

ENGAGE. INTEGRATE. INSPIRE.

The mission of the BIAC is to engage, integrate and inspire brain injury stakeholders to help achieve the Statewide Vision for Brain Injury Policies and Services.

Brain Injury Advisory Council (BIAC) Meeting

September 19, 2025 - 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. CT

Zoom information for connecting: <https://educationne.zoom.us/j/94166263913>

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National Concussion Awareness Day

MEETING MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT (and substitutes):

Tiffany Armstrong, Emaly Ball, Jodi Bodnar, Jessica Coffey, RaLynn Jacobsen, Kristen Larsen, Carla Lasley, Amy Levering, Terry Levering, Brooke Murtaugh, Judy Nichelson, Peg Ogea-Ginsburg, Darsha Pelland, Paula Dodds (Substitute for Peggy Reisher), Jennifer Swanson, Dennis Thompson, Shawna Thompson, Madison Wurtele

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Ashley Davis, Karen Houseman, Sarvinoz Kadyrova, Lisa McGuire, Michelle Ploeger, Tamera Snider

STAFF PRESENT: Keri Bennett

VISITORS/PRESENTERS: Liz Gebhart-Morgan, Partners for Insightful Evaluation (PIE)

10:00 – 10:15 am: ENGAGE

Call the meeting to order – *Council Chair, Emaly Ball*

The meeting of the Nebraska Brain Injury Advisory Council Commenced at 10:00 am.

Approve June 13, 2025, meeting minutes and September 19, 2025 meeting agenda – *Emaly Ball*

The minutes of the June 13, 2025, meeting were reviewed. A motion was made by Dennis and seconded by Darsha to approve the minutes. There were no objections, motion carried by unanimous consent.

The September 19, 2025, agenda was reviewed. A motion was made by Carla and seconded by Darsha to approve the agenda. There were no objections, motion carried by unanimous consent.

10:15 – 11:00 am: *ENGAGE and INTEGRATE*

Brain Injury Needs Assessment– *Liz Gebhart-Morgan of Partners for Insightful Evaluation (PIE)*

Liz said after talking about the 2024 Statewide Brain Injury Needs Assessment for quite some time now, from planning it, promoting surveys, sharing recent results, and now having all materials ready to disseminate and utilize, Liz hopes this will improve things within the state of Nebraska.

Liz shared the two main areas of focus in the assessment:

- The first is using the information to inform the Brain Injury State Plan. This includes looking at progress being made towards goals, including the impact of grant activities. As well as finding new activities based on needs identified.
- The second is getting a better understanding of the brain injury service delivery system.

Liz said it will be important to look at what's working well, where the gaps are, and what are the potential areas of improvement. In addition, it will be important to focus on unserved or underserved areas. As well as culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

Liz explained over time they have noticed data collection on TBIs have become much more robust. As a result, the needs assessment could change and account for new information it hasn't in the past.

They are also taking a closer look at information that has been shared in Council meetings, oversight committee meetings, work group meetings, and previous reports.

Liz shared three infographic summary reports have been made available for each of the surveys they implemented.

Liz said they looked closely at multiple organizations' Annual Reports, including the Brain Injury Association of Nebraska. These reports were used to look at all the data collectively to help create the Needs Assessment Report.

Liz then took the time to explain the 2024 report structure for Council Members.

After explaining the structure of the report, Liz informed the Council TBI Registry data may be updated when the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) approves and releases it. Also, recommendations will be reviewed by the BIAC Workgroup that will be reviewing the needs assessment data.

Liz shared they will be meeting to explore data in relation to the Brain Injury State Plan on September 24, 2025.

They will be looking at each of the five priority areas one at a time to take a deeper dive into the data pertaining to that priority area to see what they might need to modify based off the needs assessment results.

The Council Members were split into breakout groups to answer the following questions:

1. What topics would be beneficial to have a one-pager or infographic about based on the needs assessment?
2. What specific data or information would be beneficial for your organization or stakeholder to have (for strategic planning, funding applications, etc.)?

Breakout reports:

Group 1: This group discussed how a targeted one- page information sheet would be beneficial. Ideas included sharing the connection between brain injury and mental health, the causes of brain injury, a breakdown of information on populations such as age groups and the different levels of severity, possible gaps in services, key barriers, common misconceptions, the impacts of caregiving, behaviors.

Group 2: This group talked about the benefits of telehealth and how this could help people with BI in rural areas. They thought the current statistics on telehealth and BI could be shared in an infographic format. They also discussed if people with Brain Injury need information on Assistive Technology. This led into a conversation about involving AT4ALL and possibly having ATP present at a future Council meeting.

Group 3: This group talked about how current “hot topics” at the federal level could be used to support different initiatives that are already occurring. They also talked about caregiving and potential barriers and funding. They discussed the aging population and how falls might relate to brain injury. They also talked about the need to provide better information to service providers.

Group 4: This group discussed how the executive summary could turn into an infographic and be culled down to very specific things. One member in the group shared they spoke with a congressman and said he didn’t believe strokes were brain injuries. This led into a discussion about how important it is to have information and representation about other types of brain injuries. They said an infographic on common accommodations and helpful assistive technologies could be beneficial. They also had

discussions about providing information for individuals who are interested in going back to work after a BI and how this directly relates to the work Nebraska VR does.

11:00 – 11:10 am – Break

11:10 – 11:30 am: *INSPIRE*

Nebraska's Olmstead Plan – Kristen Larsen, Executive Director, Nebraska Council on Developmental Disabilities, DHHS

The new Olmstead Plan, as submitted to the Nebraska Legislature in July 2025 can be found here:

https://nebraskalegislature.gov/FloorDocs/109/PDF/Agencies/Health_and_Human_Services_Department_of/832_20250729-120921.pdf

More information on the Olmstead Plan, the Steering Group and the Advisory Committee can be found here: <https://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Olmstead.aspx>

The Council on Developmental Disabilities played an instrumental role in helping launch the first initial Nebraska Olmstead plan back in 2019. Since then, it has made significant progress over the past few years.

It is a landmark Supreme Court decision that states people with disabilities have the right to receive services in community-based settings when appropriate. This case focused on two individuals who were being unjustified institutionalized. According to the ADA people have the right to live in the community, and you cannot hold them in institutions. The recommendation was for every state to have an Olmstead plan.

Kristen shared the current Olmstead plan has seen some amendments.

The evaluation report was done in 2024 and looks at the progress Nebraska has been making. It recognized improvements in community-based services, housing accessibility, and employment opportunities. It also highlighted gaps in transportation and data collection methods.

After evaluating gaps, key recommendations were made. This includes the following:

- Extending the plan from 3 to 6 years (now from 2026-2031)
- Update terminology for clearer priority and goals
- Integrate date considerations across all focus areas
- Create a new focus area: Community Supports
- Emphasize cross-system alignment and accountability

The new focus areas in the 2026-2031 Olmstead Plan include the following:

- Community Supports

- Education
- Employment
- Housing
- Transportation

Community Supports Goals:

1. Strengthen collaboration across lifespan transitions
2. Enhance data collection and service wait time tracking
3. Expand communication services and self-advocacy tools

Education Goals:

1. Strengthen staffing and equitable access to services
2. Improve educator preparation and ongoing training
3. Increase parental engagement and knowledge of resources

Employment Goals:

1. Expand access to supported and customized employment
2. Ensure timely individualized employment services
3. Increase youth transition to employment after high school

Housing Goals:

1. Centralize affordable housing resources online
2. Improve housing access for individuals with serious mental illness
3. Strengthen housing date and policy planning
4. Reduce time for home modification projects

Transportation Goals:

1. Ensure Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) facilities meet ADA standards
2. Improve digital accessibility of NDOT content
3. Enhance accessible public engagement in transportation planning

11:30 – 11:50 am: *ENGAGE and INTEGRATE*

**Strong Infrastructure Components for Brain Injury: State Self-Assessment Tool -
Keri Bennett**

Keri said this is a great tool and resource for states as the BIAC is trying to build strong infrastructure while trying to improve access to services and supports for people with BI.

Keri shared an update with the Council where they currently are at with this process and shared some areas that need improvement.

Keri focused her presentation on discussing brain injury advocacy for policies for services and supports.

Nebraska VR is positioned to partner with appropriate entities to promote state policies that ensure access and support for people with brain injury. This goes hand in hand with Olmstead.

So far, Nebraska VR is doing a good job incorporating items from the needs assessment. We are also building partnerships with organizations and people with BI.

We could do a better job at identifying key agencies and individuals to collaborate with and advocate for public improvements. This has been tough since the COVID pandemic.

Other areas for improvement include working with other state government agencies and entities building relationships, strengthening strategies and implementing policy changes, seeking out agencies and organizations who represent unserved or underserved populations, creating a policy agenda, looking at policy issues against national data, integrating strategic initiatives into the State Plan, actively engaging key collaborators in evaluating policy impact, consulting with policy analysts, pursuing public-private partnerships, and addressing brain injury at all levels within the state's laws, regulations, and funding systems.

Keri shared BI State Plan Activities to Advance:

- Participate in work groups or committees for the Olmstead Plan.
- Equip. Nebraskans with brain injury and their families with data, resources, tools, and training
- Collaborate with Nebraska Title V Maternal and Child Block Grant
- Provide annual update to the Brain Injury Assistance Act Oversight Committee
- Provide bi-annual updates to the Department of Ed. Commissioner and State Board
- Review needs assessment data
- Identify potential funding streams by Dec. 2024

11:50 am – 12:10 pm: *Working Lunch*

12:10 – 12:25: *INTEGRATE*

BI State Plan Progress – Keri Bennett

Keri shared with the Council areas they have made significant progress on this includes the following:

- Completed needs assessment

- Collected data around COVID-19 and the impact of the pandemic on people with BI, family members, and caregivers
- Participate in workgroups or committees for the Olmstead Plan
- TBI Registry quarterly mailings are back on track
- Increasing/enhancing Peer to Peer Supports
- Participate in at least two federal grantee workgroups
- Review all the Brain Injury State Plan activities and revise them as needed to ensure they are written as SMART goals
- VR will serve as the state's lead agency providing continual support through match funding
- Provide bi-annual updates to the Department of Ed., Commissioner, and State Board
- Provide quarterly progress updates on Brain Injury State Plan Activities to the BIAC

12:25 – 1:05 pm: INSPIRE

Spring 2026 TBI Grant Funding Opportunity – Keri Bennett

Keri will share what we know so far about the upcoming grant funding opportunity, then we'll join breakout rooms for 15 minutes for small group discussion. Please choose a person in your group to take notes. Each group will then report out to the large group. The small group discussion questions, based on your review of the Needs Assessment report and Brain Injury State Plan, are: 1. Which groups of people with brain injury in Nebraska whose needs are not being met could we focus on? 2. Which programs within our system of care could we build greater capacity in to meet the needs of people with brain injury?

Keri shared we are in the last year of our current grant cycle. The end date for this year will be July 31 of 2026.

What they know so far is there will be a new grant solicitation from the National Association of State Head Injury Administrators (NASHA).

The Administration for Community Living is beginning to consider what the grant solicitation might look like.

They are being told the State's TBI grant program will be moving into the Administration for Children, Families, and Communities, however, there have been no details released so far.

Keri mentioned the same grant activities that were included in this grant cycle will likely be included in the next grant cycle.

Advisory boards will be a big part of the new grant.

There will be a match requirement. For every \$2.00 the feds provide, we will provide the state match of \$1.00.

It is likely we will move back to a 3-year grant cycle.

Members broke out into breakout groups and answered the following questions above.

Group 1: This group talked about providing better education to emergency personnel and first responders. They discussed how this population might also be at a higher risk for brain injury. They also talked about how vital it is for medical practitioners to take a more comprehensive approach when treating patients with BI as it can affect many areas of a person's life.

Group 2: This group said they felt pediatrics and the school systems is one area we could really focus in on. They talked about providing information to specific educators within schools. They thought better educational information to parents would also be beneficial.

Group 3: This group focused on the age and gender demographics who are most susceptible to having a brain injury occur. They discussed potential behaviors and cognitive issues people with a BI can exhibit. Respite care was also talked mentioned.

**1:05 – 1:15 pm - Updates: *ENGAGE and INSPIRE*
Committee and Contractor Reports (written reports)**

Public Policy – (verbal report only) – *Keri Bennett*

There continues to be progress made on LR 86, in the interim study on accessible, affordable housing.

There have been several key victories made for the brain injury community in the area of federal funding.

The TBI State Partnership Program is intact in that legislation as is the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention's Brain Injury Program.

The members of the TBI CDC Team have been let go, but there is still funding for the program.

Congress will likely need to pass a continuing resolution to continue funding the government after the September 30th deadline.

Membership – (no report) – *Carla Lasley*

Contractor reports and ACL Workgroup Updates (written reports only) – *Keri Bennett*

1:15 – 1:30: *ENGAGE and INSPIRE*

NASHIA 2025 Conference – *Keri Bennett*

Keri will share about: The National Association of State Head Injury Administrators' (NASHIA) 2025 State of the States in Brain Injury Conference is in Portland, Maine, October 27 – 30. This year's event will showcase two half-day intensives dedicated to Long-Term Services & Supports and Children & Youth, while the main conference will feature two specialized tracks on the Criminal Legal System and Brain Injury, and Behavioral Health. The conference will wrap up with a full day that includes plenary sessions, an implementation workshop, and a networking event for all attendees.

Keri said VR is sending representatives to the NASHIA conference in few weeks. Keri and a Counselor from the Lincoln VR Office will be attending.

1:30 – 2:00: *ENGAGE, INTEGRATE AND INSPIRE*

Roundtable Discussion: *All Members*

Unfinished (Old) Business (if any)

None.

New Business (if any)

None.

Adjourn –

A motion was made by Darsha and seconded by Carla to adjourn the meeting. No objections were made. Motion carried by unanimous consent.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:23 pm.

Next Meeting Date: December 12, 2025