

Jack Markell's Plan for Improving the Lives of Delawareans with Disabilities

For an estimated 115,000 Delawareans, leading full, independent and productive lives brings unique challenges. These Delawareans are people with disabilities – people who face barriers every day that prevent them from accessing adequate health care, that bar their opportunities to work, and that block their chances to live in our communities in affordable housing.

Delaware needs a Governor who will be a leader and will fight for the rights of people with disabilities. We must work to reduce the fragmentation in funding and service delivery; make sure we are tapping into all federal resources available; provide choices for people who have the skills and the desire to live independently in our communities; prevent homelessness and unnecessary confinement in institutions; and enable all people to make decisions for themselves whenever possible.

New technology and medical advances have created opportunities for people with disabilities that were not even imagined just a few years ago. Public policy must keep pace and support the aspirations, which have been inspired by these advances, of people with disabilities.

The way to keep pace is in the details and practical steps that government can take to support people with disabilities in every aspect of living – housing, support services, transportation, health care, working and playing. That is why as Governor I will work to make sure all state agencies review policies and programs, not only to identify resources for people with disabilities, but also to make sure all state policies and programs consider the effect of the policies on people with disabilities. I will include people with disabilities in all discussions on how state policies on housing, employment, health care, community and economic development, transportation and homeland security affect people with disabilities.

And as Governor, I will:

- **Support the five-year plan of the Commission on Community-Based Alternatives for Individuals with Disabilities for those who are capable and wish to participate.**
- **Support Money Follows the Person as a way to improve access to and quality of home- and community- based long term care.**
- **Help local park and recreation offices can improve accessibility for people with disabilities.**
- **Ensure that Delaware disaster preparedness plans meet the needs of people with disabilities.**
- **Start a statewide training program based on the nationally recognized Community Support Skills Standards.**
- **Improve housing for Delawareans with disabilities, including supporting the Delaware Interagency Council on Homelessness' recommendation to**

increase affordable housing alternatives for persons with mental health and substance use and other disabling conditions.

- **Increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities**

Advocate and support the five-year plan with the Commission on Community-Based Alternatives for Individuals with Disabilities

The Commission on Community-Based Alternatives for Individuals with Disabilities is responsible for improving Delaware’s support and services in the disability community and for providing individuals with disabilities the opportunity to live and work in the communities they choose. The Commission is working to eliminate fragmented funding sources and to bring various resources together to support all aspects of work and living. The Commission has identified several goals to advance Delaware’s commitment to the disability community. These include improving access to housing, employment, transportation, and health care, as well as improving the quality of the professional workforce and assessment care planning.

As Governor, I will keep the Commission intact and work closely with its members to achieve its five-year plan. The Commission’s plan is comprehensive and realistically addresses what we must do to support individuals with disabilities so that they may live and work in communities of their choosing.

As we progress down the path laid out in the five-year plan, we must be prepared to change our goals and address new challenges. As Governor, I look forward to working with the Commission to refine the five-year plan and develop strategies for improving the lives of Delawareans with disabilities beyond the next five years. I will also support the continuum of long-term care provided by facilities such as the Mary Campbell Center, where individuals who are not capable or do not wish to live independently do live life to the fullest.

Improve access to and quality of home- and community-based long term care

Long-term care services must fit the individual. That’s why I support the “Money Follows the Person” (MFP) initiative, a flexible financing option allowing people with disabilities and their families to use Medicaid funds for home- and community-based services rather than institutionalization for those who are capable and wish to do so.¹

As Governor, I will continue to work with the MFP coalition comprised of representatives from the disability community, the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, the Delaware Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance, AARP and state legislators, to make Delaware the leader of this important person-centered service.

¹ www.udel.edu/cds/ccba/pdfs/commission/A_Path_Forward.pdf

Extend ombudsman services to people with disabilities when services are denied or complaints made in all settings

Delaware's Long Term Care Ombudsman program began in 1976 to protect the rights of people in nursing homes, assisted living and other residential facilities. The world is changing, however, and rights must be protected, not only in residential settings, but also involving many other aspects of living for those with disabilities. That is why Delawareans living in community settings need an advocate as well. I will support provisions of the Money Follows The Person legislation to create a Community Ombudsman. This would be an avenue for people with disabilities to voice their concerns about all services they are attempting to access to help them live or work in the community. The Ombudsman will help mediate and resolve conflicts between consumers and service providers, including Delaware state agencies responsible for policy and program delivery affecting people with disabilities. The Ombudsman will also make sure information about services is in formats that are accessible to people with disabilities.

Focus and expand programs to improve the health of people with disabilities

A recent survey of 339 Delawareans with disabilities found that 60.8% were in fair to poor health.² Of those surveyed, 49.1% percent of them said they engaged in little to no physical activity.³ People with disabilities are faced with many health issues, some of which are unique to the disability, some of which are secondary or conditions that are preventable such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and heart conditions.

Those with disabilities should have the same access to health and wellness opportunities afforded to all Delawareans. As Governor, I will work with state health agencies, health care providers and direct service providers to promote health and wellness among people with disabilities. I will seek to expand programs available through federal funding such as the Medicaid Buy-in Program, Cash and Counseling and work assistance programs such as Ticket to Work. I will help family care givers through education and support services and respite care. I will work to increase the accessibility of public recreation and parks to people with disabilities, and I will work with private fitness centers to apply for foundation and other funds to make fitness centers accessible to people with disabilities.

As with the general population, especially the elderly, prevention of health care problems pays off many times over in the quality of life for people and the cost of care for chronic diseases. It is no different for people with disabilities. I will, therefore, require all of our health care programs to include a component for making sure services for people with disabilities are included. When we train and educate health care providers on the importance of prevention, when we work with community groups on designing local health care initiatives, when we develop programs to educate families about preventing chronic diseases, we will include components that address the special needs of people with disabilities.

² Delaware Health Status Report for Persons with Disabilities pg. 28

³ Delaware Health Status Report for Persons with Disabilities pg. 37

Ensure that Delaware disaster preparedness plans meet the needs of people with disabilities

I will work as Governor with local and state officials to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are reflected in their disaster preparedness plans, seeking out participation from people with disabilities, their families, and caregivers, as well as advocacy groups. Local and state planners need to incorporate their feedback into outreach efforts and communication strategies. These same groups can also become a resource network during an emergency.⁴

I will also work with organizations within the disability community to make sure that all disabled individuals, their families and caregivers have a personalized preparedness plan in place. This includes creating an emergency supply kit, making an emergency plan, and identifying support networks they can count on if and when a disaster occurs.⁵

Develop a statewide training program based on the nationally recognized Community Support Skills Standards.

The move away from institutional placement to community living brings with it new demands and skill requirements for human service providers who work with people with disabilities. Workers must now know how to negotiate community resources, find specialized assistance and include clients and family members in care decision-making. Human service workers need new training approaches in order to develop the skills to adapt to this new framework for services.

As Governor, I will work closely with the University of Delaware, Center for Disabilities Studies, a nationally-recognized University Center for Excellence, to develop new training programs to better prepare and retain a workforce dedicated to the long term care of individuals with disabilities.⁶ This program, based on the nationally recognized Community Support Skills Standards, will provide those interested in the field a comprehensive description of worker roles and responsibilities in such areas as community networking, consumer empowerment, advocacy and other competencies needed to be a service worker in today's non-institutional environment.⁷

Improve housing for Delawareans with disabilities

⁴ Connecticut's Inclusive Planning Efforts available on the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services website: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/add/resources/dispub.html>

⁵ Department of Homeland Security Releases New Preparedness Resources for Seniors, People with Disabilities and Pet Owners: http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/pr_1187027722320.shtm

⁶ www.udel.edu/cds/ccba/pdfs/commission/A_Path_Forward.pdf

⁷ National Organization for Human Services: <http://www.nationalhumanservices.org/?q=community-support-skill-standards>

Safe and affordable housing is a fundamental ingredient in creating opportunity for people with disabilities to participate in community life. People with disabilities, however, often have housing problems, not because of their disability, but because of their low income. People receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the federal income program to support people with disabilities, have some of the lowest incomes in the nation. In 2007, an SSI recipient received \$623 per month. According to a July 2000 study by the National Organization on Disability, “People with disabilities are almost 3 times as likely as people without a disability to live in households with total incomes of \$15,000 or less (29% compared to 10%).”⁸

At the same time, federal housing programs are changing rapidly, being eliminated and creating more complexities to understand how to access help from the federal government.

Delaware’s Governor must take action and lead in this complex and potentially costly arena. That is why I will take steps to make sure all current resources are being used effectively and look for new resources where needed. I will:

- Provide information on ways the disability community can participate in housing policy decisions.
- In light of the recommendations made by the Delaware Interagency Council on Homelessness in *Breaking the Cycle: Delaware’s Ten-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness and Reduce Long-Term Homelessness*, explore options for funding new units of housing for persons with disabilities as well as eliminating barriers to existing low income housing that prevent access by persons with disabilities.
- Develop a simple one-page summary of housing options available for those with disabilities who are seeking housing.
- Create an inventory of housing stock accessible to people with disabilities and help match individuals with disabilities with appropriate housing options.
- Advocate for an increase in federal housing assistance.
- Target state controlled block grant resources to those in most need.
- Work with housing developers to promote universal building design concepts – homes designed for both able-bodied and individuals with disabilities.
- Support housing tax credits for people who make changes in their homes in order to prevent institutionalization.
- Support the efforts of groups like Homes for Life Foundation and the ARC of Delaware which help with housing for many of the disabled in Delaware.

Increase employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities

⁸ <http://www.metrocouncil.org/planning/housing/fairhousing.htm>

It goes without saying that individuals with disabilities are capable of being productive and successful employees who can and do contribute to the state's labor force. As Governor, I will seek to increase employment opportunities so that more Delawareans may join the State's workforce and contribute to the local economy.

Delaware companies are already having great success in employing Delawareans with disabilities, and we must encourage more businesses to emulate those efforts. In the 1990s, MBNA began an employment program for Delawareans with disabilities, which Bank of America continued and is currently employing more than 200 Delawareans.

Additionally, The University of Delaware's Center for Disabilities Studies was recently selected by the U.S. Department of Labor to help lead a national effort to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Many Delawareans with disabilities have opportunities for full-time employment, but cannot take those jobs, or must work only part time, because they will earn too much money to be eligible for Medicaid. As Governor, I will remove that barrier by funding a Medicaid Buy-In program for Delaware.

The buy-in program allows individuals with disabilities to exceed Medicaid's income levels by paying a premium to enroll. The premium would be set on a sliding scale based on a person's income level.

More than 80,000 disabled Americans in 32 states have benefited from buy-in programs, according to the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Delaware needs to make this opportunity available to its residents with disabilities. Unfortunately funding for this program, about \$1 million, had to be cut this year due to the state's \$217 million revenue shortfall. This is another example of where a state investment will more than pay for itself. Funding the buy-in program will give more jobs to Delawareans and help our economy.