

Jack Markell's Plan for Improving Community Living for Delawareans with Disabilities

For an estimated 115,000 Delawareans the struggle to lead full, independent and productive lives brings with it special challenges. They 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. Delaware's next Governor must be an advocate for citizens 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 to be able to live independently in our communities; and enable consumers 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 of people with disabilities created by these advances. And 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, 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 their effect 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 them.

And as Governor, I will:

- **Support the five-year plan of the Commission on Community-Based Alternatives for Individuals with Disabilities.**
- **Improve access to and quality of home- and community- based long term care.**
- **Provide grant funding so that local park and recreation offices and private fitness centers 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.**
- **Improve transportation for Delawareans with disabilities.**
- **Increase state employment opportunities for people with disabilities.**

Advocate and support 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 chose. 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 work closely with the Commission 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.

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.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.

Expand the role of the long term care ombudsman to advocate for 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 I will expand the current role of the Long Term Care Ombudsman to become 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 are in formats that are accessible to people with disabilities.

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

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, heart conditions, etc.

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 work with private fitness centers to apply for foundation and grant funds to make fitness centers accessible.

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 education families about preventing chronic diseases, we will include components that address the special needs of people with disabilities.

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

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

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

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

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

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:

- Ensure that the disability community participates in housing policy decisions.
- Develop a simple one-page summary of housing options available for those seeking housing.

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>

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

- 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

Improve transportation for Delawareans with disabilities

Lack of transportation has been found to be the Number One impediment to Delawareans with disabilities receiving healthcare.⁹ As Governor, I will work with the Delaware Transit Corporation to find ways to improve disabled Delawareans' access to transportation.¹⁰

I will also explore the feasibility of issuing ride vouchers for Delawareans who are unable to drive. These vouchers would provide a discounted fare on public transportation or the ability to hire a private ride service to lessen dependence on public transportation.¹¹ With decent housing comes the opportunity to participate in the community through such simple things as going to the grocery store, stopping at the post office, belonging to a church, participating in a class. However, for many people with disabilities, the greatest obstacle to personal achievement and true community participation is the lack of a suitable housing situation.

Increase state employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities

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.

⁹ Delaware Health Status Report for Persons with Disabilities p. 32

¹⁰ www.udel.edu/cds/ccba/pdfs/commission/A_Path_Forward.pdf

¹¹ www.udel.edu/cds/ccba/pdfs/commission/A_Path_Forward.pdf