summary is [available online](#).

RAISE Family Caregiving Advisory Council (FCAC)

Managed by the Administration for Community Living

- The RAISE Family Caregivers Act directs the Secretary of HHS to develop a national family caregiving strategy. The RAISE Act also directed the establishment of the FCAC, a federal advisory committee charged with providing recommendations to the HHS Secretary on effective models of both family caregiving and support to family caregivers, as well as improving coordination across federal government programs. The [Administration for Community Living](#) (ACL) manages this council.
- Recent activities include:
 - A joint meeting was held September 19, 2023 along with the Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, focused on an analysis of public comments on the *2022 National Strategy to Support Family Caregivers* and updates from federal agencies about their progress in implementing the strategy. Meeting summary can be [viewed here](#).

National Council on Disability (NCD)

- Independent federal agency charged with advising the President, Congress, and other federal agencies regarding policies, programs, practices, and procedures that affect people with disabilities.
- Recent activities include:
 - NCD Chairman Andres Gallegos passed away on December 1st, 2023. A 14-year veteran of the U.S. Air Force, Gallegos first joined the Council in 2018, and became chairman in 2021. Here is the [press release](#) from his office.

- On December 19, 2023, NCD [submitted a letter to the Census Bureau](#) on a proposed change to disability questions in the American Community Survey.
- A NCD Council meeting was held on November 16-17, 2023, in Providence, Rhode Island, and virtually on Zoom. The meeting focused on housing and transportation issues. Additional information, including the agenda, is [available here](#).
- In October 2023, NCD released a report on [The Impact of Income and Asset Limits on People with Disabilities](#), which analyzed how asset limits present barriers to financial independence and self-determination for people with disabilities.
- In October 2023, NCD released a report on [Analysis of HEADs Up Act to Support Cost Estimates](#), seeking to determine the number of people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) who require specialized medical and dental care to support efforts to estimate the cost implications of the Healthcare Extension and Accessibility for Developmentally Disabled and Underserved Population (HEADs UP) Act (HR 3380).

Federal Partners in Transition (FPT)

Managed by U.S. Department of Labor

- An all-federal workgroup that was formed in 2005 with representatives from several federal departments and agencies, including ED, HHS, DOL, and SSA, to support all youth, including youth with disabilities, in successfully transitioning from school to adulthood.
- Recent activities include:
 - Steering Committee Meetings were held on December 14th and January 18th. The committee is continuing its work on a draft FPT Strategic Plan.

Interdepartmental Serious Mental Illness Coordinating Committee (ISMICC)

Managed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

- The ISMICC was established in 2017 by the 21st Century Cures Act. The ISMICC is a federal advisory committee that reports to the Secretary, Congress, and any other relevant federal department or agency on advances in serious mental illness (SMI) and serious emotional disturbance (SED), research related to the prevention, diagnosis, intervention, and treatment and recovery of SMIs, SEDs, and advances in access to services and supports for adults with SMI or children with SED.
- No new updates since the committee's [October 2023 meeting](#).

Disability Advisory Committee (DAC)

Managed by the Federal Communications Commission

- The DAC is a federal advisory committee that provides advice and recommendations to the FCC on a wide array of disability issues, including communications and video programming access.
- The DAC will meet next on January 30th, 2024 at 9am ET. The committee is expected to discuss best practices for TRS, and the use of AI for live captioning. The [video and agenda](#) are available online.

President’s Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities (PCPID)

Managed by the Administration for Community Living

- The PCPID is an advisory committee that aims to provide advice and assistance to the President of the U.S. and the HHS Secretary on a broad range of topics that impact people with intellectual disabilities as well as the field of intellectual disabilities, with the goal of improving the quality of life experienced by people with intellectual disabilities by upholding their full citizenship rights, independence, self-determination, and lifelong participation in their communities. [Here is a fact sheet](#) detailing the committee’s duties to the President.
- No new updates since the committee’s [May 2023 meeting](#).

National Advisory Committee on Individuals with Disabilities and Disasters (NACIDD)

Managed by the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response

- NACIDD is an advisory committee that evaluates issues and programs and provides findings, advice, and recommendations to support and enhance all-hazards public health and medical preparedness, response activities, and recovery related to meeting the unique needs of individuals with disabilities. The NACIDD will advise the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) on actions HHS can take before, during, and after disasters and emergencies to meet the unique needs of individuals with disabilities.
- No new updates since the committee’s [September 2023 meeting](#).

Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM)

Managed by the Federal Transit Administration

- Established in 2004, the CCAM is a Federal interagency council that works to coordinate funding and provide expertise on human services transportation for three targeted populations: people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals of low income. The CCAM works at the Federal level to improve Federal coordination of transportation resources and to address barriers faced by States and local communities when coordinating transportation.
- Recent activities include:
 - On December 14, 2023, the FTA held a webinar about the current Innovative Coordinated Access and Mobility funding opportunity. The program supports partnerships between health, transportation, and other service providers to

improve transportation access for underserved communities. Potential applicants to the Fiscal Year 2023 [Innovative Coordinated Access and Mobility Grants](#) are welcome to view the [presentation](#) or watch the [recording](#) (Passcode: =m1z9R.w). Applications are due February 13, 2024.

Federal Department and Agency Updates

HHS Releases the 2022 Report to Congress on Supportive Services for Individuals with Autism

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has released the [2022 Report to Congress on Supportive Services for Individuals with Autism](#). This report was requested by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations in [House Report 117-96](#). It describes supportive services that, in addition to healthcare services, may be beneficial for improving outcomes for autistic individuals and their families. View the [full report here](#).

OMB Releases Digital Accessibility Guidance

- The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) recently released updated guidance requiring federal agencies to improve their digital accessibility for people with disabilities. Nearly half of the most popular federal government websites are not fully accessible, which prevents access to critical services and information for millions of Americans. The new guidance establishes the required leadership, goals, and a renewed focus to improve digital accessibility across the federal government. Read the [policy guidelines from OMB here](#), or the [White House announcement](#).

GSA Issues Government-wide Section 508 Assessment to Congress

- The General Services Administration (GSA) recently issued a landmark report to Congress, which highlights the need for substantial improvements to federal Section 508 compliance. This report, the [FY23 Government-wide Section 508 Assessment](#), evaluates reporting entities' adherence to the criteria established by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in coordination with GSA, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), and the U.S. Access Board (USAB). The report also contains summaries of conclusions derived from the analysis of data, as well as recommendations to Congress for further action to improve Section 508 implementation across the federal government.

FEMA Releases Updated Training Course on Including People with Disabilities in Disaster Operations

- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Office of Disability Integration and Coordination (ODIC) has released a new version of its training course: Including People with Disabilities in Disaster Operations. The course is designed for all personnel involved in disaster operations. It provides an introductory overview of information and

strategies on how to include people with disabilities during mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. The course focuses on the difference between access and functional needs, equity and equality, and the disaster cycle as applied to people with disabilities, among other modules. The course is live now and can be accessed on [FEMA.gov](https://www.fema.gov). The self-paced course should take two hours to complete.

[The Air Up There Podcast: “Neurodiversity: A Superpower”](#)

A podcast episode from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

- This podcast episode features Neurodiversity Works, a non-profit organization that equips neurodiverse students for a career in the drone industry. The co-founder, Jason San Souci, explores the concept of neurodiversity and the benefits in the drone industry and aerospace community.

[HHS-ED Policy Statement on the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs](#)

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and U.S. Department of Education (ED) announced the release of an updated joint-policy statement on supporting the inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs. The [HHS-ED Policy Statement on the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs](#) builds upon a statement originally released in 2015 and includes a renewed commitment and urgency, as children with disabilities continue to face barriers accessing and fully participating in inclusive early childhood programs. The statement reiterates expectations for inclusive early childhood settings and updates recommendations for state and local agencies that implement Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) programs, Head Start, child-care, home visiting, preschool, and public schools to increase inclusive early learning opportunities for all children.

[Department of Labor Announces Selection of 12 States, District of Columbia to Join Initiative Expanding Opportunities for People with Disabilities](#)

- The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) announced that 12 states and the District of Columbia will participate as “core states” in fiscal year 2024 in its National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network (NEON) initiative. This project would enable government agencies in these states to receive consulting, capacity-building support, and ongoing mentoring to increase competitive integrated employment (CIE) for people with disabilities. The recently selected states are California, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Tennessee, in addition to the District of Columbia. The selections will complement existing partnerships between the department’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and six state intermediary organizations that joined NEON. [Read more here.](#)

[Monica Bertagnolli, M.D., takes the helm at NIH](#)

- Monica M. Bertagnolli, M.D., was confirmed as the 17th director of the National Institutes of Health. She is the first surgeon and the second woman to hold the position. Nominated by President Biden, Dr. Bertagnolli was confirmed on a bipartisan basis by the U.S. Senate on November 7. She transitioned from her role as the 16th director of the National Cancer Institute, a position she has held since October 2022. Dr. Bertagnolli will also serve as a new member of the IACC. Read [press release here](#).

[U.S. Census Bureau: Feedback on proposed American Community Survey content changes](#)

- The U.S. Census Bureau collected written comments on a proposed revision of the American Community Survey and Puerto Rico Community Survey. This included proposed revisions to a series of six disability questions. [Over 12,000 comments were received](#), and the Census Bureau is working to get them posted by the end of January. View the [archived notice on Federal Register](#) for more information.

Non-Governmental Activities and Updates

[Sixteen States Selected for State Respite Summit](#)

- The National Academy for State Health Policy (NASHP) announced that 16 states will be attending a State Respite Summit in Washington, DC on February 6–7, 2024. The Summit will convene state teams interested in improving access to high quality respite services for beneficiaries and their family caregivers. These teams will discuss key issues with experts, exchange strategies and insights with their peers, and have a dialogue with federal officials who are working to improve access to respite care.

[UN Observance of International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#)

- On December 1, 2023, the United Nations held a commemorative event celebrating International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The discussion was structured around five pillars of sustainable development – People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships – with a special focus on the priority areas identified in the *SDG Progress Report of 2023*, in the outcome document of the recent SDG Summit, in policy briefs prepared for the Summit for the Future and in the forthcoming *UN Disability and Development Report 2023*. Video recording of the event can be [accessed here](#).