

# Annual Update

October 2020 - September 2021

Creating change that improves the lives of Alaskans with disabilities



**GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON  
DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATION**

**GOAL 1#**  
Community Inclusion,  
Supports, and Services

**GOAL 2#**  
Self-Advocacy  
& Leadership

**GOAL 3#**  
Employment

## Community Inclusion, Supports, & Services

People with developmental disabilities will have increased access to a flexible system of meaningful supports and services in their homes and communities to increase the number of people with developmental disabilities living the lives they choose.

## Self-Advocacy & Leadership

People with developmental disabilities will have increased access to education, tools, and opportunities for self-advocacy across the lifespan to increase the number of people with developmental disabilities expressing their vision for their lives in local, state, and national forums.

## Employment

People with developmental disabilities will have access to supports, services, programs, and training necessary for successful transitions to adulthood, meaningful work experiences, integrated and competitive employment, as well as career development, across their lifespan.



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## Executive Summary

The mission of the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (the Council) is to create change that improves the lives of Alaskans with disabilities. The Council combines the expertise and experience of many stakeholders throughout the state into one unique Council. Council works to make systems change in the following ways: recommend changes in statute, regulation, policy and/or procedures, build capacity, and coordinate advocacy activities. As the State Council on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, the Council works with Senior and Disabilities Services and other state agencies to ensure people with disabilities and their families receive the services they need and participate in the design of those services.

Council developed a five-year strategic State plan that facilitates the Council objectives like advancing advocacy, community inclusion supports and services, supported decision-making, and employment focused outreach, all while developing interagency collaboration and coordination.

As we work to better serve our constituency, we developed this annual report as a means of discussing some of the valuable work the Council and its many partners continue to advance.

### Some Highlights:

Council staff generated social media posts and listserv bulletins promoting the webinars, guide, and handbook throughout the reporting period and planned to update the website during summer 2021, though the DHSS website outage has delayed that process. Council staff shared information related to Disability 101, the Alaska ABLE Plan, and the employment handbooks regularly throughout the year on Facebook to increase awareness and access to individuals with disabilities.

The Council hosted virtual visits with all three members of Alaska's U.S. Congressional Delegation: Congressman Don Young, Senator Murkowski, and Senator Sullivan. The Council served as the team captain for the Disability Policy Seminar, Virtual Hill Day legislative visits.

Staff at GCDSE collaborated with the Employment First Coordinator to hold the 2021 Virtual Job Fair which took place over an online virtual platform for four days during the last week of March. Council staff and the Employment First Coordinator created a work group comprising of staff from the Department of Health & Social Services (DHSS) and Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DOLWD or DOL) to explore various platforms for the virtual job fair.

Council staff partnered with DOL staff to create the Alaska Work Matters Task Force (WMTF) to meaningfully embed employment first principles throughout state government; a core topic



list was created with possible recommendations and barriers identified based on group input during the meetings. A report to the Governor and cabinet-level staff is being written and will be presented in the spring of 2022.

## Introduction

The mission of the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (the Council) is to create change that improves the lives of Alaskans with disabilities. The Council was first established in the 1970s through the Alaska Legislature to meet the requirements of several state and federal laws.

The Council combines the expertise and experience of many stakeholders throughout the state into one unique Council.

As the State Council on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, the Council works with Senior and Disabilities Services and other state agencies to ensure that people with disabilities and their families receive the services they need and participate in the design of those services.

As the Special Education Advisory Panel, the Council advises the Department of Education and Early Development on the provision of special education and related services for children with disabilities from age 3 through age 21.

As the Interagency Coordinating Council on Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, the Council advises the state's early intervention program on the coordination and provision of quality early intervention services for children with disabilities from birth to age 3.

The Council also serves as the governing board for the Special Education Service Agency (SESA) which provides training and consultation to Alaska school districts serving children with low incidence disabilities. SESA is an educational service agency comprised of a low incidence disability service inclusive of a statewide lending library. Low incidence disabilities include autism, deaf and hard of hearing (DHOH), vision impairment, emotional disabilities, and multiple disabilities.

Additionally, the Council serves as a beneficiary board of the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority advising the Trust on the status, conditions and needs of Alaskans with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

The Council work falls into three broad categories: Advocacy, capacity building, and systems change.

The term "advocacy activities" means active support of policies and practices that promote systems change efforts and other activities that further advance self-determination and inclusion



in all aspects of community living (including housing, education, employment, and other aspects) for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

The term “capacity building activities” means activities (such as training and technical assistance) that expand and/or improve the ability of individuals with developmental disabilities, families, supports, services, and/or systems to promote, support, and enhance self-determination, independence, productivity, and inclusion in community life.

The term “systemic change activities” means a sustainable, transferable, and replicable change in some aspect of service or support availability, design, or delivery that promotes positive or meaningful outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

## New Council State Five-Year Plan

The Council has approved and submitted our new Five-Year State Plan that runs from Federal Fiscal Years 2022 through 2026.



### Community Inclusion, Supports, & Services

People with developmental disabilities will have increased access to a flexible system of meaningful supports and services in their homes and communities to increase the number of people with developmental disabilities living the lives they choose.

### Self-Advocacy & Leadership

People with developmental disabilities will have increased access to education, tools, and opportunities for self-advocacy across the lifespan to increase the number of people with developmental disabilities expressing their vision for their lives in local, state, and national forums.

### Employment

People with developmental disabilities will have access to supports, services, programs, and training necessary for successful transitions to adulthood, meaningful work experiences, integrated and competitive employment, as well as career development, across their lifespan.



## Completed Council State Five-Year Plan

The Council has completed the 5th year of its Five-Year State Plan

### GOAL # 1 — Community Inclusion, Supports, and Services:

Improve service delivery to empower individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs) to live and thrive in their communities with formal and informal supports and services that promote independence.

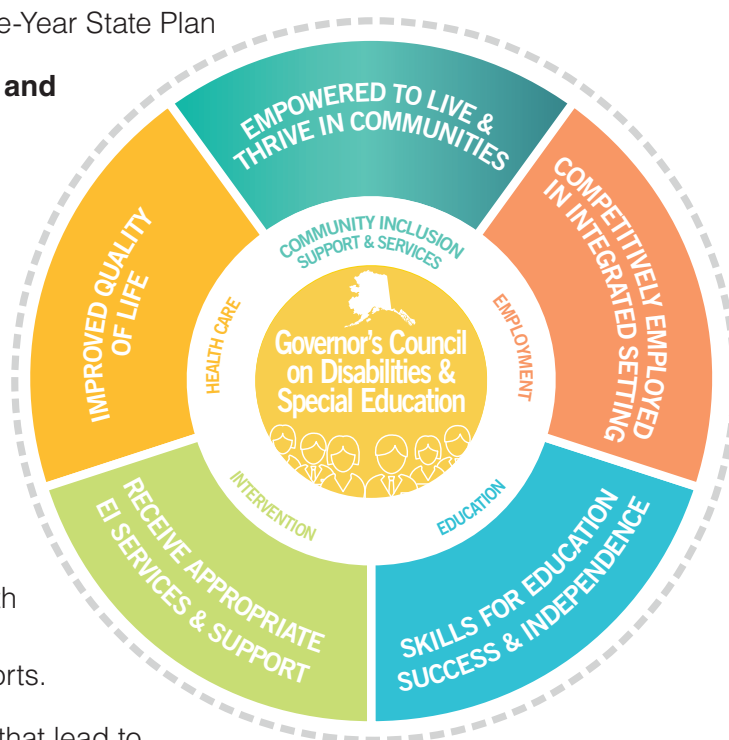
**GOAL # 2 — Employment:** Alaskans with disabilities and their families will receive the necessary employment services and supports needed to become competitively employed in an integrated setting.

**GOAL # 3 — Early Intervention:** Strengthen policies and programs so infants and toddlers with disabilities, their families, and caregivers receive appropriate early intervention services and supports.

**GOAL # 4 — Education:** Participate in activities that lead to enhanced practices so children and youth with disabilities have access to appropriate qualified professionals, curriculum, inclusion, support, and resources to ensure they have the skills they need for educational success and future independence.

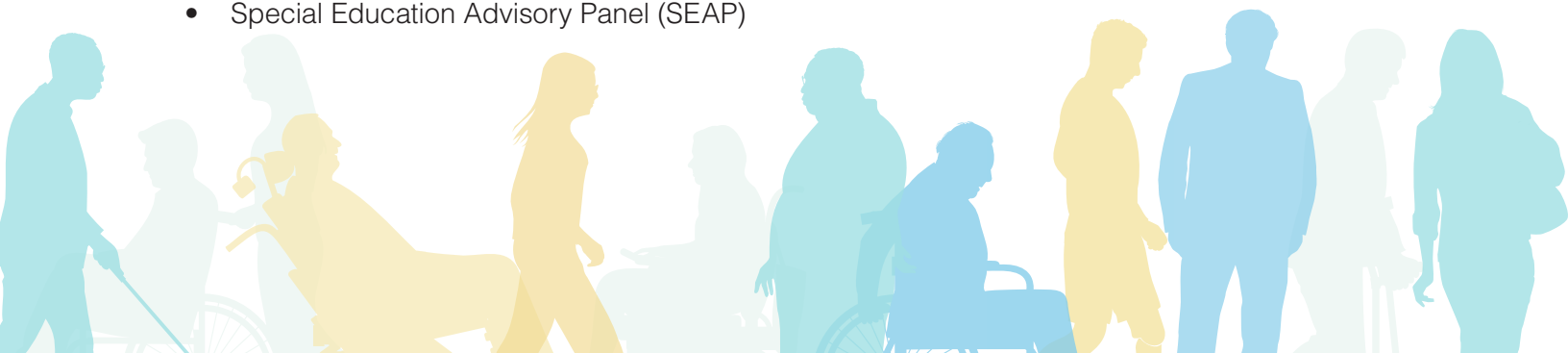
**GOAL # 5 — Healthcare:** Alaskans with disabilities will have greater access to needed health care services that will improve their quality of life.

If you are interested in participating in the day-to-day work of the Council by becoming a public member on one of the Council's committees, please contact us: [HSS.SDS.GCDSE.Staff@alaska.gov](mailto:HSS.SDS.GCDSE.Staff@alaska.gov)



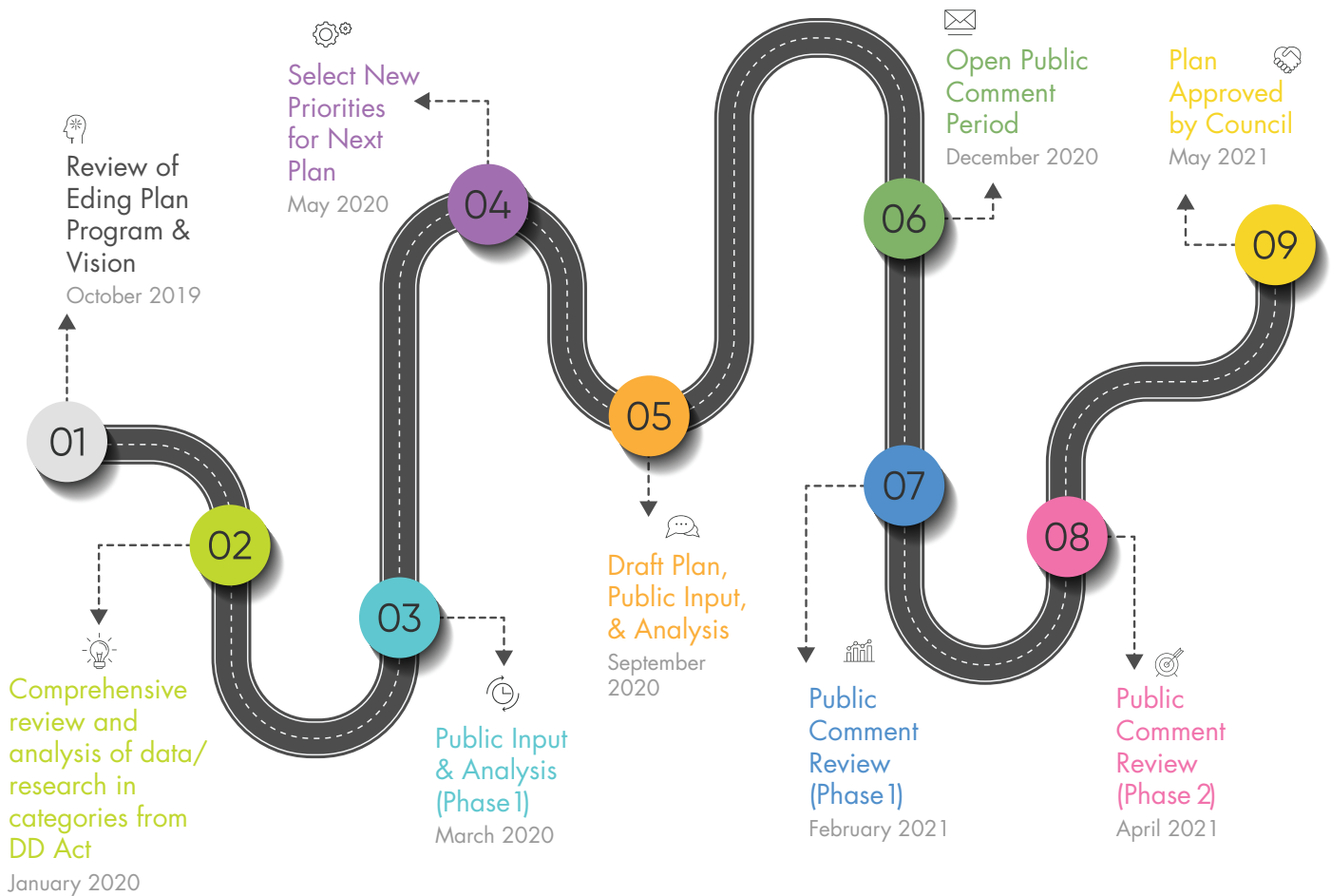
### Council Committees/Workgroups Include:

- Community Inclusion, Supports & Services Committee
- Self-Advocacy and Leadership Committee
- Employment Committee
- Legislative Committee
- Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities
- Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)



## New State Five-Year Plan Development Update

Every 5 years, the Council seeks statewide public input for developing priorities for the next Five-Year State Plan; the plan which guides advocacy, capacity building, and systemic change work for the Council. The picture below outlines the development cycle for the new Five-Year Plan and includes an overview of when key activities happened. The new plan was submitted in September 2021 and received conditional approval to begin plan implementation in Federal Fiscal Year 2022, which began October 1, 2021.



The new plan worked to streamline the operations of the council and reduced the number of goals from five to three to better emphasize the core focus areas of the council. For the first time, Self-Advocacy and Leadership has been elevated to a Goal level, and upcoming work will support the importance of this aspect.





While some of the names are identical, you may notice that there are some changes to the Goal language, which reflect the updated approach and priorities of the Council and the needs and environment within Alaska.

### **Goal 1 – Community Inclusion, Supports, & Services**

People with developmental disabilities will have increased access to a flexible system of meaningful supports and services in their homes and communities to increase the number of people with developmental disabilities living the lives they choose.

### **Goal 2 – Self-Advocacy & Leadership**

People with developmental disabilities will have increased access to education, tools, and opportunities for self-advocacy across the lifespan to increase the number of people with developmental disabilities expressing their vision for their lives in local, state, and national forums.

### **Goal 3 – Employment**

People with developmental disabilities will have access to supports, services, programs, and training necessary for successful transitions to adulthood, meaningful work experiences, integrated and competitive employment, as well as career development, across their lifespan.

Each goal contains multiple objectives which support the activities and day to day work the council undertakes to implement the plan and move closer to achieving our goals.





## Goal 1 – Community Inclusion, Supports & Services

- ✓ Choice of Independence in Long-Term Supports and Services
- ✓ Housing
- ✓ Health & Healthcare
- ✓ Education & Early Development
- ✓ Emerging Needs

### Objective 1 – Choice & Independence in Long-Term Supports and Services

People will have information, training, tools, and programs for systems change, supported decision-making, strategies and technology for independence, community-building, and more to increase the number of adults with developmental disabilities who choose and direct their long-term supports and services.

### Objective 2 – Housing

People with developmental disabilities and their families will have information, training, tools, and programs for housing accessibility, housing availability, housing rights, landlord-tenant relations, cohabitation strategies, and more to increase the number of people with developmental disabilities who live where and with whom they choose.

### Objective 3 – Health and Healthcare

People will have information, training, tools, and programs about Medicaid services, home-and-community-based services, health and well-being, community events and activities, and more to increase the number of people with developmental disabilities across their lifespan who are living full and meaningful lives.

### Objective 4 – Education & Early Development

People with developmental disabilities across their lifespan and their families will have information, training, tools, and programs to increase the number of people with disabilities included with nondisabled age peers in infant daycare, preschools, K-12, and post-secondary education.



## Objective 5 – Emerging Needs

People with developmental disabilities and their families will have information, training, and tools to prepare for them for personal emergencies, natural disasters, and/or other emergent circumstances to increase personal safety and the security of services, supports, and self-determined choices.

## Goal 2 – Self-Advocacy and Leadership

- ✓ Developmental Disabilities (DD) Shared Vision Implementation
- ✓ Support Self-Advocacy Organization

### Objective 1 – DD Shared Vision Implementation

People with developmental disabilities will have information on the Shared Vision and will have opportunities to actively participate in planning and implementation of the Shared Vision to increase the number of people who understand the Shared Vision and the number who live the life they choose with the supports they direct.

### Objective 2 – Support Self-Advocacy Organization

A self-advocacy organization will have direct funding support; and information, training, and tools for success to increase its membership, sustainability, and organizational outreach.

## Goal 3 – Employment

- ✓ Employment First Transition
- ✓ Traditional Transition

### Objective 1 – Employment First Implementation

People will have information, training, tools, and programs on telework, the state as a model employer, employment rights, and universally designed work environments to increase the percentage of people with disabilities with meaningful, integrated, competitive employment in typical work settings.



## Objective 2 – Traditional Transition

Transition-aged youth (14-22) with developmental disabilities will have increased information, education services, training, and tools that are regionally, culturally, and linguistically relevant to them to increase the number of young adults in rural communities with skills for meaningful, place-based adulthood.

For information on the current State Plan, please visit our website:

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/aboutus/>.

## Advocacy and Leadership

Advocacy on behalf of Alaskans with disabilities and their families is one of the primary responsibilities of the Council. The Council conducts its advocacy efforts on both state and federal levels due to its multiple roles.

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (GCDSE) serves as Alaska's Developmental Disabilities Council, a federally required role of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) which includes a unique responsibility to engage in "advocacy, capacity building, and systemic change activities" without interference by the State (42 USC 15024(c)(5)(L)).

### State Advocacy

- Annual meetings with Alaska legislators in collaboration with Key Coalition's Key Campaign as part of cost savings efforts.
- Presented priorities to members of the Governor's cabinet and Governor's office.

### The Council's 2021 Advocacy Priorities Included:

1. Special Education Service Agency (SESA) Reauthorization
2. Home and Community Based Services Importance
3. Home and Community Based Services Cost Saving
4. Direct Service Professionals Workforce Statement

The Council and Key Campaign continued to provide information to state legislators on both the importance of Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS), as well as the cost savings when compared with institutional care. The Key Coalition's 2021 Key Campaign included several hundred stakeholders engaged throughout the state.



## Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Result in Cost Saving

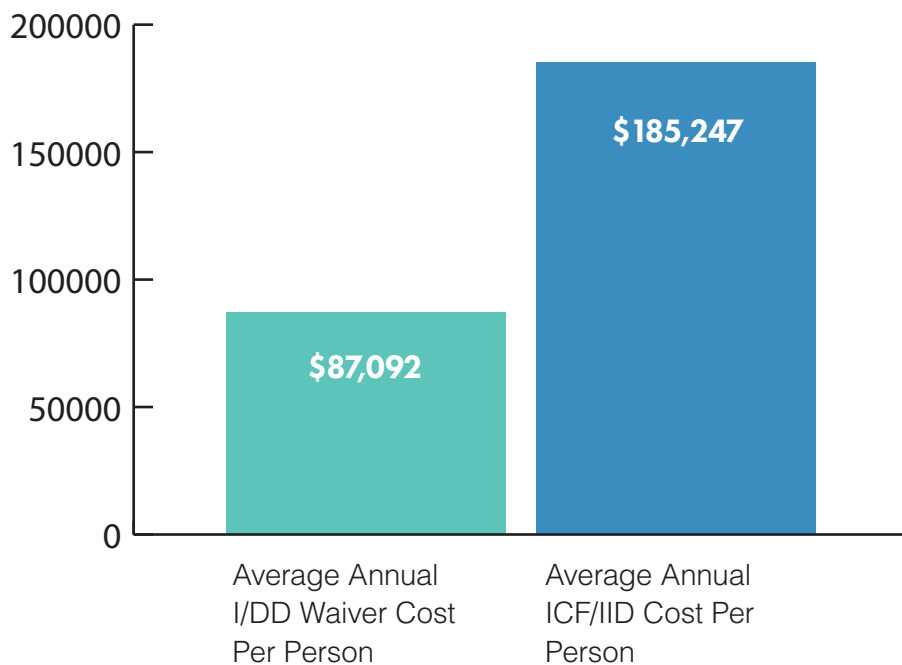
### HCBS Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) Waiver:

- Average annual I/DD Waiver cost per person = **\$87,092**

### Intermediate Care Facility for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities/Institutional Placement (ICF/IID)

- Average annual ICF/IID cost per person = **\$185,247**

### Cost of I/DD HCBS vs ICF/IID

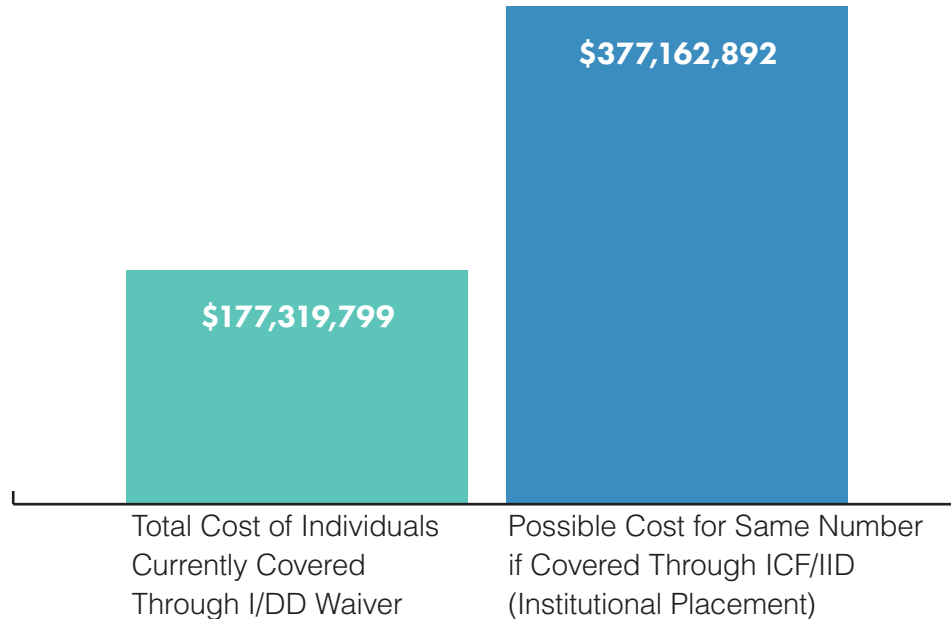


Currently, 2,036 individuals receive HCBS I/DD waiver services at a total cost of just over \$177 million.

If these 2,036 individuals were in an institution (ICF/IID), at an average cost of \$185,247 per person annually, **the total cost for serving these individuals could be around \$377 million.**



## Current HCBS I/DD Waiver Cost vs. Possible Cost of Same Number Covered via ICF/IID (Institutional Placement)



### Federal Advocacy and Disability Policy Seminar

- The Council often serves as a resource to Alaska's U.S. Congressional Delegation regarding data on Alaskans with disabilities as well as providing stakeholder feedback on important issues. Over the past year, this has included sending comment letters educating them on potential impacts of legislation or policy changes regarding Alaskans with disabilities.
- Seven Council Members were able to attend the 2021 Virtual Disability Policy Seminar and Hill Visits: a three-day, annual federal legislative conference based in Washington D.C. that provides training and updates to advocates, self-advocates, experts, and professionals from all 50 states regarding nationwide disability-related political matters. The seminar includes Hill Day visits, which provides an opportunity for Council members to visit with Members of Congress from their home state. "The Disability Policy Seminar promotes unity, movement building, and amplifies the concerns of people with I/DD before Congress." <https://disabilitypolicyseminar.org/>.
- The Council was pleased to host virtual visits with all three members of Alaska's U.S. Congressional Delegation: Congressman Don Young, Senator Murkowski, and Senator Sullivan, serving as the team captain for the Disability Policy Seminar, Virtual Hill Day legislative visits. Council members from across the nation were provided with fact sheets



and talking points to present to their state's members of congress in the following areas: Community Living, Education, ABLE, Social Security, and Criminal Justice which allowed for disability-related advocacy to be implemented as a united front to the nation's top leaders. Also discussed were the importance of vaccinations for intellectual and developmental disability population, and the HCBS Access Act, as well as other issues important to Alaskans with developmental disabilities, including impacts of the pandemic. The next Disability Policy Seminar is currently scheduled for March 28th – 30th, 2022.  
<https://disabilitypolicyseminar.org/>

## Self-Advocacy Support

### Peer Power Alaska

The Council has continued to support Alaska's statewide self-advocacy organization for individuals with I/DD.

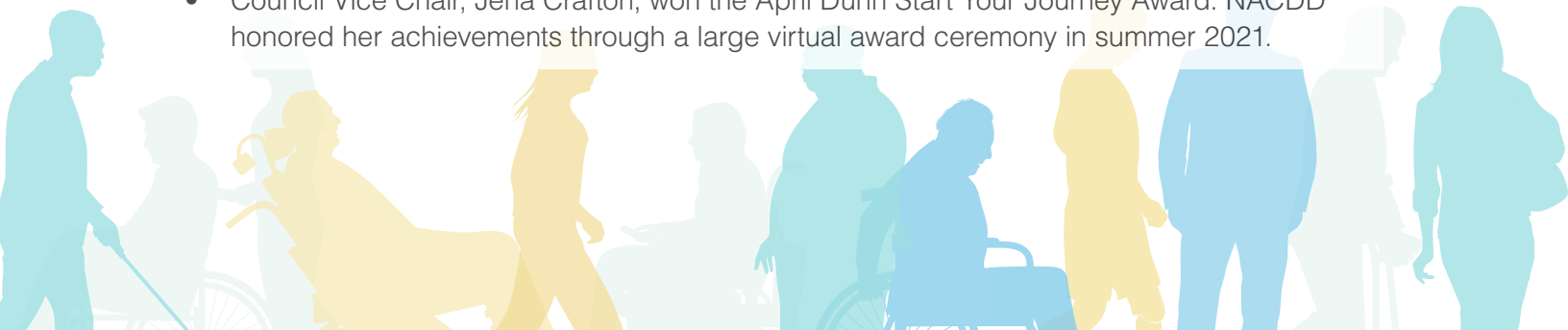
- Peer Power has postponed its annual statewide self-advocacy summit until Spring 2022 due to COVID-19. To register: <https://peerpower.ticketbud.com/2021peerpowersummit>
- Get engaged in self advocacy through Peer Power's website or Facebook page:
  - [www.peerpower907.wixsite.com/peer-power](http://www.peerpower907.wixsite.com/peer-power)
  - [www.facebook.com/Peer-Power-of-Alaska-1404232596476441/](https://www.facebook.com/Peer-Power-of-Alaska-1404232596476441/)



### Alaska Self-Advocates Receive National Recognition



- Council Vice Chair Jena Crafton and Member Anna Attla were inducted into the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD) Self-Advocate Leadership Circle.
- Council Vice Chair, Jena Crafton, won the April Dunn Start Your Journey Award. NACDD honored her achievements through a large virtual award ceremony in summer 2021.



## Community Inclusion Supports & Services

### Council's Federal Living Well Grant Update

In 2018, the Council was awarded a \$1.96 million dollar five-year federal grant by the Administration on Community Living to develop model approaches to: 1) community monitoring, and 2) community capacity building.

The overarching goal of this project is to increase the community integration, health, safety, independence, and well-being of individuals with developmental disabilities through realization of our DD Shared Vision.

#### Grant Objectives

- Improve health and safety as well as independence and employment
- Improve workforce sustainability and training
- Increase leadership opportunities for self-advocates
- Improve rights

#### Grant partners

- Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities (AADD)
- Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (the Trust)
- Disability Law Center of Alaska (DLC)
- Peer Power, Inc. (nonprofit peer advocacy organization)
- Key Coalition of Alaska (nonprofit advocacy organization)
- State of Alaska Senior & Disability Services (SDS)
- Southeast Alaska Independent Living Center (SAIL – nonprofit independent living center)
- Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)
- Center for Human Development, University of Alaska (CHD-UAA)

#### Grant Year Four Update

- Year three data collection is ongoing; a mass mailout is planned for individuals with disabilities to complete the DD Shared Vision Alignment survey.
- Disability Pride: It Starts with Us was held in summer, with national guest celebrities interviewed by local self-advocates during a five day Zoom event; Facebook Live reached a total of 4,715 people and saw 1,031 engagements.
- Council staff continued to update the COVID-19 Resource Toolkit with input from SDS staff and self-advocates, and a webinar was held in spring to broaden the reach of the toolkit; the webinar had focused on strategies to stay connected while isolating.



- HomeMAP technology/home assessment trainings held with HomeMAP assessments completed/in progress focused on improving independence, safety, and self-sufficiency
- Council staff continued to collaborate with UCEDD UAA CHD on an ECHO specifically for family members of individuals with I/DD.
- Council staff presented at the 20th annual Full Lives Conference on how the Living Well grant projects and DD Shared Vision are incorporated into the next Council five-year plan.
- Community Relationship Builder Pilot continues to be administered by CHD; natural support was a focus this year due to COVID restrictions on social gatherings.
- Council staff collaborated with Peer Power to plan the annual self-advocacy summit in September 2021, though it was delayed to spring 2022 due to COVID.
- Council partner Key Coalition held virtual meetings to discuss FMAP funds, ARPA funds, and issues related, and drafted recommendations.
- Council staff partnered with DOL staff to create the Alaska Work Matters Task Force to meaningfully embed employment first principles throughout state government; a core topic list was created with possible recommendations and barriers identified based on group input during the meetings. A report to the Governor and cabinet-level staff is being written and will be presented in the spring.
- Two person-centered / person-directed trainings were held, as well as three self-advocate planned and lead webinars.
- SDMA three-day symposium was held over Zoom in the summer, with a focus on lived experience, tools to start an SDMA, and funding information.

## Shared DD Vision Website Hosted by the Council

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/ddsharedvision/>

Check out the “Welcome to Alaska’s Shared Vision” video:

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/ddsharedvision/family.aspx>

Join the DD Shared Vision Alaska Facebook group, led by self-advocates:

<https://www.latest.facebook.com/groups/DDSharedVisionAlaska/permalink/468789300386749/>



**Developmental Disabilities Shared Vision**

Self-Advocate Family Service Provider Direct Support Professionals

**About Us**

Alaskans share a vision of a flexible system in which each person directs their own supports, based on their strengths and abilities, toward a meaningful life in their home, their job and their community. Our vision includes supported families, professional staff and services available throughout the state now and into the future.

Learn more about the DD Shared Vision by watching DD Services: A Vision for the Future





## Supported Decision-Making (SDM)

- <https://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/projects/SDMA>
- Website viewed approximately 750 times this reporting period
- 30 reported SDMAs reported in Alaska
- The Council integrated supported decision-making and SDMAs into various webinars and included individuals with lived experience as planning partners and co-presenters. Webinars were promoted to state staff, parents, transition-aged youth, adults with disabilities, special education teachers and administrators, and service agency staff.
- The Council held a 3-day SDMA symposium over Zoom in the summer, with a focus on lived experience, tools to start an SDMA, and funding information. The symposium ran three days and saw an average 37 individuals at each session.



## Disability Pride Events Across the State to Commemorate the 31st Anniversary of the ADA

The Council was pleased to support the statewide virtual Alaska Disability Pride event: It Starts with Us in July 2021. This weeklong event included highlights of Alaskan self-advocate stories elevating the DD Shared Vision as well as Alaskan self-advocates interviewing national disability advocates. Self-advocates served on the planning committee for this event as well. Council staff provided extensive Zoom and Facebook Live technical assistance planning and support during the event and assisted the emcee and presenters during the event as needed. Local self-advocates interviewed national guest celebrities during the 5-day event.

Guest celebrities included **Liz Weintraub**, a leader in self-advocacy holding many board and advisory positions at state and national organizations; **Aaron Fotheringham**, an extreme wheelchair athlete who performs tricks adapted from skateboarding and BMX; **Geri Jewell**, best known as Cousin Geri on The Facts of Life and the first person with a disability to have a regular role on a prime time series; **Emily Ladau**, a passionate disability rights activist, writer, storyteller, and digital communications consultant; and **Alvin Law**, a motivational speaker and former radio broadcaster, born without arms. Facebook Live reached a total of 4715 people and saw 1031 engagements over the 5-day event. To view the events, go to: <https://fb.me/e/7kriUkALU>.



## Strengthening the System: Alaska's Comprehensive Integrated Mental Health Program Plan 2020-24

**VISION — Alaskans receive comprehensive prevention, treatment, and support services at the appropriate level of care across their lifespan, leading to meaningful lives in their home communities.**

- Strengthening the System identifies priorities for the next five years to inform planning and funding decisions to meet the needs of Alaska Mental Health Trust beneficiaries. The intent is to strengthen the system of care to allow a comprehensive approach that quickly meets their needs.
- The Council is part of the core team which continued efforts this year focused on identifying data points to include on the yearly scorecard as well as strategic planning.
- To view the plan, visit: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/Commissioner/Pages/MentalHealth/>

### Autism Ad Hoc Committee

**Autism Speaks Advocacy Ambassador:** In March 2021, the Ad Hoc Committee joined congratulated Chairperson Heidi Lieb-Williams as the 2021 Autism Speaks Advocacy Ambassador for the United States. Chair Lieb-Williams met with U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan and Congressman Don Young from Alaska, Washington senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, and Vermont Congressman Peter Welch. She advocated for an additional \$12.7M of funding for Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), which ultimately passed. That funding helps Alaska, serving as matching funds for families to access Medicaid and home and community-based services.

**Autism Awareness Month:** Together with the Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs (AMCHP), a statewide awareness campaign was launched to bring recognition to those with Autism and their families.



**Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO):** Council staff worked with Senior and Disabilities Services (SDS) staff and University of Alaska Center for Human Development (UAA CHD) on a new Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO) specifically for family members of individuals with I/DD. This Family ECHO's goal is to increase knowledge and skills for raising and supporting family members with I/DD, behavioral health diagnoses, trauma history, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) and related neurodevelopmental disabilities, and to build a network of strong family advocates in Alaska. ECHO topics for this year included: health and safety and informed decision making during the COVID-19 pandemic, understanding, and navigating the Alaska I/DD service system, special education, service funding sources and resources, understanding working with challenging behaviors, healthy relationships, and sensory processing challenges.



## Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)

### Five-Year Plan on FASD

Stakeholders from around the state continue to work on the FASD Five-Year Strategic plan with the following priority areas: Primary Prevention of FASDs, Screening for and Diagnosis of FASD, Early Childhood and Education, System Transformation and Navigation: Youth and Adults, and Community Outreach and Engagement.

### 9 Core Messages: What Everyone Should Know About Prenatal Alcohol Exposure

A hands-on resource for individuals, families, professionals, and decision-makers that explains basic concepts and impacts of prenatal alcohol exposure, associated diagnoses (FAS, FASDs, etc.), common characteristics including strengths and challenges, the importance of diagnosis and early Interventions, prevalence, strategies for success, prevention, advocacy, and Alaska resources. This document was created by the Community Outreach and Engagement workgroup for the FASD Five-Year Strategic Plan. Link: <https://dhss.alaska.gov/abada/documents/FASDCoreMessages.pdf>

**FASD Day (9/9) and Month Awareness Activities: Social Media Toolkit & Campaign**



## Employment

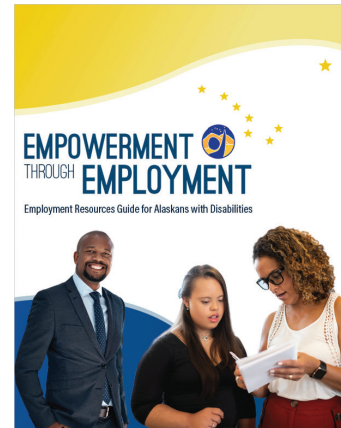
### Employer Engagement Efforts

- The Council continued to lead the Business Employment Services Team (BEST) which is a collaboration between the Departments of Health and Social Services and Labor and Workforce Development with the mission of meeting the workforce needs of Alaska businesses and improve hiring outcomes for individuals with disabilities and veterans.
- Staff at GCDSE collaborated with the Employment First Coordinator to hold the 2021 Virtual Job Fair which took place over an online virtual platform for four days during the last week of March. Council staff and the Employment First Coordinator created a work group comprising of staff from the Department of Health & Social Services (DHSS) and Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DOLWD) to explore various platforms for the virtual job fair.



## Empowerment Through Employment Guide

The Empowerment through Employment and Transitions Handbook were shared during a national presentation called 2021 Alaska Statewide Special Education Virtual Conference in February 2021. In June 2021, Council staff collaborated with self-advocates to hold an Empowerment Through Employment Guide and Transition Handbook overview webinar over Zoom, specifically for Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (MHTA) beneficiaries, individuals with developmental disabilities, their families, and staff. Self-advocates and Council staff broke the guide into smaller, manageable pieces, allowing more detailed information to be provided in areas such as youth transitions, Alaska ABLE accounts, SDMA, and Alaska Disability Benefits 101.



## Alaska Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act

- Becoming law in 2016, this act allows qualified individuals with disabilities the opportunity to save without jeopardizing vital public benefits (such as SSI and Medicaid).
- As of June 15th, 2021, there were 708 open ABLE accounts, and 678 of them contain funds. Of these 678 accounts, the combined assets are \$5,961,150.54.
- The Council led the #ABLEtoSave campaign for Alaska in the month of August and gave numerous presentations: <https://savewithable.com/ak/home/plan-benefits.html>



**There are NO limits to what people with disabilities can do**

Including building a savings account without losing benefits



## Alaska Disability Benefits 101 (AK DB101)

## Disability Benefits 101

working with a disability in Alaska

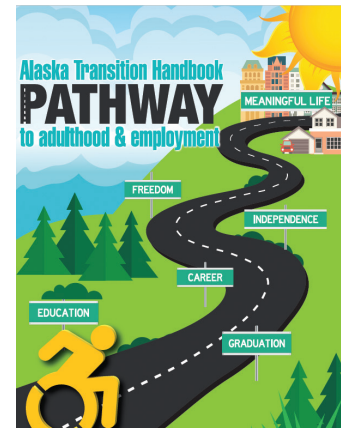


- AK DB 101 is a free website that assists individuals with disabilities and those supporting them to navigate through questions around how benefits are impacted by work.
- To learn more and use this website which includes plain language articles with interactive tools in addition to a benefits-to-work calculator, visit: <https://ak.db101.org/>
- For videos and additional tools on how to best use this exciting employment tool, visit the Council's resources page: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/db101.aspx>
- The Alaska DB 101 website had 3,657 users from October 1st 2020 to September 30th 2021, most (3,643) were new users to the site. There were 4,453 sessions conducted.

## Transition Efforts

### Alaska Transition Handbook: Pathway to Adulthood and Employment

- The Council continued to widely disseminate this Alaska-specific resource statewide to assist individuals with disabilities and those who support them in successful transitions. It includes success stories, information on state agency resources, benefits and work, savings, and employment support services.
- One way this resource was highlighted was through the Empowerment through Employment and Transitions Handbook webinar. Audience included individuals with disabilities, their families, caregivers, and direct care providers. <http://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Documents/TransitionsHandbook.pdf>



### Alaska Project SEARCH

The Council continues to support 3 Alaska Project SEARCH sites, serving as the Statewide Coordinator for Project SEARCH, allowing youth with disabilities the opportunity to gain transferable employability skills in hospitals in Anchorage (Providence Alaska Medical Center), Fairbanks (Fairbanks Memorial Hospital), and Mat-Su (Mat-Su Regional Medical Center).



### Alaska Rural Transitions Program

The Rural Transition Curriculum Roll Out webinar with the authors, Rain Van Den Berg, Frances Gage, and Charlene Hadley was held virtually over Zoom Webinar in November 2020. The



webinar gave an overview of the universally designed, culturally and linguistically diverse curriculum which teaches skills for adulthood for rural Alaska lives and livelihoods. The authors explored the curriculum and gave a first look at cohesive lessons and tools for place-based teaching that uses indigenous language, stories, and demonstrations to increase access and choices for students with disabilities who seek traditional and rural lifestyles. The Council promoted the webinar on Gov Delivery and Facebook.

### **Continued Alaska Mental Health Trust Collaboration**

The Council has continued to partner with the Trust on the Microenterprise grant program, the Beneficiary Employment Engagement Initiative, the DD mini-grants, and many other projects related to services for individuals with a developmental disability.



Interested in self-employment and being your own boss? Check out the Trust Microenterprise Grant! To learn more about this exciting self-employment resource for Trust beneficiaries, visit: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/microenterprise.aspx>

## **Early Intervention**

### **Universal Developmental Screening Advisory Committee (UDSAC)**

Happy Birthday to the UDSAC! Last year, through years of collaboration between the Council and the Section of Women's, Children & Family Health (WCFH), the UDSAC assumed the responsibility of ensuring that all children, and their caregivers, have access to developmental screening in Alaska. Since then, the UDSAC has developed training manuals, led numerous workgroups, updated existing resources and increased their outreach across all regions in the State. The Council would like to congratulate the WCFH and the UDSAC on their amazing accomplishments this year and stands ready to support the UDSAC's future and existing initiatives.

### **State Interagency Coordinating Council on Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (ICC)**

The ICC advises and assists the State Office of the Infant Learning Program (ILP) regarding the arrangement of appropriate Early Intervention Services (EIS) for children with disabilities from birth through age 3. In their duties, required by the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the ICC works with the ILP and numerous stakeholders across the State to set goals, develop plans and review



the progress of EIS. The ICC and ILP certified and submitted the Annual Progress Report to the Office of Special Education (OSEP). In June, OSEP informed the ICC that Alaska received the highest determination rating, "Meets Requirements."

This summer, the State was also awarded \$1,254,320 through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)—Grants for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities. The ICC solicited feedback about how to utilize the funds. Stakeholders included parents, teachers, staff from other state agencies and Rep. Zack Fields of the Alaska Legislature. Stakeholder suggestions relating to how to best use this money to improve EIS and to meet the needs currently experienced due to the pandemic were:

- Recruitment and retention of highly qualified staff
- Social-emotional training and support to families
- Training and workforce development
- Virtual assessments, virtual therapies, and virtual health care access
- Expand eligibility for early intervention services as well as expand billing codes,
- Increasing capacity and access to infant and early childhood mental health supports

## Education Committee

### Inclusive Practice Award 2021

The Council has established an annual award to be given at the Annual State Special Education Conference each February. For the last 17 years, the Inclusive Practice Award has honored outstanding educators and paraeducators who work to ensure students with disabilities have the opportunity for inclusive education with their general education peers. Whereas numerous educators deserve recognition for a multitude of reasons, the focus of this award is exclusively on exemplary inclusive practices. The Education Committee was proud to announce the 2021 winners Storme Fleming from the Anchorage School District and Gregory Wood from the Dillingham City School District. They truly embody the Council's mission of "creating change that improves the lives of Alaskans with disabilities."



Gregory Wood  
Dillingham City  
School District



Storme Fleming  
Anchorage School  
District

### Special Education Service Agency (SESA) Reauthorization

SESA provides training and technical assistance to school personnel who have students with low-incident disabilities, especially those in remote or



rural regions of Alaska. Set to expire on June 30, 2021, the Council advocated for the bill's reauthorization and actively worked to educate lawmakers about the vital services provided by the SESA. In January 2021, the Council wrote a formal position statement to extend the expiration date and increase pay for the agency's specialists and instructional support staff. It was transmitted to the legislature for inclusion in the public record. During the legislative session last year, HB 43 reauthorized SESA until June 30th, 2029, and a companion bill, SB 19 increased wages for the staff.

### Traditional Alaskan Transition Skills Curriculum

The Council, through the initiative, planning, and guidance of its Rural Transitions Workgroup; and with the help of its DD Act partner, the UAA Center for Human Development (CHD) continued its efforts to further develop rural transition curriculum. Council partners for this project also include the Dillingham City School District, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the network of Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation offices, and the Alaska Council on the Arts. Two units (Self-employment and Financial Literacy Skills, and Inupiaq Sewing Skills) based in Kotzebue with Inupiaq cultural stakeholders were completed in 2021. Additionally, sections on traditional carving and stewardship and harvest are under review before finalization. This Traditional Alaskan Transition Skills Curriculum can be located at: <https://www.dlgd.org/district/federal-programs/>

**Alaska State Special Education Conference (ASSEC) 2021:** ASSEC was held virtually in early 2021, Council staff recorded a presentation on the Alaska Transition Handbook Pathway to adulthood & employment and Empowerment Through Employment guide. The recording was sent to conference facilitators for attendees to view and PDFs of the guides were sent to conference facilitators to distribute as well.

- **Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP):** The Council, in its role as the Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP), advises and assists the Department of Special Education and Early Development (DEED) to improve special education services for children with disabilities from age 3 through 21. Many stakeholders contributed to the making recommendations including these representatives: the Education Committee of the GCDSE, LINKS and Stone Soup Group (Alaska parent information centers); SESA; University of Alaska; parents, and all of Alaska's 59 school districts and/or educational service agencies. SEAP and The ICC certified and submitted the Annual Progress Report to the Office of Special Education (OSEP). The report and recommendations were shared with the commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Development and the Office of





the Governor. Highlights from the report include an increase in the percent of student with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) graduating from high school with a regular high school diploma and a decrease in the percent of students with IEPs dropping out of high school.

This summer, Alaska was awarded \$8,600,000 through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to be used for students with disabilities age 3-21. Through HB 69, the State legislature appropriated \$8,711,000. The SEAP made recommendations about how to utilize the funds and how to meet the educational needs of students who experienced academic regression due to the pandemic.

**Recommendations included:**

- Recruitment and retention of highly qualified staff
- Social-emotional training and support to families
- Training and workforce development
- Compensatory Education

## Health

### Emergency Preparedness

**GetReady! Toolkits:** This past year, Alaska's emergency preparedness toolkit for individuals with disabilities continued to be distributed online.

To access the GetReady Toolkit, visit:

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/wcfh/Documents/disability/GetReadyWebaccessible.pdf>

### Health Promotion

**Annual Aging and Disability Summit:** The Council supported the seventh annual (October 5-7, 2021) event by having staff on the steering committee, assisting with mailouts and completing evaluation of the event. Over 100 individuals were in attendance this year with over 50 agencies/groups represented from across the state.



**Inclusive Play Dates:** The Council again partnered with inclusive play champions Anchorage Park Foundation and was part of the Inclusive Play initiative. GCDSE co-hosted an inclusive playdate at David Green playground in Anchorage. GCDSE staff assisted with outreach and provided resources. More information can be found at: <http://anchorageparkfoundation.org/programs/inclusiveplay/>



**Messaging Campaigns:** The Council worked with the Department of Health and Social Services on several messaging campaigns focused on health and safety during this pandemic as well as ensuring that individuals with disabilities know their rights and options. This work was highlighted nationally. A few examples: [Everyone has a Story](#), [Some People May Need Someone to Go With Them](#), and [Face Covering](#) (Note: These messages are outdated but examples of work done).



**Alaska Disability Advisory Group (ADAG):** Council staff organized and facilitated biweekly ADAG on Emergency Preparedness meetings. These meeting bring together emergency managers and the disability community to address concerns. Since March 2020, ADAG has been focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, examples of topics included: vaccine allocation, vaccine education, messaging (see above for examples), mask usage, education of emergency managers, and other disability concerns. Council staff/ADAG members also served as representatives at Mass Care and the Vaccine Workgroup.

**Expanding Disabilities Network’s (DD Councils) Access to COVID 19 Vaccines:** GCDSE & other members of ADAG, as well as other community partners were also involved in the Expanding Disabilities Network’s (DD Councils) Access to COVID 19 Vaccines grant.



## Disability Law Center Produced Videos

- **Protect yourself, be a role model, and get back to doing things you enjoy in life.** Jena Crafton a nationally award-winning self-advocate and member of the Council shares why it's important to receive your COVID-19 vaccine. Click on the link to watch [Jena's Message](#)



- **Keep yourself healthy and safe and protect those you care for.** Mariah Godes and caregiver Carly Neumuth talks about why it is important for Direct Service Providers to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Click on the link to watch [Mariah & Carly's Message.](#)



- **Stand up for what you want, and be a part of your own medical decisions.** Featuring Ross and Michael Christian.



**\*\*\*For additional accessibility options, and to view other videos in the series, visit our COVID Vaccine Champions Playlist on YouTube: [COVID Champions Accessibility Options](#)**



## COVID-19 Resources

### Alaska COVID-19 Website: [covid19.alaska.gov](https://covid19.alaska.gov)

- Visit [CovidVax.Alaska.gov](https://CovidVax.Alaska.gov) or call Alaska's COVID helpline at 907-646-3322 to get more information about how you can get vaccinated.
- Alaska Department of Health and Social Services COVID-19 Website: <https://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/epi/id/pages/covid-19/>
- Alaska Resource COVID-19 Toolkit – Your simple guide to resources: <https://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Documents/covid-19/Alaska-COVID-19-Toolkit.pdf>
- Alaska COVID-19 Careline 1- (877) 266-4357. Resources and mental health support during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- More resources for well-being: <https://dhss.alaska.gov/dbh/Pages/Well-Being-alaska.aspx>

### COVID-19 and Individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities

It's important to note that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are often in the “high risk” category for COVID-19, with recent studies showing significant risks of death for those with intellectual/developmental disabilities. (*New FAIR Health Study Uncovers Relationship between COVID-19 Comorbidities and Mortality: “[Top Three Comorbidity Risk Factors for COVID-19 Mortality across All Age Groups Are Developmental Disorders, Lung Cancer, and Intellectual Disabilities and Related Conditions](#)”*)

Per the New York Times, “People with intellectual disabilities and developmental disorders are three times more likely to die of Covid-19, compared with patients without the conditions, a new analysis found.” (*New York Times, 11/10/20, [Developmental Disabilities Heighten Risk of Covid Death](#)*)

Home and Community Based Services are especially critical for individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities during the pandemic, allowing individuals to remain in their home communities, avoiding higher cost congregate settings which increase the risk of contracting COVID-19.

Click to find [more information on people with disabilities and COVID-19](#).



## Farewell to Kristin



Alaska Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education wishes Executive Director Kristin Vandagriff well in her upcoming endeavors transiting to a new role out of state in October 2021. She will be greatly missed.

Kristin Vandagriff has been an advocate for individuals with developmental disabilities for over 25 years, and has been very personally invested in this work, as her brother

has an intellectual and developmental disability. She has worked in the social services field for individuals with disabilities for over 15 years, working in direct care for a developmental disability provider agency, as well as within the State of Alaska's Division of Senior and Disabilities Services I/DD Unit, and began working at the Council back in October of 2013. Kristin graduated from the University of Alaska Anchorage with a Bachelor of Arts in political science as a University Honors Scholar with an emphasis on American Government, especially related to access and social justice issues for individuals with disabilities. Kristin has had her work published in the National Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, as well as co-authored national briefs and the Alaska Transition Handbook. Throughout her time with the Council, Kristin has been very involved in the successful passage of numerous bills, including: Employment First, Supported Decision Making Agreements, ABLE Accounts, and the DD Shared Vision.

Kristin has dedicated her career to creating change that improves the lives of people with disabilities. She has been an instrumental to the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education as Alaska works to implement the DD Shared Vision and pursue meaningful person-directed lives for Alaskans with developmental disabilities. Countless programs, projects, and policies have been created, planned, funded, and implemented with Kristin as a key driver.

*"Working for GCDSE and seeing the individual outcome impacts of systems change on the lives of Alaskans with disabilities has been a blessing. I am so grateful for the honor of working with a council, staff, and partners who have person directed lives of meaning as the goal of all they pursue."* — Departing words from Kristin

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education and the staff that serves it wish Executive Director Kristin Vandagriff all the best on her upcoming endeavors.



## 25 Council Members

Anna Attla – Anchorage  
Jena Crafton – Eagle River  
Art Delaune – Fairbanks  
Lyle Downing – Palmer  
Donald Enoch – Juneau  
Margaret Evans – Anchorage  
David Fleurant – Chugiak  
Jeanne Gerhardt-Cyrus – Kiana  
Corey Gilmore – Anchorage  
Margaret Gore - Craig  
Ken Hemrick – Anchorage  
Elizabeth Joseph - Kongiganak  
John Lee – Anchorage  
Heidi Lieb-Williams – Anchorage  
Duane Mayes – Anchorage  
Charles McAnally – Kaasan  
Senator Peter Micciche – Kenai  
Ric Nelson – Anchorage  
Travis Noah – Anchorage  
Dean Paul – Anchorage  
Nona Safra – Anchor Point  
Charlene Tautfest – Soldotna  
Fred Villa – North Pole  
Shelly Vendetti-Vuckovich – Anchorage  
Jennifer Zucati-Pirtle – Palmer

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Jamie Kokoszka, Program Coordinator  
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