

Nebraska Brain Injury Council (BIAC) History and Vision

(Some history references are excerpted or paraphrased from *The Nebraska State Plan for Systematic Services for Individuals with Brain Injuries and Their Families*, 2002).

A New Population of Individuals with Disabilities. During the 1980's and 1990's, the numbers of persons surviving brain trauma increased dramatically nationwide. This was reflected in significant increases in the numbers of Nebraskans with brain injuries. This initially led to a new population of people with disabilities living in a context in which the disability was not officially recognized, funds for services were not clearly available, professionals were not trained to recognize and serve their needs and few resources were available for services and supports.

Advocacy to Recognize this "New" Disability. This increased incidence of traumatic brain injury (TBI) prompted survivors of brain injury and their family members to organize and advocate for services to meet their needs. This advocacy occurred largely through the efforts of the Nebraska Head Injury Association, which established support groups across the state to provide information and support. They also advocated for improved service delivery.

Developing Strategies for Systems Change. Needs assessments and surveys conducted in 1995 and 2001, and results from a "think tank" meeting conducted in 1998 informed development of Nebraska's first draft State Plan and laid the foundation for federal grant opportunities that funded future service expansion and systems change initiatives. *The Nebraska Plan for Systematic Services for Individuals with Brain Injuries and their Families* was finalized in 2002.

Federal Grant Opportunities. The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Office of Special Education received two one-year planning grants from the Health Resources Services Administration, Maternal Child Health Bureau (HRSA/MCHB) for 2000-01 and 2001-02. Accomplishments included legislation in 2000-01 for state matching funds to sustain the Head and Spinal Cord Injury Registry through the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). A 15-member TBI Advisory Board was authorized in state statute and created in June 2002. During the two-year planning phase, the TBI Advisory Board led activities to ensure that the required four core components of a culturally competent state system for TBI services were established:

- a lead agency
- an advisory board
- a statewide needs and resources assessment
- a statewide action plan

In August 2002, Nebraska received the first of several TBI Implementation Partnership Grants from the Federal TBI Program located in HRSA/MCHB with NDE's Office of Special Education serving as lead agency.

In 2008, Governor Dave Heineman designated Nebraska VR as lead agency for the grant. Nebraska VR also assumed sponsorship and support of the statewide council which serves as an advisory body, guiding implementation of the State Plan goals and federal grant activities. Recognizing the need to represent the interests of Nebraskans with all acquired brain injuries (not only TBI), the members voted in 2011 to change the council's name to the Nebraska Brain Injury Advisory Council (BIAC).

Creating a Shared Vision. The BIAC initiated strategic planning activities in 2017, which led to development of the Statewide Vision for Brain Injury Policies and Services: <https://braininjury.nebraska.gov/council/statewide-vision-brain-injury-policies-and-services>

Statewide Vision for Brain Injury Policies and Services (Adopted December 2017)

In the next 5-7 years, the future of brain injury in Nebraska will have evolved such that the following statements will accurately characterize the realm of brain injury:

- Nebraskans with a brain injury, regardless of geographic location or financial means, will have access to the necessary resources that they require to pursue their recovery journey.
- The Voice of people with a brain injury and their family members will exist as a unified Voice of solidarity and advocacy and will be engaged to shape policies and programs.
- All stakeholders in the brain injury realm will understand their unique role as well as how they complement each other towards making the future of brain injury better; subsequently, people with a brain injury will have an easier time navigating available resources with the help of specialized assistance from Peer Support Resource Navigators.
- The Nebraska Legislature will be informed about the nature of brain injury and its ongoing impact on Nebraskans and will be supportive of funding and policies to support the necessary statewide resources for those with brain injury.
- The complex nature of an injured brain and the recovery journey will be understood by everyone, such that stigma will be eliminated, and the public will be more supportive of efforts to improve overall brain injury support and resources.

Why Does the Vision Exist?

The Vision exists because it serves the purpose of documenting the collective Voice of those Nebraskans who have a brain injury and their families. It was written because without a statement of future direction, needs, and infrastructure, the many different stakeholders engaged in the realm of brain injury would not have a collective future toward which to guide their efforts, nor would they have a compelling reason to collaborate. This Vision, then, exists to bring focus for what the future should look like with respect to brain injury in Nebraska, such that all stakeholders—including those with brain injury and their families, who together represent the Voice of the people with brain injury and who collectively are the most important stakeholder—can collaborate effectively towards achieving this future Vision.

Having a written Vision creates accountability among all stakeholders. There are many roles that need to be played if this Vision is to become a reality, and the BIAC will, as one of its roles, serve as a forum for discussing the current status of this Vision, efforts and initiatives to pursue it, possible collaborations and funding sources, and other critical topics that relate to the pursuit of this Vision.

How Should the Vision Be Used?

Often, an organization develops a Vision, and that Vision is placed on a shelf. Successful organizations that are serious about walking the walk of their Mission Statement in order to achieve their Vision will keep their Vision Statement in print and in front of them to help guide their decisions. This Vision is a living document, and as such, may evolve and change over time.

The current TBI needs and resources assessment can be found on the Councils' website:

<https://braininjury.nebraska.gov/resources/brain-injury-data-and-statistics>