

Shaping the Future of Brain Injury



Brain Injury Advisory Council

Celebrating Nebraska's Accomplishments 2009-2013

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is a serious public health problem in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports approximately 1.7 million people sustain a TBI annually, and each year TBI contributes to a substantial number of deaths and cases of permanent disability. A TBI is caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain. Most TBIs are mild and their effects diminish over time, but even a mild TBI can result in permanent cognitive, physical and behavioral changes. Individuals with moderate to severe injuries may require life-long supports for housing, work and community living.

Recognizing the large number of individuals and families in Nebraska still struggling to access appropriate services to meet their needs, the Brain Injury Advisory Council remains committed to building a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, easily accessible system of care for individuals experiencing brain injury and to ensuring awareness and training for partners in the system.

Since 2009, Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has served as lead agency for a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) TBI Implementation Partnership Grant, which provides funding for states to build infrastructure and create systems change to better serve their citizens with brain injuries. The Brain Injury Advisory Council advises VR, the Nebraska Department of Education, Special Education, and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in implementing grant goals and those of the state Brain Injury Action Plan.

The Council is pleased to highlight the following accomplishments which are shaping the future of brain injury in Nebraska.

Tiffany Armstrong
Chair, Brain Injury Advisory Council

Keri Bennett
VR Program Director for Acquired Brain Injury
Project Director, Nebraska TBI Implementation Partnership Grant

Brain Injury Advisory Council

Tiffany Armstrong, Chair	Gretna
Susan Buettner	Long Term Care Administrator, Division of Medicaid and Long Term Care, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Lincoln
Tiffany Davis	Social Worker/Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit, Good Samaritan Hospital, Kearney
Rose Dymacek	Special Populations Office, Nebraska Department of Education, Lincoln
Mary Gordon	Developmental Disabilities Council Director, Nebraska Health and Human Services, Lincoln
Gary Hausmann	Blair
Michelle Hawley-Grieser	Lincoln
Brett Hoogeveen	Director, Contracting and Provider Relations, Quality Living, Inc., Omaha
Karen Hux	Instructor, University of Nebraska, Lincoln
Dale Johannes	Lincoln
Marylouise (ML) Lehman	North Platte
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Frank J. Velinsky	Caretech, Inc., Omaha
Tiffany Verzal	Lincoln
Judy Vohland	Director of Community Services, Nebraska VR, Grand Island
Technical Advisors	Tania Diaz, Disability Rights Nebraska, Lincoln, Margaret Jensen, Early Development Network, Norfolk Victoria Rasmussen, Hotline for Disability Services, Lincoln, Lori Wardlow, Nebraska/Iowa VA Health Care Systems, Lincoln

★ Brain Injury Registry Follow Up

In 2008, the Nebraska Legislature passed LB 928, the Brain Injury Registry Act, which requires physicians, psychologists, hospitals and rehabilitation centers to report diagnosed brain injuries to DHHS, Division of Public Health. The legislation also requires that information be sent to individuals with reported brain injuries to access necessary and appropriate services related to the injury. This follow-up activity is carried out under an agreement between VR and DHHS with funding from the TBI grant.



Callers have told us:

“I had not put two and two together until I got the letter. It finally made sense why my son had started to struggle in school.”

“It was nice to finally find someone that understands what I am going through.”

“ So thankful, thought it was dementia.”

The follow-up letter and brochure sent to each individual newly listed on the Brain Injury Registry includes information on brain injury signs and symptoms and contact information for the Brain Injury Association of Nebraska. Since June 1, 2008 more than 44,000 letters have been mailed. For many individuals, this follow-up contact has resulted in life-changing connections to vital services and supports.

Letter recipients request information on:

- Housing
- Employment
- Education
- Case management
- Assistive devices
- Counseling
- Why they received the letter

★ Brain Injury Association of Nebraska

The Brain Injury Association of Nebraska (BIA-NE) is the voice of brain injury in the state. Understanding the need for a grass-roots advocacy organization to speak collectively for individuals with brain injury, the Council prioritized grant funding for organizational development and technical support for the volunteer-operated group, which became a Brain Injury Association of America affiliate in 2009.

Under the direction of Executive Director Kate Kulesher Jarecke, the BIA-NE raises public awareness, provides education and training and offers support for individuals and families facing daily challenges due to brain injury. The BIA-NE:

- ★ Serves as the state TBI Ombudsman office, offering advocacy and assistance in navigating service systems
- ★ Sends Brain Injury Network email updates on state and national educational events, resources and brain injury-related news
- ★ Coordinates the Annual Brain Injury Conference and other statewide training events, connecting individuals with brain injury, caregivers and professionals to the best education and resources the state has to offer
- ★ Sponsors annual Academy of Certified Brain Injury Specialist (ACBIS) preparation and certification classes for qualified professionals in brain injury rehabilitation and community-based programs
- ★ Facilitates local support groups for individuals and families seeking counsel and encouragement from others with similar experiences

The Brain Injury Association of Nebraska is creating a better future for all Nebraskans through brain injury prevention, research, education, and advocacy.

★ Concussion Awareness Act



Nebraska's Concussion Awareness Act, LB 260 passed with no opposition in April 2011, due to the efforts of the BIA-NE members and the Brain Injury Network. This law affects all youth sports, not only high school athletics. The BIA-NE partnered early with DHHS to identify appropriate training resources for coaches, athletic trainers and other youth sports personnel, preparing for the law to go into effect in July 2012. The law's requirements regarding education, removal from play and return to play will help to protect young athletes from the effects of multiple concussions and the sometimes fatal, Second Impact Syndrome. This key legislation is already raising public awareness of brain injury across the state. More information is available at the DHHS website: <http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/concussion/Pages/Home.aspx>

★ Federal TBI Program Awards



The Nebraska Department of Education, VR and the Council's Task Force on Children and Youth were recognized in 2011 with two awards from HRSA's Federal TBI Program for a grant-funded pilot completed in collaboration with a pediatric clinic on screening children ages 0-4 years for TBI.

The "Collaboration and Coalition Building" award and the "Most Popular State Agency Grant Product" award highlighted the excellent work of the task force members in creating and piloting a screening tool and educational brochure for parents to help identify symptoms of TBI in their young children and find appropriate treatment and resources.



Alexis Verzal (left) and Olivia Grieser (right) are daughters of Council members. As mothers of children with brain injuries they encouraged parents to complete the safe child screen and return it to their child's classroom teacher, hoping the information would result in more families gaining the access to services.



★ Veterans Brain Injury Task Force

The Council and the BIA-NE jointly sponsor the work of Nebraska's Veterans Brain Injury Task Force, uniting representatives from veteran service organizations, state and federal agencies, community-based programs and the military to increase awareness of TBI, offer training, and connect veterans with TBI to resources in their communities. Task force members developed an exceptional workshop for service professionals entitled "Responding to the Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Needs of Veterans Returning from Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom", repeating it eleven times across the state.

The task force, BIA-NE, the Council and Nebraska Educational Television (NETV) partnered with several veteran organizations to produce and air the program "Healing On The Homefront: Brain Injury and PTSD" in November 2011. It tells the story of Trevor Stryker, a Nebraska marine who is living with brain injury and PTSD. The program aired on NETV several times in 2011 and can be accessed on the Council's website.

★ Traumatic Brain Injury Needs and Resources Assessment

In 2010, the Brain Injury Advisory Council partnered with DHHS and the BIA-NE to complete a comprehensive TBI Needs and Resources Assessment, describing the “state of the state” for brain injury in Nebraska:

- ✓ The state’s TBI population, incidence and prevalence rates
- ✓ Service needs of individuals with brain injury and their families
- ✓ Existing services and supports, service gaps and system barriers

An estimated 36,527 individuals are living with TBI related disabilities in Nebraska*

The greatest perceived barriers to accessing needed services are:

- * A lack of awareness and knowledge about brain injury (among the general population and among service professionals in particular)
- * Limited funding resources for TBI related services and inadequate knowledge of the resources that do exist
- * The absence of specialized case management and resource facilitation for individuals with brain injury

The executive summary and full report are available at the Council's website.

* The CDC’s National Center for Injury Prevention and Control estimates 5.3 million U.S. citizens (2% of the population) are living with a disability as a result of a TBI. The CDC’s estimated 2% prevalence rate applied to Nebraska’s 2010 population provides a conservative estimated prevalence for Nebraska of 36,527 individuals living with a TBI related disability.

★ Nebraska Brain Injury Action Plan

The Council was challenged in 2012 to study the Needs and Resources Assessment results and progress made on goals and objectives outlined in the previous Action Plan, adopted in 2007. Council members committed to the planning process, developing a vision for the next five years and a mission statement to guide them.

The Council looks forward to working with its partners and stakeholders to build better futures for Nebraskans with brain injury and their families.

Action Plan goals for 2013-2018 are to:

- ★ Increase awareness and knowledge about brain injury
- ★ Increase access to community resources for individuals with brain injury
- ★ Increase funding for services
- ★ Promote individualized services for people with brain injury

More information on the Brain Injury Action Plan goals and progress will be available at the Council’s website:

www.braininjury.ne.gov

The mission of the Nebraska Brain Injury Advisory Council is to advocate for the best possible system of support for individuals with brain injury by promoting prevention, awareness, education, research and effective public policy

Nebraska Brain Injury Advisory Council

www.braininjury.ne.gov

For more information about the Brain Injury Advisory Council or HRSA TBI Implementation Partnership Grant contact Keri Bennett, 308/865-5012 or keri.bennett@nebraska.gov

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